

VLM CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT SAFEGUARDING POLICY

This document sets out the VLM Policy on safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults. It is shared with all our overseas partners. This policy was approved by the board on 7th July 2022.

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**1. VLM values and a background to the policy**

**VLM Mission Statement**

**To form and facilitate our members to immerse themselves in the experience and culture of the Vincentian mission overseas, so that reflecting on the learned experience, they will, on their return, effect change and transformation both locally and globally.**

**VLM Values**

* Justice and Peace
* Solidarity
* Partnership
* Global Citizenship and Education

**Background and Policy Context**

Children First Act, 2015

 “This Act places a number of statutory obligations on specific groups of professionals and on particular organisations providing services to children. This revised Guidance includes information on the statutory obligations for those individuals and organisations under the Act. It also sets out the best practice procedures that should be in place for all organisations providing services to children.”

As outlined in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017 “While the role of parents is to protect their children, society also has a duty to promote the welfare and safety of children. Everyone should be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be being abused or at risk of being abused. The wider community of relatives, friends, neighbours, professionals, and voluntary workers are well placed to be aware of a child’s welfare. They should know how to recognise and respond to 4 the possibility of abuse or neglect, to ensure that the most effective steps are taken to protect a child and to contribute to the ongoing safety of children.”

It is the policy of VLM to abide by guidelines set out in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017).

**2. Purpose of this Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to protect people, particularly children, vulnerable adults from any harm that may be caused due to their coming into contact with VLM. VLM’s Volunteer Programme involves working with children and as a result VLM has a duty of care to protect the well-being of all children connected to the Programme. All staff and volunteers must be alert to the possibility of child abuse and alert to their obligation to report reasonable concerns or suspicions to the appropriate authorities. All staff and volunteers are encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behaviour to always protect themselves from false allegations and to adhere to the good practice guidelines outlined in this policy. It is the policy of VLM to carry out Garda Vetting and reference checks on all volunteers as part of the volunteer recruitment process. As a signatory to the Comhlámh Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Organisations and the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, VLM is committed to implementing all principles of good practice and carrying out an internal audit on an annual basis.

**3. Scope**

The policy applies to all:

* Staff
* Volunteers
* Board of Management
* Partner Organisations1

1 Partner organisations are required to sign up to this policy as well as have their own safeguarding policies in place

**4. Child and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy Statement**

Safeguarding means protecting a child’s and vulnerable adults’ right to live in safety, free from harm and neglect. VLM has a strong commitment to the welfare of all those involved in the scope of our work including through our partners, and their protection from abuse and exploitation. We want to develop and maintain an organisational environment that is free of harassment, abuse, and exploitation, and to ensure the same in all our work with communities.

We know that the children and vulnerable adults in the communities with whom we work can be particularly at risk and VLM is committed to preventing and bringing an end to both the risks and experience of abuse and neglect, while at the same time making sure that the child’s and adult’s wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regards to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any actions.

In line with Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), VLM’s policy states that all children have a right to protection, from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has the care of the child. Furthermore, this right is extended to all vulnerable adults with whom VLM comes into contact.

VLM is committed to the principle that children and vulnerable adults should be safe and protected from harm. VLM believes that:

* The welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount.
* All children and vulnerable adults have the right to protection from harm irrespective of their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs, pregnancy / maternity, gender reassignment and/or sexual orientation.
* Our physical and virtual spaces should be safe and secure and promote enjoyable and positive experiences.
* All suspicions and allegations of harm should be taken seriously and responded to speedily and appropriately.
* All staff should be aware of their responsibility to ensure the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.
* Our recruitment processes should ensure that our staff and volunteers do not pose a risk of harm to children or vulnerable adults.

VLM commits to addressing safeguarding throughout its work, through the three pillars of prevention, reporting and response.

**5. Defining and Recognising Abuse**

To safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults all trustees, staff and volunteers need an understanding of common safeguarding terms.

*5.1. Definition of a child and a vulnerable adult*

The UNCRC Convention (Article 1) defines a ***‘child’*** as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. For clarity, the term ‘child’ is used in this document to denote anyone under the age of 18. Where there is a discrepancy in age definitions between the laws of a country and this policy then the upper age limit should prevail in triggering VLM’s safeguarding procedures, whilst accepting the fact that it may not be possible to take action under the laws of the country involved. Safeguarding incidents should nonetheless be investigated under this policy.

A ***vulnerable adult*** is a person aged 18 or over who has the right to be protected from violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and to make informed decisions free from duress or influence or impairment. This impairment could relate to the following factors: physical or mental disability; illness; old age; emotional fragility or distress; gender; ethnicity; religious beliefs or otherwise. Vulnerability can be temporary or indefinite and should be seen as a continuum which reflects the shifting nature of vulnerability in the context of our work.

5.2. *What constitutes harm*

Living a life that is free from harm and abuse is a fundamental human right for every person. Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment. Somebody may abuse or neglect by inflicting harm, or by failing to prevent harm. Someone may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults or by a child or children. We know that the children and vulnerable adults in the communities with whom we work can be particularly at risk.

Different types of harm can include the following:

* **Financial harm** (for example an individual is unclear or confused about where their money has gone);
* **Physical harm** (for example an individual has bruises or marks that they cannot properly explain);
* **Psychological harm** (for example an individual is being verbally bullied by others);
* **Sexual harm** (for example an individual is being sexually harassed or intimidated);
* **Neglect** (for example an individual is not washing or eating properly).
* **Abuse of authority or power** (for example a person is frightened to disagree or contradict someone who is pushing them for an answer)

The examples given above are not exhaustive, and there are many types of actions and behaviours that could be considered harmful to others. Deciding if something is abuse is complex and staff should be encouraged to report any concerns they have, however minor, rather than waiting until things reach the level of abuse. Harm is not always easy to spot but the above give examples of situations to be aware of. Above all, trust your instincts – if something feels wrong, say something.

**6. Prevention**

By the nature of VLM’s work, staff and volunteers may come into contact with children and vulnerable adults. VLM will ensure, through awareness and personal and professional conduct, that staff and volunteers minimise the risk to children and vulnerable adults.

VLM will:

* Ensure all staff have access to, are familiar with, and know their responsibilities within this policy.
* Ensure that all staff and personnel named in the scope of this policy, including partners, will be required to sign up to this policy if undertaking work on behalf of VLM.
* Design and undertake all its programmes and activities in a way that protects people from any risk of harm that may arise from their coming into contact with VLM. This includes the way in which information about individuals in our programmes is gathered and communicated.
* Work with partners to design, implement and monitor programmes that put the individual’s rights first and ensure there are reporting mechanisms in place that allow community members to raise concerns with implementing partners or directly with VLM.
* Implement stringent safeguarding procedures when recruiting, managing and deploying staff and volunteers.
* Ensure volunteers receive training on safeguarding.
* Follow up on reports of safeguarding concerns promptly and according to due process.

*6.1. Good Practice*

It is Good Practice to:

• Treat everyone equally with respect and dignity.

• Always treat the welfare of every child/vulnerable adult as paramount.

• Always work in an open environment avoiding private or unobserved situations.

• Avoid placing yourself in a compromising or vulnerable position.

• Be accompanied by a second adult whenever possible.

• Avoid doing something that could be misinterpreted by a third party.

• Immediately note the circumstances of any situation which occurs which may be subject to misinterpretation by a third party.

• Wait for appropriate physical contact to be initiated by the child (e.g. holding a small child’s hand).

• Ask permission before taking photographs.

• Be aware of the potential for peer abuse and bullying and address it with both individuals where possible.

• Avoid placing children in high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children).

• Report to a supervisor when inappropriate action is being inflicted by children on other children e.g. sexually provocative games.

• Ensure, in so far as is reasonably possible, that buildings, facilities and equipment, used by children or vulnerable adults, are safe.

• Be aware of the location and contents of the nearest first-aid kits.

• Be sensitive to risks of personal safety and the possibility of unfounded allegations that can arise.

• Anticipate and control disruptive behaviour by setting clear boundaries and maintaining a group contract.

Try Not To:

• Encourage any inappropriate attention seeking behaviour

• Allow children to engage in inappropriate or high-risk games with each other.

Do Not:

• Show favouritism or spend excessive amounts of time with one child/vulnerable adult.

• Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse a child or vulnerable adult.

• Use language that will mentally or emotionally harm a child or vulnerable adult

• Suggest inappropriate behaviour or relations of any kind.

• Develop a sexual relationship with a child or vulnerable adult.

• Kiss, fondle or touch a child in an inappropriate or insensitive way.

• Do things of a personal nature that a child or vulnerable adult could do for him/herself, including dressing and bathing.

• Condone or participate in behaviour that is illegal or unsafe.

• Act in any way that intends to embarrass, shame, humiliate or degrade a child or vulnerable adult.

• Show discrimination of race, culture, age, gender, disability, religion, sexuality, or political persuasion.

*6.2. Use of photos*

Photographs, videos and websites must show respect for children and adults, be in their best interest and conform to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages that VLM is a signatory to. This includes prioritising their best interests over the opportunity for increased funding, positive public profile and advocacy purposes for VLM.

VLM pays particular attention to pictures, images, videos or other likenesses of children and adults and/or information related to children and adults that could compromise their care and protection. We will obtain full voluntary informed consent for photographs/video. Images with corresponding text which may identify a child or vulnerable adult will be removed.

*6.3. Duty of Care*

VLM takes its duty of care for children and vulnerable adults seriously and aims to ensure that all our volunteers comply with child and vulnerable adults safeguarding policies.

VLM staff and volunteers should ensure that they are never alone with a child or vulnerable adult. There should be two adults with any group of children and/or vulnerable adults at all times, and the VLM staff/volunteers should stay within sight of one another. VLM staff/volunteers will not always know the full background of the second adult, but the ‘two adults principle’ offers a higher level of protection than where an adult works alone with a child or vulnerable adult. VLM staff and volunteers must stay vigilant in supervising individuals who are given access to children and vulnerable adults.

**7. Roles and Responsibilities**

VLM staff and volunteers are obliged to -

• Contribute to creating and maintaining an environment that prevents safeguarding violations and promotes the implementation of this policy.

• Report any concerns or suspicions regarding safeguarding violations.

Working with our international partner organisations –

In carrying out our charitable mission, VLM works with partner organisations overseas, the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Fathers. Although VLM has a limited mandate to act or enforce the policies and practices of partner organisations, partnership agreements are underpinned by the principles outlined in this policy statement and this policy is shared with partners. In relation to the work of our partners, VLM will:

• Provide support and advice for partners developing their own Child Safeguarding Policy.

• Create an environment where safeguarding issues are discussed openly in a non-threatening, safe and supportive environment.

• Promote open lines of communication within and between organisations to improve awareness and to document learning from the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures.

• Create a framework to deal openly, consistently, and fairly with allegations concerning both direct and indirect abuse where information is properly recorded.

• Support our partners to create an environment where children and vulnerable adults are better able and willing to speak out about abuse

• Actively raise awareness and express our concerns where appropriate in relation to behaviour and/or practice that does not support and respect a child or vulnerable adult’s rights.

**8. Enabling Reporting**

VLM will ensure that safe, appropriate, accessible means of reporting safeguarding concerns are made available to staff and the communities we work with. This includes working with partners to ensure that they put in place adequate reporting mechanisms that allow communities to raise issues and concerns.

Anyone who reports concerns or complaints through formal whistle-blowing channels will be protected by VLM’s Whistleblowing Policy.

VLM will also accept complaints and concerns reported by/from external sources such as members of the public, partners, and official bodies.

**9. Reporting Concerns**

While disclosures of harm or abuse are rare, every individual who becomes aware of any suspicions or allegations regarding harm to children or vulnerable adults is required to report this immediately.

Any concerns should be reported in the first instance to the VLM Designated Liaison Person (VLM Coordinator) in the first instance using the VLM Incident Report Form (Appendix 1).

With Respect to Partner Organisations -

* If a situation arises while overseas which causes concern about the behaviour of the partner

organisation with respect to safeguarding, volunteers are encouraged to discuss this with the VLM Coordinator.

* All partnership agreements must include a statement confirming VLM’s commitment to child and vulnerable adults safeguarding. If the partner organisation does not have appropriate safeguarding policies, then VLM’s child and vulnerable adults safeguarding policy takes precedence.
* Our duty of care requires us to ensure that any disclosures or concerns are formally reported in order that appropriate action is taken to safeguard the welfare of the participant. Partners will be required to look at appropriate referral and reporting processes in their own country of operation. Simply leaving the issue with staff from partner organisations is not an adequate response to a disclosure. VLM and a named person at the partner organisation must be agreed.

**10. Dealing with a Disclosure**

VLM will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children and adults where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

In the event of a child/vulnerable adult disclosing an incident of abuse it is essential that this is dealt with sensitively and professionally by the staff member/volunteer involved. The following are guidelines to support the worker/volunteer in this:

● Inform the child/vulnerable adult of your duty to report their disclosure as early as possible in the conversation. Never agree to keep the disclosure secret.

● React calmly, an over-reaction may intimidate and increase any feelings of guilt.

● Listen carefully and attentively; take the child/vulnerable adult seriously; the child is taking a risk by telling you this, you should try to ensure that the child's experience of telling is a positive one.

● Reassure the child/vulnerable adult that they have taken the right action in talking to you.

● Ask questions for clarification only. Use open-ended questions such as "Do you want to tell me about this?" Be mindful not to ask leading questions.

● Check back with the child/vulnerable adult that what you have heard is correct and understood; be mindful not to make a child repeat the story unnecessarily.

● Do not express any opinions about the allegation.

● Record the conversation as soon as possible, using the child/vulnerable adults words. Sign and date the record.

● Treat the information confidentially. Information should only be shared on a ‘need to know’ basis.

**11. Monitoring and Review**

VLM’s Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy will be monitored and evaluated to ensure this policy is rigorous both in its approach and its application. The Board will also maintain oversight of safeguarding risks.

This policy will be reviewed every year or earlier if warranted, including after any safeguarding incident.

**Associated Policies and Guidelines;**

Volunteer and Staff Codes of Conduct
Anti-Bullying and Harassment policy
Whistleblowing Policy

**Incident Report Form – Strictly Confidential**

Name of the person completing the form \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name (s) of affected/injured party \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Incident \* If this is an ongoing issue or one that unfolded over a period of time, then please write "ongoing" below. Otherwise please give the exact date of the incident.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Time of Incident \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Initial Categorisation of Incident

Minor - Some professional support needed, relatively small concerns.

Medium - Professional support needed, reoccurring smaller incidents, substantial concerns.

Major – Serious incident, long term injury to volunteer(s) or local project participants; large disruption to volunteer(s) service to partner.

Type of Incident

Partner Related - impacts on volunteers work with the Partner organisation.

Safeguarding Issue - incident related to concerns regarding Volunteer/Coordinator/Partners in relation to safeguarding.

Security - Incidents related to volunteers’ security on placement.

Medical Health - Health related issues.

Medical psychological - Concerns re volunteer ability to cope

Disciplinary - Volunteer conduct related.

Location of Incident\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Description of Incident (please continue on a separate page if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Witnesses to the Incident / Other People Involved Please list any other people that witnessed the incident or involved in the incident \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Impact on Individual \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Any other impacts \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Describe Medical Care / Emergency Care Provided (if Applicable) Name of person(s), doctor(s), hospital(s) providing care, days spent in hospital, treatment given \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations for the rest of the Programme / Future Programmes\* Please include specific behavioural changes if appropriate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ BLOCK CAPITALS: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Role: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_