



Vision Action policy on HARASSMENT AND MISCONDUCT

Vision Action is committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in its activities. This policy outlines the organisations position on safeguarding of all staff and trustees of the organisation, all volunteers, temporary workers, consultants, contractors, agents and subsidiaries, partners and programme beneficiaries from harassment and misconduct (whether of a verbal, physical or sexual nature). This policy should be read in conjunction with **Vision Action's Policy on Safeguarding and Section 4 of the Staff Hand-Book in relation to "valuing diversity and dignity at work", which covers discrimination.**

Harassment and/or misconduct may include any of the following¹:

- **Inappropriate remarks of a bullying or offensive nature, verbal or written (including email, texts, social media, images used without consent)**
- **Inappropriate touching and/or physical or sexually orientated behaviour that makes the recipient uncomfortable**
- **Any forms of violence (verbal, physical and/or sexual)**
- **Any transactional forms of behaviour (cash, food, work or other types of favour for sex, or money) or any other forms of coercive, controlling or intimidating behaviour**
- **Inappropriate behaviour that contravenes gender or local norms (covered further in individual country briefings)**
- **Behaviours prohibited by local, UK and/or international laws (for example; use of prostitutes, age of sexual consent, age of marriage, age of work for children - also refer to Child Protection policy)**

Vision Action will not tolerate any contravention of this Policy and it is applicable to all employees and trustees of the organisation, and to volunteers, temporary workers, consultants, contractors, agents and subsidiaries acting for, or on behalf of Vision Action, formally Vision Aid Overseas, and is equally relevant within the UK and overseas.

This Vision Action policy also applies to any international / national partners and creates the requirement for appropriate "due diligence" in the selection and monitoring of these Partners.

Every employee and associated person acting for, or on behalf of, the organisation is responsible for maintaining the highest standards of professional and moral conduct. Any breach of this policy is likely to constitute a serious disciplinary, contractual and criminal matter for the individual concerned.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nicola Chevis", is written over a horizontal line.

Nicola Chevis
Chief Executive Officer

Updated April 2021

¹ A full list is included as Annex A

VISION ACTION POLICY ON HARASSMENT AND MISCONDUCT

Vision Action's policy on harassment and misconduct seeks to ensure that the protection of all staff, trustees, volunteers, partners, and programme beneficiaries is paramount in every area of our work. The policy applies to all Vision Aid Overseas trustees, staff and volunteers (including those employed or working/visiting either the UK or overseas), in all areas of their working and personal life.

Cross-cutting every element of this policy are the following themes:

- **Confidentiality**
- **Sensitivity**
- **Ownership**
- **Consultation**
- **Transparency**

RECRUITMENT

Vision Action is committed to ensuring that preventing harassment and misconduct is rigorously mainstreamed into our recruitment processes

KPIs:

- **Every staff member, volunteer and trustee has signed a commitment to the Vision Action policy on harassment and misconduct**
- **Policy on harassment and misconduct**
- **Policy on harassment and misconduct is referenced with all new job advertisements**

All jobs advertised will be with a job description and person specification and will state that Vision Action has a policy on harassment and misconduct that the successful candidate will be expected to comply with.

Particular attention will be paid to investigating past behaviour and any gaps in an individual's employment history and frequent changes of employment and/or address.

Where given references cannot be verified via telephone, Vision Action may contact other previous employers other than those cited as referees. Vision Action will also undertake appropriate checks with authorities (eg DBS checks in the UK) as required for the role.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Vision Action's organisational atmosphere encourages opportunities to question and learn about harassment and misconduct issues.

KPIs:

- **All Volunteer Development Programmes will have a briefing on harassment and misconduct.**
- **All induction processes for staff, trustees and volunteers will include a briefing on harassment and misconduct.**

Refresher training in preventing and responding to harassment and misconduct will be delivered to all Directors on an annual basis. Employees, volunteers and any third parties who are to have direct contact with programme beneficiaries as part of an overseas project visit will receive a briefing on harassment and misconduct by the nominated Team Leader or Country Director.

The Chief Executive Officer (in respect to the UK) and the International Programme Director (in respect to all other countries), will monitor and review the effectiveness of the harassment and misconduct policy, briefings and training on a bi-annual basis.

Local partners will receive a copy of Vision Action's policy on harassment and misconduct.

BEHAVIOUR PROTOCOLS

The Vision Action staff handbook and this policy outlines what is appropriate and expected standards of behaviours, and there may be minor variances depending on cultural norms, but those accepted in the UK should always be used as the base reference point. It is important to note however, that if some things are considered illegal in any of our countries of operation (UK or overseas), for example some countries consider prostitution illegal even with those over 18 years of age, then these local laws need to be adhered to, otherwise a criminal offence is being committed and those contravening local laws will be reported to the local authorities.

KPIs:

- **All Country Directors provide a written brief to all visitors and volunteers on what constitutes harassment and misconduct in their country of operation (if there are exceptions and/or differences to what is listed on page 1)**
- **All Country Directors provide information to programme beneficiaries and partners on who to contact in Vision Action with any feed-back, concerns or complaints that they have**
- **Everyone reports feeling 'safe' around Vision Action staff, volunteers and trustees**

Vision Action's policy should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense. Vision Action's staff, trustees and volunteers must adhere to this policy and any country-specific brief and respect local norms.

Whilst engaged in Vision Action activities, all staff, volunteers and trustees who come into contact with other staff, partners and programme beneficiaries are required to:

- Treat everyone we interact with, with respect and dignity
- Ensure that their health and safety is paramount at all times during our interactions
- Liaise openly with communities and other family members
- Only use physical contact if absolutely necessary, during eye examinations and explain what that contact may be
- Avoid being alone with any vulnerable members of the community and respect any gender norms (for example in examining women alone in some cultures)
- Listen to any disclosures/allegations/concerns of harassment and/or misconduct (of a verbal, physical or sexual nature) concerning anyone that Vision Action is interacting with, including other staff
- Report any such disclosures/allegations/concerns immediately to whoever is more senior (see following section on reporting)

REPORTING AND REACTION

In reporting and reacting to harassment and/or misconduct issues the best interests and welfare of the individual should be paramount.

KPIs:

- **Those listed below take responsibility for briefing their constituents on how to report a concern**
- **All staff, volunteers, trustees, partners, programme beneficiaries and family members involved in Vision Action's projects are aware of the procedure for reporting a concern**

All staff, trustees and volunteers hold responsibility for reporting concerns and for supporting those making the reports. However, Line Managers (including Team Leaders for volunteers on assignments), Country Directors, the Senior Management Team (including the CEO), and the Board (including Trustees) hold particular responsibility for a) briefing on the policy and making constituents aware of the policy and reporting procedures and b) taking all reports seriously and escalating to ensure at least one member of the Senior Management Team is aware of the report.

The reporting of suspected or actual harassment or misconduct is a professional and legal obligation. Failure to report information can lead to disciplinary action and/or legal action.

Reporting lines:

- ✓ To the Country Director for programme beneficiaries or partners in their country of operation
- ✓ To the Team Leader for volunteers on assignment or in the case of the allegation being made about the Team Leader, to the Country Director
- ✓ To the Country Director about country partners, team leaders and/or volunteers, or in the case of the allegation being made about the Country Director, to the International Programmes Director
- ✓ To any one of the Senior Management Team (CEO, Programmes Director, Director of Fundraising and Communications or the Finance and Operations Director) or in the case of the allegation being made about all of those to one of the trustees
- ✓ To any one of the trustees or in the case of the allegation being made about the trustees or Chair, to the Senior Management Team (CEO, Programme Director, Director of Fundraising and Communications or the Finance and Operations Director)
- ✓ In exceptional circumstances reports may be made direct to the Charities Commission if all other reporting lines within Vision Action have been exhausted

RAMIFICATIONS OF MISCONDUCT

In reporting and reacting to harassment and misconduct issues the best interests and welfare of the individual should be paramount. Vision Action recognises that it may not always be best placed to ascertain what exactly has taken place – in which case referral to relevant agencies will take place.

KPIs:

- **Investigations are prompt and follow standardised procedures**
- **HR documentation of disciplinary action**

Following an allegation of harassment/misconduct in contravention of the Vision Action Policy an appropriate individual will be nominated to coordinate an investigation and/or response (this is likely to follow the reporting lines above, with all members of the Senior Management Team being made aware of each case). It is the responsibility of the CEO to inform the Board of all cases in a timely manner.

If the alleged incident involves a Vision Action employee, volunteer, or trustee, that individual will be suspended (on contractual pay), until the investigation has been completed and / or the person removed from the Organisation. The decision to suspend or remove must be taken by CEO and is not open to challenge. (Removal from an overseas assignment may mean the volunteer being asked to remain in the hotel whilst clarification is being sought).

The investigation process will be confidential, and information limited only to those who need to know. All parties involved will be required to keep all information relating to the case confidential and documentation will be filed securely.

If any individual associated with Vision Action is found to have violated the organisation's Harassment or Misconduct Policy or committed acts which are criminal or grossly infringe individual rights, immediate disciplinary action will take place. This may include:

- Employees – disciplinary action or dismissal. (International staff will be repatriated to their country of origin and police reports will be made.)
- Volunteers, trustees, interns – ending the relationship with Vision Action and police reports will be made
- Local partner organisations – withdrawal of funding/support and ending the relationship with Vision Action, police reports will be made
- Consultants/contractors – termination of contract and police reports will be made
- Criminal prosecution

All parties concerned will be notified of Vision Action's processes and the outcome of the investigation in a timely manner. The media will be dealt with by the Senior Management Team and/or the Board. The CEO will assess reputational risk and brief the Board accordingly.

SUPPORTING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Vision Action undertakes criminal record checks from the Disclosure and Barring Service (**DBS**) for all staff, volunteers and trustees² who work with children and vulnerable adults. Volunteers who are registered with the GOC will have to have declared any criminal convictions and if undertaking work in the NHS will have undergone a CRB/DBS check previously which will need to be updated.

UK professional guidance documents and information for the optical profession can be found at:

http://www.aop.org.uk/uploads/uploaded_files/ln%20Practice/chaperoning_policy.pdf

<http://www.aop.org.uk/practitioner-advice/www.aop.org.uk/practitioneradvice/safeguarding/>

Annex A – Full definition of harassment and/or misconduct

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Behaviour can constitute bullying or harassment where: it violates the dignity of a member of staff on the grounds of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation (the protected characteristics); or where it creates an intimidating, hostile and degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Individual or accumulative acts can seriously undermine the dignity, confidence, and work satisfaction to such an extent that it has an effect on job performance, and general happiness both inside and outside work.

Conduct becomes harassment if it persists and it has been made clear that it is regarded as offensive by the recipient or a witness to the conduct, although a single offensive act can amount to harassment if it is sufficiently serious.

DEFINITIONS

Harassment

This is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

Unwanted conduct can include:

- a) spoken words
- b) banter
- c) written words
- d) posts or contact on social media
- e) imagery
- f) graffiti
- g) physical gestures
- h) facial expressions
- i) mimicry
- j) jokes or pranks
- k) acts affecting a person's surroundings
- l) aggression, and
- m) physical behaviour towards a person or their property.

Sexual harassment

This is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

- a) sexual comments or jokes
- b) displaying sexually graphic pictures, posters or photos
- c) suggestive looks, staring or leering

² From the 1st February 2018

- d) propositions and sexual advances
- e) making promises in return for sexual favours
- f) sexual gestures
- g) intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life or a person discussing their own sex life
- h) sexual posts or contact on social media
- i) spreading sexual rumours about a person
- j) sending sexually explicit emails or text messages, and
- k) unwelcome touching, hugging, massaging or kissing.

Less favourable treatment for rejecting or submitting to unwanted conduct

This occurs when:

- a) someone is subjected to unwanted conduct:
 - i) of a sexual nature
 - ii) related to sex, or
 - iii) related to gender reassignment
- b) the unwanted conduct has the purpose or effect of:
 - i) violating their dignity, or
 - ii) creating an intimidating, hostile degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them, and
- c) they are treated less favourably because they submitted to or rejected the unwanted conduct.

DETRIMENTAL BEHAVIOUR BECAUSE OF AN ASSOCIATION WITH A PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC

Bullying and harassment may not be based on the fact that a colleague belongs to a particular group, but simply because the individual has been singled out for such treatment or associates with someone of a protected characteristic. For example, this would include claiming someone is gay when they are not or making fun of someone who has a disabled relative. The bullying and harassment may take the following forms, though again this is not intended as an exhaustive list:

- Limiting or withdrawing verbal communication.
- Isolating a colleague by unfriendly behaviour.
- Behaviour designed to belittle or produce anxiety in a colleague.
- Unreasonable scrutiny of work.
- Unreasonable criticism of work and adopting double standards in expectations of work performance.
- Unreasonable denial of leave and/or special leave requests.
- Unreasonable denial of requests for flexible working.
- Work or staff social activities that deliberately exclude a colleague.
- Jokes or inappropriate humour at the expense of a colleague.

STANDARDS OF WORK BEHAVIOUR

- Courtesy towards colleagues.
- Consideration and understanding of the work demands of colleagues.
- Maintaining a temperate tone, and temperate language, in all verbal and written communication with colleagues.
- Avoidance of the use of foul language.
- Awareness of language and conduct which have the potential to offend a colleague.
- Obtaining the express or implied permission of a colleague before adopting familiarity in conduct or language.

THIRD PARTY HARASSMENT

Third party harassment occurs when one of our workforces is subjected to harassment by someone who is not part of our workforce but who is encountered in connection with work. This includes our customers, suppliers, members of the public. Third party harassment of our workforce will not be tolerated.

In order to prevent third party harassment from occurring, we have a zero-tolerance policy. Should you be subjected to third party harassment, you are encouraged to report this as soon as possible to your Line Manager.

ANNEX B TO
HARASSMENT AND MISCONDUCT POLICY
APRIL 2021
POLICY COMPLIANCE

I have received and been briefed on the Vision Action policy on Harassment and Misconduct and fully understand my responsibilities to comply with and promote the Policy.

Signed	
Name	
Position within Vision Action	
Date	

Vision Action formally known as Vision Aid Overseas. Where this policy exists in either name it is complete and relevant if signed and understood.