

# CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

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INTEGRITY



ACCOUNTABILITY



INDEPENDENCE  
AND IMPARTIALITY



RESPECT



PROFESSIONAL  
COMMITMENT



World Health  
Organization

[www.who.int/about/ethics](http://www.who.int/about/ethics)

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO) embodies the highest aspirations of the peoples of the world and its staff are bound by the requirements of international civil servants. The highest standard of conduct, competence and performance is expected of all staff in order to reflect WHO's ethical principles.

## WHO ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

-  **INTEGRITY**
-  **ACCOUNTABILITY**
-  **INDEPENDENCE AND IMPARTIALITY**
-  **RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY, WORTH, EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND PRIVACY OF ALL PERSONS**
-  **PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT**

These principles apply to all WHO staff members, independent of their location or grade, including Temporary Appointment holders, Secondees and Junior Professional Officers.

This document refers to WHO staff members with the understanding that in spirit and principle, the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct applies to all individuals who collaborate with WHO, not withstanding their contractual or remuneration status.

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## 1. INTEGRITY

**To behave in accordance with ethical principles, and act in good faith, intellectual honesty and fairness**

**WHO staff members are expected to:**

- Observe national and local laws at all times.
- Avoid any action that could be perceived as an abuse of privileges and immunities.
- Demonstrate the same standards of integrity in their personal pursuits as they do in the workplace.
- Never engage in any level of physical or verbal violence or threat of violence.
- Demonstrate the highest standards of scientific integrity as public health practitioners and/or researchers.
- Protect the security of any confidential information provided to, or generated by, WHO.
- Report suspected wrongdoing or breaches of WHO ethical principles, rules, regulations or policy through established mechanisms (**Integrity Hotline**).
- Demonstrate the same discretion and prudence in their professional and private communications, emails or social media activities.

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## 2. ACCOUNTABILITY

**To take responsibility for one's actions, decisions and their consequences**

**WHO staff members are expected to:**

- Define clear and realistic objectives and deliverables for their activities in consultation with their supervisors.
- Take responsibility for carrying out the duties of their position to the best of their abilities.
- Take responsibility for their decisions and for the consequences of their actions.
- In the case of supervisors, take responsibility for assessing the performance of staff members in a fair and factual manner, in line with agreed objectives.

- Ensure that the human, financial and material resources entrusted to them are used optimally for the benefit of WHO.
  - Record all transactions and prepare accurate and complete records, in accordance with established procedures.
  - Provide advice and guidance to colleagues, where appropriate, and exercise adequate supervision and control over tasks they delegate.
  - Bear in mind that they speak for WHO when speaking to the media on subjects within their area of responsibility and expertise, ask for permission from their supervisor and seek advice from WHO Communications Officers as appropriate.
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### **3. INDEPENDENCE AND IMPARTIALITY**

**To conduct oneself with the interests of WHO only in view and under the sole authority of the Director-General, and to ensure that personal views and convictions do not compromise ethical principles, official duties or the interests of WHO**

**WHO staff members are expected to:**

- Disclose promptly and fully any conflict of interest or potential situation of conflict of interest through a form of declaration of interest or by seeking advice from the Ethics team in the Office of Compliance, Risk and Ethics on a confidential basis. Or staff may consult their supervisor as applicable concerning the appropriate action, including possible recusal.
- Refrain from seeking or obtaining, under any circumstance, instructions or undue assistance from any government official or from any other authority external to the Organization.
- Exercise discretion at all times in their personal political activities and in expressing their personal opinions and beliefs.
- Ensure that any external experts and/or non-staff members with whom they collaborate complete declarations of interest forms and review them systematically, consulting the Ethics team for advice, and take responsibility for the final decision concerning their involvement with WHO.

- Bring any intimate relationship with another WHO staff member or other collaborator to the attention of their supervisor, Department of Human Resources or the Office of Compliance, Risk and Ethics (CRE) if there is a supervisory relationship between them.
  - Seek written permission from their supervisor and the CRE before committing to any outside activity.
  - Decline gifts whose value is in excess of US\$100, unless it would cause embarrassment to refuse, in which case they must declare them to CRE.
  - Seek authorization from the Director-General or the Regional Director, through CRE before accepting any decoration or honour.
  - Resign prior to initiating a political campaign or a nomination process.
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## 4. RESPECT

**To respect the dignity, worth, equality, diversity and privacy of all persons**

**WHO staff members are expected to:**

- Respect and value differences.
- Treat others with tact, courtesy and respect.
- Demonstrate awareness that statements or actions not necessarily intended to be offensive to another person may be perceived as such by exercising restraint and refraining from unpleasant or disparaging remarks or actions.
- Maintain a professional environment characterized by good working relations and an atmosphere of courtesy and mutual respect.
- Abstain from and actively discourage all forms of harassment, including verbal, nonverbal, written or physical abuse.
- Never engage in acts of sexual harassment, and report any they become aware of.
- Never engage in acts of sexual exploitation and abuse and report any they become aware of.
- Refrain from engaging in gossip.
- Never report erroneous facts in bad faith.

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## 5. PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT

To demonstrate a high level of professionalism and loyalty to the Organization, its mandate and objectives

WHO staff members are expected to:

- Deliver on the duties of their position in an ethical and professional manner.
- Keep in mind the longer term objectives of WHO when managing short and medium term activities or operations.
- Follow professional developments in their domain of activity to maintain excellent technical standards.
- Use their professional expertise constructively for the benefit of WHO.
- Uphold and promote the standards of their professional codes of conduct.
- Demonstrate openness to new ideas and approaches, and favour new thoughts and concepts.

### USING THE CODE OF CONDUCT

These principles are to be observed by WHO staff members at all times. The [Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#)<sup>1</sup> is intended to provide guidance to help resolve ethical dilemmas that are likely to be confronted within the course of their employment with WHO. The issues listed in the Code are not exhaustive and do not seek to envisage every potential ethical dilemma.

For more information contact the Ethics team in the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics (CRE) [ethicsoffice@who.int](mailto:ethicsoffice@who.int)

You can raise a concern confidentially through the Integrity Hotline:

<http://wrs.expolink.co.uk/integrity>

You can also raise a concern anonymously.

<sup>1</sup> [www.who.int/about/ethics/code\\_of\\_ethics\\_full\\_version.pdf](http://www.who.int/about/ethics/code_of_ethics_full_version.pdf)