



WECF Code of Conduct

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Adjustment made after approval by the BOT on June 15th 2021

Updated with Annex 7 (Child protection policy approved by BOT) on December 12th 2022

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Updated to clarify reporting steps and follow-up and to align with Complaints & Whistleblower Policy in April 2026

INTRODUCTION

Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) is a not-for-profit, independent non-governmental organisation, not affiliated to any political party or religious institution, aiming at promoting the full participation of women in sustainable development and environmental policy making.

WECF implements sustainable development projects and facilitates the cooperation among women's and environmental organisations around the world. The WECF network focuses on the issues of environment, health and sustainable development in relation to gender justice, social justice, poverty eradication and human rights. Our approach is to jointly implement practical projects and policy-influencing activities with partners in Europe and worldwide, always from a gender perspective. We have recognised that our strength is based on working from the local level to national and international levels. Our mission is to work for a healthy environment for all. Our overall goal is to achieve an equitable and sustainable future for all.

To fulfil this mission WECF expects its staff¹, board², partners³, consultants and other alliances to act in accordance with the principles set out in this Code of Conduct, which reflects WECF's beliefs.

This code of conduct is shared with all staff and annexed to all employment contracts and to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and / or contracts, which all partners sign when joining the network and / or engaging in joint activities. Furthermore, it will be the basis for all cooperation with natural or legal persons, in particular civil society organisations, donors, public authorities, governmental and inter-governmental entities and business.

This code of conduct consists of five parts: 1) Guiding Principles, 2) Inappropriate Behaviour, 3) Notification Procedures, 4) Proportionate Sanctions and 5) Reporting & Organisational Culture.

PART 1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Respect for Universal Principles

We seek to advance international and national laws and other normative frameworks that follow a human rights-based approach⁴, promoting sustainable development, environmental protection,

¹ "Staff" is defined as employees, contractors on a free-lance basis, and volunteers.

² "Board" is defined as members of the WECF network's Board of Trustees and the International Advisory Board.

³ "Partner" is defined as any natural or legal person with whom WECF jointly works

⁴ "A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights." (see United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2006: "A human rights-based approach to development cooperation"). Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations

gender equality, poverty eradication, public participation and social justice. In doing so, we respect the equal rights and dignity of all human beings.

Respect for All and Treating People Fairly

We do not discriminate on grounds of race, gender, age, social class, disability, beliefs or sexual orientation. We stimulate diversity amongst our staff, members and partners. We believe in putting people first. We put the principle of fairness at the core of our organisation by having a fair wage structure with a credible scale between highest and lowest paid worker. WECF promotes and upholds gender equality, and diversity, equity and inclusion in its organisational practices, in line with our Gender Equality & DEI Policy.

Respect for Our Environment and Future Generations

We promote the protection of our and our children's health, with a focus on a precautionary approach to environmental health. We actively promote the protection of our environment, including a nuclear free environment, fostering safe and sustainable management of energy, water and waste(-water), elimination of hazardous chemicals and technologies, including agriculture free of hazardous pesticides and GMOs (genetically modified organisms). We support a transformation of our current unsustainable economy towards socially-just economies operating within the carrying capacity of the planet, and which avoid unsustainable consumption and production practices, and respect the rights and needs of indigenous peoples and rural communities.

Making Choices in Accordance with Our Beliefs

We do not accept economic reasons for compromising on our children's health, our own health and the environment. We do not participate in actions that are not compatible with our principles and objectives. We do not seek funding from donors, including businesses, that are not in line with WECF's objectives and principles.

Being Transparent and Accountable

We commit to transparent relationships with partners and other civil society organisations, freely and as equals. We are accountable to donors, partners and members. Annual reports (narrative and financial) will be published and regularly audited. We respect the rights of our donors: to be informed about causes for which we are fundraising and to be informed about how their donation is being used. We make any source of funding public and ensure that donations are free from direct or indirect obligations and/or influence on the policies and strategies of WECF and its partner organisations. We acknowledge funding sources in publications, event materials and on our website.

Governance, Participation and Learning

We have open democratic, participatory, consultative problem-solving and non-discriminatory practices. We monitor and evaluate our activities and results, based in part on locally formulated indicators relating to process and outcome. We have a Board of Trustees, which bears the final responsibility for our strategic and financial management. We give a voice to our partners through our International Advisory Board, whose recommendations are leading in setting our strategic priorities for our work programmes. We are striving for dialogue by involving multi-stakeholders in

established by international law, in particular international human rights law. This comprises the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the core human rights treaties negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations, in particular CEDAW and secondary law, in particular resolutions by the main organs of the United Nations, the Human Rights Council, and the UN human rights treaty bodies.

our activities. We share information with all partners and invest in the necessary mechanisms to gather and exchange experiences. We encourage an interrelated transfer of knowledge and capacities between West and East and South and North. We promote professionalism and competence.

Respect for international standards

We refrain from making available directly or indirectly funds or economic resources to any natural or legal person, entity or body placed on the UN sanctions list, as well as from other activities which would violate UN sanctions. This obligation is without prejudice to exceptions to UN sanctions and possibilities to apply for exemptions from UN sanctions. Moreover, we will refrain from supporting activities whose aim is to undermine the political autonomy of a state or to bring down a lawful government by unlawful means. Whether the one or the other is lawful or unlawful will be determined not only by the views of the government of the country in question, but also in accordance with international standards, including international law.

PART 2 INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Misuse of power or position

WECF has no tolerance for **corrupt practices**. WECF's [Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy](#) (Annex 1), defines corruption as "the act of dishonestly obtaining an advantage from a third party by abusing an entrusted power for private gain. Neither fraud nor corruption are restricted to monetary or material benefits but could also include intangible benefits such as status or access to information."

As a precondition a clear understanding of what practices are considered corrupt, fraudulent and otherwise unacceptable is communicated to all staff and partners in advance. The information is part of the contracts and memorandums of understanding which they sign to ensure no misconceptions persist (see part 5).

No employee shall, while in the employment of WECF, engage in any business or activity that would undermine their performance or **conflict with the interests** of the organisation. The same applies to partners with which WECF has an on-going contract of cooperation. WECF, or its partners, shall as a rule not enter into agreements with or procure goods or services from employees, directors or their relatives. No employee, director or member of the Board of Trustees may be involved in any decision-making process, or seek in any way to influence it, where they may be in a position to gain privately from the decision or their relatives are involved. All employees shall disclose any potential conflict of interest and seek approval before proceeding.

The employee or partner is required to keep **confidentiality** as regards their knowledge arising from the function in relation to matters which should be known or reasonably should be understood to be confidential in nature or can damage the reputation of WECF.

Financial violations

WECF has a zero-tolerance policy to **fraud** and requires staff and volunteers at all times to act honestly and with integrity and to **safeguard the assets for which they are responsible**. WECF's [Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy](#) (Annex 1) defines fraud as "a whole range of activities such as deception, bribery, forgery, extortion, theft, conspiracy, embezzlement, misappropriation, false representation, concealment of material facts and collusion. It involves the act of deceit of the organization in order to obtain a personal or collective advantage, avoid an obligation or cause loss."

In addition, WECF has an [Ethical Charter for Cooperation with Partners from the Private Sector](#) (Annex 2) which defines that WECF only cooperates with socially responsible business partners that are working **in line with our organizational purpose and objectives**, excluding partners involved in unsustainable and harmful practices, including tax evasion.

Interpersonal violations

WECF has a zero-tolerance policy for **any form of sexual harassment** in the workplace. WECF's [Policy to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment and Abuse](#) (Annex 3) defines sexual harassment as “an unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated. It includes situations where a person is asked to engage in sexual activity as a condition of that person’s employment, as well as situations which create an environment which is hostile, intimidating or humiliating for the recipient.”

Every employee shall conduct themselves with courtesy, respect and integrity towards all persons while performing their work. The same applies to partners with which WECF has an on-going contract of cooperation and / or Memorandum of Understanding.

Aggression, discrimination, bullying and violence are not tolerated. WECF staff and partners must avoid any actions or behaviour involving children that may constitute poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour.

PART 3 NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Any person who witnesses a violation of this Code of Conduct is invited to report this violation, and any person to whom the Code of Conduct applies who witnesses a violation of it is required to report the violation at the earliest possible moment.

Following [WECF’s Stakeholder Satisfaction and Complaints Procedure](#) (Annex 5), staff of implementing partners, beneficiaries and service providers are encouraged to report violations or suspected violations of the Code of Conduct initially to their regular contact person at WECF or the Executive Director. Complaints about the Executive Director are dealt with and acted upon by the Board of Trustees.

How to Report

WECF operates a **tiered reporting system** designed to resolve issues at the closest level while ensuring serious matters receive appropriate oversight.

- **First Tier (Immediate Management):** Staff and partners should report concerns in writing (email) to their **responsible manager**. This is the primary route for operational issues.
- **Second Tier (Integrity Officer):** If reporting to the manager is inappropriate (e.g., the manager is involved) or if the issue is not resolved, concerns should be raised with the **Integrity Officer**.
- **Third Tier (Board of Trustees - BoT):** Reports should be made directly to the **Integrity Advisor in the Board of Trustees** in the following circumstances:
 - The concern involves a **member of the Board of Directors**.
 - The concern alleges **abuse of power, corruption, or misconduct by senior management**.

External Support

Only after the reporter has exhausted the internal reporting channels described above, or if there are exceptional circumstances where using internal channels is not reasonably practicable, the reporter may contact the **external person of trust** for independent advice and support while protecting their identity.

Contacts of WECF's Integrity Officer, the Integrity Advisor in the Board of Trustees, the external person of trust, and the external whistle-blower point can be found on the website of WECF.

More specific procedures for different types of violations of this Code of Conduct are defined in the Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy and the Policy to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment and Abuse (Annexed).

WECF attaches great importance to an open and transparent culture that supports the reporting person and makes them feel that complaints are taken seriously. WECF will never allow the reporting person to be victimized or dismissed because of filing a report. On indication of the reporting person, breaches of this Code of Conduct are handled with discretion and the utmost confidentiality.

What WECF Will Do Upon Receipt of a Report

Upon receiving a report of a Code of Conduct violation, the person to whom was reported to, will:

1. **Acknowledge:** Confirm receipt of the report within 5 working days.
2. **Assess:** Determine the appropriate path (management action, mediation, or formal investigation) based on the severity of the allegation.
3. **Protect:** Ensure the safety and support of the reporting person and any affected parties. WECF strictly prohibits retaliation against anyone who reports a concern in good faith.
4. **Investigate:** Conduct a fair and timely investigation, respecting the rights of all parties involved.
5. **Act:** Apply proportionate sanctions (as outlined in Part 4) if a violation is found.
6. **Close the Loop:** Inform the reporting person of the outcome of the process, to the extent permitted by confidentiality requirements.

PART 4 PROPORTIONATE SANCTIONS

Proportionality of sanctions is a core principle of justice. WECF has a range of sanctions it considers fair and that will be applied proportional to the offences.

To staff that has been found to violate this Code of Conduct, sanctions proportionate to the scope and seriousness of the offence will be applied. Sanctions include, but are not limited to:

- verbal or written warning
- adverse performance evaluation
- reduction in wages
- suspension
- dismissal
- reporting to public authorities

The nature of the sanctions will depend on the gravity and extent of the violation. Suitable deterrent sanctions will be applied to ensure that incidents are not treated as trivial. This may include immediate dismissal.

Anyone who violates the Code of Conduct ~~that violate~~ or act in breach of their contract with WECF are subject of WECF's [Sanction Policy](#) (Annex 6). Possible sanctions include:

- Warning to partners
- Deduct losses from project funds
- No payment or later payment of further instalments
- Early termination of the contract
- Full or partial repayment of contract funding
- Early termination of the contract
- Declaration to public authorities or legal steps to claim refund of money

WECF may choose or in some cases will be obliged to report to the relevant professional or government authorities in case the law has been or suspected to have been broken.

Final decision-making responsibility regarding sanctions lies with the Executive Director, or, in case it concerns the Executive Director, the Board of Trustees.

PART 5 REPORTING AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

WECF ensures that its Code of Conduct and related integrity policies are part of the culture of the organisation. All staff and those acting on behalf of the organization are aware of the Code of Conduct, including the notification procedures and are alert to their proper application. The Code of Conduct is part of every employment contract, and the memoranda of understanding and contracts with partners. Each year, at WECF's annual strategic meeting, attention is paid to integrity, further training needs are assessed and eventual cases that occurred during the year are discussed.

Reports and integrity risks are, depending on the nature and level of confidentiality, discussed at least annually with the Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees, and when deemed necessary more often. Staff is encouraged to put moral dilemmas on the table at any time. The Integrity Officer, is responsible for making sure integrity is on the agenda and proper actions are implemented in the organisation.

To make sure all notifications are registered, the Integrity Officer is responsible for registering all notifications in the Incident Register, which is discussed at least annually with the Board of Trustees and Board of Directors, and annually at the strategic meeting with staff. WECF aims to learn and improve its policies and procedures and will evaluate after each report if the integrity policies need to be updated.

WECF attaches great importance to transparency and reports on integrity in its Annual Accounts and Annual Activity Report. This includes information about the number and nature of reports about integrity violations and the action taken in response to those reports as well as a reflection on WECF's integrity policy.