

CATAPA towards a Safe(r) Space

A safe(r) space is a supportive, non-threatening environment that is open, respectful, stimulates willingness to learn from others, as well as physical and mental safety. It is a space that criticizes the power structures that affect our daily lives. It is a space that strives to respect the specific needs of everyone and to understand. Everyone who enters a safe(r) space has a responsibility to understand the values of maintaining space.

CATAPA is committed to inclusivity and safety for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity + expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, age, language, body size, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic standing, or otherwise. These guidelines aim to ensure CATAPA is a movement that actively works towards social justice, inclusiveness, and the elimination of all forms of oppression.

Guiding principles for building a Safe(r) space within Catapa

Every member of CATAPA has an important role in building and maintaining a safe(r) space. Therefore, we expect everyone within our organisation to abide by the following principles:

- We assure everyone is and feels included.
- We take away barriers linked to language, finances and physical abilities.
- We actively work to be a space that is free from any forms of hate or oppression.
- We acknowledge that every member of the group has an active role to play to make this a safer space and when we become part of this space, we actively and informed decide to take on this responsibility, individually and as a collective.
- When we see things happening that replicate the power systems we work to abolish we speak up or inform someone we trust.
- We actively work with comments that are brought up concerning the safety and inclusivity of our movement.
- We listen, reflect and learn when someone calls us or anyone of the movement out on something they did or said, before entering in a defensive state.
- We are aware of the space we occupy. We are aware of our privileges and the amount of verbal and/or physical space we occupy in relation to others
- We recognize that building a safe(r) space is a constant learning process, that throughout time and encounters we will find out where and how we have to change and shape in other ways as to actively build, rebuild and work this safer space as a movement.

Some concrete steps we take as a movement during our activities, in our professional workplace and in our relations with each other.

- **Education**

- We include workshops on power & privileges and safer space during the Changemakers and movement weekends and / or the Catapa summer camp. Many good formats/materials for workshops on these themes already exist made by other organizations such as the [Young Friends of the Earth Intersectionality Guide](#). This way all catapistas are included in these themes and participate in ensuring that CATAPA is a safer space.

- **Communication**

- E-mail:
 - volunteers and employees add their gender pronouns to their **signature**
 - (1) he/him/his
 - (2) she/her
 - (3) they/them/their
 - (4) or any combination of the above and/or other (neo)pronouns

(ii) Ways to **address in an email**: If you do not know the pronouns of the person you are writing to, you can address the person with the name instead of sir/mrs. When you talk about another person and you don't know their pronouns you can use their name when you refer to them or you can use the non binary pronouns: they/them/their. This also goes for external communication.¹

- Vacancies:

- We use m/v/x in the job description
- We work with with 'plus points' and profile in the job description.
- We emphasise different qualities in our job description, not only qualities that are typically seen as 'masculine'.
- We add that ALL people are encouraged to apply.
- "We are committed to diversity and equal opportunities. We select on the basis of attitude and skills. The qualities of the people are decisive, regardless of your diploma, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, colour or disability."

¹ *Why is this important?* It's hurtful to people when you misgender them.

The fact that you put your own pronouns in your signature ensures that people from all gender identities feel at ease. This way you are recognizing that you cannot assume someone's gender nor know which pronoun to use when talking to or about them. It's just basically saying: "Look, you can address me with X pronouns. How would you like to be addressed by me?"

- We do not create unrealistic job descriptions which will demotivate people to apply, especially those who are taking on caretaker roles.
 - We distribute our vacancies on various platforms.
 - We ensure the accessibility of the GECO position, by periodically reviewing the compensation offered and receiving feedback on the position.
- **Emotional and physical wellbeing**
 - Response to matters of wellbeing
 - We assign a wellbeing contact person. We also make sure all Catapistas are aware of the possibility to contact this person and how by:
 - Providing the information and contact details during intake conversations
 - Publicising the wellbeing contact person function in internal communications
 - Directing individuals towards this person
 - The current wellbeing contact person for the movement is Magdalena Pitzer (magdalena.pitzer@catapa.be). The tactic team should decide on the duration of her mandate which started in August 2023.
 - There should also be a wellbeing person for the office - the tactical team should decide on the mandate. For now this is followed-up by Karlijn Van den Broeck.
 - We offer the option to anonymously report incidents, suggestions or complaints on safety, inclusion and diversity. You can access this form [here](#)
 - This report will be followed up by the Wellbeing contact person
 - This person has the sole responsibility to investigate, discuss and view all reports, and take appropriate action.
 - If the report directly involves the Wellbeing contact person, then a member of the Board of Directors or CATAPA staff will assume responsibility.

It is the responsibility of the wellbeing contact person to:

- looks for ways to respond to the call of help of the reporting person.
- Ensure the reporting person's identity remains confidential, unless the reporting person specifically affirms their identity to be known.
- Search for possibilities of dialogue, conciliation or reparation according to the needs and desires of the reporting person.

- To ensure transparency, the reporting person (if their identity is known) must be actively involved and informed at every stage of the resolution process
- The wellbeing contact person must also seek ways to prevent such events in the future:
 - What led to such events taking place?
 - Is this problem a symptom of a wider issue within the movement? Would a training course/educational workshop help to reduce the likelihood that this situation occurs again in the future?

It is the responsibility of the Wellbeing contact person to write a report to the Board of Directors and Staff including an overview of the incident, actions taken, lessons learned for the future and next steps.

- Wellbeing as an integral part of the movement
 - We continue to work on the concept of sustainable activism. We actively seek ways to prevent burn out for Catapistas and instead ensure a sustainable and regenerative activism. We follow up on these workshops and activities.
 - We are reorganising our movement and goals (strategies and leaders) which gives the movement guidance and clarity both on an individual as on a collective level. You can read more about this process, and our new strategy, [here](#)

- **Accessibility**

The Catapa office is neither wheelchair accessible nor easy to reach for people with other disabilities. It is apparently impossible to change this on a building level. This is a reality we have to take into account. Therefore:

- We do not allow meetings to take place at the office by default if we are not sure that everyone attending can access it easily.
- We always mention that there is an option to meet at another more accessible place.
- We make sure the events are wheelchair accessible as far as possible, and mention this in the invitation to the event.
 - If the location is not wheelchair accessible, we always mention that there is an option to meet at another more accessible place.

- **Financial accessibility:**

We recognise that there is a financial barrier to participation within our organisation.

- To support volunteers to attend meetings, team building activities and events, CATAPA provides a reimbursement of transport costs, provided they use the cheapest form of public transportation. The full [reimbursement policy is detailed here](#).
 - We repeatedly mention that there is a refund for the travel costs to meetings/workshops. **Staff members emphasise this during communications leading up to every activity, and during the activity itself.** It is something that the volunteer should be informed about at the start during intake and throughout their volunteering.
- We do not assume everyone is financially able to eat out or have a drink at a bar. Food is provided during activities for a free contribution.
- We also recognise that the cost of training courses poses a barrier to participation. Therefore, CATAPA reimburses training fees, depending on several conditions. The full policy is detailed [here](#).

- **Volunteering:**

We make sure that volunteers from all kinds of backgrounds can be active in Catapa.

- We emphasise that we can look for alternative ways to participate as a volunteer. For example, if feasible, through video calls. Or on a location nearby the place of residence of the volunteers
- Language is important. We communicate in different languages so that all volunteers understand and can participate, both at events and in communication. The minority rules, we change the language into the one we all can understand, if that is not possible we work with whisper translation.
- We understand that our volunteers come from different places and contexts. Not everyone has the same amount of time, experience or skills and our job as a movement is not to expect this and to work towards, in where it is possible, an equity driven volunteer policy regarding compensations and financial help.

- **Activities/Events:**

We work to make our events inclusive spaces. These guidelines apply to **everyone in the movement when organising an activity under the banner of CATAPA.**

- We ensure the bathrooms are gender inclusive (gender inclusive symbols and trash cans in all toilets).
- We always add a disclaimer on our event page which we repeat during the activity that there is no place for sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia or other forms of hatred.

- When we are looking for collaboration with other organizations / movements when organizing events or activities, we do not always work with the same from the 'North/South' world. We look further: refugees, antiracist, feminist, queer movements,
- In case of discussions, weekends, we ask participants to write their pronouns under name tag.
- We use accessible communication in the event, not just academic language.
- We indicate which languages are or will be spoken at the events and provide the possibility of translation
- We mention who people can contact regarding inclusiveness at the events, both before and during the event.
- We do an in-depth screening of speakers, moderators to identify problematic and avoid discriminatory statements on stage
- We propose a buddy system: people who want to come to an event but don't dare/feel uncomfortable /can't do it alone will be linked to another person who's going to the event so that they can be able to go together and feel comfortable during the event.
- We remove as many financial barriers as possible by offering free activities and workshops (such as Movement Days and ULEX skill-share sessions), and using inclusive entry fees.

- **Consent**

Consent is not the absence of "no". It is the presence of a "yes".

Practising consent is an important step in creating a culture in which we want to live. A culture in which people are respected and have their autonomy, choice, freedom of choice, and therefore the freedom to decide for themselves what is best for them. Consent can be withdrawn or denied at any time. A "yes" to one situation does not mean automatic consent to another situation. It means listening to and respecting each other and paying attention to all our interactions.

- It is everyone's responsibility to ask consent and receive confirmation for every activity that involves another person. Respect everyone's physical and emotional boundaries. Ask before touching, and listen and change your behaviour if someone tells you that you are making them uncomfortable.
- We consider the right to privacy important and ask consent from everyone at the beginning of an activity before photos are taken or names are published somewhere. If people do not give consent, this is taken into account. This is also possible, for example, by using stickers or straps.

Accountability

When an individual violates our Safe(r) Space, we as an organisation declare we will take action. The form of action is always situation specific and individual specific:

- Addressing people about their behaviour - if a person is violating the safe(r) space, they will be asked to stop and will be expected to comply immediately.
- If the person continues to violate the safe(r) space, coordinators reserve the right to take any actions necessary to keep the event, activity, space (online and physical) a safe space for everyone.
- Removing the offending person(s) from the room.
- Organising a mediation with a neutral person if all parties agree.
- Informing the individual(s) about the limits they have crossed and continuing the conversation.
- Denying individual(s) access to our organisation.
- Providing additional information about the cause of certain conflicts and how they can be prevented in the future.

When a decision needs to be made to give 'benefit of the doubt' to someone who is accused of violating our Safe(r) Space rules or to support the reporting person, preference will be given to the reporting person.

We expect all volunteers and employees to implement and safeguard the above recommendations.

We are in a collective learning process. If you have any questions or suggestions on the creation of a safer space inside CATAPA, please let us know.