



# Code of Conduct

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



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# Statement by the Secretary General

For more than 70 years, the Council of Europe has been a beacon of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Throughout that time, the Organisation has relied on the professionalism and integrity of its staff. In recent years, the culture within our societies has evolved and this, in turn, has resulted in different expectations about the way in which colleagues should go about their work and interact with one another. In order to meet these expectations, clear standards and transparent systems are required.

Our response is a comprehensive new ethical framework, of which this Code of Conduct is the central pillar.

The Code of Conduct is designed as a set of behavioural and ethical standards and is relevant to every member of staff. It is intended to create a better working environment for all of us. I ask that you take the time to familiarise yourself with it, abide by it, and help ensure the high standards from which everyone will benefit.

# Guiding principles

The Council of Europe is an international organisation with 46 member states, which works to protect and promote the rule of law, human rights and democracy across Europe and beyond. It is crucial that each of the Organisation's staff members, as well as all those who participate in our activities and the pursuit of our aims, share the vision of the Council of Europe: the importance of the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

Realising this vision and fulfilling the mandate of the Council of Europe depends heavily on the expertise, knowledge and competence of its staff members and on the high standards of ethics we maintain. In our internal functioning, and in our relations with the world outside the Organisation, we strive to uphold our ethos of **professionalism, integrity and respect**. As the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, we share in this ethos and apply it in our daily work. It guides us in striving to meet the highest standards of professional expertise; in our commitment to our work and to our own personal development; and in our interaction with others in the workplace.

This Code of Conduct sets out the values and standards of conduct which emanate from our shared ethos. It defines what is expected of staff members and of all those working with the Council of Europe in various capacities. On an individual level, the Secretariat of the Organisation and those persons involved with its activities are expected to act with the highest degree of **integrity and respect**, by conducting themselves in accordance with these core values and with the values that underpin them: namely **independence, trustworthiness, responsibility, dignity, diversity, and discretion**. These values are overlapping and interwoven, and in many situations, more than one of them may inform the standards of conduct expected.

It is of the utmost importance that the conduct of all Council of Europe staff members, at all times, not only meets the standards expected of us, but is perceived by all – colleagues, stakeholders, interlocutors and the public – to meet these standards. The Code of Conduct is legally binding upon all staff members, and breaches may lead to disciplinary sanctions.

In addition, it is expected that all those involved with the Organisation's activities will uphold the values and respect the standards set out in this Code of Conduct, to the extent that they are applicable to them.

The Code of Conduct applies in all premises of the Organisation, as well as any location where Council of Europe activities take place or its staff members are present.



## Part I – Integrity

**INTEGRITY** – a core value of the Council of Europe – is synonymous with **TRUSTWORTHINESS** and **RESPONSIBILITY**. It requires acting in conformity with the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon us. These duties and responsibilities may flow from international or national laws; the rules of the Organisation; or the values that unite the staff of the Council of Europe and all those involved with its activities as an ethical community. Staff members, as international civil servants, are in a position of trust; both the Organisation and the general public have the right to expect that we will not breach this trust, but will act with complete integrity at all times. In the specific context of the Council of Europe, **INDEPENDENCE** from states, governments, and all other third parties, is a fundamental aspect of integrity. Our loyalty must always be to the Organisation. Without integrity on the part of each of us, the Council of Europe cannot maintain its credibility or effectively carry out its mandate.

# Independence

Independence is the cornerstone of the international civil service, of which Council of Europe staff members form part. It cannot be stated too strongly that staff members of the Council of Europe are not representatives of governments, or any other entity or authority, and nor are we proponents of their policies or actions. If we do not maintain our independence from all external authorities and entities, then we cannot carry out our work in the impartial manner that is so vital to the Organisation's status as an international organisation. It is therefore imperative that our acts, words and conduct reflect our independence at all times.

## 1. Independence from governments

Council of Europe staff members are appointed in their capacity as individuals and not as representatives of governments. Staff members shall not seek or accept instructions or fees from any government. In the event that instructions or fees are offered, they shall draw this to the attention of their hierarchy immediately. Staff members shall seek the prior authorisation of the Secretary General before accepting any honour or decoration offered by a representative of any government.

## 2. Independence from other third parties

Staff members shall also maintain their complete independence from any non-governmental organisation, authority or other third party. As above, this complete independence entails the obligations not to seek or accept instructions or fees, and to draw any offers of instructions or fees to the attention of their hierarchy. Furthermore, staff members shall not accept any honour, decoration, gift, favour or other advantage from a third party that could be perceived as affecting their impartiality or integrity or could pose a reputational risk to the Council of Europe.

## 3. Non-solicitation of intervention

Staff members shall strictly refrain from lobbying or soliciting any intervention by any government, authority or other third party with a view to obtaining an advantage, such as promotion or career advancement, for themselves or any other person. Similarly, staff members shall not solicit the intervention of colleagues, or any person internal to the Organisation, in order to obtain any such advantage.



## 4. Conflicts of interest

All staff members must put the interests of the Organisation as a whole ahead of their own personal interest or any sectoral interests they might have, and must carry out their tasks in an independent and impartial manner. As such, all staff members shall endeavour to avoid conflicts of interest, which are damaging to the public perception of the Council of Europe's, and its staff members', integrity. Conflicts of interest arise where a staff member has a personal interest which is such as to influence, or appear to influence, the impartial and objective performance of their duties. Where conflicts of interest do arise, whether actual, potential or perceived, they must be declared in line with the applicable legal provisions in order that they can be effectively identified and managed.

# Trustworthiness

**The Council of Europe, its stakeholders and the wider public place trust in each of us that we will fulfil the obligations incumbent upon us. Our conduct at all times must uphold and preserve this trust. This entails complying with our duties and responsibilities and adhering to laws, regulations and rules, whether external or internal to the Organisation. It also means acting honestly and truthfully and upholding the shared values of the Council of Europe.**

## 5. Compliance with national laws

Staff members of the Council of Europe shall act with integrity in all aspects of their life, which includes following the laws of the state in which they work or live, as well as any other state they may visit, whether for personal or professional reasons. Any privileges and immunities which staff members enjoy do not exempt them from compliance with national laws or regulations or provide an excuse for ignoring private legal or financial obligations. The conviction of a staff member by a national criminal court will usually, though not always, be convincing evidence of the acts for which the staff member was convicted. Acts which are generally regarded by national courts as criminal, other than very minor offenses, will usually, though not always, be presumed to amount to a breach of this Code of Conduct and, as such, shall render the convicted staff member liable to disciplinary sanctions.

## 6. Fraud and corruption

The value which the Council of Europe places on integrity, and the standards the Organisation promotes in respect of its member states, necessarily entails that there shall be zero tolerance for fraud or corruption on the part of staff members or of any third party with whom the Organisation has dealings. Fraudulent or corrupt behaviour on the part of a staff member shall be treated as gross misconduct by the Organisation. Staff members shall not engage in fraudulent or corrupt behaviour and shall report any reasonable suspicions thereof in accordance with the applicable legal provisions. Managers shall take steps in their areas of responsibility to identify risk areas; implement measures to mitigate such risks; and put in place internal controls with the aim of preventing fraud and corruption.

## 7. Non-retaliation and the duty to cooperate

7.1 Staff members shall have the duty to cooperate fully with, and not to hinder in any way, any investigation conducted in accordance with the applicable legal provisions, whether the alleged wrongdoing under investigation is their own or that of another person. This duty to cooperate does not undermine the right of all persons to defend themselves against allegations directed against them, or the right not to incriminate themselves.

7.2 Staff members shall not retaliate or threaten any retaliatory action against another person as a result of that person having reported a reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing, whether harassment or other, or cooperated with an investigation into such wrongdoing. Staff members shall not discredit other persons, including as a form of retaliation for having made allegations of wrongdoing, or manipulate other persons into retracting or modifying any allegations they may have made.

## 8. Abuse of privileges, immunities or status

As an international organisation, the Council of Europe is granted certain privileges and immunities to facilitate the pursuit of its aims. Some of these privileges and immunities extend to the Organisation's staff, but these are conferred in the interest of the Organisation alone and not for the benefit of staff members in their personal capacities. Such privileges and immunities shall be used in the spirit in which they were granted – with the goal of enabling the Organisation to pursue its aims – and shall not be abused by staff members. Furthermore, staff members shall not use or attempt to use their status as a member of the Council of Europe's Secretariat to obtain advantages from, or to influence, third parties. Abuse of the privileges and immunities or of one's status as a Council of Europe staff member amounts to a breach of trust and is detrimental to the image and reputation of the Organisation in the eyes of the public.

## 9. Conduct of private life

While staff members' private life is their own concern, they must bear in mind that there may be situations in which their conduct in the private sphere impacts on the Organisation. In addition to maintaining the highest standards of integrity in their professional conduct, therefore, staff members shall act with integrity in their personal lives, and shall avoid any behaviour which might compromise the image or reputation of the Council of Europe or diminish public trust in its staff members. Staff members shall also ensure that all members of their household are aware of the need to avoid conduct which might negatively impact the image or interests of the Council of Europe.



# Responsibility

**Responsibility is a facet of integrity which entails behaving in a dependable way and doing the right thing. It means carrying out our tasks and living our lives with due care and attention for other people and our surroundings. We act in a responsible manner when we meet our obligations and live up to the expectations the Organisation, our stakeholders and the public are entitled to have of us.**

## 10. Use of the Organisation's resources

The resources of the Council of Europe are provided for pursuit of its aims and are to be used in the Organisation's best interests. Staff members shall safeguard the Organisation's resources and ensure that they are not misused or squandered, which means using them with due care and attention and for authorised purposes only. Limited personal use of resources such as electronic and communications tools is permitted in line with the applicable legal provisions.

## 11. Use of alcohol and illicit substances

11.1 The duty to behave in a responsible manner prohibits staff members from taking illicit substances or consuming alcohol in the course of their professional duties, unless they are consuming a moderate amount of alcohol taken with a meal or in the context of a festive occasion. Staff members shall not come to work under the influence of alcohol or any illicit substance. Any situation in which a staff member is found to be under such influence shall be dealt with in line with the applicable legal provisions.

11.2 A manager who suspects that a member of their team is suffering from chronic alcohol consumption or drug addiction shall raise the subject with the staff member concerned and encourage them to seek help.

## 12. Safety and security

The security and safety of staff members, all those involved in the Council of Europe's activities and the wider public is of paramount importance to the Organisation. Managers have a duty of care, in the areas of activity falling under their responsibility, to ensure that no person's safety or security is put at risk. All staff members, moreover, shall to the extent possible take responsibility for their own safety and security and shall furthermore be aware of the impact that their conduct may have on the safety and security of others, particularly colleagues and all persons involved with the Council of Europe's activities. Staff members shall avoid taking any unnecessary risks and shall, whenever making decisions which could impact on their own or others' safety and security, give careful consideration to what would be the safest course of action. Staff members shall comply with the applicable legal provisions and shall adapt to changing circumstances or risks. To this end, they shall immediately comply with any directives they may be given with a view to ensuring their safety and security or that of others.

### 13. Environmental responsibility

Staff members shall comply with national and international environmental laws as well as the applicable internal legal provisions. They shall strive to minimise their own personal, and the Organisation's, environmental impact.





## Part II – Respect

**RESPECT is a core value of the Council of Europe, and one which must underpin all interpersonal interactions within and on behalf of the Organisation. Respect means care and consideration for ourselves, for other people and for our Organisation. It also means having due regard for others' rights, wishes and feelings. In conducting themselves at all times with respect, staff members uphold the associated values of DIGNITY, DIVERSITY, and DISCRETION.**

# Dignity

Dignity is each person's inherent worth and value as a human being. The importance that the Council of Europe places on respect for human dignity flows naturally from its central aim – the protection of human rights in Europe – since human rights are rooted in the recognition of each person's inherent worth and value. In the internal context of the Organisation, as in any workplace, harassment and other disrespectful behaviour is the conduct most likely to infringe upon the dignity of others.

## 14. Working relationships

14.1 All those who work for the Council of Europe have the obligation to treat others, including and especially their colleagues, with respect for their human dignity, their privacy and their private life.

14.2 All interaction between colleagues shall be conducted on the basis of open and unambiguous communication and mutual courtesy. Duly justified criticism is important for professional development and should always be delivered in a constructive and polite manner, as should any type of feedback, whether negative or positive. The contribution of all colleagues shall be valued and acknowledged, and no staff member shall take credit for the work of another. All are responsible for ensuring the free flow of information necessary to enable colleagues to produce their best work, under the best possible conditions.

## 15. Managers' roles

It is especially important that managers, given their hierarchical position, set an example to colleagues by closely adhering to all aspects of the present Code of Conduct. Managers' duties shall include the fostering of harmonious working relations and effective teamwork among the colleagues under their responsibility. Managers shall provide guidance and motivation and shall clearly communicate to their teams what is required of them. They shall recognise contributions from their team members when reporting to their hierarchy and shall offer positive feedback in recognition of merit and constructive criticism where required. Managers shall treat all staff members under their responsibility equally and without discrimination. Furthermore, managers should oversee the wellbeing of their teams, which requires that they listen and offer their support to any team member whom they believe to be experiencing difficulties. This may involve referring the staff member concerned to the appropriate internal or external services.

## 16. Abuse of authority

Staff members shall not abuse their authority by treating any person, whether a colleague or a person external to the Organisation, in a manner which is prejudicial to that person's human dignity. In particular, staff members shall not request colleagues who are their subordinates to carry out personal tasks, or tasks which do not form part of the colleagues' professional duties, for them. Staff members shall be entitled to refuse to carry out any such task requested by their hierarchical superior or any other colleague.

## 17. Harassment

Harassment, which is a breach of the right to respect for human dignity, has no place in any Organisation, but least of all in one such as the Council of Europe which embraces respect and human dignity as fundamental values. Harassment shall not be tolerated and shall be treated as gross misconduct by the Organisation. Sexual harassment, and harassment of a subordinate by their hierarchical superior, shall be considered as particularly egregious. Knowingly tolerating harassment by another person also amounts to a breach of the Council of Europe's values which can give rise to disciplinary action. It is the duty of all managers, from the Secretary General down through the entire Organisation, to foster a safe and caring working environment for all and a climate in which harassment cannot thrive. It is the duty of all staff members to report any instances of suspected harassment. Staff members shall refrain from knowingly or recklessly making any false accusation of harassment against another person.

# Diversity

**Our recognition of the equal worth of every person, regardless of their personal characteristics or background, means that we must treat everybody equally, without any discrimination against any person or group. The Council of Europe is made up of diverse member states comprising myriad languages, cultures, traditions and ways of thinking. As its Secretariat, we reflect that diversity and harness it to better achieve our goals. Our respect for each other means that we welcome our differences and we value our diversity as one of our greatest assets. Respect for diversity is one of our fundamental values.**

## 18. Non-discrimination

Staff members of the Council of Europe share responsibility for fostering a working environment that is inclusive and free of discrimination. To that end, they shall abide by the applicable legal provisions prohibiting discrimination and promoting diversity and inclusion. Staff members shall treat others equally, without direct or indirect discrimination on any ground, such as "race"; national, ethnic or social origin; colour; citizenship; disability; age; civil or parental status; sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or sex characteristics; or political, philosophical or religious opinions. They shall respect others' diversity, including traits, beliefs and opinions that may differ from their own.

# Discretion

Discretion is a fundamental value which should inform the way we, as Council of Europe staff members, and all those involved with our activities, handle information. This applies to confidential information, which is information entrusted to another with the expectation that it will not be divulged other than to those who are authorised to receive it, and also to information which is not necessarily confidential but the disclosure of which may nonetheless harm the Organisation. Discretion furthermore requires that we act with restraint and good judgment in our dealings with the public, regardless of the media through which such relations occur.

## 19. Confidentiality

Staff members shall not divulge confidential information as to do so would be to damage the Organisation and the trust that our interlocutors, stakeholders and the wider public are entitled to have in us. Disclosure of confidential information could seriously jeopardise the Organisation's effectiveness and credibility. Staff members shall moreover ensure that any confidential documents or information in their possession are properly safeguarded. If staff members are unclear as to whether particular information is confidential or not, they shall consult their hierarchy or the relevant colleagues.

## 20. Non-disclosure of information

In the Council of Europe context, staff members may receive information in the course of their duties which, although not necessarily confidential, is nonetheless sensitive and should not be made public. Information is a key resource of the Council of Europe which must be protected and respected, subject to regard for the right of access to official information and respect for the value of transparency in our work. Staff members shall not divulge information without authorisation, and shall not use information, which is not public but to which they are privy as a result of their employment by the Council of Europe, to their own personal advantage or the advantage of another person. These obligations persist even after a person no longer works for the Organisation, meaning that former staff members shall not use or disclose information known to them by reason of their service with the Organisation. Furthermore, they shall not contact their former colleagues with a view to obtaining information. Current staff members shall not provide sensitive information to former colleagues, who should be treated like any other person external to the Organisation.

## 21. Protection of personal data

Every staff member is responsible for ensuring the protection of personal data in their area of activity, in line with the applicable legal framework.



## 22. Public relations

22.1 Staff members have an ongoing responsibility to promote awareness and a positive image of the Council of Europe, and its aims and activities. They shall not publicly undermine the Organisation or its values or goals, or otherwise comment negatively on aspects of their work in such a manner as to detract from public confidence in the Organisation or adversely affect its reputation or work. Staff members shall regard themselves as “ambassadors” for the Organisation. However, they shall speak for the Organisation only when expressly authorised to do so and, even when authorised to do so, shall not divulge private, confidential or sensitive information or information intended for internal use only. These responsibilities apply with even greater force to staff members’ relations with the media. Staff members shall recall in any interaction they might have with the media that they are representing the Organisation and shall take care that their representation is a positive one.

22.2 Staff members shall be attentive when using social media or digital communication, including through their personal accounts, to avoid any action which might bring the Council of Europe into disrepute. They shall not divulge sensitive information or that which is intended for internal use only and shall respect confidentiality and privacy. Staff members shall refrain from expressing on social media views that could be reasonably understood as undermining the Organisation, its values or its goals; damaging its reputation; or otherwise adversely impacting its capacity to carry out its work or meet its objectives.

22.3 Staff members may accept invitations to academic and social events which are addressed to them in their professional capacity.

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