



CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULTS SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Policy Owner: Human Resources, People, and Talent Unit
Approved by: Danny Alkhoury
Origination Date: March 31, 2023
Next Revision Date: March 31, 2026 (or as appropriate)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Child and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy intends to demonstrate the commitments of the Middle East and North Africa Trauma Healing Resource Center (MENA THRC - hereafter referred to it as THRC) to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. The policy aligns with the THRC's vision, mission, and core values regarding human dignity.

THRC acknowledges that we may encounter or pose a risk to children and vulnerable adults due to the nature of our work, operations, and partners. This policy is therefore intended to manage and mitigate such risks actively. It considers various elements that determine the vulnerability of children and adults, such as age, family or social context, disability, environment, and natural disasters. This policy applies to all staff, contractors, volunteers, interns, and contracted partner organizations.

THRC interacts with all individuals in precarious conditions, especially children and vulnerable adults, ensuring their safety, dignity, and security. THRC believes that every person has the right to live in a safe, peaceful, and enabling environment where they can fully exercise their rights regardless of gender identity or other distinctions.

2. PURPOSES

THRC is committed to safeguarding children and other vulnerable adults from all kinds of harm and abuse and allowing them to live with respect, dignity, and safety through THRC's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

THRC is committed to (1) a culture of zero tolerance for all forms of harm and abuse in which THRC staff and partners "**Do No Harm**" while working for or with THRC and (2) to making sure that safety concerns and misconduct incidents are recognized, reported, and dealt with appropriately and sensibly.

To summarize, this policy provides guidance to all THRC People and Partners to always understand the importance and responsibilities of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults by upholding the dignity, worth, and respect of children and vulnerable adults; taking preventative measures to ensure their safety; recognizing concerns or allegations of abuse towards vulnerable adults and children and responding promptly and efficiently.

3. SCOPE

The THRC's Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy applies to all THRC people, including but not limited to all THRC staff, board members, subgrantees, vendors/sub-contractors, and implementing partners, guests, and visitors to THRC premises where we are operating.

4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1. **A child** refers to a person under 18 years, per Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,¹ regardless of national laws or cultural practices that may stipulate a younger age.
- 4.2. **Child abuse and exploitation** refers to neglect, commercial or other exploitation, including ill-treatment, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse that affect a child's health, survival, growth, or dignity in a relationship of trust, power, and responsibility.
- 4.3. **Vulnerable adult** refers to any person aged 18 or over, and if:
 - 4.3.1. The adult who is at risk, is abused when they are mistreated, neglected, or hurt by another person who holds a position of trust, such as when they are in custody or secure accommodation, or she is a pregnant or nursing mother; and/or
 - 4.3.2. The adult is in a relationship (work or social) or in contact with another adult who seeks to misuse their position of authority or trust to control, coerce, manipulate, or dominate them.
 - 4.3.3. The adult is dependent on someone else for the provision of essential services (including but not limited to safety, shelter, water, and food) because of their context or health conditions, such as
 - An adult in a refugee camp or an assistance recipient from an NGO is therefore potentially vulnerable to exploitation or abuse due to their situation or their lack of power and control.
 - an adult is in a foreign country and location.
 - an adult with a physical, intellectual, and sensory disability or/ or severe mental health illness.
- 4.4. **The people we serve** refers to children and vulnerable adults benefiting from THRC work and operations.
- 4.5. **Harm** refers to any physical, emotional, or psychological injury or damage to the individual's health, survival, development, or dignity.

¹ ¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 1.

- 4.6. **Do no harm** refers to THRC's responsibility to 'Do No Harm' or minimize the harm we may be doing inadvertently due to inappropriate programming.
- 4.7. **A Vendor/Subcontractor** refers to any individual, corporation, or organization with which the THRC has a contractual relationship for providing goods or services that support the project's operations and, consequently, the people we serve.
- 4.8. **Subgrantees** refer to any non-profit organizations that receive financial assistance due to the THRC's grants; when the THRC is the Grant Holder ("prime" recipient).
- 4.9. **A partner or (Implementing Partner)** refers to a private and public entity, other than subgrantees or vendors, with which the THRC has a contractual arrangement or memorandum of understanding (MoU) for project implementation.
- 4.10. **THRC staff** refers to individuals involved in THRC program operations part-time and full-time employees, workers, contracted workers, consultants, independent contractors, fellows and interns, and volunteers.
- 4.11. **Guests and visitors** refer to the people hosted by THRC. The latter visit national and regional offices and execute or financially support projects but are not THRC staff, implementing partners, journalists, photographers, THRC spokespeople, board members, and donors.
- 4.12. **Safeguarding** refers to THRC's responsibility to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are not harmed by THRC people, operations, or programs; that they are not exposed to the risk of harm and abuse; and that any concerns THRC may have about the safety of children and vulnerable adults in the communities where we work are properly reported to or addressed.

5. THRC'S PERSPECTIVES TOWARD CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT SAFEGUARDING

- 5.1. Child and vulnerable adult abuse and exploitation are never acceptable.
- 5.2. All children and vulnerable adults have equal rights to safeguard against abuse and exploitation.
- 5.3. The situation of all children and/or vulnerable adults must be improved by promoting their rights as outlined in the relevant UN Conventions and the aforementioned standards.
- 5.4. THRC has a duty of care to children and vulnerable adults with whom we work, are in contact with, or are affected by our work and operations.
- 5.5. THRC ensures that our implementing partners are accountable for meeting minimum protection standards for children and vulnerable adults within their programs, particularly those that THRC is funding.

6. SAFEGUARDING PRINCIPLES

6.1. ZERO TOLERANCE OF ABUSE

The THRC maintains a zero-tolerance policy on the exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable adults. There is no exemption for such behavior; it is inappropriate and will not be allowed.

6.2. JOINT ACCOUNTABILITY

Every THRC person is responsible for safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults. The Executive Leadership Team is accountable for implementing THRC's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adult Policy, with oversight provided by the THRC Board.

6.3. RIGHT-BASED APPROACH

International law is the foundation for the THRC's Child and Vulnerable Adults Policy. The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Keeping Children Safe by adopting International Safeguarding Standards, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and its related UN conventions, adopted in 1979; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (and its optional protocols); the UN Statement for the Elimination of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation; and all child-related UN conventions serve, which obligates signatory nations to protect children and vulnerable adults' rights in the areas of protection, survival, development, and participation, is referred to by THRC. The core principle of the Conventions is that children and vulnerable adults are endowed with their inalienable rights. In all actions pertaining to them, their best interests must take precedence.

6.4. MANAGING RISKS RELATED TO SAFETY

THRC is obliged to do everything in its ability to safeguard the people we serve. While it is difficult to eradicate the possibility of their exploitation and abuse, THRC initiatives can assist in recognizing, managing, and reducing these risks.

6.5. PROCEDURES ARE IMPARTIAL

All decisions pertaining to the well-being and protection of the people we serve shall be governed by the principle of "Best Interests." When responding to accusations or concerns about protecting those we serve, THRC will adhere to just and fair practices to guard them.

7. SAFEGUARDING APPROACHES

THRC's approaches to protecting people are based on two primary sources. However, conformity with applicable law is necessary. THRC's principles and knowledge of good understanding of the international development practices;

- 7.1. The values of THRC include a dedication to the human being as a whole, which includes addressing physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs and being aware of the opportunities presented by various life stages;
- 7.2. We know that a community's most vulnerable members must benefit from an effective humanitarian development code of conduct and practices. In other words, what benefits the vulnerable people can also benefit entire communities.

8. THRC'S SAFEGUARDING POLICY

8.1. CONFIDENTIALITY

THRC believes all people should be protected equally regardless of gender, nationality, religion or political opinions, age, sexual orientation, familial and social background, economic status, physical or mental health, or criminal background.

8.2. SAFE CULTURE

THRC will create a culture where: safeguarding issues and concerns are aired and discussed; THRC people and partners can and must confront potentially harmful or abusive behavior; reporting child abuse allegations or concerns is necessary.

8.3. SAFE INDIVIDUALS

THRC employees shall guarantee that their behavior encourages and permits individuals to live free from physical, sexual, and emotional damage and abuse, sexual harassment, physical and sexual exploitation, discrimination, and human trafficking. THRC's Code of Conduct outlines acceptable behavior for those who work with children. All THRC employees must sign and follow the code of conduct.

8.4. SAFE RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

In the recruitment and selection process, abuse prevention and safeguarding will be addressed. All THRC people will be recruited under this policy. Interviews will include inquiries to find any claims of abuse and questions around suitability concerning safeguarding the people we serve. Before starting work, THRC people will be screened for contact with children and vulnerable adults. These can involve reference checks, a criminal record check in the applicable jurisdiction/s, statutory declarations, or local legal equivalents. THRC will not hire those who endanger the people we serve. THRC fieldworkers must adopt the Safeguarding Children Policy.

8.5. SAFEGUARDING AWARENESS AND TRAINING

THRC People will learn how to report child abuse in THRC-run or THRC-funded programs. THRC will communicate this policy to relevant stakeholders, including children, in an accessible form pertinent to their context and level of involvement with THRC. THRC employees will get compliance training depending on the frequency and intensity of their engagement with the people we serve. Children and vulnerable adults will also be consulted on this policy and practice when possible. THRC programs should allow them to voice their opinions.

8.6. SAFE PRACTICES

THRC will use the following approaches to uphold its responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults:

- **Recognizing**

THRC will ensure that all THRC people are alert to and knowledgeable about the problems and concerns relating to the abuse and exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. This includes any witnessed, suspected, or alleged incidents of child or vulnerable adult abuse or any breach of the THRC Code of Conduct. Any allegation or concern regarding the abuse of a child or vulnerable adult must be treated seriously.

- **Preventing**

THRC will ensure that all THRC people mitigate the risk and danger to children and vulnerable adults through awareness and good practice.

- **Reporting**

THRC will ensure that all THRC people are informed of the actions they must take in case of a risk or threat to children or other vulnerable adults, and transparent reporting processes and procedures are in place. THRC People must report when they know of or have reasonable suspicion of child or vulnerable adult abuse or any breach of the THRC Code of Conduct. All claims or concerns should be raised urgently, including informing the Safeguarding Officer and relevant THRC people outside of regular working hours if necessary. An allegation or complaint must be reported within 24 hours. There are two means of reporting when staff has a concern and is aware of any breaches of this Code and policy non-compliance;

- **Report through a related line manager.** This is an immediate act of the report that personnel should strictly conduct accordingly. The report will later follow the path of the THRC reporting procedure.
- **Report through the THRC reporting method.** Staff can report issues to HR for documentation. HR documents complaints and refers them to the Director and Deputy Director for resolution. Suppose the concern is mutually acceptable to be brought to the committee's attention. In that case, THRC senior management and HR will facilitate the meeting to resolve the concern.

- **Responding**

When a claim or concern is made, the first step is ensuring the alleged survivor is safe and has access to proper care. Safety and care are essential in the first 24 hours after an accident.

The Safeguarding Committee handles complaints and allegations. This may involve an internal investigation or an external report. As needed, we shall report events to the proper regulatory organizations and government authorities (e.g., the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). We shall notify the appropriate police and child protection authorities if there are grounds to suspect criminal activity. Internal disciplinary measures, such as suspension and/or termination, may be suggested due to the investigation.

THRC's Safeguarding Committee manages reported safeguarding issues and documents them in a Safeguarding Incident Register that is reviewed quarterly. The Safeguarding Committee will evaluate the lessons learned from each safeguarding case to prevent or manage future cases. When identified, these lessons will be shared with the THRC and/or the Board as appropriate.

8.7. SAFE RECORDS

The Safeguarding Officer shall properly document and store all reports and investigations. All issues will be dealt with secrecy, timely reporting, truthfulness, fairness, and professionalism. THRC's Children and Vulnerable Adults' Safeguarding Guidelines explain investigation, recording, and reporting procedures.

8.8. SAFE PLANS – RISK MANAGEMENT

THRC and its partners will assess activity-related risks to the people we serve in their planning and proposals. THRC will establish the resources available in various regions and jurisdictions for notification and support if abuse is reported or suspected to assess and manage risks to the people we serve. THRC will review and manage child and vulnerable adult safeguarding concerns in any

program that permits field trips or access (i.e., consultants, supporters, volunteers). THRC's Children and Vulnerable Adults' Safeguarding Guidelines include more on risk assessment and management.

8.9. SAFE PARTNERSHIP

All partners working with THRC are expected to consistently apply good safeguarding practices in all activities involving the people we serve. THRC's partners will develop their policies and processes, adapted to their local contexts, that have the standards included in this Policy as their minimum basis. THRC is committed to cultural safety and/or linguistically diverse people/communities and the safety of children with a disability.

8.10. SAFE COMMUNICATIONS

THRC's public communications should not include any personal information that could identify them or injure their name, reputation, or families to preserve the dignity of the people we help. Also, all photographs of children MUST have parental or guardian consent. Hence, THRC people are required to adhere to the Communication Policy.

9. CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULTS' SAFEGUARDING:

- 9.1. The capacity of THRC's people to preserve and promote the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct will determine how well we can protect and support the people we serve. As THRC people, it is our responsibility to uphold these standards, serve as an example, and foster an atmosphere that promotes our adherence to this code of conduct for the protection of children and vulnerable adults.
- 9.2. It is acknowledged that the work of THRC can put THRC people in a position of power in relation to children and vulnerable adults in the communities THRC works with. It is obligatory for THRC people not to abuse this authority.
- 9.3. This Code of Conduct is designed to guide THRC people to make ethical judgments in their professional and, at times, private lives.
- 9.4. The Code applies to all THRC people, who will be required to read, comprehend, and sign an agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct. Any violation of the Code of Conduct will be taken seriously and may result in disciplinary action or termination in line with THRC's disciplinary policies.
- 9.5. All THRC people must support, advocate for, and promote the Code of Conduct. They are also responsible for implementing, monitoring, and enforcing its standards.

10. POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

THRC acknowledges that internal and external environments are changing. This change could affect the scope and elements of this policy. Therefore, this policy will be evaluated every three years. The nature of the review process will be consultative and participatory. The THRC senior management is responsible for initiating the policy evaluation. A policy review report will be made available.