

# WECF Policy to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment and Abuse



## 1. Policy Statement

As a feminist organisation WECF International is committed to providing a safe environment for all its employees free from discrimination on any ground and from harassment at work including sexual harassment, and to work with staff and network partners towards a world free of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).

#MeToo showed that sexual violence is a structural issue and is very much alive due to the power dynamics shaped by society's constructed gender roles, valuing men over women and non-binary persons. But it also showed that this is not tolerated anymore, that we need a paradigm shift.

WECF International has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of sexual harassment in the workplace, treats all incidents seriously and promptly investigates all allegations of sexual abuse and harassment. Any person found to have sexually harassed another person will face disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from employment.

All complaints of sexual harassment will be taken seriously and treated with respect and in confidence. We will not tolerate any negative treatment in the workplace of persons making such a complaint. We will always take measures to protect the aggrieved person, and in all steps of investigation of the alleged perpetrator ensure the consent of the aggrieved and reporting person. This includes external and formal reporting on extreme and criminal conducts such as rape and violence. We stand side by side with the reporting person and give guidance to relevant institutions whenever needed.

WECF International endeavours to engage, inform and build the capacity of staff and network partners to understand the underlying structural causes and power-dynamics of all forms of discrimination, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), and to promote the responsibility of all staff and partners to work towards elimination of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation in our organisations, communities and societies.

## 2. Definition of sexual harassment and consent

Sexual harassment is an unwelcome conduct of 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, such as for example sexually charged jokes.

It is very common that persons who have been subjected to unwelcome conduct do not react immediately upon it. Sometimes it can take up to years to fully cope with what you have experienced. In other cases, it can be difficult for the person to report the perpetrator, particularly if the perpetrator is in a position of power (manager, boss), or because there is lack of trust in the legal and police system. That means that sometimes there can be a time delay between the unwelcome conduct and the reporting. There is no "right way" to react to having experienced sexual harassment or rape, people react differently due to the trauma involved. Anyone making an official complaint should therefore be met with utmost respect and should always be presumed as telling the truth. Sexual harassment can

involve one or more incidents and actions constituting harassment may be physical, verbal and nonverbal. Examples of conduct or behaviour which constitute sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

#### **Physical conduct**

- Unwelcome physical contact including patting, pinching, stroking, kissing, hugging, fondling, or inappropriate touching
- Physical violence, including sexual assault and rape
- The use of job-related threats or rewards to solicit sexual favors, such as threatening to have someone fired if they tell anyone about the sexual harassment etc.

#### **Verbal conduct**

- Comments on a worker's appearance, age, private life, etc. For example to comment on someone's appearance when they are in the middle of a presentation.
- Sexual comments, stories and jokes
- Sexual advances
- Repeated and unwanted social invitations for dates or physical intimacy
- Insults based on the assumed gender of the worker
- Condescending or paternalistic remarks
- Sending sexually explicit messages (by phone or by email) without the consent of the receiver

#### **Non-verbal conduct**

- Display of sexually explicit or suggestive material
- Sexually suggestive gestures
- Whistling
- Leering

Sexual consent means "unless it's a yes, it's a no!" Any sexual conduct that does not have explicit consent from the persons participating is rape. You can withdraw your consent at any time during the sexual intercourse.

WECF international recognizes that a perpetrator can be anyone, regardless of their gender, and the sexual harassment and/or violence can be targeted towards any gender. What matters is that the sexual conduct is unwanted and unwelcome by the person against whom the conduct is directed.

WECF International recognizes that sexual harassment is a manifestation of power relationships and often occurs within unequal relationships in the workplace, for example between manager or supervisor and employee.

Anyone, including employees of WECF International, partners, contractors or visitors who sexually harasses another during work will be reprimanded in accordance with this internal policy.

All sexual harassment is prohibited whether it takes place within WECF International premises or outside, including at social events, trips, training sessions or conferences sponsored and/or hosted by WECF International.

### **3. Complaints procedures**

Anyone who is subject to sexual harassment should, if possible, inform the alleged harasser that the conduct is unwanted and unwelcome. WECF International recognizes that sexual harassment may

occur in unequal relationships (i.e. between a supervisor and his/her employee) and that it may not be possible for the aggrieved person to inform the alleged harasser.

Any person who witnesses any form of sexual harassment or abuse is invited to report this violation. Any person to whom the Code of Conduct applies who witnesses any form of sexual harassment or abuse is required to report this at the earliest possible moment.

Cases of sexual harassment and abuse can be reported to the responsible manager or the integrity officer of WECF. Suspicions involving a member of the Board of Directors can be brought to the integrity advisor in the Board of Trustees. Also, when a person does not feel comfortable to report to the responsible manager or integrity officer of WECF, a report can be filed to the integrity advisor in the Board of Trustees.

If the reporting person does not want to use the aforementioned notification procedures, the final option is to contact the external whistle-blower point. Please read WECF's Whistle-blower Policy before doing so.

In case the reporter would like to get independent advice and support while protecting their identity, they can contact the external person of trust.

**Contacts of WECF's integrity officer, the integrity advisor in the Board of Trustees, the external whistle-blower point as well as the external person of trust can be found on the website of WECF.**

The integrity officer, integrity advisor and person of trust should be trained on understanding and deciding what constitutes sexual harassment, how to investigate it and follow up on outcomes of the process, in order to make sure that the wishes and needs of the aggrieved person are incorporated into the outcome of the complaints mechanism.

When a designated person receives a complaint of sexual harassment, they will:

- immediately record the dates, times and facts of the incident(s)
- ascertain the views of the reporting person to what outcome they want
- ensure that the reporting person understands the organisation's procedures for dealing with the complaint
- discuss and agree the next steps: either informal or formal complaint, on the understanding that choosing to resolve the matter informally does not preclude the reporting person from pursuing a formal complaint if they are not satisfied with the outcome
- keep a confidential record of all discussions
- respect the choice of the reporting person
- ensure that the reporting person knows that they can lodge the complaint outside of the organisation through the relevant country/legal framework
- treat the reporting person with utter most respect throughout the procedure, WECF will never doubt the credibility of the person reporting the sexual harassment, it is the responsibility of the alleged perpetrator to prove s/he's innocence.

WECF International recognises that because sexual harassment often occurs in unequal relationships within the workplace, many often feel that they cannot come forward and report sexual harassment and violence. WECF International understands the need to support these persons in making complaints.

**Informal complaints mechanism**

If the person wishes to deal with the matter informally, the designated WECF person will:

- give an opportunity to the alleged harasser to respond to the complaint
- ensure that the alleged harasser understands the complaints mechanism
- facilitate discussion between both parties to achieve an informal resolution which is acceptable to the complainant, or refer the matter to a designated mediator to resolve the matter
- ensure that a confidential record is kept of what happens
- follow up after the outcome of the complaints mechanism to ensure that the behaviour has stopped
- ensure that the above is done speedily and within 7 days of the complaint being made

### **Formal complaints mechanism**

If the reporting person wants to make a formal complaint or if the informal complaint mechanism has not led to a satisfactory outcome, the formal complaint mechanism should be used to resolve the matter. The designated person who initially received the complaint will refer the matter to an external investigator.

The person carrying out the investigation will:

- interview the reporting person and the alleged harasser separately
- interview other relevant third parties separately
- produce a report detailing the investigations, findings and any recommendations
- if the harassment took place, consult the reporting person and decide what the appropriate remedy for them is (i.e.- an apology, a change to working arrangements, a promotion if they were demoted as a result of the harassment, training for the harasser, discipline, suspension, dismissal)
- follow up to ensure that the recommendations are implemented, that the behaviour has stopped, and that the reporting person is satisfied with the outcome
- if it cannot determine that the harassment took place, the reporting person may still make recommendations to ensure proper functioning of the workplace
- keep a record of all actions taken
- ensure that the all records concerning the matter are kept confidential
- ensure that the process is done as quickly as possible and in any event within 14 days of the complaint being made

### **Outside complaints mechanisms**

A person who has been subject to sexual harassment can also make a complaint outside of the WECF offices and related partner offices. They can do so through the following mechanisms depending on the respective country's legal framework.

We strongly encourage the reporting person to take legal steps against alleged perpetrators and will stand side by side the reporting person to give support. WECF International puts consent of the reporting person first and will never contact official authorities without the consent.

## **4. Sanctions and disciplinary measures**

Anyone who has been found to have sexually harassed another person under the terms of this policy is liable to any of the following sanctions:

- 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 harassment. Suitable deterrent sanctions will be applied to ensure that incidents of sexual harassment are not treated as trivial. Certain serious cases, including physical violence, will result in the immediate dismissal of the harasser.

## **5. Implementation of this policy**

WECF International will ensure that this policy is fully understood and will organize trainings for employees as well as network partners.

All new employees, interns and volunteers must be actively informed on the content of this policy as part of their induction into the organization. Reference is made to this policy in all employment contracts.

Contracts and Memoranda of Understanding with partners will include the requirement for partners to adhere to the zero tolerance of the Policy to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment and Abuse of WECF International, and to ensure necessary procedures in their own organizations.

For outreach and awareness raising, WECF International can organize capacity building to support network partners including those where there is no legal/ contractual relationship.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

WECF International recognizes the importance of monitoring this sexual harassment policy. Whenever a case of sexual harassment occurs the designated person for dealing with sexual harassment will report to the Board of Trustees to ensure compliance. As a result of this report, the organization will evaluate the effectiveness of this policy and make any changes needed.

### **Partners**

WECF International encourages its international partners to adopt similar policies on sexual harassment. As a feminist women's organization working towards a gender just and healthy environment, we feel the responsibility to share our experience to prevent sexual harassment and reveal underlying power structures that are the breeding ground for misconduct and abuse. Within our international projects we share best practices and demand from our local partners to have sexual harassment policies in place.

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