



# Policy and Action Plan

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Policy and action plan to combat abuse, harassment and discrimination

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**POLARFORSKNINGS  
SEKRETARIATET**  
SWEDISH POLAR RESEARCH SECRETARIAT





## Aim

The aim of the policy and action plan is to prevent and combat abuse, harassment and discrimination while facilitating reporting and investigation.

## Policy

The Swedish Polar Research Secretariat does not tolerate abuse, harassment or discrimination of any kind. All employees, trainees and temporary staff are entitled to be seen, heard and respected on the job and as professionals. The secretariat promotes a workplace that respects differences, mutuality, transparency and straightforward communication.

The secretariat shall be goal oriented and encourage proactive measures to ensure that everyone enjoys equal rights and opportunities at work.

Supervisors and managers at every level have the responsibility to act as soon as any indications arise that an individual has been the victim of abuse, harassment or discrimination. The incident must be investigated and remedial measures taken.

The secretariat shall disseminate this policy to its partners, including other authorities, as we well as acquaint itself with similar policies of other organisation, in order to collaborate in a way that helps realise the aim.

## Definitions

### **Abuse**

Abuse is behaviour that targets one or more employees in a manner that can cause health problems or exclusion (Section 4, Swedish Work Environment Authority Regulation 2015:4). Bullying is the usual colloquial term for such abuse.

*Typical abuse involves:*

- intentional insults
- ignoring or ostracising an individual
- withholding information
- making it difficult for someone to do their job
- trying to maintain unreasonable control
- failing to provide factual clarifications
- refraining from inviting an employee to attend meetings



- being overly critical or negative

Abuse should not be confused with temporary conflicts, differences of opinions and cooperation issues, which are normal phenomena at most workplaces.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is a variation of abuse and/or harassment based on gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation or age.

### **Harassment**

Harassment is a form of abuse related to one of the above bases of discrimination. Harassment pursuant to the Swedish Discrimination Act refers to behaviour that targets a specific person due to one of the bases of discrimination.

Sexual harassment is a type of discrimination. (Section 4, Chapter 1, Discrimination Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 2008:567) A single incident suffices to constitute sexual harassment if it is serious enough.

*Typical sexual harassment involves:*

- groping or other inappropriate physical contact
- unwanted hints or allusions
- insinuations about appearance, clothing or lifestyle
- derogatory jokes about sex or gender

Both the perpetrator and victim of sexual harassment can be either a woman or a man.

The particular type of harassment involved is less important than the principle that situations that give rise to the perception of abuse are serious and cannot be tolerated. The victim determines whether or not behaviour is unwanted or unsolicited. The employer is responsible for preventing and investigating perceived abuse and harassment.

### **Preventive measures**

Preventing all types of abuse, harassment and discrimination is part of systematic work environment management. The Discrimination Act clarifies the need for preventive measures when a basis for discrimination is involved.

Some of the preventive measures that the secretariat has taken:



- All supervisors and managers shall be trained or otherwise informed about ways of preventing abuse, harassment and discrimination.
- Everyone who works for the authority shall be thoroughly familiar with the meaning of abuse, harassment and discrimination.
- Regular employee satisfaction surveys.
- Regular employee performance reviews.
- Everyone who works for the authority shall be fully acquainted with this document.
- An open, respectful and supportive atmosphere that permits individuals to speak about their personal experiences and concerns.

## Responsibility

Pursuant to Section 3, Chapter 2 of the Discrimination Act, the secretariat is obligated to investigate any incident that comes to its attention whereby an employee may have been a victim of sexual or other harassment by another worker or trainee on the job. When applicable, the secretariat is also required to take reasonable measures to prevent recurrence of abuse in the future. Pursuant to Section 9 of the Regulations concerning Systematic Work Environment Management (AFS 2001:1), the employer is subject to the same obligations when it comes to abuse.

### **Supervisors and managers:**

- Taking indications of abuse, harassment or discrimination seriously.
- Preventing and calling attention to abuse, harassment and discrimination as soon as possible.
- Remaining impartial and objective.

### **Employees, trainees and temporary staff:**

- Respecting and accepting each other and their differences.
- Doing everything possible to prevent exclusion.
- Speaking out and calling attention to abusive behaviour.
- Supporting victims.
- Notifying a representative of the employer whenever an individual experiences abuse, harassment or discrimination.



## Advice to victims

You determine whether behaviour is unwanted or unsolicited.

### **Show clearly that it is unwanted.**

Speak out in no uncertain words. If you don't want to talk to the perpetrator, send an email instead and be sure to keep a copy. Another option is to ask someone else to speak with the person.

### **Write each incident down**

Note the time, place, course of events, words spoken and your reaction. Your records might serve as key documentation during an investigation. Keep any letters, emails, texts and other correspondence with the perpetrator.

### **Tell somebody else**

The first person to notify is a supervisor, manager, human resources officer or other representative of the employer. If that feels uncomfortable, contact the Equality Ombudsman, a trade union representative, occupational health services or another person whom you trust.

## Advice to those who have been accused

If you find out that your behaviour is perceived as abusive, stop engaging in it right away. The victim of your behaviour or actions determines whether or not they are unwanted.

Contact your immediate supervisor if you want to discuss the matter or obtain advice. Occupational health services can also provide support.

## Action plan for handling abuse

### **1. Who receives information about a person who perceives having been abused?**

If you are a victim and unable to resolve the issue with the perpetrator, obtain support and assistance by notifying, either orally or in writing:

- your immediate supervisor
- another supervisor or the human resources department
- the safety or trade union representative.



During expeditions, notify:

- the secretariat's representative at the expedition
- the emergency representative or your immediate supervisor
- another supervisor or a human resources officer
- the safety or trade union representative.

With the consent of the victim, the director-general of the authority and the safety representative shall be notified. If the report involves the director-general, it shall be sent to the acting director instead.

## **2. What shall the recipient do with the information?**

1. An investigation shall be launched promptly and be conducted with the discretion that the situation requires. All circumstances relevant to ensuring that a final decision can be communicated to the parties concerned and enable them to respond.
2. The matter must be processed in a way that fits the nature of the incident and the needs of the victim. The employer is required to meet its obligation to investigate.
3. A representative of the employer performs an initial assessment of whether a supervisor, human resources officer, etc., is to conduct the investigation. An assessment is also performed as to whether other people should be brought into the investigation (after checking with the perceived victim) or whether an external investigator or occupational health services should be engaged. It is important that whoever conducts the investigation have the skills and opportunity to act impartially, as well as having the trust of the **parties** concerned.
4. Once the matter has been closed, the work environment procedures and action plan of the authority to combat abuse, harassment and discrimination shall be reviewed in order to ensure that similar incidents do not reoccur.

Following harassment related to one of the bases of discrimination, the circumstances shall be investigated and preventive measures taken. In other words, the Discrimination Act requires the authority to launch an investigation even if no report has been filed.

Rapid intervention and an assessment of the situation may be needed to prevent acceleration of the problem. Such action may also be required to ensure that the victim receives assistance as soon as possible. The secretariat can engage occupational health services or another expert to provide support and assistance.



### **Documentation**

To evaluate whether the action plan is being followed and appropriate measures taken, the course of events and the response (anonymised) shall be documented in writing. The matter must be processed in a way that fits the nature of the incident.

### **Serious incidents**

A police report must be filed if the incident may be subject to the Swedish Penal Code.

### **Reporting serious near-accidents**

Serious near-accidents shall be reported to the Swedish Work Environment Authority. Severe cases of bullying, abuse or harassment are regarded as serious near-accidents.

### **Prohibition against reprisals**

An individual who has reported discrimination or violation of the Discrimination Act is legally protected against reprisals. The protection is also in force for someone who has participated in an investigation pursuant to the Discrimination Act or reported or been the victim of sexual or other harassment (Section 18, Chapter 2 of the Act).

### **Trade unions and reports to the Equality Ombudsman**

If an employee is the victim of reprisals or an employer fails to meet its obligations to investigate and take measures to combat sexual or other harassment, the employee can contact the trade union, which is legally entitled to represent its members in discrimination matters. The employee can also file a report with the Equality Ombudsman.

Additional information about the types of reports that the Equality Ombudsman can receive is available from its website.

### **Monitoring the policy and action plan**

Pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 6, Paragraph 2 of the Discrimination Act, the secretariat is to monitor and evaluate its policy and action plan to combat abuse, harassment and discrimination.

#### *When?*

Evaluation of the policy and action plan are part of annual monitoring of systematic work environment management by the safety committee and management team. When



applicable, the policy and action plan shall also be monitored after a matter has been closed.

*Responsibility*

Human resources officer along with the safety committee and management team.

**For additional information**

- [Work Environment Act \(Swedish Code of Statutes 1977:1160\)](#)
- [Penal Code \(Swedish Code of Statutes 1962:700\)](#)
- [Discrimination Act \(Swedish Code of Statutes 2008:567\)](#)
- [Equality Ombudsman website](#)
- [Organisational and Social Work Environment \(2015:4\)](#)
- [Systematic Work Environment Management \(2001:1\)](#)