



VMM Equality Policy

1. Introduction

VMM believes that human rights are universal and that every individual is equally entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. Inequality and discrimination have a huge impact on the lives of people and they undermine human rights. The aim of this policy is to ensure that best practice in relation to equality is being promoted both within the organisation and in all external interactions.

2. Values

Values are those ideals that motivate us as individuals and as an organisation. For VMM International, the values of faith, respect, integrity, compassion and commitment, and [selflessness *or* humility]¹ define and underpin our commitment to equality and human rights. Our shared values unite us, define who we are, how we work, what we believe in and what we stand for. Each value matters and taken as a whole they inform how we will deliver our vision and mission.

¹ The strategic framework states “Selflessness – to care enough to take a risk and sometimes fail. To commit and to give, as part of something bigger without ever expecting anything in return, accepting that we may never witness or measure the long term return from our work, but have faith in just knowing that a difference has been made.” However, ‘selflessness’ is perhaps not the most accurate word to describe this with. It suggests acting in ways often detrimental to one self, albeit to the benefit of others, and so might not be fully compatible with the idea of ‘care for self’ (see ‘Respect’). I suggest that ‘selflessness’ be replaced with the term ‘humility’ which captures the idea of being well grounded (in terms of faith or otherwise) and is connected with self-restraint and is contrasted with narcissism, hubris and other forms of excessive vanity, which the description of the value above aims to capture.

Faith

While VMM has Christian roots, motivation and ethos, it matters not that some colleagues and volunteers may not have an active Christian faith. What does matter is their full-hearted commitment based upon their responding to the call of the VMM vision and mission. Faith for VMM is about hope, commitment and a belief in doing whatever is right to make a positive difference wherever we are called to do so.

Respect

For self and all others in a global community, united in a common bond of mission to make a positive and lasting difference wherever we are called to work.

Integrity

Our internal compass is aligned to true north and so determines how we act in holding ourselves to account. This is about being known for transparency, accountability and honesty in every aspect of all our activities.

Compassion and Commitment

We each need both, as one without the other will not make the difference we all seek in giving the care and empathy that, alongside hope, leads to positive action to transform lives. We must be trustworthy, dependable, and there for the long term.

Selflessness or Humility

To care enough to take a risk and to sometimes fail. To commit and to give, as part of something bigger without ever expecting anything in return, accepting that we may never witness or measure the long term return from our work, but have faith in just knowing that a difference has been made.

3. Legal Framework**The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015**

The Acts prohibits *direct and indirect* discrimination and victimisation in employment on nine grounds. The definition of discrimination in the Acts focuses on whether a person has been treated less favourably in the workplace than another person in a similar situation on any of the nine grounds.

The nine grounds are:

- Gender: man, woman or transsexual.
- Marital Status: single, married, separated, divorced or widowed.
- Family Status: pregnant or the resident primary carer.
- Sexual Orientation: gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- Religion: different religious belief, background, outlook or none.
- Age: different ages (this does not cover people under 18 years of age).
- Disability: this is broadly defined including people with physical, intellectual, learning and cognitive disabilities, people with mental health difficulties, and a range of medical conditions
- Race: a particular race, skin colour, nationality or ethnic origin.
- The Traveller Community: people who are commonly called Travellers.

The Act covers employees in both the public and private sectors. The Act outlaws discrimination on any of the discriminatory grounds in all areas relevant to employment as follows:

- Discrimination by employers: with regard to access to employment, conditions of employment, training and promotion.
- Discrimination in collective agreements: with regard to access to and conditions of employment and equal pay for like work.
- Discriminatory advertising: which indicates an intention to discriminate or advertising that might reasonably be understood as indicating an intention to discriminate.
- Discrimination by employment agencies: against any person seeking employment or other services of the agency.
- Discrimination in vocational training: discrimination in the provision of vocational training.
- Discrimination by certain bodies: Discrimination by trade unions, professional and trade associations as regards membership and other benefits.

Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment 2012

The code was produced by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform and seeks to promote the development and implementation of policies and procedures which establish working environments free of sexual harassment and harassment and in which the dignity of everyone is respected. The provisions of the code are admissible in evidence and if relevant may be taken into account in any criminal or other proceedings before a court.

4. Policy Principles

Key principles:

- Human rights are universal and every individual is entitled to dignity and respect.
- In dealing with employees, partners and other stakeholders everyone should be recognised as equal and be allowed to utilise his or her own skills and abilities.
- VMM's policy is to ensure that no one who engages with VMM receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of sex, race, marital status, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion, or is disadvantaged in any way.
- The organisation is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all aspects of volunteering
- VMM's policy is to be fully committed to the safeguarding and protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. In this regard, VMM seek to ensure the protection of every person with whom we come into contact, either directly or indirectly through our work as a Mission and Development organisation.

Equality in an international context

As the work of VMM is spread across many countries in Africa that have different laws, religions, customs and social contexts, there can be challenges in establishing an effective Equality policy. In this regard the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Catholic Social Teaching provide the fundamental direction to the work of VMM.

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2011 place an obligation on all employers to prevent harassment in the workplace. Based on the nine grounds including sexual orientation. However, VMM is familiar with the Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005 and we as the employer have a duty to ensure the employees' safety, health and welfare at work as far as

is reasonably practicable. Unfortunately, in some African countries homosexuality is still illegal. If VMM believes that a volunteer or employee is in danger due to his or her sexual orientation, we will discuss options with them and will do our best to find the best suitable placement.

VMM pledges to work with our international partner organisations and our local professional volunteers to create the most suitable placement for each participant. All terms of reference can be found in our VMM Volunteer and Partner handbooks

5. Policy Implementation

General commitments made by VMM International

- To comply with all legal obligations and with the nine grounds set out by the Equality Acts 1998-2015 and the Irish National Disability Authority, in all work in Ireland.
- Identify, reduce and eliminate, where possible, any barriers to participation; in particular promoting inclusivity in the governance of VMM International and among those who wish to become short- or long-term volunteers in our overseas projects.
- Disseminate this policy to all staff, volunteers and partner organisations.
- Make this policy document available on the VMM International website.
- Where there is a concern that discrimination has occurred, VMM International pledges to redress the situation in an appropriate and speedy manner.
- No one will be victimized for making a complaint of discrimination.
- To take all reasonable steps to place volunteers in appropriate placements which match their individual needs and skills.
- To address all reasonable requests and needs to allow individuals with specific needs to participate in their desired VMM International overseas project.
- Any personal information given to VMM International will be kept in a safe manner with access restricted and only shared on a need-to-know basis, for more information read our Confidentiality Policy.
- VMM International will ensure that all international partner organisations are aware of the Equality policy and require them to agree to the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- All VMM International staff, volunteers, partners in Ireland, UK and Overseas must be made aware of this Equality policy and agree to be bound by the contents of this policy.
- VMM International will not work with organizations that have a policy of discrimination or any body or individual that displays a pattern of discriminatory behavior.

Complaints related to this Policy

When a complaint is made in relation to this policy, VMM commits to addressing the complaint in a speedy and confidential manner. Any complaints in relation to this policy should be submitted to the designated member of the board [Kathryn Hamling].²

² Niall Crowley from the Values Lab and former Director of the Equality Authority stated in the workshop: *An Equality Standard*, 3 July 2017 that best practice is to have a member of the board as contact person for equality complaints and not to have a person involved in the day-to-day running of the organization.