SP Safe Space Policy

Organization:	CDN
Resolution date:	12.12.2024
Agenda item:	3. Organisational and Internal Documents

Motion text

Introduction

Cooperation and Development Network Eastern Europe is a capacity-building network comprised of different youth and green-minded organisations from Eastern and Central Europe. Fighting for a Green movement is our common goal but at the same time, we acknowledge that we differ a lot based on the diverse cultural environments we come from. In addition, patriarchy/sexism/ nationalistic discourses are highly embedded in our societies, therefore the creation of a safe space is a crucial component for CDN activities in helping to dismantle existing power structures and challenge oppressive mechanisms. This way we ensure the creation of a welcoming environment where participation is equalised for all despite the ethnicity /religion/ sexual orientation/gender identity/ class background and different abilities of all (participants, Executive Committee, Prep Teams and Office).

In general, Safe space policies are the rules by which a community agrees to behave. They help in guaranteeing that everyone feels free to express themselves and help prevent some of the problems common in our societies (such as racism, sexism, transphobia, etc.) from becoming part of the community.

This document provides an overview of what safe spaces are, the definition of inappropriate behaviour, and what key principles/mechanisms should be followed when establishing such spaces in CDN's activities and structures (CDN Executive Committee and Office, Prep Teams and Working Groups). This document is developed by a Working team comprised of some of the members of CDN Executive Committee/ Secretariat/ Gender Working Group, and adopted by the General Assembly as an internal document of CDN in 2021. CDN aims to create a respectful, understanding and open space, and we encourage everyone, from organisers to participants, to be pro-active in creating an atmosphere where the safety of everyone is validated.

This document is a result of consecutive meetings of the Working team throughout the period between November 2020 - February 2021. The document refers to experiences documented by previous CDN EC members and Secretariat, who have recorded cases where safe space was breached at CDN activities. Guidance has also been taken from other similar youth-oriented organisations, which have documents in establishing safe spaces, and we are grateful towards all the organisations who shared with us their resources (see more on page 12).

This document is just a set of mechanisms/ techniques for constructing a safe space environment but is not a definitive document. We welcome you all to give us feedback and further suggestions for ensuring safe space at the following email address: office@cdnee.org.

Types of unacceptable behaviour

In this chapter, we will explain the types of behaviours that violate the safe space as a whole and which we aim to prevent. In case of recognizing some of these behaviours, please report to Safe Space Persons (SSP). We are aware safe space is an individual perception, and this list contains general behaviours, whilst other violations are not excluded. Any other situations that are not mentioned here but would lead to someone feeling uncomfortable, unsafe or excluded will be assessed as a violation of safe space and people are welcomed to voice them out.

Disclaimer: This chapter contains examples of unacceptable types of behaviour which some readers might find triggering. Examples are listed for the purpose of better understanding of these types of behaviour. The following behaviours can vary from moderate to severe violations of safe space, and the measures are taken accordingly(elaborated further in the last chapter).

Physical:

Breaking personal boundaries

Indicating personal boundaries, whether physical or emotional should be a basis prior to interaction and should be respected at all times. The boundaries are often defined internally and presented with body language and verbal statements. These need to be observed, recognized (or verbalized) and respected.

Example: Person X has said they do not want to be touched, and person Y teases them and "jokingly" touches the person X, and gets within their personal space without their consent.

Physical assault

Inflicting physical harm or unwanted physical contact upon someone. Any kind of physical violence or touching without consent is completely unacceptable. Any kind of touching between people has to be consensual and thoroughly communicated. Physical assault can also be sexual harassment and is a severe violation of safe space and personal boundaries. In the physical form of sexual harassment, assault can be anything from inappropriate touching and teasing to severe sexual assault and rape (further explained in point Sexual harassment).

Example: Person X punches person Y because of a disagreement of their opinions during an intense informal discussion about some topic.

Usage of hate/disrespectful symbols

Carrying (jewellery, clothing, accessories) or physically presenting (writing, drawing, mimicking) disrespect and/or hate symbols connected to religious, national and extreme ideological beliefs. List of international recognized hate symbols (link: https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols).

Example A: During an art session on a CDN activity, the participant draws a swastika on a piece of paper and shows it to others.

Example B: participant comes to an activity wearing a T-shirt with disrespectful writings about Muslims.

Verba:

Stereotyping and discrimination

Stereotyping is acting based on assumed ideas or beliefs regarding someone based on their gender, sexual orientation, national, religious identity, physical appearance. Includes assuming facts about someone based on their identities. For example: assuming that a feminine man is gay. Discrimination is the act of making unjustified distinctions between individuals on basis of race, gender, age, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, disability or other characteristics. It involves restricting members of one group or an individual from opportunities that are available to others. Extreme discriminatory behaviours like racism, chauvinism, nationalism, linguicism, homophobia, transphobia and similar will not be tolerated in CDN activities.

Example: A group of participants in a session refuse to involve a participant with hearing difficulties because this person speaks in a manner the group finds uncomfortable.

Objectifying

This behaviour conveys the idea of treating a person as a commodity or an object. Another form, sexual objectification is the act of treating a person as a mere object of sexual desire. Everyone's individuality and autonomy are their own and objectifying behaviour is destructive of these characteristics.

Example: participant X is told by another participant "hey girl! You would be prettier if you smiled".

Sexual harassment

Even though sexual harassment can be physical, it's verbal form is explained in this chapter. Along with objectifying and bullying, it is the root of other unacceptable behaviours that can lead to physical assault. Sexual harassment involves the use of explicit or implicit sexual overtones, non-verbal cues and signals, unwanted and non-consensual touch and sexual assault.

Sexual harassment includes a wide range of behaviours and interpretations, examples of which can be found here (https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/whatissh.pdf)

Mansplaining

The explanation of something in a patronizing manner, usually by someone who is privileged because of their gender. This behaviour is often present in group

discussions when the privileged person or a group of people are not allowing others to present, speak and behave in an authentic way. Mansplaining severely disturbs dynamics and create a sense of hierarchy and domination of a privileged person or group.

Example: A cis-gender white man dominates the discussion about gender equality and argues with the points of the wage gap and denies the existence of inequality.

Invisibilising / belittling

The act of not giving chance to speak, speaking over someone, ignoring opinions etc.

Excluding someone from the conversation on purpose by either not giving them a chance to speak, speaking over them or ignoring what they are saying. To marginalize someone and to erase or ignore their presence or contribution.

Example: During an event, participants are divided into small groups and working on some presentation. Within one group, one participant is missing because has gone to the bathroom, Meanwhile, the rest continue with the work and take some important decision without the presence of this participant.

Shaming and blaming

Shaming is the act of bringing negative attention to an individual or a group because of their opinions; actions; physical, racial, ethnic, religious or cultural characteristics or activities. Blaming an individual or a group is a way of shaming them based on actions and the development of a situation. Unexpected or undesirable results are not a responsibility of the action doer, and no one should be blamed or feel guilty.

For example: participant X is approached by another participant and asked: “What is wrong with you? Why do you behave like this?” or “The situation that happened is your fault and you should face consequences”

Ridiculing/bullying

Using dismissive language or behaviour towards someone. Especially problematic when done based on someone’s gender identity, sexual orientation, language, national or religious identity. Bullying can be verbal, but also physical and then is seen as physical assault.

Example: Participant X calls participant Y offensive names and laughs at them.

Criticism without constructive feedback

Criticism, if presented in a constructive way, is a tool for growth and development, however it is often misunderstood. If offered without constructive feedback, criticism can be connected to insulting, ridiculing and similar behaviors. However, everyone must be aware of different levels of knowledge, language, experience, and different opinions, and give feedback accordingly.

For example: While discussing over a topic participant X responds to participant Y in the following way: “This is stupid, you should stop talking".

Threatening and blackmailing

Threatening behaviour includes physical or verbal actions that don’t involve actual contact/injury (moving closer aggressively), general verbal or written threats to people. Blackmailing is manipulative behaviour that includes the act of demanding personal and material belongings or degrading and non-consensual activities with the threat of revealing personal information or compromising autonomy.

Example: Person X found out person Y is queer, and forces person Y to give them money or they will “out” them on social media.

Ideological claims

(Extremist) Ideological claims are strict beliefs about certain groups, geographical locations, religious beliefs, cultures and similar identifications that lead to conflict or violent thoughts and actions.

For example: As it is stated in CDN Political Platform, we should strive to acknowledge and reject the politics of division and politics that seek to use nationalistic or any other exclusionary rhetoric at the expense of minorities and vulnerable groups.

Tools and mechanisms

This chapter enlists some practical tools and practices that can help making and obtaining a safe space environment. These tips are mostly associated with activity planning and executing, but most of them are suitable for an organizational level as well.

Before an activity

- Inclusivity

One of the first steps in the creation of an inclusive environment is enabling the participation of people of different backgrounds. When selecting participants, CDN Secretariat, EC member(s) and Prep Teams (PT) are paying special attention to underrepresented groups and ensuring their participation. Depending on the topic of the activity, CDN will spread its calls for participants to various channels, putting efforts into reaching out to these marginalized groups even outside of the Green family. Both regional and gender balance (a minimum of 50% of participants are young people that self-identify as woman, trans or genderqueer) are taken into consideration.

- Ability

Addressing the needs of everyone prior to the activity with a simple questionnaire (e.g. question box within an application form) will help

organizers (CDN) to be aware of everyone's needs and assist accordingly if needed. Local PT (hosting the activity) will secure that the venue/hotel is accessible for all differently-abled people.

- Accessibility

When checking potential venues for the activity, Local PT should take into account a provisional number of participants and search for working areas that can host this number of people comfortably (and in different arrangements - e.g. sitting in circle). It is recommended to choose well-lit venues and ensure accessibility to all different venues/toilets/rooms of use to participants/Prep Teams/EC Office members.

- Information

Prior to the activity, Local PT should assemble an Infosheet with all the essential information (local transport & hotel), including a brief cultural and political background, as to make participants more comfortable with their travelling. CDN will provide all the other key information about the event itself, along with the schedule (agenda) and this policy, to familiarize new participants with the Safe Space.

During an activity

- Introduction

At the beginning of each activity, CDN organizes an introduction session, going through the agenda, background of the project and CDN. During the Introduction session, PT will go through moderation rules and introduce diverse communication tools that will be used throughout the activity. During an introduction session or shortly after, CDN will propose a round where participants will express their needs on obtaining a safe space throughout the activity.

- Spatial organisation

How CDN arranges participants and chairs in the room depends on the session itself - whether there's a movement involved, small groups division, etc. However, it is recommended arranging participants in a circle/horizontal arrangement, rather than having a classroom arrangement, for having a more inclusive environment. Moreover, working room/venue should be noise sensitive.

- Language

Facilitators (CDN) will take steps to equalize participation, ensuring all participants are heard and diverse gender identities are respected - at the beginning of an activity, all participants will be asked to share their pronouns and have them along with their name attached visibly.

Facilitators will make sure to speak slowly, clearly, avoiding jargon and excessive academic language. Acknowledging that the activity is held in English, participants will be encouraged to use the language sign 'L' when a word/phrase is unclear. Moreover, participants should be encouraged to speak in English also

outside of sessions, not to exclude participants - when someone is using their native language, anyone can raise it with 'Bora Bora' rule. This will be a gentle reminder for everyone to speak in English. Nonetheless, if someone does not speak English well, this should not be a basis for excluding person from activity and that CDN will strive to have at least one more person speaking some other language that person understands and helps with translation.

- HEGs and Morning circles

HEGs are designated groups of smaller number of participants, organised almost every day of the activity after a full-day programme and moderated by one of the PT members. This is a space where participants can reflect and share how they felt throughout the day in a more intimate environment. Each PT member shares the main thoughts/comments/concerns expressed by the participants during HEGs at the evening PT meeting. PT can make changes in an agenda, raise some points during a Morning Circle or introduce new rules according to the results of HEGs evaluation.

Morning circles are organized every day, before the actual programme begins and are moderated by one of the PT members. During this circle with all of the participants, PT will go through any changes/announcements/technical reminders for the day in question. This is also a space for PT to remind everyone of safe space and raise a point if anything had happened against safe space guidelines.

- Safe Space Persons

Elaborated in the fourth chapter.

- Question/Feedback box

During the event, there shall be a box where participants can leave written notes to facilitators and the PT members with feedback and questions. Some people might prefer this way of flagging something up, asking a specific question, or asking for support or a need to be met. The question/feedback box should be placed in a visible place where everyone can access it, and its purpose should be explained at the beginning of the activity. Other tools for anonymous messages can be also used for this purpose.

After an activity

- Evaluation

Participants share how they felt during the event and tell if there were any situations that made them feel uncomfortable. Safe space persons can also be contacted online after the activity for the purpose of improving CDN safe space regulations.

- Privacy

No pictures shall be posted on public sites or social networks without the explicit consent of the individuals who can be identified in them. In the

participants list, every participant will sign a separated column regarding the consent to be photographed and the consent to disseminate these pictures.

- Data storage

CDN stores personal data (collected through application forms) of the participants/Prep-team members and ensures the safety of data. Data erasure can be done on the demand of the participant.

Finally, the best and most basic preventive measure is to educate ourselves, acknowledge privileges we have and build understanding and solidarity for one another.

Reporting and measures

The aim of this chapter is to create a sustainable system to prevent, identify and react to different types of unacceptable behaviour (outlined at chapter 2), which is not in compliance with the rules for the provision of a safe space environment in CDN activities (online and offline). These guidelines are written from the perspective of an international umbrella youth organization.

Disclaimer: This chapter contains hypothetical cases of unacceptable behaviour which some readers might find triggering. Examples are listed for the purpose of better understanding of these types of measures taken against these behaviours. The following cases can vary from moderate to severe violations of safe space, and the measures are taken accordingly.

Definition of SSPs

The central pillar of the Safe Space preventive measures and reporting mechanism evolve around the concept of Safe Space Persons (SSP). The SSPs are elected by the organizers prior to the event and are usually members of CDN EC / Secretariat/ Prep-teams that aim to prevent, identify and react to cases of unacceptable behaviour not only during activity sessions but applicable to breaks and informal parts of events. An SSP should be a person who is internalized with the Safe Space document and preferably has participated in previous CDN events. Depending on the capacities, it is recommended to elect two SSPs.

Safe space persons are beforehand provided with Safe space Toolkit, a document created by CDN along with Safe Space policy document, which provides knowledge and detailed procedures of creating safe space and dealing with its potential violations.

SSPs are present at events to help raise awareness about the topic, intervene in questionable situations where Safe space principles are breached, and provide a listening ear to participants who have felt harassed. Nonetheless, we highly encourage everyone to be proactive in creating an atmosphere where the safety of others is validated. In case of a safe space breach, there are three stages that an SSP goes through: 1- Prevention; 2- Identifying; 3- Reporting.

Prevention

The main aim is always to prevent unacceptable behavior from happening and safe persons should guarantee this. Before the start of an offline/online event, they can briefly present the Safe Space document and measures/mechanism entailed in the document. Prevention methods are elaborated in chapter 3.

Since the document will be sent to participants in advance, the safe space person should open the floor for questions from the participants, in case that there is something unclear from the document. After the presentation, the safe space person should let participants know that he/she/they are the right person to approach, in case that somebody faces unacceptable behaviour, and this behaviour goes unnoticed from the safe space person.

Along with the preventive measures from chapter 3, participants and SSP should conduct regular emotional screening and be observant.

Identifying

Safe Space persons are trained to identify unacceptable behaviours in CDN activities and observe participants in a non-intrusive way for the sake of timely reactions. Unacceptable behaviours are not necessarily obvious and visible for bystanders and (if not verbalize) can be recognized through body-language. SSPs are trained to recognize subtle signs and react if someone feels uncomfortable. This of course depends on the specific context.

The key action in creating safe space, along with prevention, is identifying the breaches of safe space and boundaries in groups and on a personal level. There are different ways of recognizing and identifying safe space violations:

- Direct report to SSP;

These are usually subtle cases when the SSPs are notified or approached by participants/ or active bystanders who have noticed some kind of violation or strange situation. This can be a person directly seeking action to prevent further harassment, a complaint against other participant, seeking advice etc. If someone from bystanders notices someone else is feeling uncomfortable, they can inform SSP who will take further measures.

- SSPs observation ;

As mentioned previously, SSPs are observant and notice disturbed power dynamics, uncomfortable situations etc. by observing body language of participants (Example: Person A repeatedly sits next to person B on a break, each time person A moves away and appears uncomfortable. This keeps on happening and person B is retreating to their room). SSPs in these cases approach these participants and make sure to understand if there is some underlying issue that needs to be resolved.

- Feedback from the box

The box represents an opportunity specifically for reporting of safe space violations. The tips can be reported anonymously and will be researched further

by SSP and PT members. Messages in the feedback box don't necessarily have to be reports, but also suggestions, for example, to rearrange groups or be aware of some situations happening outside the venue (for example accommodation). The box is checked daily for feedback along with other preventive measures, but should not stop participants of contacting SSP or other PT members on anything relevant.

Reporting:

The SSP serves as the first line of contact and provides a type of first aid. Depending on the context, there are different ways of reporting the incident:

- the immediate reaction from the SSPs

In this scenario, the SSP are reacting immediately on spot to address the issue that have disrupted the safe space. This is sometimes done in a very intrusive way.

Techniques: educating participants, collective emotion check, body awareness exercise etc.

Examples: For instance, an SSP notices that only some participants are speaking in a discussion, therefore the SSP suggest to leave space for others who have not engaged much with the discussion.

- communication with victim/perpetrator

In case when there is a breach of Safe Space, SSPs try to identify the victim and perpetrator and have a moderated conversation separately with each of the sides involved in the dispute. Through this conversation, the SSP can understand the reasoning behind the perpetrator's behaviour and provide emotional support to the victim.

- communicating with the PT;

After consulting with both sides involved in the incident, SSPs sum up the case to the PT. This way, the PT can adjust the sessions accordingly in order to avoid similar cases for the rest of the programme, and make sure that everyone feels included and comfortable.

Measures

Based on the scale of the misbehaviour (mild-severe-extreme) there are different measures to be taken by the SSPs and PT of the activity. We will exemplify this by showing one hypothetical incident and different escalation of it from mild to an extreme incident. Let's imagine that we are facing a case where a transgender participant is being misgendered by another participant.

- Mild case: After the SSPs approach the "harasser", it turns out that this is done unintentionally due to the lack of information on the topic/ misuse of the PGP.

Measures: moderated communication/ SSPs remind participants again to read the Safe space document and ask if something is unclear.

- Severe: After the SSPs approach the “harasser”, it turns out that this is done intentionally due to the discrimination based belief. For instance, person believes, that only ciswoman are categorized as women and transwomen are men.

Measures: Emotional support to the victim, explanation to the harasser why their behaviour is unacceptable and they are asked to apologize to the harassed person. We can communicate with the problematic participant that if the behaviour will be repeated, then further measures will be taken. This will be taken into consideration for their future participation at CDN events, follow-up from the EC. If the participant is part of CDN MO, CDN EC will proceed with contacting the MO contact person.

- Extreme: when it involves instances of physical harassing/unwanted touch etc.

Measures: They can bring people to a safe place, away from whomever they felt harassed by. Furthermore, decisions and actions regarding what happens to people and an event remain with the organizers and/or CDN EC.

Other measures:

1. Group discussion can also be made during the event, where people collectively discuss the situation, and then participants can propose measures.

2. In case if there`s an extreme situation (ex. if there is a fight, if the safety of participants is risked), then the next measure will be:

2.1 contact the authorities;

2.2 expel the participant involved in the physical incident.

Safe space in online environments

CDN online spaces in which SS needs to be monitored include chats, mailing lists and online calls. This is monitored by SSP in accordance to SSP document and “SS guidelines for online spaces”. If possible, every chat should have at least one - preferably more SS persons who will overlook discussions and react in case of SS breaches.

General rules of SS in an online environment

1. Space for all
CDN chats are a space for all people, no matter one's gender, sexuality, race, religion, nationality, physical ability, etc. Stereotypes and insults are not allowed on chats. Personal opinion is valued, but it's crucial to give space to

people who are experiencing the discussed issues directly and encourage all people to share their thought.

2. Respect
There should be respect towards everyone no matter their identities. No previously outlined unacceptable behaviours are allowed in CDN chats. Trying to force religious and/or cultural beliefs is forbidden.

3. Gender and pronouns
Every member should respect other people's pronouns which should be clearly defined (or clarified if not clear). Disrespectful remarks towards a person's gender and gender identity is unacceptable.

4. Trigger warnings
If a participant is discussing topics that could be triggering to someone, it's crucial to use trigger warning (TW) or content warning (CW).

5. Misinformation
It's prohibited to spread misinformation in the chats.

6. Verbal and non-verbal communication in calls
Be aware of disctracting behaviours you might show in videos, which might be interpreted as offensive, insulting or simply distract the speaker (eg. discussions in chats of the meeting, facial expressions, physical needs, personal obligations, discussions in chats).

7 Safe space in EC and office
In order to ensure SS in the working structures of CDN, there should be similar concepts of ensuring SS in terms of unacceptable behaviours and general rules. It is recommended that 2 safe space persons are appointed - one from office and one from EC, who mutually consult and communicate on ensuring SS in these structures. Along with standard preventive methods of ensuring safe space, it is recommended that SSPs conduct regular (at least every 2 months) SS check with all members of structures, including persons under temporary contracts with CDN. In addition to the previously mentioned examples of SS breaches, the SSPs shall pay attention to the following conditions and situations: burnout states, mental health issues, communication within the team, working hours and vacation times etc. SSPs will gather recommendations on the improvement of working conditions, structure them, and regularly implement new positive practices.

Methods of ensuring SS in online spaces

SSP is responsible for chat monitoring, issuing warnings, ending conflicts, and reporting members that have been warned more than three times for not following the SS guidelines. SS guidelines are a document outlining procedures and unacceptable behaviours which can occur in online spaces and ways how to overcome them, similar to outlined SS policy procedures.
Additionally, SSP for online spaces should be aware and moderate gender balance and encourage all groups concerned to participate in the discussion. SSP can restrict people from dominating discussions in order to provide SS for everyone to share.

If personal attacks, accusations, spreading misinformation or defensive communication occurs, chat members need to be reminded by the SSP to keep

discussions constructive and reminded of the SS Guidelines and Policy. If participants ignore this reminder then SSP needs to contact involved participants privately and bring to their attention the issue.

If necessary SSP should create smaller chats for specific conversations. In case that conversations are getting out of hand then SSP (also an admin) should install slow mode (in Telegram chats).
In online meetings in cases of inappropriate verbal and non-verbal communication or breaking of moderation, SSP should remind of the SS guidelines and if the behaviour is not stopped after 3 warnings, SSP can restrict online activity as a meeting admin. In extreme cases of this behaviour, SSP can restrict activity without warning and contact the involved persons with a warning and clarification.

Resources

Hereby we would like to thank the following organisations for providing materials and resources with us in the process of creating the Safe Space Policy.

- Col·lectiu Eco-Actiu/ The Ulex project "Anti-oppression toolkit: A facilitator's guide"
- Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE)"Smash guidelines: Structural measures against sexual harassment"
- Federation of Young Europen Greens (FYEG) "Smash Glass ceiling: Handbook for brave feminist leaders"
- Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG) "Internal Rules of Procedure"
- European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet) "Safe Space Policy for Equinet Events"