

# **Ethical principles and conduct of staff**

*Compilation of WHO policies and practices*

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**World Health  
Organization**



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# 1. WHO vision, core values and guiding principles

## 1.1 Introduction

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that embodies the highest aspirations of the peoples of the world. WHO's primary objective is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.
2. The highest standards of conduct, competence and performance are expected of all WHO staff members in order to reflect the Organization's values of integrity, independence, impartiality and technical excellence. All staff members have a responsibility to contribute to the goals of the Organization, and to ensure that their conduct is consistent with the standards they are expected to uphold as international civil servants as described in the [WHO Staff Regulations and Rules](#) [article I Staff reg / Sec 1 Rules] and the [ICSC Standards of Conduct of International Civil Servants](#).
3. To achieve its purposes and maintain its capacity to attract and retain staff of the highest standards of integrity, competence and effectiveness, WHO is committed to promoting a productive work environment that encourages trust, responsibility and accountability, mutual respect, open communication and consensus building.
4. With the aforementioned in mind, this *Compilation* on WHO Ethical Principles and Conduct (the "*Compilation*") is intended to provide staff with consolidated information concerning their conduct and performance to ensure that their actions and decisions reflect at all times WHO's mission and core values.
5. This *Compilation* also contains a section on FAQ (see section 4 page 19) which relates to some practical examples staff may be confronted with.

## 1.2 WHO's core values and ethical principles

6. Article I of the Staff Regulations and Section 1 of the [Staff Rules](#) set out the duties, obligations and privileges of all WHO staff members. Upon joining the Organization, all WHO staff members commit to conduct themselves at all times in accordance with such duties and obligations.
7. This *Compilation* incorporates the basic principles of ethical behaviour and standards of conduct relevant to all international civil servants within the UN common system.
8. These principles, as applied in WHO, are:
  - loyalty to the Organization's goals, mission, priorities and policies;
  - integrity and honesty in actions and decisions that may affect WHO;
  - impartiality and independence from external sources and authorities;
  - discretion;
  - respect for the dignity, worth and equality of all persons;
  - respect for diversity;
  - accountability;
  - technical excellence.
9. Additional guidance on expected behaviours is provided in the [WHO Global Competency Model](#).

### 1.3 Objectives of this *Compilation*

10. This *Compilation* describes the standards of ethical values and conduct that WHO expects from all staff members as well as those standards and rights that staff may expect to have recognized and respected by the Organization. It reflects existing policies and other administrative issuances in these areas and sets out procedures to help staff members make ethical decisions. In addition, whenever possible, the *Compilation* includes reference to documents available on line in the WHO Intranet. Reading of the electronic version of the *Compilation* will facilitate access to all links.
11. As it is difficult to predict all of the ethical challenges staff may be faced with, when in doubt about the implications of an action or decision, you are strongly encouraged to seek advice before you act.
12. Whenever faced with a difficult situation from an ethical perspective, you may keep the following advice in mind:
  - Remember to act with common decency, good faith, and honesty.
  - Consult Article I of the Staff Regulations and Section 1 of the [Staff Rules](#), or other relevant staff rules and regulations as appropriate.
  - Consult [WHO's Financial Regulations and Rules](#).
  - Consult the [ICSC Standards of Conduct of International Civil Servants](#) and this document.
  - Address any questions to your immediate supervisor or to your office's DAF or to HRD/HPJ at Headquarters.
  - For ethical questions related to commercial transactions or relations, LEG should be contacted.

In all cases, ask yourself these questions:

- Are my actions consistent with WHO's values?
- Do I have all the facts?
- Have I reviewed and considered the facts carefully?
- Will my action reflect negatively or positively on me and/or on WHO?
- What would a reasonable person think about my actions?
- Would I be embarrassed if others knew I took this action?
- Would it breach a Staff or Financial Regulation or Rule?
- Is there an alternative action that does not give rise to concerns?

### 1.4 Applicability

13. The contents of this *Compilation* apply to all staff members of the Organization. All staff members are expected to observe these standards at all times, in their work and where appropriate, private lives, irrespective of whether or not they are in active service, working on a full-time or part-time basis or seconded to WHO. Persons employed by WHO as consultants, on special service agreements or APWs will be made aware of this *Compilation* and are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the requirements stated in this document as appropriate.

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## 2. Creating a culture of compliance and prevention

14. By providing all staff members with this *Compilation*. WHO wishes to raise the level of staff awareness in order to ensure a culture of responsibility, accountability, and compliance. The aim is also to avert and prevent instances of unethical behaviour, and to encourage and promote positive behaviours and conduct throughout the Organization.

### 2.1 Rights, responsibilities and obligations

#### 2.1.1 WHO staff members

15. All WHO staff members shall:
- follow the applicable rules and regulations and maintain the impartiality required of international civil servants;
  - while fulfilling official duties and responsibilities, make decisions that are solely in the interest of the Organization and based on objective criteria;
  - give impartial technical advice;
  - ensure proper, effective and efficient use of the Organization's resources;
  - perform their duties and arrange their private affairs so that confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of WHO are maintained and enhanced;
  - strive to avoid even the appearance of impropriety in all their actions, conduct, and decisions, both at work and outside the workplace;
  - encourage, advocate and promote appropriate conduct and ethical behaviour in the workplace, and implement, monitor, and enforce WHO's core values and principles and related policies in their own day-to-day work.
16. Managers and supervisors must also:
- act in accordance with the Regulations, rules and policies contained in this *Compilation* and ensure they exhibit the highest level of ethical conduct at all times;
  - be familiar with this *Compilation* so as to explain to and advise their staff on their rights, responsibilities and obligations;
  - encourage and allow staff under their supervision to participate in training activities sponsored by the Organization on ethical issues.

#### 2.1.2 The Organization

17. The Organization shall:
- publish on the Intranet, promote and update this *Compilation* and support staff in understanding its applicability;
  - brief new staff on Ethical Principles and Conduct of Staff during induction/orientation sessions;
  - provide advice and guidance to individual staff members on specific issues upon their request;
  - make clear to staff the procedures to follow when reporting violations
  - take action to respond to reported violations;
  - take appropriate administrative or disciplinary measures in case of such violations;
  - ensure that anyone who reports a suspected violation of the WHO's policies in good faith is not subject to retaliation (see section 3.7 below)

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## 3. Standards of conduct

### 3.1 Conduct affecting the workplace

#### 3.1.1 Basic standards of conduct

18. **Loyalty**

By accepting an appointment with WHO, staff pledge to discharge their functions and to regulate their conduct with the interests of the Organization only in view and under the sole authority of the Director-General. Good conduct requires that they respect the international character of their position and that they maintain their independence by not accepting any instructions relating to the performance of their official duties from any national government or from any other sources external to WHO.

Staff members who are seconded to the Organization, should be aware that their loyalty lies with WHO for the period of the secondment and that the obligations of staff members referred to in this *Compilation* apply to them.

19. **Integrity**

Staff are required to act with integrity in all activities, avoiding any behaviour that could reflect adversely on them, their colleagues, or on the Organization. Integrity encompasses such things as honesty and incorruptibility.

20. **Impartiality**

Staff are required to act impartially. Staff members who act impartially take care that their personal views and convictions do not compromise or appear to compromise the performance of their official duties or the interests of WHO. Their official conduct is at all times characterized by objectivity and professionalism. They do not allow personal relationships or considerations, including bias or favouritism, to influence the performance of their official duties. They avoid situations that create a real or perceived conflict of interest.

21. **Discretion**

Staff must exercise the utmost discretion in their actions; showing tact and reserve in their communication and behaving in a manner that is consistent with their status as international civil servants. Staff members who exercise discretion refrain from participating in any activity that is in conflict with the interests of WHO or might damage WHO's reputation. They respect and safeguard the confidentiality of information, which is available or known to them because of their official functions.

22. **Accountability**

WHO follows a results-based management approach that calls for delegated responsibility, authority and accountability in a decentralized environment at all levels of the Organization. Staff must act within the scope of their authority at all times. They must exercise adequate control and supervision over matters for which they are responsible in accordance with the [WHO Accountability Framework](#).

23. **Respect for diversity**

In view of the international character of WHO and the value that the Organization attaches to diversity, proper conduct requires that staff act with tolerance, sensitivity, respect, and impartiality towards persons of different cultures and backgrounds.



### 3.1.2 Harassment free workplace

24. Good conduct requires that staff demonstrate cultural sensitivity and treat their colleagues, whether supervisors, peers, or subordinates, with courtesy and respect, without harassment, or physical or verbal abuse. Good conduct also requires that staff avoid behaviour in the workplace that creates an atmosphere of hostility or intimidation.
25. Harassment means any behaviour by a staff member that is directed at and is offensive to others, which that person knows or should reasonably know, would be offensive, and which interferes with work or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Harassment may include conduct, comment or display related to race, religion, colour, creed, ethnic origin, physical attributes, age, gender, or sexual orientation. It may involve a group or team and may occur among and between all levels of employees. It can take many different forms, including sexual harassment. The most common origin of harassment is unresolved conflict in the workplace; it is often prolonged and malicious.

The definition of harassment concerns not only intent but effect. Therefore, if a specific action by a person or group is reasonably perceived as offensive by another person(s), that action might constitute harassment, whether intended or not. Offensive comments or behaviours could amount to harassment if repeated or pervasive (see more on [harassment in the HR e-manual](#)).

26. **The WHO Policy on Harassment** explains the informal and formal means of resolving complaints of harassment. [See [Revised Formal Process for Harassment Allegations for Headquarters](#), [Procedure for harassment allegations for Headquarters](#) and [HR eManual III.12.3 Grievance Procedures, WHO Policy on Harassment](#)].

### 3.1.3 Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

27. As stated above, WHO staff must uphold the highest standards of professional and personal conduct and act with integrity and discretion. In addition, sexual exploitation and abuse by WHO staff damages the image and reputation of WHO and erodes confidence and trust in the Organization. As such, WHO staff must not use their position to sexually abuse or exploit those who are beneficiaries of assistance provided by or channelled through WHO. This prohibition includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries for sex as well as exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex. Staff, especially those working in humanitarian settings, should work to create and maintain an environment, which prevents such behaviour.

### 3.1.4 Respect for national laws

28. WHO respects the privacy of staff members and does not wish to interfere in their personal lives and behaviour outside the workplace. However, the status of an international civil servant carries certain obligations, not only at work, but elsewhere. Staff members are required at all times to observe local laws, and to avoid any action that could be perceived as an abuse of the privileges and immunities conferred on WHO and its staff members.
29. WHO would view most seriously conduct by a staff member involving domestic violence or abuse of family members or domestic employees.
30. Staff members are required to meet their private legal obligations, including the payment of child support and alimony. They are expected to cooperate with local enforcement authorities, and to pay traffic fines promptly [see [HR e-Manual III.1.1](#)].

Standards of Conduct and III.3.15, 180-210]. Staff should pay particular attention to laws and directions governing bank accounts, currency dealings, purchase and disposal of motor vehicles, traffic violations, import/export and employment of household staff.

31. If concerns about a staff member's compliance with laws and private legal obligations are brought to WHO's attention by local or national authorities, WHO will cooperate with the authorities. This could include deductions of amounts from a staff member's salary to satisfy an outstanding legal obligation [see Staff Rule 380.5.5 and HR e-Manual III.3.15, 170]. Failure to comply with private obligations may also be grounds for disciplinary action.
32. Staff must also satisfy all outstanding locally incurred financial debts promptly and in any case prior to leaving the duty station or separating from WHO.
33. Moreover, while certain behaviour and conduct may be acceptable in one country, it may be illegal or otherwise inappropriate in other countries. Staff are therefore expected to refrain from behaviour that violates accepted norms of behaviour in their duty station or could damage WHO's reputation.
34. At all times staff must comply with relevant laws and standards regarding employment of domestic employees.

### 3.1.5 Conduct with respect to WHO elections

35. In line with Article I of the Staff Regulations and Section 1 of the Staff Rules [see WHO Staff Regulations and Rules], during any WHO election, staff members should continue to work solely with the interests of the Organization in mind. Proper conduct requires, for example, that staff members act impartially with respect to all candidates for elected office in WHO. They must neither express publicly their views concerning any candidate, nor work in support of any candidacy be it publicly or otherwise.

### 3.1.6 Personal relationships in the workplace

36. Consensual intimate relationships between colleagues should not interfere with work or create an environment where other colleagues might feel uncomfortable or professionally disadvantaged because of the relationship. In cases where there is a hierarchical or supervisory relationship, the colleagues have an obligation to bring the relationship to the attention of their respective supervisors or Director HRD or DAF in order to decide for example whether one of the persons should be reassigned to a different work unit.

### 3.1.7 Violence in the workplace, drug and alcohol abuse, smoke-free environment

37. WHO strives to provide a safe work environment for all staff and does not tolerate violence or verbal or physical threats of any kind committed by or against someone working for WHO. Additionally, the carrying of weapons on WHO property, in WHO vehicles, or any place where WHO conducts business is strictly prohibited. This prohibition does not extend to host government law enforcement officials or authorized professional security personnel at duty stations.
38. WHO workplaces must be free from illegal drugs and from the harmful use of alcohol, where the use of alcohol is permitted. Staff must always be able to perform their duties free from the negative effects of illegal drugs or alcohol. Consequently, staff must avoid

any such behaviour that interferes with the performance of their duties and work objectives, or that might bring the Organization into disrepute. With respect to WHO related meetings where alcohol is served, staff must remember that they represent WHO and act responsibly.

39. If staff have concerns or questions about drug or alcohol abuse, they may seek confidential assistance through the Health Medical Service or the Regional Physician.
40. As indicated in [HR e-Manual III.19.3](#), staff should not smoke inside WHO premises and only in designated areas where these exist.

### 3.1.8 Dress code

41. Although WHO does not have a dress code, staff should nevertheless dress in a manner that reflects professionalism, respect for others, and is appropriate to the work performed. As a general rule, business casual attire is appropriate for most office-based work.
42. Of course, no guidance on appropriate dress can cover all contingencies; staff must use good judgment in their choice of clothing. For example, attire that is appropriate for outdoor work in the field would not be appropriate for a WHO meeting with Ministers of Health. Moreover, appropriate dress can change from one country or region to another, which is important to bear in mind when travelling globally representing WHO.
43. If staff are uncertain about what is acceptable attire for work, they should ask their supervisor or colleagues for advice.

## 3.2 Media relations and public statements

44. In general, WHO technical staff may speak to the media on subjects within their area of responsibility and expertise. Staff should bear in mind that they speak for WHO, not as an individual, an academic or an independent expert in their field. They should speak to and from their knowledge and expertise but should not exceed it. These principles should be applied to any communications opportunity and with any audience, when speaking to media, in meetings or at conferences where they represent WHO. Before speaking, staff should seek advice from their supervisor and the communications officer (who in turn may need to contact DGO/DCO). Additional information and guidance about media communications is found on the [WHO Intranet](#). All staff who anticipates that they might speak to the media or to the public should take part in communications training offered by WHO through DCO to prepare. In addition, staff should bear in mind that remarks made to journalists might be important to colleagues elsewhere in the Organization. Therefore, staff must keep relevant colleagues informed about work they do with the media, including the scientific media and journals.

### 3.3 Use of WHO's property, resources and information

#### 3.3.1 Use and disclosure of information

45. Staff have a responsibility to protect the security of any confidential information provided to, or generated by, the Organization. To avoid any unauthorized disclosure staff should be careful how they handle confidential information as described in the WHO Policy on [Acceptable Use of Information and Communication Systems](#).
46. In addition, staff must not use information known to them because of their official duties for their private advantage, for example, in their personal dealings. This requirement applies even after they cease to be a staff member (see [Staff Regulation 1.6](#)).

#### 3.3.2 Intellectual property – Publications

47. All rights, including title, copyright and patent rights, in any work or invention produced or developed by a staff member as part of official duties is vested in WHO ([Staff Rule 120](#)). WHO has the right to use such work in any manner it deems appropriate, including by choosing to publish or not to publish the work. If staff produce material for external publication, they must comply with the established clearance procedures, as provided in WHO Manual Part VIII, Section 5, in [Staff Rule 110.5](#) and [HR e-Manual III.1.3](#) and in the [WHO Publishing Policies](#).
48. Staff who have prepared written material in their spare time and in their personal capacity on subjects having no relationship to the work of the Organization, do not have to have the material cleared. Any such published materials are their personal responsibility. They must ensure that, when published, any such work does not refer to their position in, or employment by, WHO (please see also above paragraph 45). Any remuneration received for such publications may be retained by the staff member.

#### 3.3.3 Record keeping

49. It is crucial that WHO maintains accurate records and internal control systems. As such, staff must record all transactions and prepare accurate and complete records, in accordance with established procedures. Staff must not inaccurately record time for reporting purposes, provide false or intentionally misleading information to the Organization, submit false or misleading claims or falsify any official WHO documents. Such actions could result in disciplinary actions.

#### 3.3.4 Use of official time and office technology including vehicles

50. Staff are responsible for ensuring that the resources of the Organization, including WHO computers, telephone equipment and vehicles, are used for official business. Good conduct requires that staff devote their time during working hours to the official activities of WHO. It requires that any personal use of office equipment, in particular internet, e-mail and telephone, be kept to a minimum and not conflict with the interests of the Organization. Moreover, any such use must not disrupt staff work or that of their colleagues, or over-burden the electronic network.
51. In order to demonstrate good conduct, any private telephone calls made from the office telephone must be made using a personal code or in accordance with the local WHO policy as described in the [Acceptable Use of Information and Communication Systems](#).

52. Likewise, if staff have been provided with a WHO mobile telephone or similar equipment, they must identify their private telephone calls, following the [instructions on WHO's Intranet](#) or in accordance with the local WHO policy.

## 3.4 Conflict of interest

### 3.4.1 Overview

53. A conflict of interest occurs when, for example, a staff member's financial, personal or other non-WHO interest or commitment could reasonably interfere – or appear to interfere – with the staff member's ability to act impartially and to discharge their functions and to regulate their conduct with the interests of WHO only in view. Even if there is no evidence of actual impropriety, a conflict of interest can create an appearance of impropriety that can undermine confidence in WHO or damage the reputation of the Organization. Avoiding and preventing even the appearance of a conflict of interest is one of the primary means by which staff can maintain public confidence in the impartiality and objectivity of the Organization.
54. A conflict of interest exists when, for example:
- your personal or private interests interfere with your official responsibilities;
  - someone might reasonably question whether your official actions or decisions are influenced by your personal or private interests or the interests of someone closely related to you by blood or marriage, friends, former colleagues or individuals with whom you have a significant relationship or affiliation outside of WHO;
  - you use your contacts or position in the Organization to advance your personal or private interests or those of others including someone closely related to you by blood or marriage, friends, former colleagues or individuals with whom you have a significant relationship or affiliation outside of WHO;
  - you are involved in a decision to award a contract to an individual with whom you share personal or private relations, such as someone closely related to you by blood or marriage, friends, former colleagues or individuals with whom you have a significant relationship or affiliation outside of WHO.
55. Any conflict of interest or appearance of a conflict of interest must be resolved in the interest of the Organization.

### 3.4.2 Disclosing conflict of interest – Declaration of interest

56. If a potential conflict of interest exists, the staff member concerned must make prompt and full disclosure to their supervisor and seek his or her views as to the appropriate action, including whether they should recuse themselves from the situation that is creating the conflict or the appearance of a conflict. In case of doubt, LEG should be consulted. Depending on the nature of the conflict staff should also submit a declaration of interest form, even if they do not fall within the category of staff that is required to fill in this form annually (see paragraph 58, below) ([WHO 849](#) and [Staff Rule 110.7](#) and [HR e-Manual III.1.2](#)).
57. Conflicts of interest can relate to current work and to possible future employment. For example, when negotiating for prospective employment outside WHO, staff must refrain from discussing or revealing WHO information that is not in the public domain. They should recuse themselves from involvement in matters that could benefit, or could be

perceived to benefit, the prospective employer. Similar conduct is required of staff that are on secondment to WHO concerning dealings with the seconded staff member's parent institution or government.

58. Each year, WHO staff members in designated employment categories are required to submit a [Declaration of Interest form](#) [see also [HR e-Manual III.1.2.20](#)]. Generally, this includes staff at grades P6 and above, WHO Representatives and Liaison Officers (or equivalent), and staff involved in procurement.

59. **Personal financial affairs**

Staff are generally free to conduct their personal financial affairs as they see fit, unless an actual or perceived conflict of interest arises. A conflict of interest would arise, for example, if staff were to own shares in a company with which they are required to have official dealings on behalf of WHO. Other examples of similar conflicts of interest are included on the [Declaration of Interest form](#).

60. **Working with the private sector**

In addition to working with Member States, WHO also interacts with other public bodies, civil society and commercial enterprises. In developing relationships with commercial enterprises, WHO's reputation and values must be ensured and scientific validity must not be compromised. Staff who interact with representatives of commercial enterprises must be guided by [WHO's Guidelines on working with the private sector to achieve health outcomes](#).

### 3.4.3 Hiring of spouses and other family members

61. The Organization may employ the spouse of a staff member under the condition stated in Staff Rule [Staff Rule 410.3.1](#). Generally, a spouse can be hired if, after conducting a competitive selection process, the spouse is found to be fully qualified and is the best candidate without preferential treatment having been given. However, the spouse cannot be in a supervisory or subordinate position to the staff member ([Staff Rule 410.3.2.1](#)).
62. Except where another person equally well qualified cannot be recruited, appointment shall not be granted to a person who bears any of the following relationships to a staff member: father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister (see [Staff Rule 410.3](#)). If you become aware that a person closely related to you by blood or marriage, has applied for a position with the Organization, you must immediately advise the Director of Human Resources.
63. Under no circumstance may staff participate in any activity that involves the hiring, advancement, promotion or evaluation of their spouse or of anyone who is closely related to them by blood or marriage or with whom they are involved in a significant personal relationship or close friendship.

### 3.4.4 Acceptance of gifts, decorations and honours

64. Proper conduct requires that staff never solicit gifts or favours in connection with their WHO duties (see [Staff Regulation 1.7](#) and [Staff Rule 110.6](#)). Gifts that are offered should normally be declined. However, staff may accept a gift, particularly one that is inexpensive, when it clearly would create an embarrassment to refuse it. If its value is clearly less than USD 100, it may be kept and there is no need to report it. If the value of the gift could exceed USD 100, staff must report it to Director, HRD, along with the estimate of its value. Director HRD will decide whether staff may keep it, or whether it



must give to WHO for official use, or returned. The gift may have to be appraised if there is a question about its value.

65. Before accepting any honour or decoration offered to them, staff must ask for authorization from the Director-General, through Director HRD ([Staff Rule 110.6](#)) or from the Regional Director. If authorization is given, when receiving any such award they must acknowledge that it is being conferred in recognition of work for WHO. In cases where the honour or decoration is in recognition of services totally unrelated to the staff member's official duties with WHO the organization may permit acceptance of such recognition in a personal capacity, subject to the staff member's formal request and the prior agreement of Director HRD or Regional Director.
66. Staff members must not participate in the selection of nominees or recipients of awards or prizes that are external to WHO.

### 3.4.5 Frequent flyer points

67. Staff members may join a frequent flyer scheme and retain for personal use the mileage points that they accrue while travelling on official business. However, mileage points that have been accrued on personal or official travel cannot be used by staff when procuring air-tickets when they have opted for a lump sum payment for statutory travel ([HR e-Manual III.8.7](#)).

### 3.4.6 Relations with governments and political activity

68. While staff clearly have an obligation to maintain good relations with governments of WHO Member States, they should not interfere with internal affairs of these governments. In order to maintain the impartiality required of international civil servants, staff must remain independent of any authority outside of the Organization and their conduct must reflect that independence. For this reason, they may not seek or obtain, under any circumstance, instructions or assistance from any government official or from any other authority external to the Organization, particularly in an attempt to:
  - interfere with the internal deliberations or policy direction of the Organization;
  - change an unfavourable action or decision, such as non-renewal of their employment contract, or their separation or termination from the Organization; or
  - obtain a promotion, benefit or any other type of employment advantage.
69. Staff members must refrain from actions that could be viewed as critical or intended to discredit a government, or that might interfere with governmental policies or affairs.
70. Because of the independence and impartiality of the international civil servants, as indicated in the [HR e-Manual III.1.4](#), in the [Information Note 05/2008](#) and in [Staff Regulation 1.8](#), staff may not participate in political activities, including running for or holding local or national political office, while they are under WHO's employ.
71. Additionally, while staff may vote and belong to political parties, they must exercise discretion at all times in their personal political activities and may not participate in campaigns for fundraising or other campaign activities.

### 3.4.7 Right of association

72. As indicated in Article VIII of the Staff Regulations and [Section 9 of the Staff Rules](#), staff have the right to associate themselves together in a formal organization for the purpose of developing staff activities and making proposals and representations to the Organization concerning personnel policy and conditions of service.

### 3.4.8 External activities

73. Staff must request authorization from Director HRD or Regional Director before they may engage in any external office, occupation or similar activity. If staff contemplate any such activity they should first consider, among other things, whether it would: 1) in any way interfere with their work and status as an international civil servant; 2) be performed exclusively outside the hours during which they are expected to be working for WHO, or during periods of approved annual leave; 3) entail remuneration, and 4) benefit their professional development, skills and competence. Before they enter into any commitment for any external activity staff need to request permission in writing from Regional Director or Director HRD, through the Department Director [see Information Note 21/2004: [Remuneration from outside sources: Engagement in outside office or occupation](#) and [Staff Regulation 1.4](#)].
74. As a general rule, staff may not accept financial remuneration from external sources. However, if they are offered remuneration which is compatible with their status as an international civil servant, for example, fees and honoraria for lectures or academic papers, and provided they obtain prior permission from Director HRD, staff may accept such remuneration. Permission to accept such remuneration normally requires the deposit of the sums concerned in the WHO Voluntary Fund for Health Promotion [see Information Note 21/2004: [Remuneration from outside sources: Engagement in outside office or occupation](#)].
75. If permission for an external activity is granted, staff may be required to act in their private capacity and in their own time. In particular:
- participation on an editorial or advisory board of a scientific or other journal will normally be approved in their private capacity, provided that: (i) the journal's subject matter is not overly controversial or political, and does not give rise to commercial concerns; and (ii) the journal is not so recent a publication that it is not possible to make an assessment.
  - general membership in an external scientific or professional association will normally be approved in a private capacity.
  - teaching a short course or lecturing on staff own time and in their private capacity will normally be approved, provided that there is nothing in the relationship with the institution that might be harmful to WHO's interests.
76. WHO does not allow staff members to carry out managerial or executive functions in an outside entity, even in a private capacity. As a result, staff may not accept an invitation to sit on a Board of Directors or a similar body. Any exception would have to be approved by the Director-General. WHO also does not normally allow staff members to be members of outside entities, including advisory bodies, other than as stated in paragraph 75, above. However, if participation in the work of the outside entity in an official capacity would be in the interest of WHO, permission might be granted to participate as an observer.



## 3.5 Duty to comply

### 3.5.1 Privileges and immunities

77. Privileges and immunities are accorded to staff members in the interest of the Organization only and not for the personal benefit of staff members. The Organization has the right and the duty to waive the immunity of any staff member in any case where, in its opinion, the immunity would impede the course of justice and such immunity can be waived without prejudice to the interests of the Organization.

### 3.5.2 Disciplinary measures

78. Actions or decisions by a staff member that may constitute a failure to observe the standards of conduct required of staff members may sometimes be resolved by the supervisor drawing the staff member's attention to the standards and conduct that are expected of all staff. However, failure to observe standards of conduct may also lead to disciplinary charges and be grounds for disciplinary action as indicated in Staff Regulation Article X and XI and Staff Rules Section 11 and 12 [see [Staff Regulations and Staff Rules](#)]. Depending on the gravity of the offense, staff may be subject to one or more of the following disciplinary actions:
- oral reprimand;
  - written reprimand;
  - reassignment with or without reduction in grade;
  - dismissal for misconduct;
  - summary dismissal for serious misconduct.

## 3.6 Reporting

79. A staff member who has reason to believe that fraud, corruption, breach of integrity, abuse of the Organization's resources or other suspected wrongdoing has occurred has a duty to report it to the Director Internal Oversight Services (IOS).
80. IOS shall be available to receive directly from individual staff members complaints or information concerning the possible existence of fraud, waste, abuse of authority or other irregular activities. Confidentiality shall be respected at all times, and no reprisals shall be taken against staff members providing such information unless this was wilfully provided with the knowledge that it was false or with intent to misinform.
81. Information on the investigation of suspected misconduct is found in IOS document "[The Investigation Process](#)". Guidance in this area is also found in [WHO's Fraud Prevention Policy](#).

## 3.7 Protection against retaliation

### 3.7.1 Whistleblower protection policy

82. WHO is committed to ensuring compliance with its Regulations and Rules. As such, any staff member who, in good faith, reports suspected misconduct by another staff member will be protected from retaliation in accordance with the WHO [Whistleblower Protection Policy](#). However, the intentional filing of a false or misleading report is itself a violation of the Organization's regulations and rules that may constitute misconduct and may result in disciplinary proceedings.

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## 4. Examples of answers to frequently asked questions

- **Privileges and immunities**

*Because I was worried about being late for a WHO meeting, I drove too fast on the motorway and was fined by the police. As this is related to my WHO work, may I invoke the privileges and immunities accorded to the Organization and refuse to pay the fine ?*

No, privileges and immunities are intended not for the personal benefit of staff members, but to safeguard the independent exercise of official functions in connection with the Organization. Moreover, it is for WHO to invoke immunity where appropriate, not individual staff members. You are expected to pay the fine.

- **Basic standards of conduct**

*I am aware that a colleague has submitted a falsified travel claim. Should I report this?*

Yes, staff members have a duty to report reasonable suspicions of wrongdoing. If you do so in good faith, you will be entitled to protection against retaliation (see section 3.7).

- **Respect for persons and cultural sensitivity**

*A staff member hangs a calendar with sexually explicit photos in the office. Another staff member reports that the calendar makes her uncomfortable. Should the staff member be required to remove the calendar?*

Yes, staff are expected to avoid actions that could reasonably be deemed to create a hostile work environment or make others uncomfortable in the workplace. Assuming that this situation meets these criteria, the staff member should be respectful of the colleague's feelings and remove the calendar (see paragraph 24).

*My child is fundraising for a school project. May I ask colleagues whether they wish to contribute?*

Yes, so long as there is no coercion or pressure placed on colleagues to make a contribution (see paragraph 24).

- **Respect for national laws**

*A staff member fails to comply with national laws, such as domestic violence laws, or a court order regarding visitation rights. Does this violate WHO's standards of conduct?*

Yes. Staff members are required to comply with all local laws, including laws involving domestic matters. WHO has an interest in ensuring that its staff members do not abuse any immunities, engage in acts of violence against household members, or violate court orders (see paragraphs 28 and 30).

- **Personal relationships in the workplace**

*I am involved in an intimate relationship with a staff member whom I supervise. What should I do?*

You should report the relationship to your supervisor or Director HRD or DAF. It could be decided to reassign one of you or change reporting lines (see paragraph 36).

- **Media relations and public statements**

*I have been contacted by a journalist to give an interview on a subject in my area of my expertise. May I accept?*

Yes, if you are the staff member who is technically qualified to speak on the subject and you have sought advice from your supervisor and your office's communications officer, particularly if the subject is sensitive or controversial. When speaking with media representatives, it is important to remember that you are speaking as a representative of WHO and to ensure that what you say is consistent with WHO's policies (see paragraph 44).

- **Use and disclosure of information**

*I am writing an article for a scientific journal. May I include information I have acquired during the course of my employment with WHO, which has not yet been made public?*

No. Any information known to you by reason of your official position with WHO, which has not been made public, may not be disclosed, unless you have obtained all necessary clearances (see paragraph 45). In addition, any publication related to work needs to go through the proper clearance procedures.

- **Intellectual property – Publications**

*I wish to write a children's fiction book. May I have it published? Can I be paid for it?*

Yes, you may have it published, so long as you have written the book in your own time, have not gained any information used in the book from your work at WHO and do not make any reference to your status as a WHO staff member (see paragraph 48). Yes, you may accept and keep any payment in respect of that particular publication/book (see paragraph 48).

- **Use of official time and office technology**

*My daughter is away at a university abroad. In order to cut down on the cost of telephone calls, I occasionally send her e-mails from WHO. Is this a violation of WHO's standards of conduct?*

No, provided that the sending of e-mails is kept to a minimum, does not affect the performance of your work or overburden the electronic network, and does not conflict with the interests of the Organization (see paragraphs 50 and 51 re. payment of personal calls).

*I am organizing a presentation to be given by an outside speaker at my child's school. To do so, I need to make and receive a few phone calls during working hours. May I do this from my office?*

Yes, so long as the number and duration of such calls are limited and do not interfere with the performance of your duties (see paragraph 50).

*I am getting divorced. I need to speak to my lawyer on the telephone during working hours. Occasionally, these calls are time-consuming. What should I do?*

You should discuss this with your supervisor to find a solution that meets the needs of the office, along with your needs and those of your colleagues. For example, your supervisor might decide that you can take these calls during working hours and make the time up later (see paragraph 50).

*I enjoy listening music while working. The easiest for me is to stay connected to audio stream through Internet. Is this acceptable?*

No. This could lead to a major overload of the system due to the processing of very large quantities of data (see WHO Policy on [Acceptable Use of Information and Communication Systems](#)).

- **Conflict of interest**

*I learned through my brother-in-law, who works for a software firm, of a new product of that firm that may be useful for WHO. May I arrange a meeting between the software firm and representatives of WHO?*

No. This could give the appearance of a conflict of interest. However, you could tell your supervisor about the product and be forthright about the source of information (i.e., a relative). You must do nothing to influence WHO's decision whether to acquire the software or otherwise use the products of this firm (see paragraphs 54 to 57).

*I work for WHO, but have been recruited to work for a pharmaceutical company. Before leaving WHO, I am asked to work on a WHO project that might produce information beneficial to the pharmaceutical sector. In the course of working on this project, I might come across confidential information that might be useful to my next employer. Should I agree to work on the WHO project?*

No. You should bring this potential conflict of interest to the attention of your supervisor, who would be expected not to involve you in the project (see paragraphs 54 to 57).

*My work in WHO involves me directly with vaccine development at a senior level. May I hold shares in a pharmaceutical company that produces vaccines?*

No. This would be considered a conflict of interest (see paragraphs 54 to 57).

*I own shares in a tobacco company. May I still work for WHO?*

Yes, provided you sell the shares (see paragraphs 54 to 57).

- **Hiring of spouses and family members**

*I am sitting in a selection panel as neutral party and my nephew has applied to the position. I know that he is an excellent candidate. What should I do?*

You should immediately inform the members of the panel that you have a conflict of interest and ask to be replaced in the selection panel. In addition, you need to inform your nephew to indicate on his application form that you are working for WHO. Should he be considered for the position, you need to inform Director HRD.

- **Acceptance of gifts, decorations and honours**

*I am invited to accept an award in connection with my alumni activities, which is unrelated to my work with WHO. May I accept?*

Yes, if you do so in your private capacity and do not refer to your connection with WHO (see paragraph 65).

*I have been offered an award for work I have done while working for WHO. May I accept?*

Yes, provided that you request WHO and approval is given in advance. If you are given permission to accept the award, when you do so you must acknowledge that the award is also conferred in recognition of the work of WHO (see paragraph 65).

- **Relations with governments and political activity**

*I have been asked to run for the next local elections in my village (1000 inhabitants). May I continue working for WHO and run for these elections ?*

No. WHO policy on “Candidacy for public office and right to vote” states that WHO staff may not be candidate for public office, local or otherwise, unless they resign from the Organization (see paragraph 70).

- **External activities**

*I have been invited by a local university to teach a course on health and nutrition in my own time, for which I have been offered a fee of US\$ 5000. May I accept the invitation?*

Yes, provided authorization has been granted by your department and Director, HRD. Any payment should be refused or paid to the Voluntary Fund for Health Promotion (see paragraphs 73 and 74).

*I have been asked to become a member of an advisory group of a research institution involved in my area of work. May I accept the invitation?*

No. Staff members are not normally allowed to be members of an outside entity. However, if participation in the work of the advisory group would be in WHO's interest, permission might be granted for you to participate as an observer, and not as a formal member (see paragraph 76).

*I have been invited to become a member of the Board of Directors of a NGO. May I accept the invitation?*

No. Staff members are not permitted to carry out any managerial or executive functions in outside entities (see paragraph 76).

*May I become a general member of a cultural association?*

Yes, since the work of the association is unrelated to WHO's work, and you will be a general member (see paragraph 75) .