



Code of Conduct

1. Introduction and applicability

This Code of Conduct contains principles of behaviour and guidelines for the ethical conduct of all employees of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) conducting activities abroad. It also applies to the personnel seconded to a third party. Employees of the FDFA are required to comply with the principles and guidelines of this Code.

The Code of Conduct is subsidiary to the labour law provisions (in particular Art. 20 of the Federal Personnel Act [FPA; SR 172.220.1]), contractual agreements, guidelines within specific departments or administrative units and the Federal Administration Code of Conduct. These take precedence in the event of any discrepancies.

Employees performing activities abroad should ensure that their accompanying family members adhere to the principles included in this Code of Conduct.

2. General principles

FDFA employees are expected to be irreproachable in their personal and professional behaviour at all times and to comply with the objectives of the FDFA. FDFA employees' conduct is to be characterised by integrity, respect and loyalty, honesty, truthfulness and incorruptibility and, particularly in their role as representatives of Switzerland while abroad, the employees avoid in any way harming or compromising Switzerland's reputation. FDFA employees should be aware that their personal conduct and activities inside and outside the working place reflect on the credibility and image of the FDFA and Switzerland.

FDFA employees are expected to refrain from incitement to violence or hatred. They should be aware of power asymmetries in society and exercise special sensitivity to marginalising or vulnerabilising factors such as gender, age, ethnic origins, language, sexual orientation or groups socially and economically disadvantaged or facing discrimination, such as persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees as well as dependent persons and in particular private household employees.

3. Law and regulations

FDFA employees abroad are expected to respect the relevant laws and regulations as well as human rights standards. In particular, they are required to respect the laws and regulations of the host country as well as its local customs and traditions insofar as they are not contrary to human rights norms and standards.

FDFA employees are expected not to breach the provisions of the relevant criminal code. The use of illegal narcotics and intoxicants of any kind is strictly forbidden. The consumption of alcohol should be appropriate to the specific situation and take into account other regulations, e.g. those concerning the conduct and use of official vehicles.

FDFA employees are expected to avoid any person who could reasonably be suspected of fraud, engaging in trafficking in human beings, illegal adoption or who is involved in other criminal activities under the law of the host country or of Swiss or international law.

4. Harassment, abuse of power and offences against personal integrity

Harassment in any form, including sexual harassment and any other form of offences against personal integrity as well as abuse of power, is strictly prohibited and is subject to sanctions (for more information: www.eda.admin.ch/respect). The exploitation of a person in a position of need or dependency and the practice of sexual exploitation, including the purchase of sexual services, are prohibited.

5. Privileges and immunities

Employees with diplomatic or consular privileges and immunities are expected to comply with the associated conditions and refrain from any misuse thereof. They are responsible for the use of privileges and immunities by persons forming part of their household.

6. Impartiality and conflicts of interest

FDFA employees are expected to refrain from any action that might impinge on their impartiality, objectivity or decision-making capacity in the execution of their work or which might arouse suspicion of venality, bias or corruption. Representing Switzerland requires a high degree of integrity and credibility. Employees of the FDFA carry out their tasks irrespective of their own personal interests. They are expected to avoid situations where their interests conflict with those of the Confederation and to refrain from doing anything which might compromise their ability to do their job effectively. Unavoidable conflicts of interests – or the appearance of such – are to be reported immediately to their supervisors.

7. Other remunerated or unremunerated work and public offices

Employees of the FDFA are expected not to engage in remunerated or unremunerated work or other activities which may interfere with or lead to conflicts of interest with the Confederation, its values and objectives. Any such work or public office should not impair the staff member's performance or compromise their impartiality. Employees of the FDFA inform their supervisors of any public offices held or any other remunerated or unremunerated work.

8. Acceptance of gifts

In the course of their work, FDFA employees do not accept advantages, favours or gifts in cash or in kind, promises of gifts or any other advantage unless these are small in nature and socially or traditionally motivated. If the acceptance of an advantage, favour or gift undermines the employee's independence, objectiveness or scope for action, the acceptance of a gift or benefit is precluded, regardless of its value, since it can no longer be considered minor or customary. Staff members involved in procurement or decision-making processes (e.g. visa process, awarding of contracts, supervisory roles) are expected to turn down even small and socially or traditionally motivated benefits insofar as they are offered in connection with those processes.

9. Working relations

Working in an international setting requires a willingness to work with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds in an unbiased manner. Whenever confronted with culturally different attitudes, work customs and working methods, employees are expected to demonstrate sensitivity towards and respect for different views and cultures. Any form of preferential treatment or harassment is to be avoided.

Understanding of and sensitivity to cultural and gender differences are indispensable for FDFA work. FDFA employees are therefore expected to live up to and promote the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination of any person. FDFA employees show due respect, particularly through their conduct, dress and language, for the religious beliefs, usages and customs, rules, practices and habits of the people of the country or context they are in.

10. Relations with the public and the media

Employees of the FDFA are duty-bound to promote a better understanding and a positive image of Switzerland abroad and to disseminate information about the principles, objectives and mandate of Swiss foreign policy. Loyalty requires FDFA employees to refrain from public criticism of the FDFA or of Switzerland's foreign policy.

11. Discretion and publications

FDFA employees are expected not to disclose any sensitive information or information regarding third parties without the authorisation of the FDFA.

FDFA employees are expected to notify the relevant service of any publications, presentations or public statements (e.g. article, book or blog) made outside the course of their official duties abroad insofar as these relate to Switzerland's foreign policy and/or the work of the FDFA.

12. Safety and security

FDFA employees endeavour to be diligent in observing all the guidelines, procedures and instructions regarding safety and security that are given to them by the FDFA. FDFA employees are to take all necessary precautions not to jeopardise their personal health and safety or that of others.

13. Protection of property

FDFA employees are expected to protect and manage efficiently the resources and property of the FDFA and avoid any loss or damage.

14. Environment

FDFA employees are expected to avoid wasteful use of natural resources, reduce environmental impacts and minimise the use of substances and compounds that harm the environment. Special care is to be taken when selecting suppliers and partners and to avoid contractual relationships with entities whose activities are inconsistent with the ethical use of resources or which fail to respect populations.

15. Infringements of the Code of Conduct and procedure

Any violation of criminal law of which employees are aware, or any violation or suspected violation of this Code of Conduct, must be reported as soon as possible to a line manager or hierarchical superior or to the Compliance Office via the FDFA's reporting platform <https://eda.integrityline.org>.

If the violation of this Code of Conduct involves sexual harassment, workplace bullying or discrimination, it may be reported to a line manager or hierarchical superior or via the FDFA's reporting platform <https://eda.integrityline.org>.

16. Coming into operation

This Code of Conduct for employees of the FDFA comes into operation on 1 August 2018. It replaces the Code of Conduct for Members of the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding (SEP) of 29 March 2012 and the Code of Conduct for SDC Employees and Partners.

30.07.2018, updated on 16.06.2023