Working together
Putting ethics to work

Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 2
What we stand for .................................................................................................... 2
Core values ............................................................................................................. 3
The United Nations workplace .............................................................................. 4
Personal conduct .................................................................................................... 4
Conflict of interest .................................................................................................. 5
Use of privileged information .................................................................................. 8
Use of United Nations property and assets .............................................................. 8
Working in communities .......................................................................................... 9
Setting an example ................................................................................................ 9
Raising concerns .................................................................................................... 10
Resources for seeking advice and assistance ....................................................... 11
Introduction

This Guide is intended to help United Nations staff understand and apply the provisions of the United Nation’s Code of Conduct\(^1\). It also serves to encourage staff and managers to discuss the ways in which they might guide their professional and personal conduct.

The Guide does not replace or supersede the Staff Regulations and Rules, the Secretary-General’s Bulletins, or Administrative Instructions. Rather, it highlights the main challenges to professional and ethical conduct, and clarifies the main reasons for the standards adopted by the United Nations to manage them. It does so in the context of the Organization’s mission and values, so that the relevance of these principles to our everyday decisions and actions might be more apparent.

The Guide also refers to key documents, services and other resources to help staff with dilemmas on conflicts of interests, misconduct, and professional standards. Thus, it is not meant to stand alone. Rather, it is an important communication tool to promote the Organization’s values, highlight professional ethics and help staff to put principles into practice.

What we stand for

Our commitment to the highest ethical standards should guide all of our actions and decisions. The Charter of the United Nations sets out the purposes and principles of the Organization. The Charter also stipulates that, as staff, we will adhere to the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. The United Nations Core Values and Competencies describe the personal and behavioural attributes expected of United Nations staff. The basic standards are specified in the Staff Regulations and Rules and compiled in ST/SGB/2002/13, entitled “Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members”. Violation of or failure to respect them may result in disciplinary action.

---

\(^1\) ST/SGB/2002/13: Status, Basic Rights and Duties of UN staff members is the UN’s “code of conduct.”
Core Values

**Integrity**

Integrity is a core value in all aspects of our professional and personal life. Integrity includes, but is not limited to, probity, impartiality, fairness, honesty and truthfulness in all matters affecting work. These qualities provide a basis for ethical decision-making when staff members face situations where applying rules may be difficult or unpopular, where a conflict between professional and private interests arises, or where special concessions are requested. As the integrity of the United Nations depends on the integrity of its staff, we are expected to:

- Demonstrate in practice the values of the United Nations in our activities and behaviour;
- Make decisions without consideration for personal gain;
- Resist political pressure in decision-making;
- Ensure that official power or authority is not abused;
- Seek to promote the Organization’s interests at all times;
- Take prompt and effective action to deal with unprofessional or unethical behaviour.

**Professionalism**

As international civil servants, we need to be mindful of our duty to serve the international community as effectively and efficiently as possible. In carrying out our daily activities, we need to keep abreast of the latest developments in our areas of work. We should seek to apply the most effective techniques and tools in managing ourselves and our work. In order to achieve high standards of professionalism, we should:

- Show pride in our work and achievements;
- Demonstrate the highest standards of competence;
- Be conscientious and efficient in meeting goals and commitments;
- Be motivated by professional objectives rather than personal concerns;
- Show persistence when faced with problems or challenges;
- Demonstrate self-control in stressful situations.
**Respect for diversity**

We take pride in the diversity of our workforce, which brings together staff from varied backgrounds, cultures and experiences. We should embrace this diversity and view it as an advantage. Any form of discrimination and harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We should show respect and tolerance in our interactions with colleagues. At times, the multicultural nature of our workforce poses a special challenge, as norms and customs acceptable in one culture may be offensive in another. We should make an extra effort to make colleagues who engage in such behaviour understand that it is unacceptable. In order to maintain an environment in which all staff can work together with openness and trust, we should:

- Work effectively with people from all backgrounds;
- Treat colleagues fairly and equally, with dignity and respect;
- Show respect for and understanding of diverse points of view;
- Examine our assumptions and avoid stereotypes;
- Show no discrimination against any individual or group.

**The United Nations workplace**

The United Nations is committed to creating and maintaining a harmonious environment where all staff can work together and are treated with dignity and respect. We should contribute to this effort by treating our colleagues, clients and others with fairness, tolerance, courtesy, and by showing respect for differences. We should place the interests of the Organization above our own and use its resources in a responsible manner.

**Personal conduct**

The United Nations does not seek to regulate our private conduct, unless certain forms of behaviour by staff members could bring the Organization into disrepute or interfere with the performance of our official duties. However, we should be aware that our personal conduct may become the object of public scrutiny. The line between professional and personal conduct may become blurred in small duty stations and field missions where, in practice, United Nations staff members have no anonymity. Fulfilling our private obligations by, for example, respecting local laws, or complying with obligations to make
alimony payments or repayments of debts, is a matter of personal integrity and honesty, and one of the basic duties of United Nations staff. Such obligations should be met in a manner that preserves and enhances public confidence in our own integrity and that of the Organization.

Misrepresentation by a United Nations official of his or her function and title or duties for personal advantage is an abuse of position and a breach of trust. We should always avoid conduct which is, or could be seen as, an abuse of the privileges and immunities of the Organization. These serve to protect us, not for ourselves, but to ensure the proper discharge of the Organization’s mandates.

**Conflict of interest**

A conflict of interest arises when our private interests — such as outside professional relationships or personal financial assets — might interfere with our professional obligations to the United Nations. We should strive to avoid situations where we can be seen to benefit personally, directly or indirectly, or allow another to benefit, from the decisions we make. Even when such a perception is not warranted, we need to be aware of how our actions, in the absence of an explanation, may appear or be interpreted by others. Such conflict of interest situations do not necessarily imply wrongdoing. However, if they are not identified and managed appropriately, they can compromise our work and the Organization’s integrity. It is of utmost importance that the independence and impartiality of official decision-making is preserved at all times. Conflicts of interest can only be appropriately avoided or resolved by clearly placing the interests of the Organization above our own.

As we are both United Nations staff members and private citizens, each and every one of us is likely to face ethical dilemmas entailing a conflict of interest at some time. Such conflicts of interest can often be complex and difficult to identify. For example, our personal relationships may interfere with our abilities to be, or appear to be, impartial in carrying out our work. Some forms of potential conflicts of interest are discussed in the following sections of the Guide.

**HONOURS, GIFTS AND REMUNERATION** Accepting an honour, decoration, favour, gift or remuneration in connection with official duties may give rise to a real or potential conflict of interest, as it may be seen to create an obligation.
As a rule, we cannot accept such benefits from any governmental sources. However, when the rejection of a gift would be seen as embarrassing to the Organization, we may accept it, but must hand it over to the Secretary-General. Likewise, we cannot receive honours, gifts or benefits from non-governmental sources without prior approval. Small gifts of a social or customary nature from non-governmental sources are normally acceptable but must be reported to the head of the Office or Department. Even after receiving approval, we should always be mindful not to create an impression that a benefit could improperly influence our professional actions or decisions.

FAVOURITISM. As international civil servants, we should be impartial and objective in carrying out our jobs. We should not use our office or knowledge gained from our work to favour family members or friends. Nor should we prejudice the position of those colleagues or our clients whom we may dislike. In recruiting staff or consultants, we should always seek the candidates best suited for the job. We must not hire or supervise immediate family members, though the Organization permits the hiring of spouses in another separate work unit. We must also exercise special care in any decision-making or selection process involving friends or others with whom we have a close relationship that may bias our judgment. Disclosure and recusal in such situations will help us avoid giving the impression of favouritism.

OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT AND ACTIVITIES. The image and reputation of the United Nations depends on our conduct, and we are expected to devote our time and energy to the work of the Organization. Engagement in employment and activities outside the Organization, paid or unpaid, may interfere with this expectation. More importantly, such external activities may be incompatible with our status as United Nations officials, or in conflict with the interests or objectives of the Organization. For these reasons, outside activities are not permitted unless prior approval has been given by the Secretary-General.

We must also be careful not to engage in activities that may adversely impact on the Organization or affect our
status as independent civil servants. We can participate in local community, civic or charitable activities without the Secretary-General’s permission, provided that we are certain that they do not conflict with our status as international civil servants. Likewise, outside activities which are beneficial to both the Organization and staff members, such as the development of our professional and technical skills, are not only permitted, but also encouraged, subject to the considerations outlined above. As private citizens, we may vote and belong to political parties; however, we must avoid political activities that may compromise our effectiveness in performing duties and responsibilities for the Organization.

We should remember that we maintain our status as international civil servants at all times, including periods of paid or unpaid leave. It is our responsibility to exercise sound judgment in our decisions and actions, and to seek guidance or permission before engaging in any form of conduct which could raise doubts about the integrity and independence of the Organization.

**FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE.** The United Nations’ business activities with other organizations, businesses, suppliers, contractors, and others must be faultless. Accordingly, the Organization has set out strict requirements for the disclosure of personal financial interests by staff members who are in positions of authority, or hold specific positions which entail financial decision-making responsibilities, such as in procurement.

By disclosing our personal financial and business interests, we endeavour to protect ourselves and the United Nations from potential conflicts of interest and embarrassment. Disclosure of the financial interests of our immediate family members will also help to ensure that our conduct remains beyond reproach and that our decisions are not open to criticism and question.

If there is concern about a potential conflict of interest, staff should seek advice, either from a supervisor, a human resources officer or the Ethics Office. This will avoid compromising situations or even violations that can result in
disciplinary measures being taken. By avoiding conflicts of interest, we can maintain public confidence in the integrity of the United Nations.

Use of privileged information

We should promote the spirit of openness and transparency, and be committed to fostering this spirit with our internal and external constituencies. However, not all information available to us through our position can be made public, even when it is not specifically protected as ‘confidential’. Inappropriate disclosure or use of privileged United Nations information can harm the efficiency and credibility of the Organization and damage its ability to achieve its objectives. We therefore must ensure that sensitive or confidential information is carefully protected in order to safeguard the interests of the Organization, our clients, partners and staff. Confidential information must never be disclosed or used improperly for personal or other private gain. We must be aware that our obligation to protect confidential information remains after we separate from the Organization.

Consult your supervisor or the Ethics Office if you are not sure whether information may be disclosed or not.

Use of United Nations property and assets

We are all responsible for the appropriate use and protection of United Nations property and assets. These include both human, financial and material resources such as facilities, equipment, supplies, and organizational resources in any other form. The resources of the Organization should be used with care for purposes directly related to official objectives and duties. You should not ask a staff member under your supervision to run your personal errands. Any careless or improper use of United Nations resources whatsoever — whether involving the large-scale abuse of a procurement exercise or the abuse of uncertified sick-leave — is incompatible with honesty and integrity.

The Organization recognizes that certain activities of a personal nature can only reasonably be undertaken in working hours. Many staff members, particularly in field missions, face the reality of
performing official tasks in after-hours personal leisure time. In this context, we must responsibly maintain a reasonable balance in the use of United Nations resources for private purposes.

**Working in communities**

It is our obligation to respect different peoples, languages, cultures, customs and traditions. We must also be respectful of people whose lives we impact upon, and be sensitive to the local cultures in which we operate. Likewise, we must voice our concerns about acts that are contrary to the obligation to protect human rights.

Often, particularly in field missions, we may find ourselves in unequal power relationships with the local population. In such situations, we should be aware that relationships – whether emotional, financial or work-related – between staff members and the local population could be seen as potentially involving an abuse of power or a conflict of interest, even if we consider them to be consensual or non-exploitative. Identifying and resolving such relationships in discussion with supervisors will help to establish clarity in what could otherwise become ambiguous or potentially exploitative circumstances.

Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse violate universally recognized international legal norms and standards and have always been unacceptable behaviour and prohibited conduct for United Nations staff. In order to further protect the most vulnerable sectors of populations, especially women and children, specific standards have been set to reiterate existing general obligations in this area. It is our responsibility to be aware of, and fully adhere to, these standards.

**Setting an example**

We all contribute to our Organizational culture by being aware of the United Nations core values and standards of conduct, and by voluntarily demonstrating them in our work. Each one of us can enhance or undermine the reputation of the United Nations by our individual conduct. We should therefore always seek to meet our obligation to be trustworthy, which we owe to the Organization.

Managers have a particular responsibility to ensure that they and their staff have the knowledge and skills to understand and comply with the standards expected of them and should ensure that they are
in a position to provide advice to staff in need of guidance. A particular responsibility falls on managers to set a good example and to show leadership where rules are unclear or where good judgement concerning conflicting values is required.

As international civil servants, we are expected to have an understanding of the policies and their applications outlined in this Guide. We must familiarize ourselves with the details of the policies that particularly affect proper performance of our jobs. We should keep up with changes to standards of conduct and actively seek advice before taking any action in unclear situations. Guidance can be sought from various sources including our managers, human resources officers, or the Ethics Office.

**Raising concerns**

It is our duty as international civil servants to promptly raise concerns about any potential violations of our standards of conduct. We need to be aware of the different channels available for raising our concerns: our managers and department heads, Office of the United Nations Ombudsman, the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. We should cooperate in investigations at the request of authorized officials and have a right to be protected from retaliation for reporting, in good faith, integrity concerns.
Resources for seeking advice and assistance

United Nations Ethics Office
United Nations Headquarters
United Nations Secretariat, Room S-3001
New York, NY 10017
Helpline: (917) 367-9858 / Fax. (917) 367-9861
Email: ethicsoffice@un.org
Website: http://iseek.un.org under “QuickLinks”

Office of Human Resources Management
United Nations Headquarters
United Nations Secretariat, Room S-2527
New York, NY 10017
Tel. (212) 963-3432 / Fax (212) 963-1944

Staff Counsellor’s Office
Office of Human Resources Management
United Nations Headquarters
United Nations Secretariat, Room S-505
New York, NY 10017
Tel. (212) 963-7044 / Fax. (212) 963-4399
Website: http://iseek.un.org under “Topics; Community”

Office of the United Nations Ombudsman
P.O. Box 4136
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
Tel. (917) 367-5731 / Fax. (917) 367-4211
Email: ombudsman@un.org
Website: http://www.un.org/ombudsman

Office of Internal Oversight Services
Reporting Facility
Dag Hammarskjöld Convenience Center
P.O. Box 20114
New York, NY 10017
Tel. (212)963-1111 / Fax. (212) 963-7774
Website: http://www.un.org.depts/oios/hotline.htm
Reference Documents on Professional Conduct

Charter of the United Nations
Staff Regulations (ST/SGB/2006/4)
Staff Rules: 100 Series (ST/SGB/2002/1), 200 Series (ST/SGB/2002/2) and 300 Series (ST/SGB/2006/3)
Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members (ST/SGB/2002/13)
Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants (International Civil Service Commission, 2001)

Other Administrative Issuances by Subject

Mandates of office

Ethics Office – Establishment and Terms of Reference (ST/SGB/2005/22)
Office of the Ombudsman – Appointment and Terms of Reference of the Ombudsman (ST/SGB/2002/12)

Conflicts of interest

Honours, Gifts or Remuneration from Outside Sources (ST/IC/2006/31)
Outside Activities (ST/IC/2006/30 and ST/AI/2000/13)
Acceptance of Pro Bono Goods and Services
Disciplinary procedures

Practice of the Secretary-General in Disciplinary Matters (ST/IC as current)


Harassment and interpersonal conflicts

Prevention of Workplace Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority (ST/SGB/2005/20)

Conflict Resolution in the United Nations Secretariat (ST/IC/2004/4)


Protection of staff

Protection against Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct and for Cooperating with Duly Authorized Audits or Investigations (ST/SGB/2005/21)

Reporting misconduct:

Reporting of Suspected Misconduct (ST/IC/2005/19)

Reporting of Inappropriate Use of United Nations Resources and Proposals for Improvement of Programme Delivery (ST/AI/397 – 7 September 1994)
Staff responsibilities

Financial Disclosure and Declaration of Interest Statements (ST/SGB/2006/6)

Integrity Awareness Initiative (ST/SGB/2005/17)

Financial Responsibility of Staff Members for Gross Negligence (ST/AI/2004/3)

Our Core Values Prohibit Discrimination and Harassment (ST/IC/2003/17)

Private Legal Obligations of Staff Members (ST/AI/2000/12)

Post-employment Restrictions (ST/SGB/2006/15)

Use of organizational resources

Policy on the Provision and Use of Official Cars (ST/AI/2006/1)

Use of Information and Communication Technology Resources and Data (ST/SGB/2004/15)

Property Management and Inventory Control at United Nations Headquarters (ST/AI/2003/5)

Official Travel (ST/AI/2006/4)