

## **MDFC SAFEGUARDING POLICY**



**Approved by the MDFC Board of Directors**

**14<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Medical Doctors For Choice (MDFC) is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of all children, young individuals, and vulnerable adults involved in our initiatives. We envision a world where everyone can lead a life free from harassment, exploitation, and abuse. MDFC acknowledges the higher vulnerability of certain groups, such as women, vulnerable adults, and children, to mistreatment due to existing disparities. Addressing power imbalances within our operations and programs is of utmost importance to prevent any misuse for personal gain or harm.

At MDFC, we acknowledge the specific responsibility we bear in promoting human dignity and social justice within our organization. We prioritize the creation of a safe and respectful workplace, understanding the significance of organizational culture and accountability in fostering a secure and supportive environment for our staff, partners, and the communities we serve.

MDFC adopts a zero-tolerance towards sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, and child abuse. We firmly refuse to accept any instance of sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, or child abuse from our staff, partners, or any individuals associated with our organization, towards anyone.

As a result, any allegations or complaints of misconduct will be treated with the utmost seriousness and addressed promptly and appropriately. We assure you that no one will face any form of retaliation or victimization for bravely coming forward to report such issues.

### **1. The objective of this policy**

- To promote and ensure the safeguarding of Vulnerable Persons directly served by MDFC and its partners.
- To ensure that any abuse of Vulnerable Persons that occurs in the context of MDFC's projects and programs are reported and addressed.

### **2. Scope of Application**

This policy applies to all MDFC Staff, employees, and Related-Personnel:

- Medical Doctors for Choice staff, MDFC Members, MDFC employees, and MDFC Country Offices.
- Related Personnel includes board members, volunteers, interns, visitors, as well as international and local consultants associated with these entities and related personnel.

The policy's scope extends to both during and outside of regular work hours. Any actions taken by MDFC Employees and Related Personnel outside of working hours that contradict this policy will be regarded as a violation of the policy's terms.

### 3. Context:

**Child:** Any individual under the age of 18 years.

**Safe Guarding:** Protecting an individual from harm. Harm includes any form of bullying, harassment, exploitation, abuse, or other act that causes injury or suffering

**Vulnerability:** The extent to which a population, individual, or organization is unable to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impacts of disasters or poverty.

**Vulnerable groups:** In the context of MDFC, vulnerable groups include women of reproductive age, adolescents and youth, historically marginalized communities, people living with HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ persons, female and male sex workers, persons with disabilities, substance users and addicted individuals, refugees, young housemaids (female and male), people who are incarcerated, and children.

**Vulnerable adults:** Refers to individuals aged 18 or older who require special care, support, or have particular needs, and those who are dependent on or reliant upon others. Vulnerabilities may arise from conflict, disasters, or other circumstances, either short-term or long-term. This category also includes individuals who self-identify as unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation or those marginalized by society or the state.

**Abuse:** is defined as any behavior towards a person that results in harm endangers life, or violates their rights. Examples of abuse include:

**Physical abuse:** The actual or potential physical harm inflicted by another person, adult, or child, which may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning, burning, or fabricating symptoms or inducing illness in a child or vulnerable adult.

**Emotional abuse:** Continuous emotional maltreatment that adversely affects mental well-being and health. Examples include restricting movement, degrading, humiliating, bullying (including cyberbullying), threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing, or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

**Sexual abuse:** The actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, involving force or coercion, particularly in situations of unequal power or control.

**Sexual exploitation:** Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

**Sexual harassment:** Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors, verbal or physical conduct, or gestures of a sexual nature that may reasonably be perceived as offensive or humiliating to another person.

**Harassment:** Unwanted behavior, whether verbal, physical, or gestural, that offends, intimidates, or humiliates another person.

**Discrimination:** abuse fueled by discriminatory attitudes based on age, race, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or cultural background.

**Commercial exploitation:** The exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult in work or other activities for the benefit of others, leading to harm to their physical or mental health, education, morality, or social-emotional development. This may include child labor, among other forms.

**Neglect and negligent treatment:** Persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs, resulting in significant impairment of their healthy physical, spiritual, moral, and mental development. This includes inadequate supervision, failure to protect children from harm, and neglect to provide proper nutrition, shelter, and safe living/working conditions. It also covers maternal neglect during pregnancy due to drug or alcohol misuse and ill-treatment of children with disabilities.

**Financial or material abuse,** such as stealing or denying access to money or possessions, and expecting favors in exchange for MDFC assets or involvement in a project.

## **4. MDFC's Safeguarding Commitments**

### **4.1. Protecting Vulnerable People**

MDFC staff, board members, volunteers, and contractors are expected to abide by the following principles:

- All Vulnerable Persons possess individual rights and should not face discrimination based on race, color, sex, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, or social origin, property, disability, sexual orientation, birth, or other status.
- Equal protection from abuse and exploitation is the entitlement of all Vulnerable Persons.
- Efforts will be made to empower Vulnerable Persons to achieve their full potential, with a focus on addressing inequalities.

- The safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of Vulnerable Persons are of utmost importance.
- Everyone shares a responsibility to support and protect Vulnerable Persons.
- MDFC, along with other non-profit or development organizations, holds a specific duty of care towards the Vulnerable Persons they interact with and serve.
- When partnering with other organizations, MDFC is obligated to ensure that minimum protection standards are met for the Vulnerable Persons involved in the collaborative programs.
- Recognizing the significance of collaborating with MDFC's Partners in safeguarding Vulnerable Persons.
- Staff members are regarded as representatives of MDFC at all times, even outside of working hours, and are obligated to adhere to this policy continuously.

**4.2. MDFC staff shall strive to make MDFC's activities safe and caring environment(s) for all people, with special attention to Vulnerable Persons.**

**A Caring Environment, as envisioned by MDFC:**

- I. The health, safety, and welfare of Vulnerable Persons are evaluated and taken care of.
- II. Staff members are conscious of the potential for abuse and proactively take measures to prevent it.
- III. A robust and well-established reporting system is in place for any incidents that may arise.

**4.3. Activities conducted by MDFC, shall be planned, organized, and executed in alignment with the principles outlined in MDFC's Policy for Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons.**

**4.4. People management:** MDFC will ensure that all personnel are well-informed about our Safeguarding Policy, the expected behaviors and conduct, and the procedure for reporting any misconduct. This will be accomplished by incorporating MDFC's guidelines for preventing sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and child abuse into relevant codes of conduct, new employee and visitor orientations, safeguarding awareness-raising training, refresher courses, and regular internal communications.

**4.5. MDFC Safeguarding with Partners:** MDFC will actively advocate and enforce safeguarding practices with partners. As part of the due diligence process for new partnerships, MDFC will

ensure comprehensive safeguarding assessments. Partner selection will be based on their dedication to social justice and equality, organizational values, and their ability to safeguard their staff and program participants effectively.

**4.6. Safe Communications:** MDFC shall ensure that its utilization of social media is done in a manner that does not have any adverse effects on children and vulnerable adults. Before employing social media, MDFC will conduct a risk assessment to ensure it does not negatively impact children and vulnerable adults.

#### **4.7. Response and Follow-up to Reports:**

MDFC will extend support and assistance to complainants and individuals who have experienced sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, or child abuse involving MDFC Employees and Related Personnel. This support may encompass medical treatment, legal aid, and psycho-social assistance. Our approach to providing support and assistance will be centered around survivors, taking feasibility and risk assessments into account.

**Protection from retaliation:** MDFC will take appropriate actions to the best of our abilities to protect individuals from any form of retaliation when they report allegations of sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, or child abuse involving MDFC Employees or Related Personnel in good faith. MDFC will ensure that all allegations of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and child abuse by MDFC Employees and Related Personnel are thoroughly examined, risk-assessed, and, if necessary, investigated. In some cases, we may refer the matter to another agency for investigation or report it to law enforcement.

**Reporting and recording safeguarding concerns:** MDFC recognise the potential difficulties of reporting and recording safeguarding concerns and importance of creating and maintaining a culture within organisations that allow both vulnerable persons or MDFC staff, interns, fellow, volunteers, and contractors to report any form of bullying, harassment, exploitation, abuse with confidence and without accusation. A practical, accessible and well understood process for reporting such concerns to responsible person unconnected with the alleged or perceived abuse.

All MDFC staff, interns, fellows, volunteers, and contractors shall report any concerns or incidents to the Safeguarding Officer (Ms. Revocathe GIRIMPUNDU) through telephone number +250782864790 or use email: [grevocathe@gmail.com](mailto:grevocathe@gmail.com)

If the matter involves an MDFC board member, the victim or any other interested person shall report the matter to the Executive Director Dr. Claude Nsabimana through telephone number +250788 393 189 or use email: [board@medicaldoctorsforchoice.org](mailto:board@medicaldoctorsforchoice.org)

However, if the allegations are against the Executive Director, the alleged victim or any other interested person shall report the case to the MDFC Safeguarding officer.

Deliberate false allegations are a serious disciplinary offense and will be investigated.

Anyone who brings any safeguarding suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or former abuse to the notice of the Safeguarding Officer, will be responded to respectfully and actively. All safeguarding work will be recorded with clarity and detail. All suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations will be reported.

Safeguarding records are needed in order to:

- Ensure that what happened and when it happened is recorded.
- Provide a history of events so that patterns can be identified.
- Record and justify the action/s of staff, interns/fellows, volunteers and contractors.
- Promote the exercise of accountability.
- Provide a basis of evidence for future safeguarding activity or formal proceedings.
- Allow for continuity when there is a change of personnel.

When making records the following practice should be followed:

- Wherever possible, take notes during any conversation (or immediately after if more appropriate). Using the MDFC SAFEGUARDING CONCERN FORM found on Annex1 of this policy ensures that all relevant information is gathered.
- Ask consent to make notes, taking age and understanding into account.
- Explain why you want to take notes, and that they can have access to the information they have shared with you.
- Make sure your notes are legible, clear, concise, relevant, through and jargon free.
- Use the person's own words and phrases. Do not attempt to sanitise language or improve grammar.
- Ensure the notes are up to date, signed, dated and timed.
- Ask the person to review the notes and confirm that they are accurate.
- Pass records to the Safeguarding Officer, Revocate the GIRIMPUNDU, as soon as possible but at the latest by noon of the next day.
- Keep a log of all actions you have taken.
- Please refer to page Annex 2 of this policy for an example of the Case Note form we agree to use.

**Storing Safeguarding Information:** The following measures should be put in place if material containing special category or criminal data is retained:

- Access provision should be carefully planned. Only those that are required to see and use records should have access to them.
- For MDFC the following people have access to Safeguarding Information on a routine basis:
  - Revocathe GIRIMPUNDU (Safeguarding Officer)
  - Claude NSABIMANA (Executive Director)
  - Berchmans UWIMANA (Chair of The Board)
- Data held on personally owned computers can be lost if unforeseen personal circumstances arise. This should never be the sole source of safeguarding records.
- Digital files should be subject to regular back-up.
- If the data is stored on a stand-alone computer. The provisions for back-up should be away from this source to ensure that there is another copy if hardware is lost or corrupted beyond recovery. A secure server is the best option for back-up, where available but again access to safeguarding files should be limited to personnel listed in the access protocol.
- Pen drives or removable media must be encrypted if they are being used to store safeguarding records. However, the risks of loss of such items are higher than less mobile storage so great care should be taken in use.
- Software which identifies viruses, malware and phishing must be installed on systems storing safeguarding records. It must be regularly updated and the provision must include a regular scanning facility.
- Hard copy material must be stored in lockable cupboards or cabinets.
- If material is scanned for digital retention, care should be taken to ensure that all parts of the document are contained in the scan, particularly the edges of documents. It is important to retain the integrity of the document, in case it is needed for proceedings at a later date.

#### **4.8 Action:**

The Safeguarding Officer, after being informed of an allegation, will make a preliminary assessment and determine the course of action appropriate to the seriousness of the alleged offense. Once it is decided that an alleged abuse needs to be investigated, then the Safeguarding Officer will disclose all relevant information to the Senior Operations Committee that is made of the two members of the board of directors and the Executive Director for further action.

#### **5. Prevention:**



MDFC will implement preventive measures to create a secure environment for vulnerable individuals in the workplace, as well as in MDFC's projects and programs. These measures will not only safeguard staff but also uphold the organization's reputation. Furthermore, MDFC will advocate that its partners adopt the highest standards possible in accordance with the scope of their operations and organizational structure. MDFC will ensure that all its staff and partners involved in direct interactions with Vulnerable Persons, especially children, introduce a system of checks when recruiting new staff.

## **6. Implementation and dissemination**

This policy forms an integral part of any contractual agreement between MDFC and its staff, employees, interns/fellows, and contractors and is always available in the MDFC open resources for everyone to see and refers to. All staff and volunteers must be familiar from their first engagement with their legal responsibilities for the welfare and safeguarding of vulnerable persons and must comply with safeguarding policies applicable to them through their work for MDFC and/or any partner, contractors or beneficiary organization supported by us

All MDFC employees, interns/fellows, volunteers and contractors will have periodic training and updates should be provided in order all MDFC employees, interns/fellows, and contractors to be aware of current regulatory requirements and policies, developments in the regulatory environment and to maintain the requisite standards of compliance. this will include training in what constitutes any form of bullying, harassment, exploitation, abuse, or other act that causes injury or suffering and how complaints or concerns should be addressed fairly and sensitively to protect all concerned. This policy forms an integral part of any contractual agreement between MDFC and its staff, employees, interns/fellows, and contractors and is always available in the MDFC open resources for everyone to see and refers to.

## **7. Review and update**

The Board will conduct an annual review of the policy's implementation, and if needed, will make appropriate updates accordingly.