

## NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ASTROPHYSICS

### 2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTED COUNSELLOR

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#### 1) **The role of the Trusted Counsellor in INAF**

I took up the role of Trusted Counsellor in INAF in July 2023. This figure is foreseen in the “**Ethical Code for the prevention of sexual and moral harassment, for the protection of the dignity of people working and operating at the National Institute for Astrophysics**”, which defines its tasks and regulates its activity. The document, within the framework of principles and aims to which it is inspired, proves the Institute’s commitment to protect the employees’ right to live in a serene environment, in which interpersonal relations are based on **fairness and mutual respect of freedom, equality and personal dignity**. Tasks and functions of the trusted Counsellor are strictly related to such goals. This figure constitutes the operational tool for their practical implementation. The trusted Counsellor should support the Institute in pursuing such strategic commitment, aiming at the **wellbeing** of all those involved in INAF activities, so as to ensure a working environment in which men and women respect the freedom, equality and inviolability of the human being, are protected by any action or behaviour which may produce detrimental effect and may even indirectly discriminate on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, language, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, personal beliefs and any inhibit any persecutory, abusive or vexatious behaviour, such that it causes physical and psychological discomfort or unease in workers. Therefore, concrete actions falling within the scope of the Code consist in **direct and indirect discriminations, harassment, sexual and moral harassment, and mobbing**. The Code takes into account the rules of transposition of EU Directives on discrimination 2000/43/CE (equal treatment of persons regardless of their racial and ethnical origin), and 2000/78/CE (equal treatment of persons regardless

of their religion, personal beliefs, handicaps, age and sexual orientation as far as job and conditions are concerned), which were implemented respectively with D. Lgs. nr. 215/2003 and nr. 216/2003, as well as the Directive 2002/73/CE (discriminations on the basis of sex) transposed into D. Lgs. nr. 145/2005. There is also a Directiva “of revision” 2006/54/CE (implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and on equal treatment of men and women as far as work is concerned on the basis of sex), through D. Lgs. nr. 5 of 2010, which made significant changes to the Legislative Decree nr. 198/06 (Equal Opportunities Code). Finally, the Code takes into account D. Lgs. nr. 81/08, (as changed by D. Lgs. nr. 106/2009) also Community-based, which establishes important provisions of a preventive and prescriptive nature, aiming at protecting working well-being, in particular as regards gender difference in relation to risk assessment and work-related stress.

I would like to underline the opportunity to promote periodic actions of information and awareness-raising of staff and management on the contents of the **Ethical Code**, so as to create opportunities for reflection on the values of the Institute and get to know the figure of the Trusted Counsellor.

To this regard, I thank the Committee for Equal Opportunities, which in the course of the year 2024 invited the Trusted Counsellor, as well as the reference person of the Organizational Listening Point, to take part presentations in the various offices of the Institute (the s-called “CUG in Tour”), either in-person or remote participation, so that the employees get to know figure, tasks and functions of the Counsellor. Here is a list of the activities of the Counsellor derived from the Code:

1) **ACTIVITY OF INFORMATION:** The Counsellor communicates the contents of the code, so as to gain visibility and recognition as a guarantee figure.

2) **ACTIVITY OF EDUCATION:** The Counsellor provides her skill and experience, where required, for the training of both personnel and management on the topics handled by the Code;

3) **ACTIVITY OF ASSISTANCE AND CONSULTANCY:**

The Counsellor provides advice to the staff, in particular to victims of harmful behaviours (discriminations, persecutions, harassment). Upon request, the Counsellor assists workers in informal and formal procedures.

4) **RELATIONS ACTIVITY:** the Counsellor relates with the personnel, the Presidency and the management, the trade-union representatives, the members of the Equal Opportunities Committee, the reference person for the Listening Point;

## Mode of Operation of the Service

As mentioned above, the Code entrusts the Counsellors the primary task of **counselling and assistance** for those employees who are victims of behaviours damaging the dignity of women and men in the working environment, including discriminations, harassment and mobbing, in the sense of moral and psychological harassment, with deliberately vexing connotations.

The Counsellor, in the course of her mandate, in order to ensure a correct and confidential advice, used a series of communication channels with staff and management: an e-mail account provided by the Institute (consigliera.fiducia@inaf.it). The Counsellor can be called at a dedicated mobile phone number, given by the Institute (cell. 3667664628) and has provided also her own office landline (studio 055 282066). In order to satisfy the necessary conditions for an appropriate role functionality, namely **information on the role, visibility, accessibility**, the Counsellor has her own webpage within the Institute's website. From the operational point of view, while informal contact with the Counsellor is allowed, for the first information approach or a consultancy, and should be free and simple for all employees, it is necessary to sum up the "codified" modes of intervention which can be activated at the request of the person concerned.

The so-called **informal Procedure** provides the following steps:

- 1) The Counsellor, at the request of the injured person, takes over the case, so as to stop unwanted behavior.
- 2) The Trusted Counsellor cannot take any initiative without the express prior consent of the person reporting such conduct.
- 3) The Trusted Counsellor can:
  - 4) A) advise the injured person on the most appropriate course of action to resolve the case;
  - 5) Interview the alleged author of abusive behavior;
  - 6) Acquire any evidence and access to any administrative documents concerning the case;
  - 7) Propose conciliatory meeting between the injured party and the abuser;

- 8) In the most serious cases, advice the person in charge of the possible transfer of one of the persons concerned, subject to the requirements of the injured party;
- 9) Suggest appropriate actions to ensure a working environment respectful of the freedom and dignity of the personnel involved in the case.
- 10) The formal procedure should be completed within a reasonably short time (in any case within 90 days).
- 11) The report may be withdrawn by the injured person at any time during the informal procedure.

The **formal procedure** envisages a formal complaint by the employee, and, on his/her demand, with the assistance of the Counsellor, to the person responsible for the structure, about conduct that is considered damaging, or to the President, in case he/she is the author of the damaging conduct. Within 5 days of the notification of the fact, the complaint is forwarded to the office responsible for disciplinary proceedings, and the resulting procedure is organized according to the T.U. n. 165/2001 and il CCNL (National Collective Bargaining Agreement), with the chance to listen to the Counsellor as an informed person.

In any case, the Counsellor makes herself available, after the first contact through e-mail or phone, for a direct meeting with the injured person as early as possible, for clarification and further investigation of the case. Indeed, I think the timely availability to **listen** is a fundamental element for the effectiveness of the figure. It is useful to examine the reported event together with the person requesting action, in order to specify the details of the complaint and check the actions to be taken. In this context, the event is better defined, and sometimes resized. During the direct meeting, the Counsellor helps the injured party to identify **their own strategies for overcoming the criticality**, mobilizing and exploiting their own inner resources. In certain less serious cases, a direct – even just informative - meeting, can even complete the task of the Counsellor. Often the Counsellor stands beside the person who addressed her, advising him/her in the behaviour to assume and the actions to take.

2) In case it is necessary to involve **other specialists (psychologists)**, the counsellor underlines the importance for INAF of offering a **listening point managed by a highly capable psychologist/psychotherapist**. The service, whose functionality is highly appreciated, positively supported staff expressing organizational criticalities, thus indirectly helping also the Counsellor in handling cases. While strictly respecting the confidentiality of both professionals

in performing their different functions, we note that often the staff involves both figures. A psychological support has actually helped people to get a clearer picture of the question, identify the nature of the discomfort and take paths to emerge from critical issues with the help of the Counsellor and a psychological support.

The experience I gained in preceding positions has identified a correlation between **personal distress and working climate**. This correlation can be found in INAF too, where – however – a fully-fledged updated, synchronous climate survey has not been made as yet, in view of improvement actions. Thus, even if there have been commendable actions of data collection and training in the years preceding my appointment, I still do not have elements for an assessment of the working climate on the basis of objective data offering a structured insight on the distress. In this first year of mandate, therefore, in order to obtain a better picture of the individual cases brought to my attention, I used an empirical assessment, derived from the cross-referencing of informations gathered during meetings (both in-person and online) in the various structures on the occasion of the presentation of my role, together with CUG. We look forward to the start of a survey of work-related stress, which, where possible, may use multidimensional survey methods, so that among the areas investigated, we may find **well-being, equity, transparency, discrimination and harassment**. As I will explain better later on, the subsistence of a critical working climate comes from the concentration in specific structures of a number of individual distress cases, which present common indicators and suggest a homogeneous matrix. In my preceding experiences in other institutes, in order to solve a conflict or address a discomfort, initiatives such as seminars, training or workshops have proved very effective, as well as organisational listening circles, so as to face topics in a larger context. In such fields, it has also been useful involving experts in occupational psychology, so as to learn or recover the valuable dimension of “teamwork”, regain motivation for collaboration, talk and mutual appreciation between colleagues, use an inclusive – neither violent nor aggressive – language, management of stress and conflict on the part of the Institute leadership. I intend to propose experimental initiatives, in those Structures where the symptoms of discomfort were concentrate, in order to address the critical issues in a systematic way.

I also suggest an **increased number of the occasions of staff participation and organisational listen**, either collective or individual, managed by the Counsellor, as an effective methodology to intercept and reduce discomfort. Indeed, even the content of training courses (protection against discrimination and mobbing), in my opinion can be a chance to facilitate greater awareness in the target groups, making the activation of forms of self-protection more effective.

### **3) Summary of 2024 activities .**

#### ***Handling of cases.***

The Counsellor took office in July 2023 and inherited from her predecessor a few open cases. There were also cases not yet report, both new and rooted in past events. From the report of prof. Calafà concerning her third and last year of activity **there were 16 requests for action**, with an increasing trend in her three years of activity (2019/2023).

In respect of the current office, all in all **from the start of the mandate, and for the whole year 2024, critical reports and requests for advice or action were 30**, of which 15 women and 15 men.

In terms of a quantity, therefore we record an **increase** i comparison with the preceding years, which has grown steadily together with a greater “closeness” with the Counsellor and the chances of direct meeting have multiplied, thanks also to the presentations organized during the Cug tour, which involved the Counsellor as well.

Of these requests, 29 concerned individual instances. In one case, a group of Research Fellows (men and women) asked the counsellor for advice and assistance. They were spokespersons of a larger number of other individuals all over Italy, belonging to the same category, in order to represent an health-care related issue, and to be assisted in conveying their request to the INAF Management. The question was brought by CUG to the attention of the INAF Management.

In two cases, the facility manager asked the Counsellor for support and advice, so as to address issues with the employees. One case has been successfully resolved, whereas the other one is still ongoing.

From the viewpoint of the professional qualification of the applicants, the cases concerned 12 researchers, 10 technicians and technologists, 8 administrative staff.

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The kind of questions I addressed belongs to the following categories:

1) management's organisation of work and human resources (for example territorial mobility and professional roles, and task management);

2) Flexibility management on the part of directors/responsible people, in particular in case of maternity, health problems, employees' family care commitments and the resulting conflicts;

3) Discomfort due to relationship problems with superiors/ colleagues and difficulties encountered in the leaderships' management of interventions.

4) horizontal micro-conflictuality among colleagues and vertical conflicts with the superiors.

In all cases, I **have been listening and supporting** applicants. In 28 cases I required the activation of informal procedures; in two cases the introduction of formal procedures. Applicants have been offered support, information, suggestion and help to find a solution to the problem, or at least to face it with one's own resources. In most cases (according to an empirical experience, which is not precisely definable) applicants have also support from the psychological listening point. No confirmed cases of sexual harassment have been reported.

### **Analytical Treatment of cases**

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In conclusion, I endorse and repeat the general remarks of the previous Counsellor, based on the experience gained during her term of office, which are still highly topical:

- The Institute should pay attention to the formalization of internal procedures, in order to avoid an excessive margin of discretionality on the part of the local Directors,
- We need clear, precise and synthetical acts and rules, so as to avoid discretionary and discordant interpretations by all those individuals managing groups and resources;

- Local directors, as well as researchers responsible for a project, should pay greater attention to the management of human resources, always with a view to fairness and transparency.

#### **4) Final Considerations and future Scenarios**

- a) Planning targeted interventions in those offices, which have shown signs of structural distress.*

I suggest that pilot seminars (at first in two local structures, which may represent north/centre/south-islands) managed by the Counsellor and by the person responsible for the psychological listening point, which combine training with immersive and interactive methodologies (such as *role playing*), in order to bring out relational criticalities and test conflict management techniques and use of non-violent communication. We suggest to choose those local structures which sedi have shown strong conflicts and indicators requiring action.

- b) Contribute to the dissemination of the Ethical Code and the presentation of the Counsellor, information and training on the topics related to anti-discrimination law, work-life balance, organisational well-being, inclusive language.*

One might even plan an illustrated, agile, concise and effective “*guide to work welfare in INAF*”, including the presentation of the Counsellor, information on the Ethical Code, and rights (maternity and paternity, anti-discriminatory law, mobbing and harassment), followed by moments of presentation for information and awareness-raising of the employees and of the personnel office. This would reduce the uncertainties of application of the provisions, prevent misunderstandings, between beneficiaries and managers of the human resources and the resulting risk of latent conflict.



- c) *Collaboration to initiatives organised by INAF per implement work welfare and training, in particular the management, in view of diversity management.*

The Counsellor is willing, as a lawyer and expert in antidiscriminatory law, whenever deemed appropriate, to participate in training initiatives planned in 2025 by the office responsible for the implementation of organizational well-being. It is very important to plan – as part of the staff (and management) training proposal - the treatment of topics such labour right, equal opportunities, prevention and elimination of discriminations, health and safety in the sense of *diversity management*. An improved feeling of fairness in the organization is possible by disseminating at all levels the principles of equality, equal treatment and equal opportunities, which should shape the behaviour of the Public Administration. The Institute must be aware of the risks of direct – but mostly indirect - discrimination, which takes place when the administrative action, even unintentionally, unjustifiably causes harmful effects for groups of people with different features (because of gender, origin, age, etc.). Finally, the enhancement of individual skills merits is very important, and does not necessarily have economic implications. The management's appreciation of the contribution of single employees, especially in activities which are supported in different ways by many people with different contractual positions, increases their motivation and gratification, in a word makes people feel good. A greater attention for individual contribution, an improvement of listening skills: all these are low-cost interventions, which are in any case very effective in terms of organizational well-being.

- d) *Proposition for a pilot for the creation of a network of “organisational listening circles” in the various Institutes;*

For the realization of this project, the concept of “organizational well-being” is the starting point, in the sense that the Institute is effective and productive in relation to its primary mission, but also to its growth and development through the promotion and maintenance of an adequate degree of psychological and physical well-being of both employees and collaborators and fostering their constructive social coexistence. The sensitive topics on which one should work are the following:

- *Collaboration among colleagues.*
- *Organizational efficiency and openness to innovation.*
- *Environmental comfort and workplace safety.*
- *Levels of conflictuality and management of non-violent communication.*
- *Support from supervisors.*
- *Perception of fairness and equality*
- *Stress ed il over-exertion:*

We envisage the creation of a pilot-group, the division of employees in groups in the local structures selected for testing and training of facilitators, so as to detect any discomfort in advance in more direct and proactive ways. In order to avoid in advance that eustress (or positive stress, which shows when environmental stimulation is constructive and interesting) is transformed, because of overload, in distress (or negative stress, which provokes instead emotional and physical imbalance). In prior experiences in other Institutes, a very important positive effect was found in the multiplication of the occasions for listening to the personnel. Doubtlessly the direct participation of people to problem finding, discussion and search for solutions contributes to overcome the problems themselves, while taking individual and collective responsibility. On the one hand, there is a greater role for individuals, who have the opportunity to express their opinion in a constructive way and to get involved; on the other hand, the leadership take their own responsibility. The **circles** aim at intercepting the organizational discomfort and criticalities, which affect the well-being of workers, develop them according to a structured method and detect local improvement measures. The strengths of the initiative are: direct participation, the staff taking responsibility, testing a *problem solving* method, proposing regular moments of listening to the staff, intervention at a local level for planning shared improvement interventions and continued support to testing through coordination and monitoring on the part of the Counsellor and the CUG.

The aims of the project therefore consist in experimentation in INAF of the method of organisational listening circles, the regular monitoring of the steering committee di pilotaggio, and the contribution of trained facilitators, chosen by local Directors among the staff, who collect, through the involvement of workers and periodic meetings, concrete

criticalities emerging from daily work, study them in depth and suggest to the management hypotheses of solution and improvement measures.

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I conclude the present report hoping that I have carried out my task with passion and appropriate expertise, thus contributing to improve the organizational climate and interpersonal relationships.

I am grateful to the President and to the Director General for their trust and collaboration, as well as the CUG for the concrete sharing of objectives addressed to well-being at work for all INAF employees.

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La Consiglieria di Fiducia

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