

MSF as a responsible employer

Introduction

Already in 2003, the IC recognised the concept of a 'socially responsible employer' as an important principle underlying MSF's international staff policies. This was reiterated in 2004 with a particular emphasis on national staff. However, until now there has been no common understanding of the concept. With renewed recommendation from the ExDir (June 2008) to work on a joint definition, the IDRH platform has drafted a document clarifying the meaning of a "responsible employer". The IDRH has chosen an "aspirational" approach rather than just one reflecting the status quo as this document should guide us for the years to come.

The purpose of the document is to provide a framework from within which MSF can develop all its human resources policies. It is not intended as an agreement between MSF and its employees, but as a document to guide our human resources policies and practices going forward. By providing a framework for MSF as a responsible employer, we hope to ensure coherence of our human resource policies across the movement while leaving room for sections to develop their own specific policies.

As a responsible employer, MSF fosters its richness in social, cultural and linguistic diversity, and promotes multiculturalism and the acceptance of differences.

People are unquestionably MSF's key asset. They are critical to the success of MSF operations. MSF strives to be a responsible employer in the management of its personnel, beyond legal requirements. MSF aims in this document to clarify the meaning and objectives of being a responsible employer.

The concept of responsible employer is defined around 4 pillars:

1. As a **responsible employer** MSF bases its action on the following **principles and values**:
 - **Responsibility**: MSF identifies three areas of responsibility when it comes to its Human Resources:
 - (1) A socially responsible organisation that places people at the centre of concern;
 - (2) The responsibility of managers to support and guide their staff;
 - (3) The responsibility of each individual concerning their security, their action and behaviour and also as the main drivers of their professional career;
 - **Fairness**: The key concepts of fair treatment of staff are:
 - 1) Equity in terms of balanced treatment for all HR matters;
 - 2) Impartiality in terms of the absence of discrimination in any form or favouritism in appointing and promoting people;
 - 3) Equality and justness in terms of a process for appeal;
 - **Transparency & accountability**: MSF is committed to implementing transparent and accessible HR policies & rules known and understood by all its staff members - and holds itself accountable as to their implementation within all missions and entities.
 - **Participation & ownership**: MSF stimulates and asks its staff to contribute to the development of the organisation through objective reflection and through fair, open and inclusive debate.

2. As a **responsible employer** MSF wants to offer to its employees **decent working conditions** whose central components are:
 - **Contract**: Each employee has a written contract clearly describing the working relations terms and duly signed by the employee and the MSF entitled person;
 - **Job description**: Each employee has a reference document clearly describing his/her role and responsibilities;
 - **Remuneration**: MSF endeavours to offer its staff a level of pay and benefits commensurate with their responsibilities, allowing for decent and adequate living conditions;

3. As a **responsible employer** MSF provides its employees the **opportunity to professionally evolve and progress** aiming at finding the best balance between the primacy of organizational needs and personal aspirations. This policy is developed through:
 - **Appraisal**: Each employee is entitled to be regularly appraised to know his/her level of performance and the area of competencies that requires improvement;
 - **Training & Development**: To give opportunity to employees to increase their competencies in line with MSF needs and constraints, training sessions and policies are developed and made accessible to MSF employees.
 - **Mobility and job opportunity**: MSF aims to encourage development of competencies and experience by offering job opportunity and by promoting internal mobility practices to its staff on the basis of competences and commitment.
 - **Reintegration**: MSF aspires to the wish that people will professionally commit to the organisation for a significant length of time and further is ready to support those who have fulfilled this commitment, to successfully pursue their professional life even beyond their time with MSF according to the organization's needs.

4. As a **responsible employer**, MSF does its utmost to reduce risks and to put in place the necessary means for its employees to work in a as safe an environment as can reasonably be expected given the unique nature of MSF projects and operations. The main components of this are the following:
 - **Minimizing risks**: MSF has an obligation of means to minimize the risks for its staff. Therefore it draws up organisational policies on security and local internal regulations and provides the means to reduce the risk of security incidents in the framework of risks that can be expected in hostile or conflict environments. A specific effort is made to train staff on basic security concerns.
 - **Health & safety**: MSF continually develops and reviews adequate health & safety policies to protect staff working in the field and on its premises. All MSF employees have access or the means to have access to quality health care as defined by MSF within the limits of what is available in the country of intervention or work. Prevention is the focus of its Health & Safety policies but MSF also ensures sound protection in case of disease or accident.
 - **Behaviour & power abuses**: MSF expects from its personnel to behave sensibly and respectfully and has drawn up policies and mechanisms to prevent (and address if necessary) abuse of staff and beneficiaries
 - **Confidentiality**: MSF treats its employees respectfully and applies strict confidential measures.