Annex 19 :

Code of ethics

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# Introduction

IFSI asbl (asbl = non profit organisation), the International Institute for Trade Union Cooperation, supported by the General Labour Confederation of (FGTB), is co-financed both by public funds and by its own funds, generated from the contributions of FGTB members.

The IFSI must, on the one hand, comply with a series of legal obligations as a non-profit organisation financed by public funds and, on the other, with a series of principles and values defended by the FGTB. This body of ethics served as the basis for drawing up the principles in the present ethical and normative code.

This code of ethics is intended primarily for employees, directors, members of the General Assembly and volunteers who have a contractual relationship with IFSI[[1]](#footnote-1). The code in no way replaces the legal or regulatory provisions in force.

Through this code of ethics and its signature, IFSI implements point 1 of the Integrity Charter.

# Our vision and mission

## Vision

Through social dialogue and collective bargaining, all the trade union partners of IFSI mobilise to defend the rights of workers, improve working conditions for all and influence public policy-making as part of the Decent Work Agenda. They fight to contribute to societies based on solidarity, that are inclusive, just, fair, and democratic. Workers support them and mobilise in this dynamic.

Here and elsewhere IFSI, the FGTB and their partners are:

* actors for democracy, by making the voices of working people heard and being active counterpowers;
* actors for change, by mobilising workers and building power balanced relationships;
* actors for solidarity, by defending the collective interest and creating networks;
* international actors, by organising across borders;
* actors for social justice, by fighting against inequality;
* actors for peace.

##

## Mission

IFSI’s mission is multiple:

* the IFSI implements **the international policy** of the FGTB;
* the IFSI helps partner organisations to **become institutionally recognised** as actors in social dialogue and supports them strategically and in solidarity in their process of change by facilitating their strengthening through the exchange of experiences and expertise, training and networking;
* the IFSI promotes **awareness-raising and active involvement** of the members and militants of the FGTB in international solidarity, by giving visibility to its partners and their trade union struggles and by developing action synergies between workers and between trade union organisations;
* the IFSI facilitates **international network syndicalism**, by developing a common dynamic among union militants;
* the IFSI contributes to building a strong, free and independent international **trade union counterforce**, committed to social and political change in line with progressive values.

# Our principles

### Horizontal and solidarity partnerships

A partnership is a relationship **among equals**, founded on respect, on mutual trust and understanding, recognising and respecting diversity and differences through a process of mutual learning . **[[2]](#footnote-2)**

For us, a partner-relationship is based on solidarity among trade unions that share a vision and promote common values, within a trade union network that is in constant evolution and structuring. We attach great importance to respect between individuals, employees and members of different organisations. The autonomy and emancipation of partners are central values for the IFSI. We are committed to bringing our activities to a successful conclusion and ensuring the follow-up of the projects with respect to this criterion.

### Commitment, responsibility and quality work

We carry out our missions and tasks with a view to achieving the objectives of our non-profit organisation. Every day, at every level of the organisation, we take decisions based on the information we receive internally. Having the right information is essential to deliver quality work. We are therefore committed to providing reports, notes, financial and accounting records - that are complete, accurate and substantiated. In carrying out our mission we demonstrate commitment and determination and we take up our responsibility to the fullest.

### An uninterrupted learning process

For several years, the IFSI has adopted a **quality approach** and is committed to continuously improving the processes, operation and management of the non-profit organisation with a view to achieving efficient results for the benefit of each target group. We also make an effort to propose innovative solutions and working methods, while respecting procedures and in line with our organisation's objectives. [[3]](#footnote-3)

### Transparency and financial integrity

The IFSI strives for the greatest possible **transparency**, both internally and externally, including through the communication provisions stipulated in the legislation on non-profit organisations, the partnership agreements and the internal exchanges within our team, among employees and with the internal audit department of the FGTB. Every year, and whenever the situation requires it, the governing bodies of the IFSI meet to take the necessary management decisions and ensure the good governance of the institute. Transparency and publicity are guaranteed, as required by the legislation on non-profit organisations. We also note that the IFSI manages its budgets transparently, together with its partners.

The IFSI team promotes openness and access to information in order to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the various initiatives of its staff and partners. In line with its financial policy, IFSI ensures the quality of its financial control through a number of measures, tools and appropriate procedures.

We condemn any form of attack on **integrity** (abuse, fraud, corruption) both in our organisation and among partners and/or participating parties in the interventions we finance. When staff members observe irregular behaviour on the part of other employees or third parties who have a contractual relationship with IFSI, they must inform their own hierarchical superior or that of the person concerned, or inform the hotline so that the necessary steps and appropriate action can be taken.

### Equal treatment, non-discrimination and sexual harassment

We defend equal treatment for all, without any distinction based on gender, sex, age, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, appearance or skin colour. We place our values of solidarity, justice, equality and democracy in the forefront. Similarly, we reject racist, sexist, xenophobic, fascist behaviour or thought - both within our own organisation and outside it.

Moreover, IFSI condemns any form of harassment, abuse or exploitation, at any level, among colleagues, managers and volunteers and towards any individual, especially the beneficiaries of our actions. This also implies that we refuse to accept or negotiate sexual relations, including sexual favours or any form of humiliating, degrading or exploitative sexual behaviour in exchange for a job, goods or services.

The IFSI considers sexual exploitation and sexual abuse a grave professional misconduct. Exchanging money, work, goods and services for sexual relations is absolutely prohibited, as is any sexual act with minors. Indeed, these are criminal acts.

In case of a complaint or even suspicion of the existence of acts of exploitation, employees, managers and members of the IFSI bodies commit themselves to denounce them through the mechanisms provided for that purpose (see point D). Finally, IFSI discourages any sexual relationship between its beneficiaries and employees/members of the governing bodies/managers. IFSI expects all participants in its activities to conduct themselves in a proper and professional manner at all times.

### Cross-cutting gender approach

In line with the 'Gender Mainstreaming' charter (signed by the FGTB, the ACV and the ACLVB in 2004 (and updated in 2024), with IFSI's *gender policy* and with the Gender Charter signed Belgian CSOs (including IFSI) in 2018, IFSI commits to developing a gender approach with its partners, in all aspects of its work.

We encourage the gender approach both in our policies and internal operations and in our partner relations. Similarly, we also encourage the promotion of women's autonomy in all our activities. Moreover, fighting discrimination against women contributes to the fight against poverty and inequality.

To put this principle into practice, the IFSI will appoint a 'gender' officer within its team who will monitor gender-related issues in international cooperation and ensure that the gender dimension will be encouraged and strengthened in the programme and projects of the IFSI. This person will cooperate with the Gender Department of the FGTB.

### Data protection, confidentiality and external communication

As far as **data protection[[4]](#footnote-4)** is concerned, the IFSI has internal policies, in line with the General Data Protection Regulation, accessible on its website . [[5]](#footnote-5)

With regard to **confidentiality**, when distributing any document containing data sensitive to our partners, we analyse the issue of **confidentiality** and consider whether data should be made wholly or partially anonymous[[6]](#footnote-6) . The auditors/evaluators have access to confidential information, which means that they are obliged to remain discreet and prohibited from using the data for personal use or communicating information in their possession to others for researchers, articles or research projects.

In all our **external communication**, we take care not to harm the image of the IFSI or its partners.

### Conflicts of interest

Personal interest that includes any benefit to ourselves, to our family, parents, relatives, friends or organisations with which we have (had) a personal connection or also personal relationships (business, political or other).

We ensure that we do not find ourselves in a situation of **conflict of interest**, i.e. a situation in which we ourselves become involved directly, or through an intermediary, in which interests are involved that may influence the impartial and objective performance of our duties or give the impression of such an influence. If a conflict of interest does arise, we will take appropriate measures to put an end to it.

# Practical modalities of this code of ethics

As a signatory to the 'Charter Integrity' presented to the sector at the initiative of Minister Alexander De Croo, the IFSI undertakes to implement a series of measures to operationalise its commitment to integrity:

#### IFSI's Code of Ethics was **approved by its governing bodies** and signed by all IFSI staff and management team. Moreover, it was signed by **all actors who have entered into a contractual relationship with the IFSI** in the context of our international operations. For each mission abroad, the code of ethics is forwarded to the person accompanying the IFSI (FGTB or external) before departure. The latter agrees with its content and commits himself to comply with the code of ethics. By doing this systematically before every departure, regardless of whether the person accompanying has on a previous occasion taken note of the contents of the code of ethics, we promote awareness and prevention in this area. For missions within Belgium, the same rules apply: the code of ethics is forwarded to the persons concerned (partners, externals or FGTB), who will be required to sign it before starting the mission.

#### ☞ With this point, the IFSI implements point 1 of the integrity charter : a code of ethics signed by everyone formally working for the IFSI.

#### The IFSI undertakes to **raise** maximum **awareness of** integrity **among** its employees, volunteers and partners. This through training sessions or guidance by persons proposed by the Acodev/Ngo federation, any other external organisation with any expertise in the matter or through exchange moments with its programme partners FOS and Solsoc.

We also include the theme of integrity in our annual monitoring and field visits to partner organisations. During these visits, a session on integrity is built in and exchanges are made with the partner on this theme. We make our partners aware of integrity and encourage them to develop an integrity policy within their organisation as well.

Our employees can **turn to a person of confidence** for advice on integrity and possible attacks on it. These are confidential counsellors designated within the FGTB structure to which the IFSI is associated. This person has the necessary training and recognition to detect integrity violations and provide expert advice on them.

☞ With this point, IFSI implements points 2, 3 and 10 of the integrity charter: raising awareness on the subject of integrity (2), a confidential advisor to whom staff and volunteers can turn (3) and collaborating with other actors (10).

#### **Regarding financial integrity,** we take the necessary preventive measures to mitigate the risks associated with integrity.

#### For example:

* The existence of an **IFSI financial policy**;
* the signing by our partners of a **financial manual** for the coordinators and accountants of the organisations in the partner countries (added to the five-year partnership agreements);
* the preparation of a **financial vademecum** intended for the teams in Belgium (IFSI team and audit of the FGTB);
* The designation of a **'financial integrity' contact person** within the IFSI to help improve control and financial management processes;
* the **creation of a 'financial task force' within the IFSI** with the aim of analysing and developing recommendations for the financial management of the IFSI, in which at least the IFSI coordinator, the person responsible for financial control and the 'financial integrity' contact person participate. This *task force* meets regularly with the director of the internal audit department of the FGTB and an accounting officer appointed by him/her. The Financial Task Force is queried by the IFSI staff in case of questions or doubts about the existence of corruption cases at partner/beneficiary level from partner countries.
* an annual external audit - both as regards the FGTB and the audit commissioned by DGD should ensure that any irregularities are uncovered in time.
* **the exchange of good practices with the sector** through the participation of one or more IFSI team members in the development cooperation sector exchange platforms on financial management.

☞ With this item, IFSI implements points 4 and 7 of the integrity charter regarding the financial integrity aspect. We take the necessary preventive measures to mitigate the risk of financial integrity violations (4) and the quarterly audits allow us to identify possible financial integrity violations faster and improve our financial systems if necessary (7).

#### The necessary integrity provisions are included in the **partnership agreements** we conclude with our **partners** in Belgium and in the partner countries. By signing the partnership agreement, all parties - that is, the IFSI, the partner organisations in Belgium and in the partner countries - agree to the contents of the code of ethics and undertake to comply with it conscientiously.

☞ With this point, IFSI implements point 5 of the integrity charter: provisions on integrity in the contracts with our partners.

#### The IFSI has created a confidential hotline to which staff, partners, beneficiaries or victims can send their complaints regarding breaches of integrity. This contact point is: integrity@ifsi-isvi.be. It is listed on the IFSI's website

#### The IFSI informs **its partners of the existence of this contact point**, which is also formally described in the partnership agreements.

☞ With this item, IFSI implements point 6 of the integrity charter: a confidential hotline for complaints of integrity violations

#### The topic of integrity is put on the agenda of the IFSI governing bodies every year. At that time, one has the opportunity:

* report the existence of any complaints received at the contact point during the year. IFSI keeps an incident register, in which any complaints and the measures taken are noted. Of course this is done in an anonymised manner for the sake of protecting the personal data of parties involved.
* explain the **IFSI'**s **actions and internal developments on** integrity;
* **if necessary, adapt** the code of ethics and, more specifically, its practical application modalities as described in point D with a view to continuous improvement

#### We organise regular checks to identify any integrity violations and to improve our systems. Regarding financial integrity violations, IFSI staff carry out quarterly audits of financial reports submitted quarterly by its partners to IFSI (see also point 3).

* With this point, IFSI implements point 7 of the integrity charter: organising regular checks to identify integrity violations

#### In the event of integrity breaches, the IFSI undertakes to follow up promptly on reported cases and take appropriate action immediately. The decision-making bodies of the IFSI may take a position on the measures and/or sanctions to be taken. Regarding possible complaints against the staff of the IFSI, the existing provisions in the FGTB (labour regulations, procedures, involvement of bodies representing workers) apply. With regard to partners from Belgium (FGTB), external partners or any other partners from partner countries, the bodies will determine ad hoc measures depending on the specific case.

* With this point, IFSI implements point 8 of the integrity charter: immediately take appropriate action in case of integrity violations

#### While respecting the rules of privacy protection**, we** broadly communicate integrity infractions **at least once a year**. The topic of integrity is on the agenda of the IFSI bodies every year (see point 6) and is also included in our annual reports.

* With this point, IFSI implements point 9 of the integrity charter: global communication on integrity violations at least once a year

#### As explained in section 2, we are actively working with other actors to implement these measures and improve our practices and existing systems. One way we do this is by participating in the integrity working groups organised by NGO Federation and by exchanging experiences with FOS and Solsoc. From the experiences shared during the integrity working group and the exchanges with FOS and Solsoc, we can test our existing systems against the realities and adjust them where necessary.

* With this point, IFSI implements point 10 of the integrity charter: actively collaborate with other actors and strive for continuous improvement of systems.

# Grievance handling

The contact point integrity@ifsi-IFSI.be is available for anyone who is concerned about unacceptable behaviour or who witnesses such behaviour. The person behind the e-mail address, to whom the complaint is addressed, is an employee of the Federal FGTB. This is the confidant who has sufficient status and experience to deal with the case and has received the appropriate training to do so.

The investigation and resolution of a complaint may, if necessary, be carried out by a complaints committee, consisting at least of the complaints manager, the confidant and the internal prevention and protection adviser. If necessary, the external prevention and protection service may also be involved in this investigation.

IFSI undertakes to handle complaints in a timely manner according to the existing guidelines within the FGTB. If violence and harassment are found to have occurred, appropriate action will be taken.

For the full complaints procedure: see Annex 20.

1. #####  Also communicated to the partners of the asbl

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. #####  Partnership policy of the IFSI

 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. #####  Strategic policy of the IFSI

 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. #####  The GDPR (or AVG, General Data Protection Regulation) is a European regulation to protect personal data that came into force in all EU member states on 25 May 2018.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. #####  IFSI's policy on the GPDR (or AVG)

 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. #####  Results-oriented management policy

 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)