



Equal opportunities in the workplace: FDFA Guidelines

1. Objective

The aim of these guidelines is to promote and to guarantee equal opportunities for all staff in the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The FDFA wants to provide a workplace free of discrimination, sexual harassment and workplace mobbing, with an organisational culture in which all staff are treated with respect and dignity, irrespective of their personal characteristics, and in which management is conducting itself with empathy and responsibility. On the other hand, the FDFA expects all employees to show high willingness to perform, to focus on results, and to identify with Switzerland's values and objectives.

All staff have a role to play in ensuring that the workplace is free of discrimination and harassment, where they and their colleagues can expect to flourish and be treated with respect and consideration. It falls to management to set an example in terms of appropriate behaviour and personal integrity, in particular as far as new and younger staff members are concerned.

2. Scope

These guidelines are based on the FDFA's management principles and are applicable throughout the entire department in Bern and abroad. Managers are to promote respectful interaction within their teams, taking into account the respective cultural context. They should also promote equal opportunities in the workplace.

The guidelines contain principles for the behaviour of all staff members. They apply to the FDFA's transferable and non-transferable staff at head office and in the representations, as well as local staff.

The [FDFA Code of Conduct for employees abroad](#) and corresponding workplace regulations applicable to employees in Switzerland provide complementary and more specific aspects relating to equal opportunities.

The guidelines therefore also represent a core instrument for the implementation of the [Equal opportunities in the workplace: FDFA Action Plan 2028](#). The Action Plan focuses on four overarching fields of action: (1) Promoting a respectful and inclusive departmental culture free from discrimination, supporting staff members in reconciling work and family life, and enforcing zero tolerance of discrimination; (2) Strengthening and adequately representing cultural and linguistic diversity within the FDFA; (3) Ensuring a balanced gender ratio for all functions and at all hierarchical levels (gender parity); and (4) Recognising the importance of leadership and processes in promoting a culture of responsibility and accountability within the FDFA.



3. Principles of a results-focused, fair and forward-looking organisational culture

a. Respecting diversity

The FDFA provides a working environment where equal opportunities and a balanced representation of different groups of people are an express aim. Diversity in the composition of its workforce is an asset and a key factor in the FDFA's success anywhere in the world.

A culture of equal opportunities takes account of the fact that staff members are all different, whether in terms of their background, ethnic origins, gender, age, language, social standing, lifestyle, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious, philosophical or political beliefs, physical abilities, education, or any other particularity.

b. Human resources management free of discrimination

Equal opportunities play a major part in the recruitment process: FDFA staff members and external applicants must all be placed on an equal footing, regardless of their personal characteristics. Internally as well as externally advertised posts must meet equal opportunity requirements: They may not contain any explicit or implicit references to the effect that any particular person or group of applicants will be discriminated against because of any of the personal characteristics listed above.

In evaluating the performance of their team members, managers have to bear gender- and diversity-specific issues in mind. They must base their evaluations on facts and be familiar with the dangers of preconceived opinions, prejudice and stereotypes regarding specific groups of people. When awarding promotions, line managers must give members of various groups equal opportunities.

The FDFA endeavours to ensure that the workplace allows staff to strike a balance between their professional and private family commitments. Management supports the use of flexible and mobile working models, insofar as these are compatible with operational requirements in individual cases.

The FDFA offers continuing education and training that supports the professional development and advancement of its staff.

c. Protection against discrimination, sexual harassment and mobbing

Protection against discrimination

All staff are entitled to have their personal integrity protected in the workplace and enjoy a working environment that is free of any form of discrimination based on their background, ethnic origins, gender, age, language, social standing, lifestyle, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious, philosophical or political beliefs, or any physical or psychological disability. Stereotypes can lead to unjustified discrimination and must be challenged and rooted out.

Behaviour that discriminates against staff members or offends their dignity shall not be tolerated and shall lead to disciplinary measures.



Protection against sexual harassment

All staff are entitled to a working environment free of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment shall not be tolerated and results in disciplinary measures.

Persons lodging a complaint of sexual harassment shall not suffer any discrimination in their professional status as a result. Those concerned can find additional information at <https://www.eda.admin.ch/respect/en/home.html>.

Protection against mobbing

All staff are entitled to a working environment free of mobbing. Mobbing shall not be tolerated and results in disciplinary measures.

In the workplace, line managers assume a role of responsibility and work actively to find good solutions so that the conflict can be resolved without health-related or social consequences for those concerned.

4. Responsibilities

At head office, the responsibility for implementing these guidelines lies with the directors. They must inform all staff of the guidelines, their principles, as well as where to report incidents or get advice.

In the representations abroad, responsibility for the implementation of these guidelines lies with the heads of mission. They must inform all staff of the guidelines and their principles and take appropriate measures if and when any problems arise. In addition to these guidelines, they must also take into account the local legal system and the corresponding local conditions. Staff abroad may also make use of the services offering advice at head office.

Each directorate and representation may, where necessary, also formulate their own additional principles of behaviour, beyond those of these guidelines, provided they do not contradict the values contained in these guidelines or the applicable legal framework.

5. Reporting incidents

All FDFA staff may contact the external [whistleblowing platform of the FDFA](#) to report any possible cases of sexual harassment, mobbing or discrimination. As a neutral body that is independent of the FDFA's operational directorates, the FDFA Compliance Office operates the whistleblowing platform and makes an initial assessment of the situation. The Compliance Office offers the opportunity to have a confidential conversation, informing the person reporting the incident of the different options (informal steps or the formal procedure). Informal steps include advice on possible courses of action and on support from other contact points, for example the Personnel and Social Counselling Service of the Federal Administration and the HR Advisory Services. A formal procedure begins as soon as the person concerned, in full knowledge of the facts, requests that a formal procedure be initiated by the employer. The



case is forwarded by the Compliance Office to the employer (DR or head of mission for local staff) for the facts to be examined and, if necessary, for an external investigation to be opened.

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