

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SAFEGUARDING EVENTS
ON MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH

PROTOCOL OF CARE



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A NOTE

When working with themes of migration, displacement and mental health, it is important to acknowledge a simple truth: no space can ever be completely “safe.” People bring their own histories, identities, memories and vulnerabilities into the room, and we can’t predict what may feel painful or uncomfortable for someone else. Experiences of displacement and trauma are complex, and emotional responses can come up unexpectedly.

Our focus is on creating spaces that feel supportive and intentional. This means being honest about the limits of what we can control, while taking meaningful steps to reduce harm and support everyone involved including staff, artists, collaborators, participants, audiences and yourself.

We strongly encourage you to continue hosting events that explore difficult and necessary topics. These conversations matter, especially in the current political climate. They help challenge stigma, build understanding and create visibility for communities whose stories are often untold or mistold. But they must be held with care.

This Protocol of Care has been created with input from our network including artists, participants and organisations. It is made to help us put the right measures in place so that staff, artists and audiences feel as supported as possible. Our aim is never to remove difficulty from the room, difficult topics are often the very reason we come together, but to ensure that the people engaging in these conversations are treated with dignity throughout.

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AIMS

The Protocol of Care supports anyone delivering or facilitating events that explore themes of migration, displacement and mental health. Its aim is to ensure that:

- Artists, participants and audiences feel welcomed and supported.
- Events are delivered with cultural sensitivity and trauma-aware practice.
- Facilitators know how to respond if someone becomes distressed or uncomfortable.
- Safeguarding responsibilities are clear.
- Signposting pathways are readily available and appropriate.

CORE PRINCIPLES

1. KINDNESS AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

- Understand that people may have lived experience of trauma, displacement or violence.
- Avoid assumptions about identity, background or experience.
- Use inclusive approaches that prioritise choice and consent.

2. DO NO HARM

- Prioritise emotional safety over artistic or organisational goals.
- Avoid pressuring anyone to share personal stories.
- Ensure that participation is always voluntary.

3. LIVED EXPERIENCE LEADERSHIP

- Involve people with lived experience in planning, delivery and decision-making.
- Ensure they are supported, paid fairly and not placed in extractive or tokenistic roles.

4. TRANSPARENCY

- Be clear about the purpose of the event, what will happen, and what support is available.
- Communicate boundaries and expectations in advance.

SAFEGUARDING

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Identify a designated safeguarding lead for the event.
- Ensure all staff and facilitators know your safeguarding procedure.
- Review the venue for safety, accessibility and privacy.
- Prepare a list of local and national support services for signposting.
- Ensure artists and facilitators understand the emotional risks of the content.

DURING THE EVENT

- Make sure staff are visible and approachable.
- Provide a quiet space where people can step away if needed.
- Avoid closed-door situations with individual participants unless necessary and safe.
- If a safeguarding concern arises, follow the organisational or venues safeguarding policy immediately without pointing attention to the concern.

AFTER THE EVENT

- Log any safeguarding concerns.
- Follow up with individuals if appropriate and safe.
- Debrief with staff and artists.
- If possible, introduce measures to avoid safeguarding concern in the future.

SUPPORT

FOR ARTISTS

Artists working on themes of migration and displacement may be drawing on personal or community trauma. Support should be built into the process.

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Discuss emotional boundaries and what the artist is comfortable sharing.
- Build a shared language to avoid terms that can feel offensive, triggering or othering.
- Ensure they understand the audience context and potential sensitivities.
- Offer regular check-ins to identify support needs.
- Provide clarity on logistics, expectations and content warnings.

DURING THE EVENT

- Ensure artists have a named staff contact.
- Provide breaks and a quiet space if needed.
- Avoid putting artists in the position of being informal counsellors.

AFTER THE EVENT

- Hold a debrief to check on wellbeing.
- Offer signposting if the event brought up difficult emotions.
- Ensure payment is prompt and communication is respectful.

FOR AUDIENCES & PARTICIPANTS

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE SPACE

- Welcome people warmly and explain the structure of the event.
- Make it clear that people can leave the room at any time.
- Provide water, seating options and a quiet space.

LANGUAGE

- Use inclusive and accessible language.
- Avoid graphic descriptions of violence or trauma, unless a trigger warning is given.
- Emphasise resilience, creativity and agency.

TRIGGER WARNINGS

HOW, WHEN AND WHERE TO GIVE THEM

Trigger warnings are not about avoiding difficult topics, they are about giving people choice and control.

WHEN TO USE A TRIGGER WARNING

Use a content note when the event includes:

- Themes of war, displacement, detention or persecution
- References to violence, loss or trauma
- Emotionally intense material
- Personal testimonies

HOW TO DELIVER A TRIGGER WARNING

A good content note is:

- Clear, briefly state what themes will be covered.
- Neutral, avoid sensational language.
- Empowering, remind people they can step out at any point.

For example:

"This event includes references to displacement and loss. Some people may find these themes challenging. You are welcome to step outside at any time, and a quiet space is available if you need it. There will be clearly visible members of staff available to talk to."

WHERE TO PLACE TRIGGER WARNINGS

- Event description
- Registration confirmation
- At the start of the event
- Before specific segments if needed

RESPONDING

WHEN SOMEONE FEELS TRIGGERED

Sometimes people can feel triggered, even when you think you put everything in place to try and avoid it from happening. This does not mean you did anything wrong. However, It does mean that an immediate response is necessary.

IF SOMEONE BECOMES VISIBLY UPSET:

- Stay calm.
- Offer to accompany them to a quiet space.
- Use simple, supportive language like “Would you like some space?” or “Can I get you water?”
- Do not touch the person unless they initiate or explicitly consent.
- Do not ask for details of their experience.
- Respect peoples boundaries.
- If the person does not speak English, try to find someone who can communicate with them.

IF THEY WANT TO TALK

- Listen without judgement.
- Avoid giving advice or interpreting their experience.
- Gently encourage grounding techniques (e.g. breathing, noticing surroundings).
- Offer signposting if appropriate.

IF THEY ARE IN CRISIS

- Follow the safeguarding procedure.
- Contact emergency services only if there is an immediate risk of harm.
- Stay with the person until help arrives (if safe to do so).

SIGNPOSTING

Provide signposting rather than counselling. Signposting should be culturally appropriate, easily accessible, local and relevant to refugees, asylum seekers and migrant communities.

EXAMPLES OF SIGNPOSTING CATEGORIES

- Refugee and migrant support organisations
- Community groups
- Mental health charities
- Local wellbeing hubs
- GP or NHS services (if appropriate)
- Helplines
- Faith-based or cultural organisations

HOW TO OFFER SIGNPOSTING

- Ask if the person would like information, don't push.
- Provide options rather than a single route.
- Avoid overwhelming them with too many choices.
- Never promise that a service will be available or appropriate.
- Never promise to keep something to yourself.

REFLECTING

After each event:

- Note any incidents or concerns.
- Reflect on what worked and what could be improved.
- Update your Protocol of Care as needed.
- Share learning with the wider team.
- When events are delivered in partnership with institutions, share your reflections and learnings directly with them. This is how we create systemic change, asking institutions to change their internal practices so they are genuinely welcoming to artists and communities with lived experience of displacement.

ARTIST / FACILITATOR WELLBEING

Supporting others can be emotionally demanding. We therefore recommend anyone dealing with topics of mental health, trauma and/or displacement to have:

- Regular supervision
- Debriefs after every event
- Access to wellbeing resources
- Clear boundaries around roles and responsibilities
- Training in trauma-aware practice and mental health first aid

And remember, facilitators should not feel responsible for solving participants' problems, their role is only to hold space and signpost.

FINAL NOTES

Every decision we make in how we hold these events, from how we design the room, to how we react to what might happen, to how we debrief afterwards, is a chance to model the kind of systems we want to see. This document is not just about minimising harm in the moment. It is about demonstrating, through our practice, what supportive, inclusive and collaborative spaces look like.

Lived experience of displacement is often accompanied by experiences of gender-based violence, racism, homophobia, generational trauma and/or other forms of structural harm. Being aware of this, and not requiring people to separate these experiences when participating, is in itself a form of care. You do not need to know someone's full history, you need to hold space for its complexity

This guide focuses primarily on public events and one-off gatherings. Many of these principles apply equally to longer-term work. In those contexts, emotional support, boundaries and regular check-ins become even more important, because relationships deepen and the stakes for the artist often grow over time. If you are working with an artist over a period of time, revisit these principles at each stage of the process, not just at the beginning.

If you have any questions or would like to have a conversation please reach out to maren@counterpoints.org.uk

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