

Civil Society Europe's Code of Conduct

Adopted in June 2024

This Code of Conduct was drafted based on the mapping of CSE members' codes of conduct and other accountability policies discussed at the accountability training session that CSE organised in December 2022. A first proposal was reviewed by the General Assembly in June 2023 and further revised by the CSE Board in March and June 2024. The Code was adopted by the General Assembly in June 2024.

1. About Civil Society Europe (CSE)

Civil Society Europe (CSE) is the coordination of civil society organisations (CSOs) at the EU level. Officially established in 2016, CSE brings together 24 European platforms and networks of CSOs. Through its membership, CSE reaches out to millions of people active in or supported by not-for-profit organisations and CSOs across the EU.

CSE's mission is to contribute to EU-level recognition of the essential role and value of independent and plural CSOs in building and nurturing a democratic society that is based on fundamental rights and the rule of law.

CSE also works to create the conditions for the development of a strong and independent civil society voice and an effective, open, and structured civil dialogue at the EU level, as well as a thriving and enabling civic space across the Union in a context of growing challenges for CSOs in Europe.

2. Introduction

This Code of Conduct sets out CSE's core values and the standards of behaviour by our Governance, staff, members, and other actors involved in CSE's activities (see *Section 3. Scope and applicability*). It also explains the different mechanisms available in case of breaches of this Code.

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to ensure:

- that proper safeguards are in place to protect employees, volunteers, members, participants and anyone engaged with CSE's activities,
- that the spaces we provide for participation are inclusive and safe,
- that everyone who represents us does so with professionalism and a commitment to equality, solidarity, inclusiveness and democracy,
- that we are accountable as an organisation for providing this inclusive, professional and safe space and dealing with any breaches of this Code.

CSE does not tolerate discrimination, bullying, harassment, stalking, violence, sexual misconduct, conflicts of interest, fraud, mismanagement of information or data, corruption, blackmail, and improper use of a position of power.

This policy takes a survivor-centred approach. In case of breaches of this Code of Conduct, CSE is committed to prioritising the needs, rights, and well-being of individuals who have experienced harm.

While handling incidents, CSE will aim to ensure that the people affected are treated with dignity and that their voices are heard and valued throughout the process.

This Code of Conduct complements CSE's Statutes, internal rules and other documents that guide our work.

3. Scope and applicability

The Code of Conduct applies to all staff members and subcontractors, CSE Board members, CSE member organisations (when they speak and/or act as representatives of CSE), any individual and organisation that enters into any form of an agreement with CSE, as well as all participants in any events, meetings or other activities organised by CSE, whether in person or online.

The Code of Conduct also applies to all online activities (including social media platforms, websites, and mailing groups), formal and informal settings, and any work-related activity or interaction outside the workplace.

This Code of Conduct will take effect immediately and every CSE staff and Board member will have to read, sign and adhere to it. Staff and Board members are responsible for ensuring that they comply with the Code and they should be aware of the existing mechanisms to report any breach of this Code.

The Code of Conduct will also automatically apply to all participants in any CSE activities.

The Code of Conduct will be posted on our website and be made available to everyone participating in CSE activities and events. A complaint form will be available on our website to allow people to report violations of the Code (with the option of filling out the form anonymously).

4. Core values of CSE

CSE and our members are committed to ensuring that the values of equality, solidarity, inclusiveness and democracy are respected, implemented and protected within our activities and operations.

As a workplace and safe and inclusive community, CSE aims to foster mutual respect, well-being and dignity in all its relations in the workplace and with partners and individuals.

Representatives of CSE, particularly staff and Board members, shall always act in the interest of CSE and in accordance with its Statutes, internal rules and other policies, including this Code of Conduct. Representatives of CSE must also adhere to Belgian or national laws that are applicable. CSE reserves the right to report swiftly any breach of laws to the appropriate authorities.

5. Unacceptable behaviours

CSE does not tolerate any kind of discrimination, bullying, harassment, stalking, violence, sexual misconduct, conflicts of interest, fraud, mismanagement of information or data, corruption, blackmail, and improper use of a position of power.

Discrimination occurs when people are treated less favourably than others in a comparable situation only because they belong, or are perceived to belong, to a certain group or category of people. Discrimination can take the form of unequal treatment because of age, disability, ethnicity, class and background, political belief, race, religion, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, language, culture, and any other characteristic protected by law. Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Discrimination is direct when based on one of the protected criteria; a person is treated less favourably than a person without said characteristic; or is not treated the same in a comparable situation and without objective justification foreseen by the law. It is indirect when a disposition, criterion, or apparently neutral practice is susceptible to generating a specific disadvantage for a person with a protected criterion and without objective justification foreseen by the law, relative to others.

Bullying is unwanted, recurring aggressive behaviour, the goal or consequence of which is victimising, humiliating, undermining or threatening an individual or group of individuals. It causes psychological and/or physical harm, and/or causes the personality, dignity, physical or psychological integrity of a person to be affected in the execution of their work. Bullying may involve a misuse or abuse of power/authority. It can be physical, verbal, social or relational, cyber, and work-related. Such behaviour can be associated with but not limited to a variety of grounds, including those listed under discrimination.

Harassment refers to single or repeated cases of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical behaviour, whether in person, online or through other forms of contact, the goal or consequence of which is violating a person's dignity, victimising, humiliating, undermining, threatening or creating a hostile, degrading, or offensive environment for a person. Such behaviour can be associated with but not limited to a variety of grounds, including those listed under discrimination.

Stalking is engaging in a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and/or contact that violates an individual's personal boundaries and privacy, causing distress and fear for their physical or psychological safety. Stalking behaviours may include but are not limited to repeated unwanted communication through any means, following or surveillance of an individual's activities and location, threatening and intimidating behaviour, intruding upon the personal life of the targeted individual, using third parties to make contact, among other behaviours.

Violence refers to any intentional act or behaviour whereby a person or group of people are emotionally, psychologically or physically threatened or attacked.

Sexual misconduct is any sexual act or act targeting an individual's sexuality, gender identity or expression, whether the act is physical or psychological in nature. It is committed, threatened or attempted against an individual without their consent. Sexual misconduct **includes but is not limited to sexual assault, sexual harassment** (which is single or repeated cases of unwelcome verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, whether in person, online, or through other forms of contact, that detrimentally affects the working environment, or leads to adverse consequences for the one directly subjected to the harassment), **indecent exposure, voyeurism, distribution of sexually explicit photographs or recordings, and sexual abuse and exploitation.**

Conflicts of interest occur when an individual's financial, political or other strategic interests are not in the best interest of the organisation and/or interfere (or have the potential to interfere) with the

individual's responsibilities, decisions, or actions within the organisation. Those covered by this Code of Conduct should put CSE's interests before their own when carrying out their duties on behalf of CSE and should report actual, potential, direct or indirect conflicts of interest to CSE's Secretariat or Board.

Fraud refers to any intentional act or omission designed to deceive others resulting in the perpetrator achieving a financial or personal gain. Fraud may include any dishonest act concerning contracts or finances including theft of money or supplies, false accounting, bribery and corruption, deception and collusion concerning CSE or CSE partners' assets; dishonest handling of financial transactions or falsification of expense claims either in paper or online financial records; making profit from CSE's work beyond the job that someone is contracted for; accepting or trying to gain things of material value from contractors.

Mismanagement of information or data occurs when personal information or data is not processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, also known as Regulation (EU) 2016/679. Other forms of mismanagement include disclosing sensitive information and using information that has not been made public for an individual's private benefit.

Corruption refers to dishonest, unethical or illegal behaviour for private gain. Such behaviour can be associated with but not limited to a variety of grounds, including those listed under conflicts of interest, fraud, mismanagement of information or data, and improper use of a position of power.

Blackmail is the act of exerting pressure on a person or group to do something they do not want to do, for instance by making threats (e.g. revealing personal, sensitive or damaging information unless certain demands are met) and/or manipulating them. Blackmail leverages fear and intimidation, coercing the victim into compliance.

Improper use of a position of power: At CSE, we recognise that power relations exist within social contexts, including the workplace, and are committed to addressing power imbalances and misuse. Improper use of a position of power refers to exploitation, abuse, or misuse of power for personal benefit or at the expense of others. This can include but is not limited to coercion and intimidation, favouritism and nepotism, exploitation of subordinates, retaliation and unfair treatment, as well as other unacceptable behaviours listed in this document, such as discrimination, harassment, corruption, conflicts of interest, et cetera. Moreover, a close affective relationship between individuals of differing power levels is considered inappropriate and shall be avoided, as such a relationship could be influenced by power dynamics and could expose either party and the organisation to negative consequences. Should such a relationship arise, CSE's Director or the well-being points of contact shall be informed as soon as possible.

6. Prevention, training and awareness

CSE staff and Board members will be trained as soon as possible within the year of the entering into force of the code and at every renewal of the Board (every two years) to be able to effectively prevent and address violations of the Code of Conduct. This training can be done by external third parties or within CSE.

The CSE Secretariat will provide the Board with an annual report regarding the implementation of this Code and possible violations.

The CSE Secretariat will also conduct an anonymised survey every two years to identify potential undetected issues and evaluate the safeguarding procedures in place. The results of this survey will be shared with CSE members to keep them informed, gather feedback, and support awareness-raising efforts about the behaviours that are prohibited by this Code.

Questions, comments or concerns regarding the Code of Conduct can be addressed to:
info(at)civilsocietyeurope(dot)eu

7. Procedure for handling incidents

7.1 Reporting mechanisms

Any incident or concern related to unacceptable behaviours should be reported as soon as possible. To facilitate that process, CSE will establish an online complaint form and well-being points of contact for online and in-person communication.

a. Complaint form

People can report violations of the Code of Conduct using an online complaint form on CSE's website; it is possible to fill out the form anonymously. The form will also be made available to all participants of CSE activities.

People can fill out the form if they have been a victim of or witness to any behaviour that breaches CSE's Code of Conduct.

b. Care and well-being points of contact

In order to make CSE a safe environment for everyone, CSE has also designated well-being points of contact who can be contacted online at any time regarding any violations of the Code. The designated individuals are Dylan Power from CSE Secretariat, and Board member, Adrien Licha. Moreover, for in-person events, a designated individual will be available to handle urgent incidents and ensure the well-being of any person(s) affected on-site.

A third party may contact one of the points of contact if requested to do so by the complainant.

7.2 Privacy

CSE will respect the privacy of all parties involved in a case. Disclosure of information provided by the parties in a case will operate on a strictly need-to-know basis, depending on the type of process engaged by the complainant.

The personal data of the complainant and the alleged offender remain confidential both during and after the end of the proceedings.

7.3 Mediation process

A complainant can choose to launch a mediation process led by someone from CSE or, if requested, an impartial third party, in order to reach an informal resolution with the alleged offender. This process will take into consideration the gravity of the incident and will be tailored to ensure the safety and needs of the complainant.

The complainant can be involved in the decision-making process regarding their participation—including the choice of mediator, the timing and location of sessions, and the choice to withdraw their participation at any time without repercussions—as well as the outcome of the mediation process.

7.4 Remedies

After carefully considering factors such as the content, nature, and threat level of the violation, evaluating the available information as well as the needs and preferences of the person affected, CSE will determine a course of action within a period of up to 5 working days, including deciding whether and which remedy is appropriate. Such a decision is left to the CSE Board, in consultation with the CSE Director, the point of contact within the CSE Secretariat and the complainant.

Potential remedies include but are not limited to:

- Warnings;
- Asking for an apology and/or retraction;
- Denying funding and support;
- Removing a speaker from an event;
- (Temporarily) Banning a participant from future events;
- Support and protection of the victims of abuse;
- Awareness and accountability training.

If a remedy or the timing of it puts the safety and confidentiality of the reporting individual(s) at risk, CSE will take that into consideration and prioritise preventing further harm. It is possible to take immediate action.

After a remedy is put in place, follow-up will be implemented by the well-being points of contact. This is to ensure the complainant's safety and to make sure the offender understands which aspects of their behaviour were unacceptable and that future situations can be avoided where possible.

7.5 Civil or penal responsibility

Any action taken based on the remedies detailed in Article 7.4 does not preclude further administrative, civil or penal responsibility or action.

In case of incidents involving a breach of the law in force in Belgium, the CSE Director or President will swiftly notify the relevant authorities.

8. Implementation and revision of this Code of Conduct

Every CSE staff and Board member has the responsibility of familiarising themselves with this Code of Conduct, the safeguarding procedures available and the remedies in place. The Code of Conduct will be an element of induction for CSE staff and Board members.

All persons to whom this Code applies shall ensure and maintain a safe environment that prevents unacceptable behaviours and ensures and promotes the implementation of the values of equality, solidarity, inclusiveness and democracy.

This Code automatically forms part of all contracts of employment or contractual conditions of service.

CSE's Board will review the Code of Conduct after two years of implementation and present proposals for changes to the General Assembly. The CSE Director is responsible for ensuring that the Code and related documents are known and complied within CSE and among participants in CSE's activities. CSE will strive to notify all affected stakeholders of any changes.

Signature

Date