



**Protocol on the Prevention, Reporting, and  
Consequences of Prohibited Conduct, including Sexual  
Harassment, Harassment, Abuse of Authority, and other  
Misconduct**

## **Purpose**

In its Staff Regulation and Rules WMO has comprehensive provisions to deal with various forms of prohibited conduct such as sexual harassment and others. The purpose of this protocol is to lay out and clarify for staff, Management, and other interested parties (such as e.g. non-staff personnel and contractors), the definitions, responsibilities, and actions to take in cases of such conduct. Building on the existing framework of regulations and rules, this protocol aims to create a common understanding of issues of ethical behavior and to reinforce the requirement among staff and concerned non-staff of displaying the highest standard of ethics in the conduct of their responsibilities.

## **Scope**

This protocol applies to all staff in WMO as well as to non-staff employees such as consultants and interns, and to outside contractors working with WMO.

## **Principles**

WMO is an organization of the UN common system and as such abides by the guiding principles of the UN Charter and the UN's general commitments to providing safe and secure work environment for its staff.

In this regard, WMO commits to ensure:

- That all staff and non-staff working in WMO enjoy a work environment free from abuse and all forms of harassment.
- That Management enforces a zero-tolerance approach for any form of harassment and abuse.
- That victims of abuse and harassment are afforded swift, confidential, and effective support and redress.
- That perpetrators of harassment and abuse are held accountable in accordance with the regulations and rules.
- That staff, non-staff, and other partners are aware of the expected standards and the consequences of violations.

## **Definitions**

- **Misconduct**

In accordance with Staff Regulation 10.1 and Staff Rule 1101.1, misconduct is the failure by a staff member to comply with his or her obligations under the Convention of WMO, General Regulations, the Staff Regulations and Rules, the Financial Regulations and Rules or other relevant WMO administrative instructions or to observe the standards of conduct expected of an international civil servant as specified in the UN Charter, the ICSC standard of conduct and the WMO code of ethics, may amount to misconduct and may lead to the institution of a disciplinary process and the imposition of disciplinary measures for misconduct.

- **Harassment**

In accordance with Standing Instruction 4.42.3, harassment means any behaviour by a staff member that is directed at and is offensive to another or others, which that person knows or should reasonably have known, would be offensive, and which interferes with work or privacy, or creates an intimidating, humiliating, hostile or

offensive work environment. Harassment may include conduct, comments 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.

The definition of harassment concerns not only intent but also effect. Therefore, if another person reasonably perceives a specific action or a series of actions by a person or group as offensive, this might constitute harassment, whether intended or not. Offensive comments or behaviour could amount to harassment if repeated or pervasive.

Harassment can take many different forms. It includes, but is not limited to, the following which may occur singly, simultaneously or consecutively:

- Repeated or persistent aggression, by one or more persons, whether verbal, psychological or physical, at the workplace or in connection with work, that has the effect of humiliating, belittling, offending, intimidating or discriminating against a person;
- Bullying/mobbing, which can include:
  - (i) Measures to exclude or isolate a person from professional activities;
  - (ii) Persistent negative attacks on personal or professional performance without reason or legitimate authority;
  - (iii) Manipulation of a person's personal or professional reputation by rumour, gossip and ridicule;
  - (iv) Abusing a position of power by persistently undermining a person's work, or setting objectives with unreasonable and/or impossible deadlines, or unachievable tasks;
  - (v) Unreasonable or inappropriate monitoring of a person's performance; and
  - (vi) Unreasonable and/or unfounded refusal of leave and training.

- **Sexual Harassment**

Standing Instruction 4.42.7 defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when it is made a condition of employment, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment or it interferes with work. In all cases it refers to conduct that is unwanted by the recipient.

When any official who is in a position to influence career or employment conditions (including hiring, assignment, contract renewal, performance evaluation or promotion) of the recipient of such attentions, engages in behaviour of this kind it also constitutes an abuse of power.

WMO recognizes three categories of sexual harassment:

(a) "Physical conduct of a sexual nature which is commonly regarded as meaning unwanted physical contact ranging from unnecessary touching, patting or pinching or brushing against another employee's body, to assault and coercing sexual intercourse."

(b) "Verbal conduct of a sexual nature which may include unwelcome sexual advances, propositions or pressure for sexual activity; continued suggestions for social activity outside the workplace after it has been made clear that such suggestions are unwelcome; offensive flirtations; suggestive remarks, innuendoes or lewd comments."

(c) "Non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature which refers to the display of pornographic or sexually-suggestive pictures, objects of written materials; leering, whistling, or making sexually-suggestive gestures."

Sexual harassment is distinguished from other forms of mutual contact by its unwelcome, unreciprocated and imposed nature. Mutually acceptable behaviour is not sexual harassment regardless of the employment relationship.

- **Abuse of Authority**

In accordance with ST/SGB/2019/8 of the United Nations, abuse of authority is the improper use of a position of influence, power or authority against another person. This is particularly serious when a person uses their influence, power or authority to improperly influence the career or employment conditions of another, including, but not limited to, appointment, assignment, contract renewal, performance evaluation, working conditions or promotion. Abuse of authority may also include conduct that creates a hostile or offensive work environment which includes, but is not limited to, the use of intimidation, threats, blackmail or coercion. Discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, are particularly serious when accompanied by abuse of authority.

### **Relevant Provisions**

- Article 10 of the Staff Regulations and Rules
- Staff Regulation 10.1 and Staff Rule 1101.1,
- Standing Instruction 4.42.3
- Standing Instruction 4.42.7
- Standing Instructions Chapter 11, Ethics Framework

### **Responsibilities**

- **WMO Senior Management**

WMO Senior Management sets the tone vocally and convincingly for a zero-tolerance approach towards all forms of prohibited conduct in the WMO Secretariat including Regional Offices.

- **WMO Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General reviews preliminary investigation reports by IOO to decide whether a formal investigation into allegations of prohibited conduct is warranted. Furthermore, the SG reviews reports of formal investigations and decides on the appropriate course of action/sanction.

- **Internal Oversight Office (IOO)**

The IOO is responsible for investigating all allegations or presumptions of fraud, waste, mismanagement or misconduct and for conducting inspections of services and organizational units. IOO will prepare preliminary investigation reports for the Secretary-General's review and decision whether a formal investigation is initiated. Staff members who feel that they were victims of any of the above prohibited conduct should inform IOO so that an investigation of the instance can be initiated.

- **Staff members**

Staff members must report any misconduct they observe to IOO. Staff members who feel that they were victims of prohibited conduct are strongly encouraged to report such incidents to IOO. They can also avail themselves of the services of the UN Staff Counsellor, the Office of the Ombudsman, and Human Resources.

- **Support Mechanisms and Resources**

WMO collaborates closely with the relevant entities in the United Nations to provide comprehensive support for personnel experiencing potential prohibited conduct. Specifically, WMO personnel have access to the services of the Office of the UN Ombudsman, the UN Ethics Office, and the UN Staff Counselling Office.

WMO provides annual training sessions for all staff on the prevention of sexual harassment. Furthermore, a host of information material such as videos and educational electronic brochures are available at the WMO Hub (intranet of WMO).

## **Addressing instances of Prohibited Conduct**

- **Making a complaint**

Any person working in WMO, staff members, consultants, interns, volunteers, who believes that they were victims of prohibited conduct, can make a complaint. Furthermore, any third party with direct knowledge of the situation can report such incidents.

Any person working in WMO who was subject to prohibited conduct are encouraged to take action as soon as possible. Likewise, any person working in WMO, who witnesses such behavior should take action. Taking action may include intervening, reporting the matter, offering to serve as a witness in the case or providing other forms of support.

Where possible, the matter can initially be addressed informally with the alleged offender.

- **How to take informal action**

WMO personnel who believe they are subject to prohibited conduct are encouraged to immediately inform the offender of the unwelcome nature of his or her behavior.

In any case, the aggrieved individual is encouraged to seek advice and help from the HR Officer, from a member of WMO Staff Committee or from a senior member of their department or office.

The aggrieved individual should keep a written record of events, as soon as possible after the incident or incidents have occurred, noting dates, places, a short description of what happened and the names of any witnesses and anyone to whom the incident might have been mentioned.

- **How to take formal action**

Individuals who wish to pursue a formal procedure, or have been unable to resolve the matter informally, should file a formal complaint with IOO.

The IOO will determine whether the allegation can be established based on the facts of the case. In case prohibited conduct is identified, disciplinary proceedings will take place in accordance with the Staff Regulations and Rules.

## **Protection against retaliation**

Acts or threats of retaliation against any person exercising their right to complain about prohibited conduct are unacceptable and unlawful (see Ethics Framework, 11.D.5).

Requests for protection against retaliation should be submitted to the Ethics Office as soon as possible. Complaints may be made in person, by regular mail or by e-mail.

If the Ethics Office finds that there is a credible case of retaliation or threat of retaliation, he/she will refer the matter in writing to IOO for investigation.

IOO will seek to complete its investigation and submit its report to the Ethics Officer within 120 days.

Once the Ethics Office has received the investigation report, she/he will make his/her recommendations on the case to the head of the department and to the Secretary-General. Recommendations may include disciplinary actions to be taken against the retaliator.