

Prevention of corruption and whistleblowing



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Finance FDF
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Swiss Federal Administration

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Corruption? In the Federal Administration?

The level of corruption in the public sector in Switzerland is low or marginal. But that is no reason to ignore it. Corrupt behaviour quickly erodes a citizen's trust in the integrity of the state and its administration.

It is possible to recognise and fight corruption, and the first signs of it, through greater awareness and a broader understanding of what it is. For it is not always immediately obvious.

This brochure will show you where you should be particularly vigilant in your daily work.

Basic principles

An organisation is only as respectable or as corrupt as the people working for it. Corruption means abusing a professional position of trust, or power, for your own personal gain or that of others close to you. Corruption is a punishable offence. Failure to comply with the staff code of conduct can also have repercussions under public service law.

What is correct conduct?

- Staff members of the Federal Administration must be trustworthy, act with integrity and demonstrate impartiality in their work.
- They must avoid conflicts between their own interests and those of the Confederation.
- They must not use their professional position, or information which has not been made public, for private purposes.

(See «Code of conduct for Federal Administration employees» of 28 August 2024, available on InfoPers: Recruitment and communication > Corruption prevention > Code of conduct for Federal Administration employees)

Gifts and invitations

Staff members of the Federal Administration may not accept gifts in the course of their work, unless they are small in nature (valued no more than CHF 200) and are socially or traditionally motivated. The individual administrative units may decide what constitutes «socially or traditionally motivated». Invitations must be declined when impartiality or normal working relations might otherwise be compromised. Invitations abroad may be accepted only when the staff member has the written authorisation of his or her superior. Invitations may not be accepted during procurement or decision-making processes; in such cases, even small and socially or traditionally motivated benefits are not permitted.

Your administrative unit is free to impose stricter rules and limits or even place a ban on minor benefits and invitations. Know the rules!

The questions below will help you decide whether or not you can accept a minor benefit or an invitation.

- Do any special rules apply in my administrative unit?
- Is the gift or invitation in any way linked to my work?
- Could my impartiality or normal working relations be affected?
- If I accept, what kind of impression could that give to the general public?

Gifts which must be accepted as a matter of courtesy (e.g. in connection with diplomatic relations) are the property of the Confederation, and as such must be handed over to your administrative unit.

Obligation to withdraw

Staff must withdraw from a process if they face, or could face, a conflict of interests with regard to their own personal involvement or any other reason. Even an apparent conflict of interests is enough to justify withdrawal.

Conflicts of interests exist in particular when a transaction of yours directly or indirectly involves someone who:

- is particularly close to you, and shares or has shared in the past a personal friendship or enmity with you, whether for private or professional reasons;
- is dependent on you, whether personally or professionally;
- has recently made you a job offer.

Provide your superior spontaneously and in a timely manner with all information regarding any conflict of interests affecting you.

The duty to report and the right to report (whistleblowing)

A whistleblower is someone who provides information about unacceptable misconduct of individuals within organisations and companies. In the course of your work, have you ever come across criminal conduct or some other irregularity? Report it. You need not fear negative repercussions.

Based on the Federal Personnel Act, you have a duty to report any crimes or offences prosecuted ex officio that come to your attention in the course of your work and that are related to a federal task or one of your employer's activities (duty to report). You can choose to report such information to your line manager(s), to the federal Whistleblowing Reporting Office at the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) or to the prosecution authorities. Employees of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) can also report such suspicions to the FDFA Reporting Office if they have a connection with a foreign country. In addition, you have the right to report other irregularities (e.g. inadequate supervision or management, etc.) directly to the SFAO (right to report). The SFAO also accepts anonymous reports. FDFA employees may also report such irregularities to the FDFA Reporting Office if they have a connection with a foreign country (right to report).

If you file charges or make a report in good faith, you are protected by law from any discrimination in your job resulting from it. Through your vigilance, you can make an important contribution to preventing or exposing corrupt or criminal conduct.

Secondary occupations

Staff of the Federal Administration may carry out a secondary occupation in addition to their primary job. You must report all paid secondary occupations to your superior, and also any unpaid secondary occupations when they might give rise to a conflict of interests. Authorisation is required for any secondary occupations which:

- adversely affect your capacity to function in your job with the Confederation;
- or could conflict with your primary employment interests.

If a conflict of interests cannot be ruled out, authorisation will be refused. A conflict of interests can exist particularly if your secondary occupation:

- involves advising/representing third parties regarding issues that lie within the ambit of your administrative unit;
- is associated with mandates executed for the Confederation or which will be awarded by the Confederation in the foreseeable future.

Slightly different provisions apply to staff working abroad. Ask your superior about them.

Handling information which has not been made public

Staff of the Federal Administration may not use information which they have learned about in the course of their work – and which has not been made public – in order to gain any personal advantage for their own account or on behalf of others. This applies in particular to price-sensitive information which has not been made public.

If you have access to such information, you are not permitted to carry out any private transactions. Legal transactions are considered private transactions if:

- you carry them out in your own name, for your own account or on behalf of others;
- they refer to you as a related party;
- you have them carried out by a third party in order to conceal your identity.

Your administrative unit may establish additional rules, apply further restrictions or prohibit all private transactions. Know the rules!

Where to get advice

The information above will help you to recognise critical situations and know how to react. Are any of the following questions still unclear?

- Should I accept this gift or invitation?
 - Do I need to withdraw from this contract?
 - Does my secondary occupation need to be officially authorised?
 - or whether you are allowed to do a particular business transaction for which you have information that is not in the public domain,
- then contact your line manager(s), your HR department or another internal point of contact in your administrative unit.

Pay particular attention to any relevant directives your administrative unit may have issued.

Do you suspect something?

Do you have a suspicion? Don't look away, take a closer look and report any suspicions to your line manager(s) or to the federal Whistleblowing Reporting Office.

SFAO whistleblowing platform



FDFA whistleblowing platform (FDFA employees with a connection to a foreign country)



The SFAO, the FDFA reporting office and/or your line manager(s) will clarify the facts and take the necessary measures.

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