

## Facilities Management from A to Z

Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard  
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### **ulnerable Workers**

“Vulnerable workers” is a term used by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and a number of other workplace enforcement agencies to describe those who are at risk of having their workplace entitlements denied or those who lack the capacity or means to secure them. Such people can include migrant workers, those who are not confident expressing themselves in English, young and inexperienced workers, expectant mothers, those new to the job, or agency and temporary workers.

The Commission on Vulnerable Employment (COVE) estimates that around two million workers in the UK find themselves in vulnerable employment – which they define as precarious work that places people at risk of continuing poverty and injustice resulting from an imbalance of power in the employer-worker relationship. FM related sectors including cleaning, catering and security are frequently cited as problem areas for vulnerable workers.

Factors like race, gender, disability, age and work patterns can affect people's health and safety and sometimes health and safety is used as an excuse to justify discriminating against certain groups of workers. It's important to take account of diversity and involve all groups of people when assessing risk and managing health and safety.

There is statistical evidence to prove the logical assumption that recently appointed workers face a higher risk of accidents and ill-health than those with more experience. Facility managers should make sure there is adequate induction, training, supervision and communications to protect those who fall into these groups.

In addition to standard induction procedures the FM should take particular account of levels of experience of new recruits and their familiarity with the work being done and the working environment. Cultural and language issues must be taken into account as possible aggravating factors. The employer must ensure that vulnerable workers are properly supervised, can communicate effectively with their supervisor, and that they know how to raise any concerns they may have about health and

Health and safety legislation applies to all workers regardless of their age, sex or nationality. It is unlawful to discriminate against both younger and older workers or on grounds of race or sex. Allegations of increased health and safety risks cannot be used as a false excuse for not employing someone.

*The TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment (COVE) [www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk](http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk) has a large directory of links to organizations offering support to vulnerable workers of all kinds and guidance for their employers.*

*[www.conferencing.bt.com/infocentre/guides](http://www.conferencing.bt.com/infocentre/guides)*