

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ASTROPHYSICS

2025 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTED COUNSELOR (SYNTHETIC VERSION FOR PUBLICATION)

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1) **The Role of the INAF Trusted Counselor**

I took office as INAF Trusted Counselor on the 1st of July 2023. This role is envisaged in the “**Code of Ethics for the prevention of sexual and moral harassment for the protection of INAF workers’ dignity**”, which provides for its tasks and regulates its activity. The document, within the principles and purposes on which it is inspired, proves the Institute’s commitment to protecting the right of its employees to live in a serene environment, in which interpersonal relationships are subject to **fairness and mutual respect for freedom, equality and dignity of the person**. Tasks and functions of the Trusted Counsellor are closely related to these purposes. This figure constitutes the main operational tool for their concrete realization. The Counselor should support the Institute in pursuing this strategic commitment, for the sake of the **working wellbeing** of all people involved in INAF’s activities, so as to guarantee a working environment in which women and men respect each other’s freedom, equality and inviolability of the human person, and are protected from any action or behaviour leading to prejudice and discriminations - even indirectly - on grounds of sex, ethnicity, language, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, personal beliefs. Any prevarication, persecutory, or vexatious behaviour will be inhibited, since it may cause unease and psycho-physical discomfort in employees. Therefore, concrete actions related to the sphere of effectiveness of the Code are **direct and indirect discriminations, sexual and moral harassment, and mobbing**. The Code takes due account of the transposition rules of the EC anti-discrimination Directives 2000/43/CE (equal treatment of persons irrespective of race and origin), and 2000/78/CE (equal treatment irrespective of religion, personal beliefs, handicaps, age and sexual orientation as regards job and working conditions), which were realized respectively with Legislative Decrees nr. 215/2003 and n.

216/2003, as well as Directive 2002/73/CE (discriminations on grounds of sex) transposed by the Legislative Decree nr. 145/2005. We should also mention the “recasting” Directive 2006/54/CE (implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women with respect to work on grounds of sex), through the Legislative Decree nr. 5/2010, which has brought significant changes to the Legislative Decree nr. 198/06 (Code of Equal Opportunities). The Code finally takes into account the Legislative Decree Lgs. nr. 81/08, (changed by Lgs. Decree nr. 106/2009) also of EC origin, which establishes important preventive and prescriptive dispositions, aimed at protecting **working wellbeing**, with particular regard to the consideration of gender difference, as related to the assessment of risks and work-related stress.

We highlight the opportunity to promote periodic awareness-raising actions on staff and management on the contents of the **Code of Ethics**, thus creating opportunities for reflection on the values adopted by the Institute, and chances to get to know the figure of the Trusted Counselor.

The Counselor’s activities derive from the provisions of the Code:

- 1) **INFORMATION**: The Counselor communicates the contents of the code and gives visibility and recognizability of the guarantee figure.
- 2) **TRAINING**: the Counselor makes available, on request, her own skill and experience for the training of both staff and management on the topics handled by the Code;
- 3) **ASSISTANCE AND ADVICE**: the Counsellor provides consultancy to the staff, in particular to victims of harmful behaviour (discriminations, prevarications, persecution, harassment) and, if this is demanded, assists workers in informal and formal procedures.
- 4) **CONNECTION**: the Counselor relates with the staff, the President and the management, as well as with Unions representatives, the CUG members, and the psychologist responsible for the Counseling Desk for work-related Distress;

Methods of carrying out the service.

As mentioned above, the Code entrusts the Counselor with the primary task of **consultancy, support and assistance** of those employees who are victims of behaviours harming the dignity of women and men in the working environment. It can be a matter of discrimination, harassment and mobbing, in the sense of moral and psychological harassment with an intentionally vexatious connotation.

During her mandate, the Counsellor used a series of communication channels with staff and management, so as to guarantee a correct and confidential consultancy. First of all, a dedicated e-mail account (consigliera.fiducia@inaf.it). The Counselor can also be contacted by phone – dedicate portable phone line, also provided by the Institute (3667664628). In case of need, the Counselor has also made available her office landline in office hours (study 055 282066). In order to meet the necessary assumptions for this figure to be effective, i.e. **timely information on her role and visibility, easy contact**, the Counselor has her own page within the Institute website. Operationally, it being understood that the Counselor can be contacted by all staff informally for the first informative approach or a consultancy, it is appropriate to summarize the “coded” intervention modes, which can be activated on request.

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

- 1) On request of the injured party, the Counselor takes on the la case, so as to put an end to unwanted behaviours.
- 2) The Trusted Counselor cannot take any initiatives without the prior express consent of the person who reported such behaviours.
- 3) The trusted Counselor can:
- 4) A) give advice to the injured party on the most suitable ways to solve the case;
- 5) Talk with the alleged perpetrator of harassing behaviour;
- 6) Acquire any testimonials and get access to any administrative documents relating to the case in question;
- 7) Propose conciliatory meetings between the injured party and the author of harassment;
- 8) In the most serious cases, advice the Responsible of the facility concerned to relocate one of the persons involved, without prejudice to the requirements of the injured party;
- 9) Suggest appropriate actions to ensure a working environment with respect for the freedom and dignity of the staff involved in the case.
- 10) The informal procedure should be completed in reasonably short terms (in any case within 90 days).
- 11) The complaint may be withdrawn by the injured party at any stage of the informal procedure.

The **formal procedure** envisages a formal complaint on the part of the employee, and – if requested – with the assistance of the Counselor, addressed to the person responsible for the facility, for behavior considered as harmful. The complaint can be addressed to the President in case he/she is the perpetrator of the acts deemed harmful.

Within 5 days of the news of the fact, the complaint is forwarded to the disciplinary proceedings office, and the following procedure is structured according to the provisions of the TU nr. 165/2001 and the CCNL, with the possibility of listening to the Counselor as a person informed of the facts.

In any case, the Counselor is available, after the first written or phone contact, to a meeting, as soon as possible, with the person reporting the behavior deemed harmful, for clarifications and further investigation of the case. Indeed, we think that timely availability to **listening** is a key factor for the effectiveness of the figure. It is important to examine the reported event together with the person asking for the intervention, to outline the contours of complaints and jointly verify the actions to be taken. In such context, the event is better defined, and sometimes resized. During the direct meeting, the Counselor helps the injured party to detect **his/her own personal strategies for overcoming critical issues**, by using and enhancing one's own inner resources. In a few less serious cases, a direct, informative meeting can even exhaust the Counselor's task. More often, the Counselor supports the person who turned to her, advises on the behaviour to be followed and in the actions to be undertaken.

2) On the other hand, when it is necessary to involve **other specialists**, the counselor underlines the importance for INAF to offer a **listening desk managed by a competent psychologist/ psycho-therapist**. The service successfully supported those employees complaining for organizational issues, indirectly helping also the Counselor in handling cases. While both Counselor and Psychologist have strictly respected confidentiality while handling their different tasks, the staff has often and knowingly involved both figures. A psychological support facilitated people to better frame the issued and detect the nature of their discomfort, so as to adopt a way out of working issues with both the help of the Counselor and the Psychologist.

The experience I have gained in previous assignments highlighted an interrelationship between **personal discomfort and working environment**. This interrelationship is noticeable in INAF too, where – moreover - a real, updated, synchronous and systematic climate survey has not yet been carried out, so as to plan improvement actions. Thus, even in the face of praiseworthy actions, such as gathering data and organizing training courses in the years before I took office, I do not have elements allowing me to assess the working climate on the basis of quantitative data offering a structured reading key to discomfort. Therefore, in my first year of mandate, for a better placement of the individual cases brought to attention, I made use of an empirical evaluation, derived from the cross-referencing of information collected

in the meetings (both in-person and remote). We are waiting for a survey to be launched, which may hopefully make use of multidimensional methods, thus including **working well-being, equality, transparency, phenomena of discrimination and harassment**. As we will explain better later on, the existence of a critical working climate has been inferred from the concentration of multiple individual cases of discomfort in certain facilities, with shared indicators which suggest a common root. In my preceding experiences in other institutes, in order to solve a conflict or address a discomfort, it has been very useful to organize training events or workshops, as well as **organizational listening circles**, to face topics within a larger framework. In such contexts, it has also helped to involve experts in occupational psychology so as to learn or recover the precious dimension of “working group”, to regain motivation for collaboration between colleagues, dialogue, mutual appreciation and respect, use of an inclusive, non-violent or aggressive language, while the Management handles stress and conflict.

In this respect, in the course of 2025 I suggested planning an experimental initiative in the facilities where the manifestations of discomfort were most concentrated, so as to face the issues systematically. The project to organize **organizational listening circles**, as we will explain later on, immediately attracted interest from INAF governance and CUG, in view of giving the staff a **chance of participation and organizational listening**, either collective or individual, as an effective method to detect and diminish discomfort and **identify concrete bottom-up improvement actions**.

Finally, in parallel with such initiatives, the basis for targeted **training interventions** for organizational well-being, ethical values, protection against discrimination and mobbing, which will take place in the course of 2026, in agreement with the office for working well-being and training needs. Such initiatives, according to me, will also constitute a precious occasion to facilitate greater awareness among the recipients of information and training. Thus, the activation of forms of self-protection in a cooperative way will be more effective.

3) Summary of the activity carried out in 2025.

Handling cases.

The Counselor took office in July 2023 and inherited her predecessor a few open cases. There were also new cases, and cases rooted in preceding events (...) As regards the present, all in all from the start of my mandate and in my first year of activity (2024), reports of critical issues, requests for advice or intervention gradually **increased** with

respect to preceding years, due to a greater knowledge of the figure of the counselor and more chances of direct meeting, thanks to the presentations organized by Cug.

As far as 2025 is concerned, the cases have slightly decreased.

From the viewpoint of professional qualification of personnel asking for assistance, the cases concerned **by about 50% researchers. For the rest, variously distributed percentages are found among technicians, technologists and administrative staff.** The small downturn in the number of reports and formal requests for intervention according to an empirical assessment, is due to systematic planned interventions and improvement actions in certain particularly critical environments, which have likely held back or delayed the filing of individual claims. This provoked the creation of expectation and patient waiting for a change of climate, while hoping that cross-cutting actions might have a positive spillover on individual distress situations. It should be noted that the main improvement action of 2025, ie the organizational listening circles, will begin in 2026. Therefore, at the moment, we cannot yet evaluate whether these initiatives aiming at increasing organizational well-being will bring the hoped-for benefits even in individual critical situations.

The types of issues addressed can essentially be divided into the following categories:

- 1) Management's organization of work and human, in particular distribution of tasks, geographical mobility, and the communication difficulties which often accompany them;
- 2) the discomfort due to relational problems with superiors/ colleagues; difficulties encountered by the Management in handling interventions.
- 3) horizontal micro-conflicts with colleagues and vertical micro-conflicts with superiors, often related to communication problems and use of unwelcoming and non-inclusive language.
- 4) contract renewal and expectations of stabilization, in a critical moment of conclusion of a number of projects related to PNRR.
- 5) the feeling of unfairness and lack of transparency on the part of the Institute.

In all these cases, I carried out an **action consisting in listening and supporting** those seeking help. In two cases, the initiation of informal procedures was requested. In three cases, I had to start up formal procedures. The applicants were offered support, information, advice, and help to find a solution to the problem, or at least deal with the problem with one's own resources. In most cases (according to an empirical perception – which obviously cannot be precisely quantified because of privacy), applicants have also received support from the

listening desk for work-related distress. No cases of sexual harassment have been reported.

Analytical Treatment of the cases addressed (omissis).

In conclusion, I list below the suggestions made earlier, since they still appear relevant:

- The Institute should pay attention to formalising internal procedures, so as to avoid discretionary powers exercised by local managers;
- clear, precise and concise acts are needed, so as to avoid discretionary and conflicting interpretations on the part of all those persons responsible for managing groups and resources;
- local directors, as well as project managers, should pay greater attention to human resource management, always with a view to fairness and transparency.

5) participation to INAF events and meetings.

The Counselor was invited to take part and talk at the **Meeting “Oltre i confini (Beyond Borders)”** which took place in Bologna on May 5-7 and was devoted to inclusion, with a particular focus on disability. In this occasion, some **short informative videos** were produced at the request of the CUG, to promote awareness and accessibility of support tools, such as the Counselor, the psychologist responsible for the listening desk for work-related Distress, and the CUG itself.

4) Final Considerations and future scenarios

a) launch of the pilot project for a network of di “organizational listening circles” in various facilities;

In the course of 2025, as mentioned above, an experimental project was proposed aiming at adopting the method of **organizational listening circles** in a few facilities carrying significant indicators.

The driving force behind the project stemmed from the concept of di “organizational wellbeing”, with reference to the Institute’s effectiveness and productivity as from its primary mission, but also to its ability to grow and develop while promoting and maintaining an adequate degree of psycho-physical wellbeing of employees and

collaborators, and constructively nurture social coexistence among its employees.

The sensitive issues to be addressed are the following:

- *Collaboration among colleagues.*
- *Organizational efficiency and openness to innovation.*
- *Environmental comfort and workplace safety.*
- *Levels of conflict and management of non-violent communication.*
- *Support from superiors.*
- *Perception of fairness and transparency*
- *Stress and overwork:*

This will prevent the transformation of *eustress* (positive stress, which arises when environmental stimulation is constructive and interesting), due to overload, into *distress* (negative stress, which provokes emotional and physical imbalances). In a few preceding experiences in other Institutes, a very important positive effect has been observed when multiplying the chances for listening to the staff. Doubtless, the direct participation of the staff to a procedure including problem reporting, discussion and research of solutions may contribute to overcome problems, in view of taking both individual and collective responsibility. On the one hand, there is a greater prominence for individuals, who have the opportunity to express their opinion in a proactive way, and put themselves out there. On the other hand, the Institute takes responsibility. The **circles** aim at identifying discomfort and critical issues, which affect working wellbeing, and approach them using a structured method for detecting local interventions for improvement. The strength of the initiative consists of direct participation and assumption of responsibility by the staff, in testing a *problem solving* methodology, proposing moments of continuous and structured listening, extensive intervention at the local level, planning shared interventions for improvement and continuous support for experimentation through its coordination and monitoring by both the da Counsellor and the CUG.

The goals of the project therefore consist in testing - within INAF - the **method of organizational listening circles**, which with the constant monitoring of the steering committee and the contribution of facilitators, chosen by the Directors among the staff and specially trained, collect, through an employee engagement process and regular, structured listening sessions, the concrete critical issues emerging from daily work. These issues are explored in depth, and suggest possible solutions and improvement to the management.

The project called “ **PersoneAlCentro**”(People at the Centre) has been included in the **actions envisaged by PAPn2025-2027 within the INAF PIAO, approved by the INAF Board with the resolution of January 29, 2025.**

A steering group has been set up, which includes the trusted Counselor, the CUG president and vice-president, the manager responsible for wellbeing and training, the psychologist responsible for the listening desk for work-related distress. The project was approved by both President and Director General. The Board has been informed of this.

The steering group contacted the directors of the INAF Facilities in **Bologna, Firenze, Roma OAR and Catania**, who made themselves available to take part in this experimentation, and have selected the names of two facilitators (representing the two genders) for each facility. On November 18 and 19 November 2025 in Roma, at the Headquarters, a 8-hour training course was offered to facilitators, together with the steering group. Within the end of 2015, the directors have asked the personnel of 4 facilities the availability to take part, as member of the future local circle and activated a channel for collecting applications in view of an effective start of activities, foreseen starting from January 2026.

- b) *participation in the design and implementation of a training course on “Organizational Wellbeing and Ethical Values”, which will take place in the course of 2026.*

I acted as intermediary for the design of a training course for the INAF staff, proposed by “*Fondazione Rigel ETS*”. This *Fondazione* is a non-profit organization, whose mission is to promote, support and realize progetti aimed at spreading the culture of respect, inclusiveness and equal opportunities, value of diversity, prevention and fight against any form of discrimination, health and work safety, the public value of organizational wellbeing, ethics and economic, social and environmental sustainability. Under a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ministers of Public Administration and Enterprises, the CUG National Network, The *Fondazione Rigel* committed to promoting training in the Public Administration. Therefore, the project in question was agreed with INAF and successfully nominated in response to the Call for Application - PerFormaPA. This is an asynchronous course, which can be followed profitably in parallel with the activities of the listening circles, with a view to synergy and mutual enhancement.

- c) *Planning targeted interventions in those facilities which have shown signs of structural distress.*

We propose to realize pilot seminar initiatives - managed both by the Counselor and the Psychologist responsible for the listening desk for work-related distress – combining training and immersive and interactive participation methods (such as *role playing*), so as to bring out the critical issues in relationships and test practical techniques of conflict management and use of non-violent communication. We suggest that the choice includes facilities or working environments which have shown a significant conflict and signs demanding a structural intervention. Even this action may integrate and support the initiative of the circles, or a continuation, as an improvement measure.

- d) *Contribution to the spreading of the Code of Ethics and a better knowledge of the figure of the Counselor; contribution to disseminating the Code of Ethics, information, training on topics related to anti-discrimination law, conciliazione vita-lavoro, al benessere organizzativo, al linguaggio inclusivo.*

As it already happened in the past, one could even think of realizing an illustrated, synthetic and effective “*Guide to working wellbeing in INAF*”, which includes the presentation of the Counselor, as well as information on the Code of Ethics and in terms of rights (maternity and paternity, anti-discrimination law, mobbing and harassment), followed by moments of seminar presentation for information and awareness-raising purposes towards employees and personnel department. This would allow to diminish uncertainties in applying the provisions, prevent misunderstandings, among beneficiaries and human resource managers, with the resulting risk of latent conflict.

- e) *Ongoing collaboration to initiatives organized by INAF to implement working wellbeing and training, in particular of the management, in view of diversity management.*

More in general, the Counselor is available, as a legal expert in anti-discrimination law, where deemed useful, to take part in future training initiatives on the part of the office responsible for implementing organizational wellbeing. It is crucial to include in the training proposal for staff and management, topics such as labour rights, equal opportunities, prevention and removal of discriminations, health and safety for *diversity management*. An improved perception of fairness in the organization can be achieved by disseminating at any level the

principles of equality, equal treatment and equal opportunities, which must necessarily characterize the Public Administration. INAF will always have to keep in mind the risks of direct and indirect discrimination in its daily actions. Indeed, indirect discrimination occurs when the administrative action, even unintentionally, unjustifiably produces prejudicial effects for certain categories of people, characterized by gender, origin, age, ecc.). Finally, the enhancement of individual skills and merit is very important and does not necessarily imply economic issues. The appreciation from the managers of the contribution of each person, especially in activities requiring work from many people with different job contract, increases motivation, and thence wellbeing. A greater attention for individual contribution, and a higher listening skill have low costs, but a greater effectiveness upon organizational wellbeing.

I conclude this report with the hope that I have properly carried out my task, thus giving my contribution to improve organizational climate and interpersonal relationships.

I am grateful to both President and Director General for their trust in me, as well as to CUG for sharing the goals of working wellbegin of all INAF employees. I would also like to thank the Psychologist responsible for the listening Desk for Work-related Distress and the Manager of the office for organizational wellbeing and training needs for their fruitful collaboration.

Firenze-Roma, 29 January 2026

La Consigliera di Fiducia (Trusted Counselor)

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