

# **Policy on Discrimination, Harassment, Retaliation, Standard of Conduct and other Workplace Concerns**

## **Chapter 1**

### **1.1 Title and application**

The policy shall be called the policy on discrimination, harassment, retaliation, standard of conduct and other workplace concerns of IRTC

### **1.2 Purpose and Stakeholders of the Policy**

IRTC is committed to provide a positive environment where everyone can be a successful contributor to the organization and to the society. To that end, each employee of IRTC should expect, and has a responsibility to uphold, a workplace and culture that are free of harassment, discrimination, misconduct, abusive conduct, and retaliation. This policy applies to conduct by and towards many types of individuals, regardless of class, caste, creed, religion, region, gender and nationality including but not limited to, applicants, employees (including interns, co-workers, Supervisors, Division heads, the Registrar, the Director), **Associated personals (APs)** (anyone who work in association with IRTC, field staffs, temporary workers, staffs of sister organizations and contractors), customers, clients and other third parties, at work and at work-related social events, such as office tours, off-sites, and entertainment events held inside or outside of the institution conducted by IRTC. There are multiple ways in which an employee or any person working in association with IRTC can raise or escalate a concern about improper conduct under this policy (see **Addressing a concern** below).

**Employees** who are found to have violated this policy are subject to disciplinary action, including but not limited to: coaching, training, a verbal warning, a written warning, impact to performance ratings, impact to compensation, or termination of employment.

**APs** are also expected to abide by this policy and behave appropriately when on our premises or at events interacting with our employees or one another. Policy violations by APs may result in actions such as removal from the premises or termination of a business contract.

**Visitors, clients, Interns** and other **third parties** are expected to conduct themselves appropriately as well, when on our premises or at our events or when interacting with our employees or APs. If you observe behaviour by a third party on IRTC campus, at any event or interacting with our employees or APs that appears inappropriate or that otherwise violates this policy, please speak up via the channels outlined below (see **Addressing a concern** below). Any behaviour that is inappropriate or otherwise violates this policy may result in actions such as removal from the premises or event or termination of contract.

Additionally, IRTC may take into account and review allegations of behavior that occur outside the course of employment, to the extent permitted by law, where IRTC determines such conduct may materially affect the workplace.

This policy defines problematic conduct, explains where it can be reported, and describes how concerns are handled and IRTC's policy against retaliation. It is subject to constitution of India.

### **1.3 Dealing with matters not provided in this policy**

For matters not provided in this policy, the decision of the Executive committee of IRTC shall be final.





# Chapter 2

## Definitions

### 2.1 Harassment

Harassment is unwelcome conduct (physical, verbal or non-verbal) based on an individual's protected status that creates an environment that is intimidating, hostile, or abusive, or a situation where enduring such conduct is a condition of employment. Harassment can be one severe incident or a series of less severe incidents.

In addition, harassment can range from extreme forms such as violence, threats, or physical touching to less obvious actions like ridiculing, teasing, or jokes based on a co-worker's protected status.

Sexual harassment is addressed separately below. Other types of harassment may include the following types of conduct:

- derogatory or insensitive jokes, pranks, or comments;
- slurs or epithets;
- nonverbal behavior such as staring, leering, or gestures;
- ridiculing or demeaning comments;
- innuendos or veiled threats;
- displaying or sharing offensive images such as posters, videos, photos, cartoons, screensavers, emails, or drawings that are derogatory;
- offensive comments about appearance, or other personal or physical characteristics, such as comments on someone's physical disability or religious attire; or
- Unnecessary or unwanted bodily contact such as blocking normal movement, or physically interfering with the work of another individual.

This list of examples is not exhaustive, and there may be other behaviors that constitute unacceptable harassment under the policy. All employees have an obligation to comply with this policy and if you observe or become aware of conduct that might violate this policy, you should



immediately report it. IRTC may consider conduct to be a violation of this policy even if it falls short of unlawful harassment under applicable law. For more information on how to raise a concern or the investigations process, read **Workplace Concerns & Investigations** below.

## 2.2 Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct (physical, verbal or non-verbal) of a sexual nature and includes, but is not limited to, conduct such as the following:

- making unwanted sexual advances and requests for sexual favours;
- making unwanted sexual advances and requests for sexual favours where submission to such conduct is made an explicit or implicit term or condition of employment;
- submission to or rejection of advances is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting an individual (sometimes these are referred to as a "quid pro quo" form of sexual harassment);
- unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment, even if it does not lead to tangible or economic job consequences (sometimes these are referred to as a "hostile work environment" form of sexual harassment);
- displaying or sharing offensive images such as posters, videos, photos, cartoons, screensavers, emails, or drawings that are obscene or sexual in nature;
- unwanted comments about appearance, or other personal or physical characteristics, such as sexually charged comments, words, signs, jokes, pranks, intimidation, or physical violence that is of a sexual nature or directed at an individual because of that individual's sex;
- unwanted verbal or physical advances, sexually explicit derogatory statements, or sexually discriminatory remarks made by someone that are offensive or objectionable to the recipient, that cause the recipient discomfort or humiliation, and/or that interfere with the recipient's job performance;
- unnecessary or unwanted bodily contact such as groping or massaging; or
- Threats or demands that a person submit to sexual requests as a condition of continued employment or to avoid some other loss, and offers of employment-related benefits in return for sexual favours





Sexual harassment can happen regardless of the gender, gender identity; orientation or gender expression of the individuals involved, and can, for example, occur between same-sex individuals as well as between opposite-sex individuals. It does not require that the harassment conduct be motivated by sexual desire. In some instances, sexual harassment may not only be a violation of institutional policy but also is a form of workplace discrimination and is against the law.

When determining whether conduct constitutes harassment or sexual harassment, the respective committee will consider whether a reasonable person could conclude that the conduct created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive workplace environment. "I didn't mean it," "it was just a joke" and/or "I was drinking" are not excuses for engaging in inappropriate conduct. According to this policy, the employees, APs or anyone who is working in association with IRTC are held to the same standards of conduct regardless of impairment by alcohol or controlled substances.

*Note: refer the Policy on Prohibition of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (PSEA) of IRTC for more information*

### **2.3 Discrimination**

Discrimination is behaviour affecting the workplace, which can take place between employees of IRTC, APs, clients, and/or customers, which results in the terms and conditions of an individual's employment being adversely affected due to the individual's protected status. Discriminatory conduct can include taking actions based on a person's protected status such as intentionally reducing someone's performance score, or bonus, not putting someone up for promotion, or putting someone on a performance improvement plan, just as examples.

### **2.4 Protected status**

IRTC prohibits discrimination or harassment based on certain characteristics, known as protected statuses. Protected status varies by location, but may include categories like, actual or perceived:

- race, colour, ethnic or national origin
- age
- religion or religious creed (or belief, where applicable)
- sex, including pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, or related medical conditions





- sexual orientation
- gender, gender identity, gender expression, transgender status, or sexual stereotypes
- nationality, citizenship, or ancestry
- marital status;
- physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information or characteristics (or those of a family member);
- status as a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking; or
- Any other basis prohibited under the constitution of India.

## 2.5 Standards of Conduct

IRTC holds employees to the highest standards of ethics and conduct to maintain a healthy, fun and collaborative environment. IRTC expects its employees to work cooperatively with co-workers, APs, clients, and visitors (including applicants), and maintain basic standards of civility and respect. We strongly believe that the employees of IRTC expect the same. IRTC also have a legal responsibility to maintain a work environment free of unlawful harassment as well as an interest in maintaining our collaborative environment. All employees have an obligation to comply with this policy, and if anyone observe or become aware of conduct that might violate this policy, they should immediately report it. For more information on how to raise a concern or the investigations process, read **Workplace Concerns & Investigations** below.

Certain prohibited behaviours could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. Examples of those behaviours are provided below. Nothing in this policy, or any other IRTC policy, limits employees' rights to (1) talk about pay, hours, or IRTC policies, or other terms of employment or working conditions, as long as employees abide by basic standards of civility and respect, or (2) to communicate with a government agency or official regarding terms and conditions of employment or any violation of law.

## 2.6 Prohibited behaviours include:

1. Failure to maintain basic standards of civility towards one another, APs and visitors (including applicants) pursuant to the core values followed by IRTC. Examples include but

are not limited to:





- a. disparaging or insulting comments or profanity or obscenity that is directed at an individual;
  - b. statements or conduct that constitute workplace harassment or discrimination in violation of this policy;
  - c. engaging in or threatening to engage in violent behaviour or behaviour that creates a substantial likelihood of violence towards others;
  - d. disclosure of personal information about an employ of IRTC (including contact information) for the purpose of causing the employee of IRTC to be subjected to physical, verbal, or online abuse or harassment, or under circumstances where a reasonable person should know that the disclosure is likely to lead to such abuse or harassment (this includes providing information for purposes of "doxxing,"(search for and publish private or identifying information about (a particular individual) on the internet, typically with malicious intent) which is defined for purposes of this policy as including, but not limited to, revealing financial information, a residential address, or a personal cell phone number without the consent of the owner so that the owner will be harassed -- note that contact details that are available on Teams, or that the concerned person chooses to share on an internal discussion alias, are not considered private information; regardless, disclosure of those details for the purpose of subjecting an employee of IRTC to abuse or harassment is prohibited);
  - e. Unprofessional behaviour toward clients or visitors (including applicants), including but not limited to the use of profane or disrespectful language or unwanted physical behaviour.
2. Inappropriate or unwanted touching, including hugging and kissing, that does not raise to the level of Harassment as set forth above;
  3. Engaging in conduct that interferes with productivity and other legitimate business goals, such as the ability to collaborate or create;
  4. Theft, stealing or removal (without express permission) of any property you do not own;
  5. Unethical behaviour, including dishonesty, failure to disclose conflicts of interest, or falsification of any records, forms, or reports (including misusing IRTC's systems or entering inaccurate information on such systems with the intention of achieving personal gain)
  6. Engaging in or permitting the creation of a conflict of interest, whether or not one personally benefits from the conflict;
  7. Accessing data in violation of privacy, security or other policies, or modifying access rights to any system that contains user, employee or customer data without express permission of the data owner;
  8. Insubordination (refusing a reasonable work assignment or refusing to follow work-related instructions);





9. Excessive absenteeism (that is not protected by any right to leave/accommodation under applicable law), such as being absent for three or more days in a row without notice;
10. Creating a significant safety or health hazard, intentionally or unintentionally;
11. Possession of weapons and/or any type of firearms on IRTC premises, except as otherwise provided by applicable law;
12. Mistreating or destroying company property, such as physical harm to IRTC assets
13. Subject to applicable law, conviction of a murder, rape or other serious criminal offense that is substantially related to the employee's job and might impact and undermine or compromise IRTC's reputation or that otherwise impacts the suitability for continued employment (such as offenses that relate to dishonesty, fraud or theft);
14. Any breach of the terms of your employment including any terms that relate to the use of confidential information; or
15. Violation of this or any policy put forth by IRTC.

## **2.7 Retaliation**

IRTC prohibits retaliation for raising a concern about a violation of policy or law or participating in an investigation relating to a violation of policy or law. Retaliation means taking an adverse action against an employee or AP as a consequence of reporting, for expressing an intent to report, for assisting another employee in an effort to report, for testifying or assisting in a proceeding involving sexual harassment under any federal, state or local anti-discrimination law, or for participating in the investigation of what they believe in good faith to be a possible violation of the Code of Conduct, IRTC policy or the law of the country. In some instances, it may not only be a violation of policy of IRTC but also against the law for one employee to retaliate against another for their participation in the complaint process. An adverse action may include, but is not limited to, discipline, termination or demotion.

IRTC cannot guarantee a conflict free workplace. The employees at IRTC can and do discuss a variety of topics -- work and non-work related -- and often feel passionately about their discussions. If anyone report something that is not a policy violation and believe that they are being treated adversely as a result, they should feel free to report that and IRTC will look into it, but it may not amount to retaliation under this policy.





# Chapter 3

## Workplace Concerns & Investigations

### 3.1 Addressing a concern

Each employee of IRTC has an obligation to comply with this policy and is expected to foster a workplace culture that is free of harassment, discrimination, abusive conduct and retaliation. If you observe or become aware of such improper conduct that might violate this policy, you should immediately report it. This includes any behaviour that you observe or become aware of involving an employee, APs, and other third parties.

There are multiple ways in which an employee at IRTC can raise or escalate a concern about improper conduct under this policy, including the following:

Concerns and complains other than Sexual harassment can be discussed with

- The Director
- The Director of Research
- The Registrar
- The Head of the division
- The Supervisor
- HR team

In the case of complaints against the Director or the Registrar the employee can contact the chairperson of IRTC.

All complaints related to sexual harassment should be reported to the internal complaints committee (ICC) (contact details are provided in the Appendix) *Note: refer the Policy on sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) of IRTC for more information*

Concerns may be communicated either orally or in writing. It is important to provide as much information as possible about the concern. Having more detailed information allows IRTC to address the concern as comprehensively, effectively and quickly as possible. If a complaint of





prohibited conduct under this policy is substantiated, then appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination, will be taken.

There may be additional local laws that apply. If you have experienced harassment or assault that involves unwanted physical touching, coerced physical confinement or coerced sex acts, such conduct may constitute a crime and you may also contact the local police department.

### **3.2 Obligations as a Division head**

Head of the Divisions have a responsibility to create, uphold, and promote a safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment. Like all employees, Head of the divisions are required to comply with the standards of conduct set forth in this policy. Head of the Divisions may be subject to disciplinary action if they engage in, ignore , or in any way condone, conduct that violates this policy (for example, sexually harassing conduct). The head of the divisions are required to promptly report any violation or suspected violation of this policy to the Registrar or the ICC in case of sexual harassment. Promptness is the key and a head of the division should try to report as soon as possible upon learning of a concern whenever possible. Failure by the head of the division to forward a complaint in a timely fashion or at all may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. In case of complaints against the divisional heads, or the registrar the Director of IRTC can initiate necessary actions prescribed in this policy. In case of complaints against the Director, the complaints must be taken up to the chairperson IRTC.

### **3.3 Workplace investigations**

As soon as a potential violation of the policies or Code of Conduct is reported, it is the job and obligation of IRTC to investigate. If a violation of policy or law is found as a result of that investigation, IRTC is committed to take timely appropriate action. It is the goal of IRTC to create a safe and respectful work environment where everyone can come and do their best work.





### **3.4 committees for handling the concern**

Once a concern has been brought to the attention of the respective mechanism of IRTC, it will be referred to the appropriate and qualified team to look into. Investigations will be conducted in an impartial, fair, timely, and thorough manner. The matters related to sexual harassment shall be exclusively dealt by the Internal Complaints Committee and all other matters of concern will be handled by expert team set up by the administration in accordance with the nature of the concern. Below are the main committees that look into workplace concerns.

- Committee on Security – this committee will be headed by the Director of research and will consist of Head of Division (1 in rotation basis), the systems administrator, one expert from documentation, one senior staff member female. This committee will deal with issues relating to violence or criminal activity in the IRTC campus, theft, leaks of Confidential Information, other intellectual property and/or privileged information.
- Committee on Ethics & Compliance – this committee will be headed by the Director of IRTC and will consist of the Head of division (1 in rotation basis), two EC members (at least one must be female) and one female staff member. This committee will deal with conflicts of interest or violations of the core values of the institution.
- Committee on Employee Relations management – this committee will be headed by the chairperson of the ICC and will consist of the Head of social science division, one gender expert, one female EC member and one staff member. This committee will deal with the issues relating with the violations of the policies against harassment, discrimination and retaliation.
- HR committee – Committee will be headed by the HR manager and will consist of one expert from the social science division, two senior staff members (at least one of them should be female) and this committee will deal with most other concerns such as interpersonal conflicts or challenges to performance.

Note: While every concern is different, the general process that each of these committees follow for handling a concern will be similar.





### **3.5 Handling a concern**

Every situation is different and how the committees handling the concern may vary depending on local requirements. For example, if the concern is the subject of an active criminal investigation by law enforcement, deference to law enforcement may impact the scope or timing of the internal review of IRTC. However, the IRTC will give proper insight into some common steps that the organization may take. The investigating committees often need to speak with other people as well -- any individual(s) against whom the concerns are being raised, as well as people who may have witnessed the events at issue related to the concern had similar experiences or who may have relevant information. Subject to local law, employees must cooperate and provide truthful information in an investigation. Providing false or misleading information in an investigation is a violation of this policy and can lead to discipline up to and including termination.

In addition, where applicable, the relevant committees may review documents and data that might provide them with additional context about the concern raised. This could include but is not limited to: employment and performance records, demographic data, reports, contracts, emails, expense reports and invoices, video footage, and shall take appropriate steps to preserve such information relevant to the investigation. If anyone thinks there is someone the committee should speak with or something the committee should review, they may do so and any such information shall also fall under the category of confidential information. While the investigation is pending, the person(s) who raised the concern can also make special requests or that would make them more comfortable while the committee looks into the concern. IRTC will take appropriate steps to keep written documentation and associated documents in the secure and confidential files of IRTC.

HR team will assist employees affected by the alleged prohibited behaviour. This assistance may include, for example, an accommodation, reassigning or moving an individual who raised concerns or against whom concerns have been raised, placing such individual on leave, or changing work schedules while an investigation is pending. HR team will evaluate the need for accommodations or other interim measures based on the circumstances and information available at the time of the complaint.





The committees which investigate the issue or concern are committed to being respectful, impartial, and professional during the investigation and any complaints regarding the procedure, breach of confidentiality, impartiality or disrespectful behaviour from the committee or the members of the committee can be reported to the Chairperson of IRTC or the EC of IRTC itself.

### **3.6 Confidentiality**

IRTC is committed to keep the matters, issues and concerns raised under the scope of this policy as confidential as possible, only disclosing information on a need to know basis. However, IRTC cannot promise absolute confidentiality as may need to disclose some or all of the information as part of the investigation and towards resolving the concern. If anyone who want to report a concern anonymously, they can do so through the complaint boxes or write to the concerned committee keeping their identity anonymous.

### **3.7 Resolving a concern**

IRTC believes in creating joyful work environment and hence try to look into and resolve workplace concerns as quickly as possible. Once the committee starts looking into the concern and has gathered the information they need, they will need to reasonably conclude what they believe happened and whether any policies were violated. They will make appropriate recommendations on what actions to take. If the committee decided that corrective action is appropriate, this could include but is not limited to: coaching, training, a verbal warning, a written warning, impact to performance ratings, impact to compensation, demotion, suspension, transfer or termination of employment.





In most circumstances, when the inquiry has been completed, someone from the committee looking into the issue, will follow up with the one who has raised the issue or concern, as well as the individual about whom the complaint was made, to share the outcome. While we typically create written documentation for the basis of the decision, together with any corrective action(s), the information we can share at the end of the process of looking into a concern is limited to protect the confidentiality and privacy of all parties involved. As part of the confidentiality involved in the process only general information about the process will only be shared and more specific information about the inquiry, including details of any corrective action involving others will not be shared with anyone unless otherwise required by state or local law.

### 3.8 Out come

There might be disturbing thing happening around, even if the matter is closed. Either of the party involved in the case might feel uncomfortable about the outcome. It should be noted that any of the concerned party may feel free to contact the local law enforcement agencies if they feel so. IRTC is bound to the law of the land and shall not contradict any of its decisions with the law of the land. The one who raised issue may experiences emotional issues, peer pressure and discomforts after the case is closed, in such cases IRTC is committed to provide professional help, if such incidents are reported. The aim of this policy is to make IRTC a great and fine environment to work and hence the workplace concerns are addressed seriously when they are brought to attention. If anyone see or experience something that does not feel right, please feel free to speak up.



  
**Registrar**  
**Integrated Rural Technology Centre**  
**Mundur, Palakkad, Kerala**