



Gifts and hospitality offered to officials by external sources

Introduction

1. Article 1.5 of the Staff Regulations provides that “[a]n official shall not accept any ... favour, gift or fee from any government or from any other source external to the Organization, unless in the opinion of the Director-General, such acceptance is compatible with [the] status as an international civil servant”. Principle 9 of the Principles of Conduct for Staff of the International Labour Office ¹ further states that staff may not accept gifts without prior authorization by the Director-General.
2. The above rules aim at protecting the ILO from any appearance of impropriety, ensuring integrity of officials, the prevention of conflicts of interest and upholding the impartiality and independence of the Office. These rules apply to all ILO officials, including those in development cooperation projects, whether they are in headquarters or in external offices, are on paid or unpaid leave, and whose conditions of service are governed by the Staff Regulations or Rules Governing Conditions of Service of Short-Term Officials. The failure to respect the applicable rules and procedures may qualify as misconduct and give rise to disciplinary action, as appropriate.

Purpose

3. The purpose of this Guideline is to recall the applicable rules and to provide guidance regarding the conduct expected from officials with regard to gifts or hospitality offered by governments, constituents, commercial entities or other external sources.
4. This Guideline should be read in conjunction with the:
 - (a) Office Directive, *Ethics in the Office*, IGDS No. 76;
 - (b) Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service;
 - (c) Principles of Conduct for Staff of the International Labour Office;
 - (d) Office Directive, *Rules governing outside activities and occupations*, IGDS No. 71;
 - (e) Office Directive, *Anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy*, IGDS No. 69;

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/ethics/documents/principles.pdf>.

- (f) Office Directive, *Register of financial interests and related party disclosures*, IGDS No. 116; and
 - (g) Office Procedure, *Register of financial interests and related party disclosures*, IGDS No. 117.
5. The present Guideline supersedes Office Guideline, *Gifts and entertainment*, IGDS No. 57 (version 2) of 3 December 2014.

Duty to decline gifts

6. All ILO officials should be prepared to decline gifts, favours or fees with tact and diplomacy, drawing the attention of counterparts to the fact that acceptance would bring them in conflict with ILO rules. Officials can also point out that these rules aim at upholding the integrity of the Office and ensuring the impartiality and independence of officials, as is required under the Constitution of the ILO and expected by ILO member States and constituents.
7. Assumptions or concerns that non-acceptance of a gift might negatively impact the relations with the counterpart concerned cannot, as such, override the applicable rules. However, where an official is unexpectedly recognized and presented with a gift, and rejection would cause embarrassment to the ILO, the gift may be received on behalf of the ILO but must be disclosed to the responsible chief and, in principle, be returned subsequently with a polite explanation. In case there are any doubts whether returning a gift is appropriate or not, advice should be sought from the Ethics Officer who shall liaise with the Treasurer and Financial Comptroller and the Office of the Legal Adviser (JUR). If, in exceptional circumstances, it is decided not to return the gift, it should be forwarded to the Records and Archives Management Services Unit (RAMS) for registering and safekeeping.

Gifts of nominal value

8. Notwithstanding the above, officials may accept occasional gifts of not more than nominal value.² For example, this may include: (a) souvenirs of a commemoration or other ceremony, conferences or event; (b) tokens within normal standards of courtesy or protocol; and (c) small promotional items offered by suppliers or other parties such as calendars, pens, agendas, stationery items and other tokens in line with normal business practice.
9. The applicable rules do not provide for a specific value threshold for nominal value gifts, but such gifts should be of not more than minimal commercial value. Further, frequent receipt of nominal value gifts from a single source is inappropriate. As it may not be possible to assess properly the value of a gift at the moment of reception, officials should, in such cases, exercise utmost diligence and return the gift subsequently if it is worth more than nominal value. Accepting cash amounts is never permitted.³ Officials are required to make an informed judgement, taking into account the circumstances.
10. It is recalled that according to the ILO policy relating to the disclosure of financial interests (see paragraphs 4(f) and (g) above), officials required to file annual

² Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, para. 50; the Principles of Conduct for Staff of the International Labour Office, Principle 9.

³ ILO Circular No. 24 (Rev. 1), *Payments by outside bodies to staff members for services rendered in the course of their official duties*, provides further guidance.

declarations are bound to indicate in their declaration any such gifts where the combined value from a single source equals or exceeds US\$250.

Hospitality

11. Hospitality refers to free meals and functions such as cocktail parties, receptions, presentations or conferences, and invitations to social or cultural events.⁴ Hospitality accepted by officials should be directly related to the exercise of official duties and responsibilities only. Officials should not accept hospitality which might reasonably be perceived as compromising their personal judgement or integrity. To be considered appropriate, hospitality should, in principle, be moderate and within what can reasonably be considered as normal business practice. In assessing whether accepting hospitality is appropriate, officials should consider all relevant facts and the specific circumstances and seek Ethics advice if in doubt.

Further information

12. For any questions or advice related to gifts and hospitality as addressed in this Guideline or otherwise, officials should contact the Ethics Officer at ethics@ilo.org.

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Additional references

Office Guideline, Outside activities and occupations, IGDS No. 67

Office Guideline, Conflicts of Interest, IGDS No. 68

⁴ Hospitality does not include travel or subsistence expenses offered by third parties in relation to official activities accepted in line with the relevant rules and procedures.