



Versatile Consultants

Safeguarding of Vulnerable People and Children

Safeguarding of Vulnerable People

and Children Definition

A vulnerable adult is a person who is aged 18 years or over and who is living in residential accommodation, such as a care home; who may need community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age, and illness; detained in lawful custody and who may be unable to take care of themselves or unable to protect themselves against significant harm; who may have substantial learning and cognitive challenges.

For the purpose of this policy, children will be treated to have the same rights to protection from abuse and harm as other vulnerable individuals.

Abuse/harm to a vulnerable individual:

The below instances constitute abuse and harm to children and vulnerable adults:

- Physical, sexual, or emotional injury or threat of injury,
- Compromising the dignity or treating disrespectfully,
- Neglect of needs of a vulnerable individual,
- Failure to protect a vulnerable individual from danger and harm,
- Financial or material exploitation of all/any kind, or
- Any action/omission which would jeopardise the well-being of the child/vulnerable individual.

This definition of harm includes portraying children and vulnerable adults in a compromising situation (situation of dependency, helplessness or vulnerability of any kind).

Versatile Consultants expresses and commits to zero tolerance of abuse/harm of children and vulnerable people. VC will ensure that the communication material which is produced by it or its partners (including but not limited to videos, images, brochures, etc.) will be screened from this perspective. The material will also respect the privacy and confidentiality of the children and individuals.

VC may come into contact with vulnerable people in its field research work – especially where VC is working with the beneficiaries of an aid / financial or in-kind support program.

Scope of Application

This policy applies to VC staff, board, PI's, consultants, partners, and affiliates.

Responsibilities and Prevention

It is the responsibility of all VC employees, consultants, partners, and affiliates to be aware of the issue and be sensitive to all situations where there is potential of abuse. In case any information is shared with them about actual/suspected abuse, they should report it to the safeguarding focal person at VC. A dedicated email ID has been created. All Safeguarding-related information, concerns, complaints, and suggestions should be sent to this

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email: safeguarding@versatile-consultants.com.

Training and Awareness about the Policy

As part of their orientation process, all new employees at Versatile Consultants will receive training on the policy.

All partners who work with Versatile on projects that involve interaction with vulnerable individuals will be provided a copy of the policy and asked to confirm that they have read the policy and commit to abide by the principles laid therein. They will be given an adequate opportunity to ask questions and understand the policy.

At the time of the interview, prospective employees who are being hired on a project involving work with vulnerable individuals and are also likely to come in contact with vulnerable individuals will be asked behavioral questions related to safeguarding in order to ensure their suitability for the job.

Safeguarding Officer

A member of the Employ Committee will serve as the Safeguarding Officer, who will be the focal person on all issues about the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable individuals.

The safeguarding officer will identify VC's projects, which involve working with vulnerable individuals. The officer will work with the project team/s to prevent chances of safeguarding incidents.

The focal person will keep a log of all the reported issues and will be responsible to investigate, escalate and resolve these appropriately. Field workers will report the issues to their line managers who will notify the focal person accordingly. When the issue involves the line manager, the focal person will be notified directly.

Role of the Safeguarding Officer

The Safeguarding Officer will be responsible for the below deliverables and for upholding the processes:

1. Hiring checks & Training:

- Ensure that all employees getting onboard with Versatile Consultants (on the projects where VC is working with vulnerable individuals) undergo training on the issue of safeguarding and about VC's relevant policies and practices, within 2 months of joining.
- Work with the relevant VC colleagues to screen job roles where there is a likelihood of working with children and vulnerable individuals.
- Ensure that all candidates for the job are screened to prove suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults

2. Reporting, Recording and Resolving Breaches

- The Safeguarding officer will ensure that VC's procedures on breaches of the policy are followed.
- The safeguarding officer will record all the proceedings, evidence and follow-up actions

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- The officer will develop and maintain a safeguarding register, which will record all complaints, their status, resolution, and any follow-up actions

3. Ensuring compliance from the Downstream Partner

The officer will also keep the downstream partners (on projects involving work with vulnerable individuals) aware of VC's safeguarding policy. The downstream partner will make commitments to ensure that safeguarding concerns will be anticipated, prevented, and reported for immediate resolution.

Mechanism to Resolve Safeguarding Reports

Safeguarding incidents fall in the following categories and will be resolved differently:

1. A child or vulnerable adult is at risk of neglect
2. A child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm / is being harmed by the person who is not in employment of VC or of a downstream partner of VC
3. A child or vulnerable adult is being harmed and the accused/suspected person is VC's employee or a downstream partner's employee

In the case of category (1) and (2), it will be the responsibility of VC's employee/partner who has witnessed the neglect/abuse to bring the matter to the Safeguarding Officer's notice immediately. The safeguarding officer will decide whether the matter should be reported to the authorities i.e. local police station, government agencies for child protection, and government agencies for the welfare of vulnerable individuals (e.g. Social Welfare Department, Child Protection Bureau). Alternately, depending on the nature of the case, the Safeguarding Officer will provide the necessary support & counseling to the individual at risk and to his/her guardian, family member, etc.

In cases where the accused or suspected person is an employee of Versatile's downstream partner, the matter will be reported to the management of the partner organization. The Safeguarding Officer will ensure that this matter is resolved by the partner organization. Depending on the nature or magnitude of the case, VC management may decide to escalate the matter to the police and government agencies.

In such instances, where the accused/suspect is a VC Employee, a disciplinary case will be initiated against the accused. The Inquiry Committee for the Sexual Harassment / Harassment cases will deal with such Safeguarding-related cases also and will collect information and evidence within a stipulated time. They will present their recommendations to the Competent Authority. To avoid any conflict of interest, The Inquiry Committee's composition may be changed.

Inquiry Process of the Safeguarding Reports

The Inquiry Committee, within three days of receipt of the report, shall:

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- a. Communicate to the accused individual the charges and statement of allegations levelled against them, the formal written receipt of which will be given.
- b. Require the accused within seven days from the day the charge is communicated to them to submit a written defense. If they fail to do so without reasonable cause, the Committee shall proceed ex-parte; and
- c. Enquire into the charge and may examine such oral or documentary evidence in support of the charge or in defense of the accused as the Committee may consider necessary.

During the investigation

1. Assistance in the inquiry procedure can be sought from any member of VC. Versatile expects its staff and other members of the community to cooperate fully in the investigation process. Any staff member who is the subject of, or potential witness regarding, a safeguarding complaint and refuses to cooperate in an investigation is subject to disciplinary action. VC shall do its best to temporarily adjust so that the accused and the victim do not have to interact. VC can also decide to send the accused on leave or suspend the accused in accordance with the applicable procedures for dealing with cases of misconduct if required. In addition:

Within thirty days of the initiation of the formal inquiry

- The Inquiry Committee shall submit its findings and recommendations in writing to the Competent Authority
- If the Inquiry Committee finds the accused to be guilty it shall recommend disciplinary action to the Competent Authority

After the investigation is concluded:

The Competent Authority shall impose the disciplinary action recommended by the Inquiry Committee within one week of the receipt of the recommendation.

Confidentiality

The reporting and subsequent proceedings will keep the identity of the vulnerable individuals confidential. All details of the incident will be kept confidential and will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

Approval

This Safeguarding of Vulnerable People and Children Policy has been approved by the Board of Directors of Versatile Consultants and is effective as of January 31, 2023.

Signatures

Muhammad Zubair Rafique
Chief Executive Officer/Director
Versatile Consultants (Private) Limited



Haider Ali
Board Chair
Versatile Consultants (Private) Limited

