

To the National Institute for Astrophysics



RE: Report on the 2025 activity of the INAF Counselling Desk

The Counselling Desk for Work-related Distress (Sportello di Ascolto del Disagio Lavorativo, hereafter S.A.D.L.), carries out its activities through two main areas of intervention: a) psychological counselling for cases of work-related hardship; b) dissemination and information activities on topics of interest to the service.

The specific actions carried out by the person responsible for this service, during the period in question (January 2025 - December 2025), are set out below, together with a few indications and opportunities of intervention, defined by the cases and the reports received.

Counselling Desk for Work-related Distress

The **Counselling Desk for Work-related Distress**, established and launched in the month of January 2024, is a **service aimed at offering psychological counselling to those who find themselves in uncomfortable situations in their own working environment** – i.e. situations of work-related distress, or imbalance between workloads and resources; conflict or ambiguity of professional role; relationship difficulties with colleagues/managers; personal problems affecting their work.

The activity carried out by the Counselling Desk for Work-related Distress can be considered as **psychological counseling**, constituted by the **analysis and definition of the problematic situation and individuation of the possible solutions and policies**; the activity of psychological counseling offers advice and support, while respecting the values and ability of the person to self-determination, and highlighting his/her resources, such as, for example, emotional, relational and stress-management skills.

The intervention is structured in a series of up to eight sessions, every two weeks. If necessary, a follow-up meeting is arranged three/six months after the end of the treatment.

The service is addressed to **all categories of INAF personnel** (administrative and technical staff, as well as research and technological staff) and is managed by an **outside consultant (Responsible for the**

service), **psychologist and psychotherapist**, specialized in occupational health, who guarantees **anonymity and maximum confidentiality** to those who contact her.

In the INAF website you can find a page devoted to detailed information related to the Responsible and to the service operating mode (<http://www.inaf.it/it/notizie-inaf/sedi/sede-centrale-nuova/comitato-unico-di-garanzia/sportello-dascolto>). It is possible to activate the service by sending an e-mail request to sportellodascolto@inaf.it.

In cases of direct or indirect discriminatory actions, moral or sexual harassment, violent or hostile acts, or any action violating the “Code of Ethics for the prevention of sexual and moral harassment and the protection of the dignity of INAF”, the Psychologist proposes the patient a **complementary consultation with the INAF Trust Counsellor**, a key person for the guarantee of equal treatment and fight against discriminations, as well as a mediator, with whom a fruitful and important collaboration was initiated immediately.

S.A.D.L. can be considered a **virtuous initiative on the part of INAF**, as not derived from a legal obligation, but rather an indication of the wish to support in a proactive way the psychological health of all its employees. Even though this service is not imposed by law, there are several regulatory references to the health and psychologic protection of workers which are respected by this service. You can take as example the legislative decree nr. 159/2025, nr. 81/2008 and nr. 150/2009, according to which it is **crucial to invest on individual psychological resources**, such as resilience, self-efficacy, active coping and determination, so as to be able to **cope with stress and prevent burnout, recover psychological balance in the face of tensions, guarantee long-term well-being and competitiveness**.

Psychological Consultation for individual cases

By considering the counseling activity, during the period in question (i.e. 12 months; January 2025 – December 2025) **45 requests for advice** were handled, for a total of **182 interviews**.

60% of the requests arrived from **Research personnel and Technologists (N=27)**, including short-term contract personnel (i.e. research fellows, 22%): for the remaining 40% **Technical-Administrative Staff (N=18)**. In comparison with last year, therefore, there was an increased use of the service on the part of research personnel and technologists (+69%). The S.A.D.L. clients were mostly **females** (34 women; 75%). The average age is 46 (< 40: 12 people; 40-50: 21 people; >50: 12 people). The employees who contacted S.A.D.L. are working in the **16 different branches/observatories** spread all over Italy.

While examining the reasons for accessing the SADL service, we can identify specific clusters, which are in some cases transversal to the tasks and structures where people work, characterizing situations of work-related hardship. Such groupings delineate:

- a) conditions of **fatigue** due to **work overload**: protracted situations of unbalance between work demands and available resources, associated with increased workload for organizational reasons, understaffed areas, unbalanced distribution of activities;

- b) difficulties in managing work demands because of **resources perceived as inadequate**, as for instance lack of clarity of role and organizational processes, lack of communication, deficiencies in the working environment and tools, inadequate support on the part of both colleagues and/or managers. There are still critical issues reported several times by the research staff for the lack of support from the administrative sector to activities requesting the completion of management-bureaucratic practices; moreover, a few Institutes run the risk of operating through diversified organizational procedures, thus limiting the processes of standardization among them;

- c) situations of **shortcomings, critical issues, or conflicts**, both **between employee and manager** and between colleagues of equal rank. In most cases, the collaborator perceived the lack of recognition, on the part of his/her boss, efforts and commitment made, an insufficient autonomy and delegation, an inadequate support. In a few cases, people have reported verbal and hostile behaviour – perceived as harassing – on the part of the office manager.
Leaders' difficulties in managing their collaborator/s were also reported, although to a lesser extent. I remind that the reporting of critical on the part of multiple employees of the same location may suggest the presence of an organizational issue requiring a targeted cross-sectional and group intervention.
Micro-conflict situation between colleagues have also emerged, which can manifest itself through inappropriate behaviour, such as domineering attitudes, or episodes of aggressive verbal communication, of varying intensity; to a lesser extent, cases of **moral harassment** are reported, often linked to episodes of hostile communication, and, in limited cases, episodes of (direct or indirect) **discrimination** on the part of colleagues or managers;

- d) **job dissatisfaction** and decreased motivation, associated to a perception of low involvement, valorization and/or reward, allocation of activities inadequate to the level of training and/or reported skills, poor prospects for skill and/or role growth;

- e) to a lesser extent, cases of **home-work imbalance**, difficulties reconciling care duties and workloads were reported;
- f) to a lesser extent, cases of **problems experienced in private life** (e.g. problems of physical and /or mental health) which make it difficult to meet or adapt to job demands were reported;
- g) to a lesser extent, situations in where the **workload** is much **lower** than the management skills of the employee, and there is a limited involvement in work practices and operational activities were reported. This dynamic could occur more frequently in the case of new hires;
- h) finally, **difficulties in the process of adaptation to the local operational context** on the part of **workers of foreign origin**, in particular research fellows, as regards a limited involvement by colleagues, language barriers, a potential risk of isolation and issues in finding and using INAF resources.

In many cases, it was transient, medium-intensity symptomatology, which has caused a medium or moderate impact on the quality of life. However, in a few cases, the chronicization of the imbalance between workloads and resources and/or the persistence or intensity of the adverse situation have led – over time – to the development of symptoms attributable to burnout or work maladjustment. For about one third of the cases, it was suggested the intervention of external health professionals (i.e. general practitioner, psychologist, psychotherapist, psychiatrist).

Dissemination and Information Activity on the subject of work well-being and discriminations

Since the early stages of the S.A.D.L. activity, a **fruitful collaboration** with the **INAF Equal Opportunities Committee**), the **Trusted Advisor** and the Manager of the Service for **Work Well-Being and Training** was established. This allowed us to initiate synergies on the initiatives to protect and promote well-being in the workplace.

During 2025, the CUG invited the S.A.D.L. Representative to the Meeting “Oltre i Confini” (Beyond Borders, Bologna, May 5-7, 2025) to show participants the method of intervention of this service, and illustrate its role as a tool to promote equity and inclusion inside INAF.

In order to promote the dissemination and awareness of the service for INAF employees, we realized a short **informational video** about S.A.D.L., to be distributed on the institutional Facebook webpage. In the video, we illustrate working methods, purposes and expected benefits of the service, as well as the main causes for discomfort which can be experienced in the workplace. The main goal of this initiative was to promote a greater awareness of these phenomena and encourage the use of the service.

Moreover, in the month of November 2025 we started off the project “**PersoneAlCentro - I circoli di ascolto organizzativo**” (**Focus on people – organizational listening circles**), an initiative devoted to promote organizational well-being. The project includes, over and above the involvement of CUG, Trusted Advisor and Manager of the Service for Organizational Well-being and Training needs, the participation of specific Facilitators, identified in the 4 pilot locations involved in the project. The S.A.D.L. representative trained Facilitators on November 18 and 19, 2025 on relational and communication issues, and will keep supporting the project later on, for the entire duration of the project, lasting 12 months.

Guidance and opportunities for intervention

If we create a psychologically healthy work environment, this means minimizing risks for workers’ mental health, recognize psychological well-being as an objective of equal value to other organizational goals. The guidelines of National and International Institutes (i.e. INAIL, OMS, ILO) indicate that the actions to fight work risks for psychological health can be carried out on various levels: individual, group and organizational. Furthermore, the interventions can be aimed at : a) preventing work circumstances affecting psychological health through organizational actions promoting work conditions, culture and relations; b) protecting and promoting psychological health/wellbeing on the workplace, in particular through training and measures improving awareness of the growth of emotional and psychological resources, recognition of signs of impairment and accountability in seeking support; c) help workers who have experienced forms of discomfort through psychological support.

In line with the above-mentioned indications, and on the basis of cases and reports received by the service, the opportunity is felt to illustrate the following interventions – in the area of both organization and training – aiming at:

- **strengthening leadership and employee-management skills**, so as to foster psychological safety, enhance resources and skills, promote and protect mental health, as well as the culture of recognition and positive feedback, involve the working group in decision-making processes, respect for fairness and

transparency. It is also appropriate to encourage autonomy and delegation to more experienced collaborators, while supporting and guiding junior employees. Hopefully training courses on employee-management skills will be offered at any level of leadership, to both technical-administrative and research staff.

- **promoting personal growth and the development of workers' transversal and emotional skills**, in particular as regards the **management of relational issues and conflict dynamics**, so as to provide effective tools to assertively address and prevent conflicts in the workplace. It is useful to encourage training on the management of work stress, of time, and work-life balance;
- improving the **definition of roles and responsibilities, as well as of organizational procedures** (i.e. a clear and shared definition of goals, tools and responsibilities of single activities); **improve the flows and effectiveness of communication inside each group and among groups**. It may help, in particular, to start off a **standardization of managing and administrative processes**, in order to **avoid discretionary and dissonant interpretations** on the part of all employees responsible for the management of groups resources, as well as the differentiated readings of single locations, which can create inequalities and compromise cohesion and overall effectiveness in the long term. Furthermore, a renewed call for the standardization of procedure might contribute to **enhance INAF's "collective identity"**, which in certain occasions is still scaled down by the single preceding identities (i.e. CNR);
- systemizing *onboarding* processes for new hires, and strengthening support and involvement actions targeting foreign researchers;
- **monitoring organizational well-being and psycho-social risk factors** using special detection instruments (i.e. risk assessment of work-related stress) while inviting a broad participation of all job profiles. **Investigate and intervene in areas where work well-being is compromised**;
- launching a **continuing education activity mental health and work well-being issues**, which may contribute to promote a culture of well-being; foster the sharing of **INAF values**, raising awareness on **work ethic issues**, highlighting **proactive and virtuous initiatives of**, while emphasizing best practices;
- continuing **raising awareness among all staff about the recognition and management of discriminatory behavior and harassment in the workplace**; support inclusive culture, against any

form of violence, while increasing the climate of psychological safety, so as to elicit victim's reporting as much as possible;

- **promoting managing policies for flexibility and e life-work balance.**

Finally, I specify also that, in order to build and maintain a culture promoting work well-being, a joint and integrated action of all actors involved in the process of safety and health protection is essential. S.A.D.L. should move in synergy and continuous dialogue with both CUG and Trusted Councillor, as well as with the occupational Physician in charge, the Equal Opportunities Protection bodies, Trade Unions representatives, people in charge of Prevention and Protection service, so as to maximize the work of each interlocutor.

Milano, 15.12.2025

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