



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

# Anti-Harassment Guidelines

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## 1 Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 These Anti-Harassment Guidelines give practical advice on what constitutes harassment and provide guidance on how to analyse, report and resolve a harassment incident.
- 1.2 These Guidelines cover all forms of harassment occurring in the workplace, or in another environment in which Federation staff may find themselves in connection with their work for and with the Federation.
- 1.3 The Federation rules on staff conduct in relation to harassment are set out in the Staff Code of Conduct – these Guidelines do not override the Code of Conduct or any other obligations of Staff.

## 2 Document Detail

### 2.1 Basic Principles

- 2.1.1 All staff shall treat one another with courtesy, fairly, with dignity and with respect for different customs and cultures. Any form of harassment is an affront to human dignity and staff must not carry out any harassment act, at any time or under any circumstances. The Federation will not tolerate any form of harassment and is committed to ensuring a harassment-free working environment for all staff.
- 2.1.2 Focus shall be placed on preventive actions against harassment. Priority shall be given to the early detection of harassment and to swift action to stop harassment.
- 2.1.3 Each staff member has the responsibility to ensure that their own behaviour cannot be seen as harassment and shall contribute to a climate of trust, respect and tolerance.
- 2.1.4 Managers bear the responsibility to ensure and maintain a working environment free of any forms of harassment, and all managers are obliged to prompt actions when harassment is alleged.
- 2.1.5 If proven, harassment will be sanctioned and the harasser will be subject to disciplinary measures, in accordance with disciplinary procedures set out in the Staff Regulations. The appropriate disciplinary measures imposed for such misconduct will depend on the circumstances, the severity of the violation as well as the staff member's prior record of conduct.
- 2.1.6 Sanctions may also be imposed against a manager who knowingly tolerates harassment once he/she has become aware of it. Threats or acts of retribution against a staff member who raises concerns, makes claims or assists in providing information about harassment are also sanctionable. The same applies to deliberately false or malicious allegations of harassment.

### 2.2 What is harassment?

#### 2.2.1 Definition

- 2.2.1.1 "Harassment" includes any improper and unwelcome conduct that has or that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another. Harassment may be present in the form of words, gestures, or actions which tend to annoy, alarm, abuse, demean, intimidate, belittle, or cause personal humiliation or embarrassment to another or that causes an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive work environment.
- 2.2.1.2 This definition contains two elements:
  - Ø "Unwelcome conduct" implies that it is the recipient's feeling and individual perception to particular behaviour that matters.
  - Ø Additionally, the behaviour in question must "reasonably be expected or be perceived" to have the effect of creating an offensive working environment. That means that the behaviour must be considered as unreasonable by a person having access to all the circumstances of the harassment complaint.



2.2.1.3 Harassment may be by a male or female staff, be it a manager, peer, or subordinate.

## 2.3 Considerations when defining harassment

### 2.3.1 Threshold

2.3.1.1 Each person brings to work his/her own “baggage”: e.g., background, upbringing and education, which all inform his/her feelings and reactions to certain situations and his/her own understanding of others’ behaviour. For example, a person that has experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault may find any physical advances disturbing and offensive. The slightest touch might cause a flashback to the abuse, intensifying her/his fear, humiliation and disgust of the perpetrator and the situation. Personal comments, lewd jokes, sexual innuendos or questions about this person’s private life may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and isolation. However, people have different levels of resilience and response; and because personal experiences differ, while one person accepts the attention of another person, another person may see the same attention as sexual harassment. It is important to understand that each staff has the right to decide for his/herself what is acceptable.

2.3.1.2 As a principle, behaving appropriately in the workplace means, among others, taking care not to upset, hurt, embarrass or humiliate colleagues.

### 2.3.2 Intention

2.3.2.1 As every person has different thresholds, they have the right to decide that a particular conduct is unacceptable. The intention of the perpetrator does not matter. Justifying offensive behaviour on the grounds that it was “meant to be a joke”, or “I thought she/he would like it”, or “it wasn’t meant to hurt” will not lessen the pain or embarrassment caused to the recipient.

### 2.3.3 Reasonable behaviour

2.3.3.1 However, some behaviour that might be perceived as harassment is the result of an honest mistake based on different cultural backgrounds and mentalities. Also some conduct in question might even be in line with the provisions of the Federation’s Staff Rules and Regulations and Code of Conduct.

2.3.3.2 Therefore the definition contains a second objective element, i.e., that the behaviour in question must have “reasonably considered” the effect of creating an offensive working environment.

2.3.3.3 Behaviour, reasonably considered, may not be harassment if:

- Ø there is a reasonable explanation for the conduct in question (e.g., the conduct in question had a managerial purpose such as if the renewal of an appointment is denied due to restructuring measures in the department, or the decision to transfer staff is based on operational needs and is in accordance with internal rules and regulations), or
- Ø the behaviour was the result of an honest mistake (e.g., in general harassment will not be found if the recipient tells the alleged perpetrator that this conduct made him/her feel uncomfortable and the person immediately apologises and stops this behaviour).

### 2.3.4 Impact

2.3.4.1 The conduct in question can also be assessed according to the impact the behaviour has on the person, including the effect it has on that person’s well-being and ability to do the job. For example, regular sick-leaves of certain staff members might be an indication of ongoing harassment in the department.

### 2.3.5 Repetition of incidents

2.3.5.1 The term “harassment” is commonly taken to refer to something which happens repeatedly or persistently. However, depending on the circumstances, behaviour that happened only once may also constitute harassment.



2.3.5.2 In general, incidents which are not deemed serious would need to be repeated in order to constitute a harassment claim.

2.3.5.3 Each individual harassment complaint has to be assessed in the context in which it happened, the seniority of the perpetrator, the severity of the incident and the impact this particular behaviour had on the well-being of the recipient.

## 2.4 Different forms of harassment

Harassment in a general sense may take various forms, such as abuse of authority harassment, sexual harassment and psychological harassment. The third example includes bullying, badgering, pestering, intimidating, maliciously teasing others due to race, gender, religion, disability, age, national or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, family status, and the like.

### 2.4.1 Abuse of authority harassment

2.4.1.1 A typical example for abuse of authority harassment is the so-called *quid pro quo harassment* or also called “sexual blackmail”. *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when a sexual conduct is requested from a staff member, either under the promise of a reward for acquiescence or threats of detrimental action for refusal. Consequently *quid pro quo* harassment can only be committed by someone with the power to give or take away an employment benefit.

### 2.4.2 Sexual Harassment

2.4.2.1 “Sexual Harassment” is understood as any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature (including pornography, sexually-coloured remarks, etc.) that has or that might reasonably be expected or perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another.

2.4.2.2 It must be remembered that what is offensive to one person may be acceptable to another, and it does not matter whether the harasser intended to harass or not – it is the impact on the recipient and the recipient's feelings which are the determining factors.

2.4.2.3 Both male and female staff members can be either the injured party or the offender.

2.4.2.4 The following (non-exhaustive) examples may be indications of sexual harassment situations:

- Ø deliberate and unsolicited physical contact
- Ø unnecessary close physical proximity
- Ø repeated sexually oriented comments and gestures about a person's appearance or life-style
- Ø offensive phone calls, letters or emails
- Ø questions about a person's private life
- Ø sexually explicit jokes or propositions
- Ø persistent invitations to social activities after a person has made it clear they are not welcome
- Ø unwanted compliments with sexual content
- Ø name-calling (e.g., “darling”)
- Ø playing games with a person's name
- Ø use of obscene language
- Ø repeated sexually orientated gestures about a person's body
- Ø nods, winks, gestures with the hands, fingers, legs or arms and other behaviour which is sexually suggestive
- Ø persistent staring at a person or part of his/her body
- Ø display of pornographic web-sites, material, graffiti, etc.

2.4.2.5 When sexual harassment is committed by a staff member who is in a position to influence the career or employment conditions of a staff member, the sexual harassment also constitutes an abuse of authority harassment (see above “abuse of authority harassment”). Sexual relationships with subordinates do not only constitute sexual harassment but also illustrate very unprofessional management.



### 2.4.3 Psychological Harassment

2.4.3.1 Mobbing and bullying are typical examples of psychological harassment.

2.4.3.2 Workplace bullying is repeated offensive, cruel, intimidating, insulting or humiliating behaviour, combined with the misuse of power or position, to undermine an individual or group of individuals. It can be physical, verbal, visual or written; direct or indirect. In order to define a behaviour as "bullying" it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., over the course of one month). Single events do not qualify for the label "bullying", but may qualify as psychological harassment. Examples of bullying include:

- Ø punishing others for being too competent by constant criticism or by removing their responsibilities, often giving them trivial tasks to do instead
- Ø refusing to delegate because bullies feel they can't trust someone else
- Ø shouting at staff to get things done
- Ø persistently picking on people in front of others or in private
- Ø insisting that a way of doing things is always right
- Ø keeping individuals in their workplace by blocking their promotion
- Ø if someone challenges a bully's authority, overloading them with work and reducing the deadlines, hoping they will fail at what they do
- Ø feeling envious of another's professional or social ability, so setting out to make them appear incompetent
- Ø criticising through humiliating comparisons
- Ø withholding information from individuals to make it difficult for them to perform competently

2.4.3.3 Mobbing typically involves a group of individuals ganging up on a target employee and subjecting that person to psychological harassment. Like bullying, mobbing has to occur repeatedly and regularly and over a period of time. Single events would not qualify for the label "mobbing", but may constitute another form of psychological harassment. Examples of mobbing include:

- Ø making continuous negative remarks about a person or constantly criticising the person
- Ø isolating a person by leaving them without social contacts
- Ø constantly gossiping or spreading false information about a person

### 2.5 Examples of non-harassing behaviour

2.5.1 Each case and situation has to be considered individually, and in some cases it will be difficult to establish the dividing line between harassment and other work-related conflicts. The following cases - in single occurrence - would very likely not evidence harassment:

- Ø Criticism of a subordinate's performance and behaviour, even in inappropriately strong language, does not, in itself, evidence harassment or prejudice. This is especially so where the performance and behaviour in question can be objectively confirmed.
- Ø Professional requirements such as transfers, changes in job description, etc.
- Ø Poor working conditions, if temporary and based on reasonable managerial decisions.

## 3 Responsibilities

### 3.1 Responsibilities of managers

3.1.1 Managers have a special responsibility to take early and swift action on potential and actual harassment. Once they are aware of such situations, they must not tolerate their continuation. They are obliged to talk with the parties concerned and ensure that appropriate action is taken, while demonstrating fairness and impartiality, and being free from intimidation or favouritism.

3.1.2 Managers and staff members providing a channel for dialogue and conciliation between the parties to a harassment dispute should receive special training on conflict prevention and resolution.



3.1.3 Once a harassment complaint has been resolved, managers are responsible for ensuring that corrective action is taken and the resolution is implemented. Managers concerned are responsible for monitoring the situation closely to ensure that improper behaviour is not repeated.

3.1.4 Managers should ensure that the Anti-Harassment Guidelines are an element of the basic training course for international delegates, the induction course and other relevant training, and that the Guidelines are discussed during pre-mission briefings and debriefings.

### **3.2 Responsibilities of all staff**

3.2.1 All staff have the responsibility to familiarise themselves with these Guidelines.

3.2.2 All staff have a duty to ensure and maintain an environment that prevents any form of harassment.

3.2.3 All staff members have the duty to report to the Human Resources Department or to their manager any harassment acts they have legitimate reasons to believe are being carried out by a colleague.

3.2.4 Staff having any doubts of the ethical implication of an action, or having any queries about the application of these Guidelines should contact their manager or the Human Resources Department.

### **3.3 Responsibilities of the Human Resources Department**

3.3.1 Human Resources Department staff have the responsibility to assist managers in identifying, resolving and sanctioning harassment acts, as well as retaliation acts against staff raising concerns related to harassment and deliberately false or malicious allegations of harassment.

3.3.2 The Federation's Human Resources Department in Geneva shall report every year to the Secretary General on the implementation of these Anti-Harassment Guidelines, providing information on the number of complaints filed with the Human Resources Department, their nature, the outcome of mediation or investigation, and the disciplinary actions taken. A summary report (with the number of cases and the type of outcome) shall be made available to all staff every year. Both the report to the Secretary General and the summary report made available to all staff will be statistical only and will keep confidential the identities of all individuals involved in particular cases.

## **4 Abbreviations / Acronyms**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
n/a	

## **5 Related Documents**

<b>File Number</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Version</b>
	Staff Rules	
	Staff Regulations	
	Code of Conduct 2007	
	For information purposes: WHO Publication: "Protecting Workers' Health Series No. 4: Raising Awareness of Psychological Harassment at Work", <a href="http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/en/pwh4e.pdf">http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/en/pwh4e.pdf</a>	

## **6 Document Revision History:**

**Note documents should remain Draft until all stakeholders authorize, when it becomes Version 1**

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1	12 October 2007	