



# VSO GLOBAL SAFEGUARDING POLICY

## Introduction and Purpose

Safeguarding is a broad term that VSO uses to describe the organisation's policies, procedures and practices designed to prevent and protect people from all forms of abuse, including child abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence of any kind including sexual harassment caused by employees, volunteers, associated personnel, operations, or programmes.

VSO is committed to upholding and maintaining the highest standards of behaviour and integrity and its commitment to safeguarding complies with the values that shape our culture.

This policy is informed by and committed to the principles laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

VSO believes that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and the duty to safeguard others applies without exception to anyone associated with VSO.

Safeguarding incidents are rooted in an imbalance of power, particularly gendered and sexualised abuses of power. VSO has a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence of any kind including sexual harassment committed by employees, volunteers or others affiliated with our work. We acknowledge that the risk of these harms can never be completely eradicated and for this reason, zero tolerance means we encourage reports, we investigate, and we sanction even minor infringements of this policy and related breaches of our Global Code of Conduct whether a proven incident happened in or out of working hours.

VSO recognises that persons with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination and are at increased risk of abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence. The heightened risk means that additional measures must be considered to fully protect them and a disability inclusive safeguarding approach that proactively includes persons with disabilities must be applied.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set out the position of VSO on the prevention of and protection from abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence of all kinds
- Set out responsibilities and procedures to be followed in order prevent abuse happening in the first place
- Set out responsibilities and procedures to be followed where a suspicion, allegation or actual harm has happened

## Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees contracted by VSO. The term employee refers to all permanent and temporary employees including interns.
- All volunteers including but not limited to National and International volunteers, E-volunteers, community volunteers, corporate volunteers, youth volunteers and the voluntary workforce

- Associated personnel while engaged in work or visits related to VSO, including but not limited to partners, consultants, contractors, journalists, funders, government representatives
- All trustees
- Guests and observers

## Responsibilities

### All

All employees, volunteers, consultants, trustees, guests, observers, and other representatives are obliged to follow this policy and maintain an environment that prevents exploitation and abuse, and which encourages reporting of breaches of this policy.

**All employees, volunteers, consultants, trustees, guests, observers, and anyone associated with VSO must always:**

- Strive to create and maintain an environment which prevents abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence including sexual harassment.
- Promote a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of all kinds, sexual exploitation and sexual violence including sexual harassment.
- Strive to develop relationships with all stakeholders which are based on equality, trust, respect, and honesty
- Be aware that people can hold or lack power based on characteristics such as gender, race, disability, sexuality, caste, ethnicity, education, their role in an organisation. A lack of power can increase the risk of exploitation and abuse and the misuse of power and privilege is at the core of abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence
- Immediately report any concerns, suspicions or incidents that indicate this policy has been breached by anyone associated with VSO

### Children

- Always treat children with respect, value their views and take them seriously
- Use positive, non-violent methods to support and manage children's' behaviour
- Maintain professional boundaries and consider how language and actions may be perceived by children
- Wherever possible follow the 'two-adult' rule while conducting activities that involve children ensuring that two or more adults supervise all activities and are always visible and present. Where a practitioner is working with a child with disabilities who has personal care requirements, the practitioner should work with the child and their parents or carers to discuss how the 'two adult rule' will work, document this consultation process, and collect informed consent/ assent.
- Report any concerns about the welfare of a child



**All employees, volunteers, consultants, trustees, guests, observers, and anyone associated with VSO must never:**

- Sexually harass anyone. Sexual harassment is unwanted or unsolicited sexual attention that does not involve physical contact, such as sexualised comments, jokes, or gestures. This can be in person or via digital media.
- Sexually assault anyone. Sexual assault is unwanted or uninvited sexual contact. This includes, grabbing, fondling, deliberately touching without consent.
- Rape anyone. Rape is non-consensual penetration including oral, genital, and rectal.
- Sexually abuse anyone. Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a vulnerable person to take part in sexual activities where that person is unable to give consent for example a child or a person with disabilities.
- Sexually exploit anyone. Sexual exploitation includes taking advantage of an imbalance of power to manipulate or coerce another person to engage in sexual activity for financial, sexual, or political benefit of the abuser.
- Exchange money for sexual activity, this includes paying for sex with a sex worker, which is a form of exploitation and applies even in countries where this is legal.
- Exchange employment, goods, or services for sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour
- Develop or seek to develop a sexual relationship with a primary actor of any age; such relationships are not acceptable and will not be tolerated since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics
- Physically harass, assault, or abuse another person
- Emotionally abuse another person such as engaging in behaviour intended to shame humiliate, belittle, or degrade
- Condone or participate in any behaviour which is abuse, discriminatory, illegal, or unsafe
- Use any form of technology to exploit or harass another person
- Use any form of technology to access, view, create, download, or distribute indecent images (e.g., pornographic images, sexualised images of children, images of child abuse)

**Children**

- Act in ways that may be or be perceived to be abusive or exploitative (physically, emotionally, neglectfully, or sexually) towards children
- Have sexual intercourse or participate in any form of sexual activity with any person under 18 years old or under the local age of sexual consent (whichever is higher). Mistaken belief in the age of the child is not a defence.
- Abuse their position of power to withhold professional assistance or give preferential treatment to children or behave in any way that discriminates against children
- Use physical punishment/discipline towards children (e.g., hitting, corporal punishment).
- Use any form of technology (e.g., computers, mobile phones, digital cameras) to exploit, harass or bully children
- Use any form of technology to access, view, create, download, or distribute indecent images of children (e.g., pornographic images of children).
- Communicate with a child via digital platforms (e.g., Facebook Twitter, Instagram), mobile technology (WhatsApp, Skype, texting) or online without consent and knowledge of his/her parents or caregiver.

- Fail to disclose any convictions or child related investigations that they are subject to or have been subject to
- Agree with a child to keep a secret which has implication for their safety or the safety of other children
- Fail to report concerns relating to children
- Condone or participate in behaviour towards children which is illegal, unsafe, harmful, or abusive in any way or condone or participate in any child related activity which is illegal, exploitative, unsafe, or abusive
- Make children run errands for financial gain or otherwise, or use them to solicit support
- Use language towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative or that is intended to shame, humiliate, or emotionally abuse
- Promote any form of child labour or recruit children for any labour which is inappropriate to their age or developmental stage which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities or which places them at risk of injury
- Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves (e.g. dressing, toileting). Where a practitioner is working with a child with disabilities who has personal care requirements, the practitioner should work with the child and their parents or carers to discuss how the 'two adult rule' will work, document this consultation process and collect informed consent/ assent.
- Seek to make contact or spend time with any child who they come into contact with as part of their work, except as part of the designated activities set out in their role. For example, an employee or volunteer or other representative should not visit the home of a child alone or invite unaccompanied children into their own accommodation
- Take children to their home or sleep in the same room or bed as a child

### **Managers**

As well as upholding safeguarding standards themselves, managers at all levels are responsible for ensuring employees, volunteers, and other representatives are aware of the policy receive regular safeguarding training commensurate with their role and are supported to implement and work in accordance with it.

Managers are responsible for encouraging an open and transparent way of working that facilitates a strong safeguarding culture within and between teams by:

- Ensuring the dissemination of this policy and promoting its relevance in all aspects of their work
- Holding themselves and others accountable for their behaviour and adherence to this policy
- Supporting and developing systems that maintain an environment in which primary actors, employees, volunteers, contractors, partners, and other representatives know how VSO expects them to behave and responding should they fail to meet those expectations
- Ensuring employees, volunteers, primary actors, contractors, partners, and other associates know how they can submit complaints and report their concerns

### **Safeguarding Focal Points in projects, teams or countries**

The role of the Safeguarding Focal Point is to support VSO project teams to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by receiving concerns and forwarding these to the Global Safeguarding Team, raising awareness and promoting best practice. This is not an expert role but one that works collaboratively across the project team and VSO's safeguarding experts.



Safeguarding focal points will:

Sensitively receive complaints and refer all and any of them to the Global Safeguarding Team in line with the VSO Incident Management framework

- Collaborate with VSO safeguarding experts to promote best practice, prevention, and awareness in programmes
- Work with the Global safeguarding team to acknowledge complaints and to provide or facilitate first-line support to complainants and survivors throughout the process
- Work with the Global safeguarding team and other relevant stakeholders (eg volunteer representatives, community leaders, MEAL) to develop and maintain accessible reporting mechanisms
- Work with the Global safeguarding team to support the delivery of safeguarding training, awareness raising and other capacity building activities for project teams, volunteers and partner organisations
- Where appropriate provide support in partnership with the Safeguarding Team to facilitate safeguarding investigations

### **Global Safeguarding Team**

VSO's global safeguarding team lead, oversee, and quality assure all areas of safeguarding to ensure the mainstreaming and integration of safeguarding into VSO's global portfolio of work. They provide adequate and appropriate training opportunities, expert advice, guidance, and leadership to support effective implementation of VSO's safeguarding framework. They are responsible for the case management of incidents related to safeguarding.

### **VSO Executive Board**

The VSO executive board is responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this policy and associated procedures and ensuring that everyone linked with VSO is equipped and supported to meet their responsibilities.

### **Trustees**

The board of trustees holds ultimate accountability for this policy.

### **Reporting**

VSO places a mandatory obligation on all employees, volunteers, interns, consultants, partner agencies, sub-grantees, and visitors to our projects to immediately report concerns, suspicions, allegations, and incidents which indicate actual or potential abuse of any kind, sexual violence including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation or any behaviour which suggests this policy may have been breached.

It is not the responsibility of the person reporting the concern to decide whether abuse has taken place. The responsibility is to report so that the procedure for dealing with suspected or actual incidents of abuse can be initiated.

Concerns can be raised with an individual's line manager, functional lead, project safeguarding focal point or directly to the global safeguarding team.

If the person feels uncomfortable reporting through any of the above reporting lines, they can report directly to:



VSO Global Safeguarding Team: [safeguarding@vsoint.org](mailto:safeguarding@vsoint.org)

Or

VSO Whistleblowing: [whistleblowing@vsoint.org](mailto:whistleblowing@vsoint.org)

Reported breaches of this policy will be kept confidential and information shared only with relevant individuals. VSO will do all it can to protect individuals who report misconduct from any form of retaliation.

For internal cases, the following parties are likely to receive redacted information about the concern, Executive Director of People and Organisation Development, Head of Internal Audit and Risk, Chief Executive, and the Board of Trustees. Donors will be informed where there is a mandate to do so, and VSO will report serious incidents to the Charity Commission for England and Wales (statutory bodies in other countries may be informed where there is an obligation to do so). All names and any identifying information will be redacted, and strict confidentiality protocols will be adhered to.

## **Policy application across VSO**

### **Risk assessment and programme design**

VSO has a comprehensive safeguarding risk framework which supports risk assessment and risk management across the programme design cycle, including assessing the safeguarding capacity of its partner agencies and sub-grantees.

VSO will ensure that disability inclusive safeguarding risk assessment and mitigation planning is embedded in the programme design cycle and continues to be a key reference document across the life of the programme.

Mitigation strategies will be fully costed and adequately resourced, and a contingency will be apportioned to support robust incident management should a safeguarding incident occur.

### **Complaints and feedback mechanisms**

VSO will inform primary actors, partners, and communities in which it works of the standard of behaviour they can expect from anyone associated with VSO and how they can raise concerns about inappropriate behaviour. Complaints and feedback mechanisms will be accessible to all stake holders including children and disabled people.

### **Incident Response**

VSO takes all concerns and reports of abuse seriously and immediate action will be taken. All concerns, suspicions and incidents must be reported to VSO's Global Safeguarding Team in line with the VSO Incident Management Framework.

All those involved in responding to a report of abuse are guided by VSO's Incident Management Framework to triage, escalate as appropriate and manage the concern or incident.

In responding to an incident of abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual violence VSO will take a survivor centred approach. A survivor-centred approach aims to ensure that anyone who has been the target of abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual violence is treated with dignity and respect and that the person's rights, privacy, needs, and wishes are respected. VSO's response will be guided by the VSO Responding to Sexual Violence Toolkit.



Every effort must be made to maintain confidentiality throughout the incident response process and beyond by all VSO people. VSO employees and volunteers who breach confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

### **Safer Recruitment**

VSO is committed to recruiting employees, volunteers, and other representatives safely in line with its Global People Resourcing Policy.

All roles will be specifically evaluated for safeguarding risk to determine the level of background checking required.

Employment offers or volunteer agreements are conditional depending on satisfactory background checking and no individual will begin service with VSO until all background checks have been done and returned satisfactory results. Checks, although not of themselves a guarantee of safety are mandatory.

VSO recognises that no form of checks can substitute for adequate supervision and management.

### **Induction and Training**

VSO includes an Introduction to Safeguarding as a mandatory module in the induction timetable of all employees, volunteers, trustees, and those associated with our work.

In addition to this mandatory module all VSO people must receive safeguarding training commensurate with their role prior to their start of service. This training will be carried out by a specialist and will include information about VSO's policy positions, how to recognise signs and symptoms of abuse, reporting procedures and how to embed Safeguarding into VSO's work.

All VSO people will receive safeguarding periodic refresher training or other safeguarding training at least once every two years thereafter.

### **Communications, Storytelling, and social media**

VSO takes care to ensure that in all forms of communication primary actors are treated with respect, portrayed with dignity, and not put at risk as a result of their contact with VSO.

Text, photographs, or video images should never be used in a way that may put a primary actor at risk of harm and risk assessment is an essential stage of any content gathering.

Images should never include partially clothed or naked subjects and should not in any way be sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.

Primary actors who are invited to be the subject of text, photograph or video resource gathering should be provided with accessible information about how their story or image will be used to enable them to make an informed decision about consent. Consent is only meaningful if it can be freely given and informed by a clear understanding of the context and usage of material.

VSO employees, volunteers and other representatives should adhere to VSO's Global social media Policy when engaging in any social networking activity which includes both personal accounts as well as VSO branded social channels



This policy shall be made available in accessible formats for blind and deaf people. I.e., in braille, audio format and in sign language

## **Associated tools and guidance**

**Safeguarding Glossary**

**Project Safeguarding Risk Assessment**

**Safeguarding Country Context Analysis**

**Partnership Safeguarding Assessment**

**Safeguarding risk levels for job descriptions**

**Disability Inclusive Child Safeguarding Guidelines**

## **Associated and linked global policies**

**Code of Conduct**

**Security Policy**

**Whistleblowing policy**

**People Resourcing Policy**

**Social Media Policy**

**Harassment, Bullying and Intimidation Prevention Policy**

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