



Respect and dignity at the EESC



A practical guide to proper conduct
for members of the EESC



European Economic
and Social Committee

More clarity, greater financial transparency, prevention of harassment and stronger sanctions for non-compliance. On 28 January 2021, the members of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) voted for major changes to their [Code of Conduct](#). This is the first milestone in the reform of the Committee being undertaken by the new EESC presidency.

The guidelines for our work in the Committee are laid down in the Code of Conduct. Its basis is the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Dignity for all people and dignity at work are essential. We have an obligation to make those principles a reality at the Committee and to prevent harassment.

Christan Bäuml, Chair of the Rules of Procedure Panel

The EESC is strongly committed to high ethical standards and to modern, transparent working methods. The new Code of Conduct for members comes as a first solid milestone in our efforts to reform and strengthen the way we work. I want to ensure that every staff and every member is proud to work for our Committee.

Christa Schweng, EESC President



Rules of Procedure and Code of Conduct of the Members of the EESC:

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about/rules-procedure-and-code-conduct-members-eesc>



ZERO
TOLERANCE

Respect and dignity at the EESC

The Code of Conduct for members of the EESC

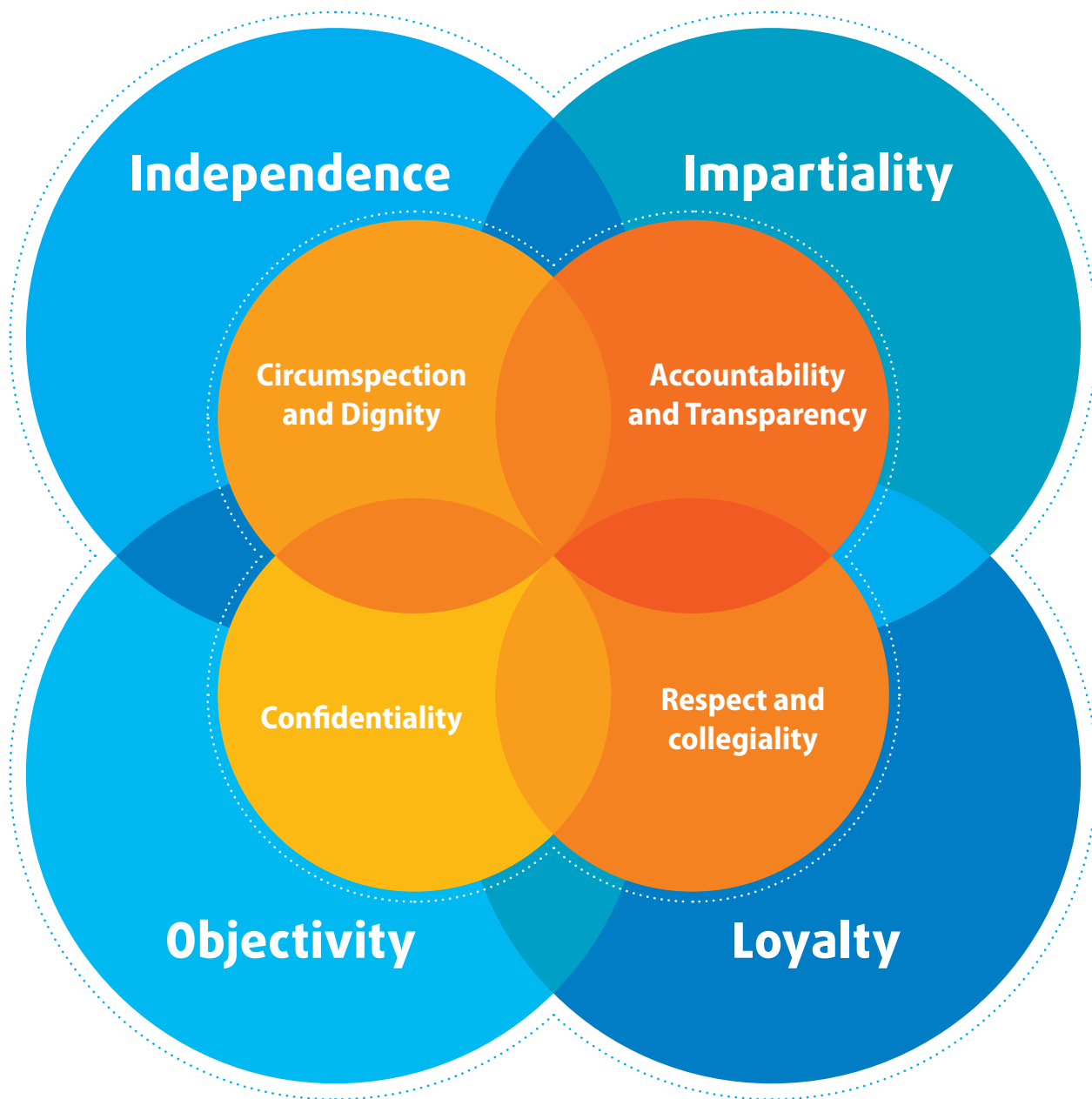
The aim of this brochure is to inform you about the new **Code of Conduct**. It will also give you hints and guidelines on respect and dignity at the EESC workplace.

At the EESC, **we all come from different sectors, industries, administrations and countries**. We all have different habits and different languages, gestures and expressions. An expression or element of behaviour that is normal in your country may be perceived differently elsewhere.

This brochure addresses the interaction between members, delegates, alternates and experts, as well as their interaction with the administration of the EESC.

The Directorate for Human Resources and Finance and the General Secretariat have together developed this guide for EESC members.

Principles of ethics and integrity in the interests of the European Union and of good administration



Ethical principles and integrity

All of us represent the EESC and
contribute to its image and reputation!

YOUR ROLE AS MEMBER OF THE EESC

The EESC is made up of members and CCMI delegates from all the EU Member States, appointed for a renewable five-year term of office. The rules on ethical principles and integrity apply to members, delegates, alternates and experts in the same way.

Employers, trade unionists and representatives of social, professional, economic, cultural and environmental organisations - you all represent organised European civil society. Your primary role is to advise the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

The General Secretariat of the EESC supports your advisory work. The EESC's staff is comprised of people from across Europe. Members and staff represent the EESC every day and it is up to all of us to build a reputation of excellence.



Anyone working for the EESC can legitimately expect to be treated with professionalism, dignity and respect.



Prevention is the key element in a zero-harassment work environment.



HOW TO PREVENT HARASSMENT

Respect for dignity at work is the basis for balanced working relationships. All the people working at the EESC are an invaluable resource, contributing through their knowledge, expertise and dedication to the efficient operation of the institution. In the event of differences of opinion, and particularly in stressful periods and at moments of tension, **the culture of respecting dignity at work** is key to preserving good and constructive relationships. Training courses on respect and dignity are provided which can help you to become familiar with the EESC's internal rules and administrative culture.

Below are some hints for avoiding inappropriate behaviour, conflict and harassment situations.

Wherever you are and whoever you work with, **these principles apply:**



Dialogue and frank discussion may prevent many misunderstandings.



Always use **decent, polite language** when speaking with other members and with EESC staff. The level of familiarity used in conversations might depend on cultural habits.



Never use rude or insulting language. Do not shout at staff or other members. This is never acceptable. Be aware that vulgar and sexist language is not acceptable either in any circumstances. Mutual respect is always the best basis for interaction with others.





Do not make inappropriate comments on other people's physical appearance.



Give staff **clear, coherent information** about how you want work to be organised, what the objectives of your actions are and what contribution is expected from them. Do not give staff duties lying outside the scope of the EESC's work.



Your feedback is important. Always consider the situation and the audience when giving feedback. Always check the relevant information before providing constructive feedback.



Respect the normal working hours when setting up meetings.



If another member or a member of staff lets you know that she or he perceives your behaviour as being offensive or inappropriate, **take it seriously**. Active communication that leads to concrete suggestions for a solution is better than letting a situation get out of hand and deteriorate.



If you notice inappropriate behaviour among members or staff, such as sexist jokes, vulgar actions, insults or condescending gestures (non-verbal communication can also be very inappropriate), **express your disagreement with it**.



HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE: WHAT EXACTLY IS HARASSMENT?

Psychological harassment

"Psychological harassment means any improper conduct that takes place over a period, is repetitive or systematic and involves physical behaviour (body language), spoken or written language, gestures or other acts that are intentional and that may undermine the personality, dignity or physical or psychological integrity of any person."

(Staff Regulations, Article 12a)



Psychological harassment always involves persistent, repetitive actions and has a serious psychological impact and possibly also a physical impact on the victim.

Some examples of psychological harassment:

- ▶ **Offensive or degrading** comments; bullying, **threatening** remarks
- ▶ **Antagonism, pressure**, refusal to communicate or to discuss
- ▶ **Insults** relating to someone's personal or professional competence
- ▶ **Belittling** someone's contributions and achievements
- ▶ **Isolating, rejecting** or **humiliating** someone
- ▶ Setting **unrealistic working objectives** or not giving a person any work; giving a person tasks that do not correspond to their job description
- ▶ Any kind of **abuse of hierarchical power**



Sexual harassment

“Sexual harassment means conduct relating to sex which is unwanted by the person to whom it is directed and which has the purpose or effect of offending that person or creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing environment. Sexual harassment shall be treated as discrimination based on gender.”

(Staff Regulations, Article 12a)

Sexual harassment differs from psychological harassment, inter alia in that **it does not need to be repetitive** and take place over time. It only takes one manifestation of this type of harassment for it to be declared.

Some examples of sexual harassment:

- ▶ Promises of rewards in return for **sexual favours**
- ▶ Dating is not considered to be harassment as long as it is consensual and not unwelcome or offensive. Consent has to be expressed of the person's own free will, without there being any **abuse of hierarchical power** or any other influence
- ▶ **Repeated or exaggerated compliments** on the appearance of a work colleague
- ▶ **Unsolicited physical contact**, rubbing against someone, pinching, deliberate unwanted kisses or inappropriate or overly tight hugs
- ▶ **Crude and obscene language and gestures**
- ▶ **Coarse or suggestive remarks or sexual innuendo**
- ▶ **Voyeurism or exhibitionism**





Prevention of harassment:



Members must refrain from any type of harassment, both within and outside the EESC, including at meetings, on missions and at conferences.



Members must be aware of and cooperate in the procedures in place for managing conflict and harassment situations.



Members are encouraged to follow training courses on this subject proposed by the EESC training department.

What is not harassment?

Inappropriate, uncontrolled or impertinent behaviour that only happens once may not in itself constitute harassment. If this happens, however, do not underestimate the consequences on your work environment. Speak openly about what has happened. A single act with a sexual connotation can be considered to be sexual harassment.

What is inappropriate behaviour?

Inappropriate behaviour and conduct that is unwarranted and is reasonably interpreted as being demeaning or offensive. **Persistent, repeated inappropriate behaviour can become a form of harassment.**

Some examples of inappropriate behaviour:

The graphic box contains a list of four examples of inappropriate behavior, each preceded by a blue play button icon inside a dotted circle:

- Shouting at another person
- Using bad language
- Slamming doors
- Banging your fist on the table

On the right side of the box, there are two overlapping circular callouts:

- An orange circle with a dotted border containing the text: "RESPECT IS ALWAYS AN APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR".
- A blue circle with a dotted border containing the text: "ZERO TOLERANCE".

What is conflict at the workplace?

Conflict at work means any interpersonal conflict in the context of a working relationship, including during external meetings, missions or other events relating to the professional context.

Conflict usually takes place at just one point in time: it is a disagreement between two or more people. Each party defends their position. It does not necessarily involve a relationship of subordination, hierarchical power or influence.

In most cases, workplace conflict can be resolved through discussion between the people involved. Indeed, it is necessary to dispel misunderstandings so as to avoid getting into a vicious circle that could turn into psychological harassment.

PREVENTION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The new Code of Conduct introduces a number of significant changes. The two most notable additions are detailed rules regarding the prevention of conflicts of interests and the strengthened obligation to be fully transparent and declare financial interests. These obligations ensure that members perform their work in complete impartiality and independence.

Conflicts of interests

Members must avoid any situation of conflict of interests. They should not have a personal interest that might conflict with the interests of the European Union or could improperly influence their work at the EESC.

Examples of conflicts of interests:



Personal interests include any potential benefit or advantage to members themselves, their spouses, partners or direct family members. Such interests are not necessarily of a financial nature or property-related.



As an EESC member, you must not accept instructions from third parties, irrespective of whether they are your employer or the professional organisation to which you belong.



Conflict can also occur when you occupy two conflicting functions concurrently within the EESC.



How can you prevent conflicts of interests?



A conflict of interest may be real or perceived as such by others. Either way, you need to solve the situation. If the situation is ambiguous, you may first seek advice in confidence from the Ethical Committee.



You must either put an end to the external activities giving rise to the conflict or give up all or part of your responsibilities within the EESC.



If the conflict of interests persists, you must also report the problem to the President in writing.

Financial transparency

Members, delegates, alternates and experts must submit a declaration of their financial interests upon taking up their duties, update it when necessary and subsequently renew it every year by 1 January. The declaration is to be sent to the following functional mailbox: findec-eesc@eesc.europa.eu

This is a condition for receiving any allowances or reimbursement of expenses, as well as for being able to carry out any official function or activity at the EESC.



WHISTLEBLOWING FRAUD AND MISCONDUCT

Whenever a member becomes aware of possible cases of fraud, corruption, misconduct, breach of ethical principles or any illegal activities, they are obliged to report these facts to the EESC President, or, if they consider it useful, to OLAF directly.



Members must report to the President or to OLAF whenever they notice situations of corruption (e.g. submission of fake documents for the reimbursement of expenses) or misconduct (e.g. harassment towards other persons).



Members reporting such cases will be considered as whistleblowers. Whistleblowers will be protected so that their confidentiality is guaranteed, and individualised assistance may also be offered, if needed.



Members are expected to cooperate fully and to lend any assistance required to the investigation that may follow.

WHISTLE
BLOWER

THE NEW ETHICAL COMMITTEE

The [Ethical Committee](#) ensures compliance with the Code of Conduct. This committee operates with full autonomy, independence and confidentiality.

How does the Ethical Committee work?



Any EESC member or any person working at the EESC may consult the Ethical Committee on any question relating to the Code of Conduct, such as complaints or alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct.



The Ethical Committee advises the EESC President and the EESC Bureau on the interpretation and implementation of the provisions of the Code of Conduct.



In the event of a complaint, you will be contacted to submit evidence and be heard by the Ethical Committee.

Sanctions

When assessing the conduct concerned, the **severity of any sanctions** imposed shall **be proportionate to the seriousness of the misconduct** and to the member's hierarchical position. Depending on the member's behaviour, one or more of the following sanctions may apply:



WRITTEN WARNING



TEMPORARY SUSPENSION
OF ALLOWANCES



TEMPORARY SUSPENSION
FROM PERFORMING EESC
ACTIVITIES



TEMPORARY SUSPENSION
FROM THE OFFICE HELD AT
THE EESC



CALLING UPON THE
COUNCIL TO REMOVE THE
MEMBER FROM THE EESC



In addition to the above sanctions, the following measures may be applied:



Requiring the member to take action to adapt his or her position to bring it in line with the rules



Requiring the member to make a personal statement of apology (privately, to a specific person, or publicly, at the plenary session)



Requiring the member to repair, put right or compensate for any damage caused



ADVICE IN THE EVENT OF DIFFICULT INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS



If a certain type of conduct is felt to be **inappropriate** or **embarrassing**, **make it clear by reacting immediately** to the perpetrator of these acts and setting limits politely but firmly.



If this unwanted behaviour continues, start keeping a written record of all the incidents involved.



Always **make sure witnesses are present** if the person is behaving inappropriately. Never remain alone. Leave doors open.



Do not hesitate to **contact and consult the Human Resources Directorate**.



Several tools are available to help you:



The EESC has put **training courses** in place **for members** on Dignity and Respect at work. These courses are provided by the training department several times a year.
Contact: FormationsCESE@eesc.europa.eu



The Ethical Committee monitors application of the Code of Conduct for EESC members. You can address any complaints to the Ethical Committee: advisorycommittee@eesc.europa.eu

You can also contact the following:



President of the EESC: president.eesc@eesc.europa.eu



Helpdesk for Members: helpdesk-members-cese@eesc.europa.eu



EESC's Director for Human Resources and Finance: hfr-management@eesc.europa.eu



EESC's internal ombudsman (is being set up)



The **Questors of the EESC:** questeurs-cese@eesc.europa.eu



EESC's medical service: svcmédicosocialcese@eesc.europa.eu



In addition, you can contact the European Anti-Fraud Office (**OLAF**):
[European Anti-Fraud Office | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-anti-fraud-office.ec.europa.eu/)



For further information, please consult this link on the Members' Portal:
<https://intranet.eesc.europa.eu/EN/members/Pages/code-conduct.aspx>



**European Economic
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Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

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