



Reference:

Standing Instructions Chapter 12 and Chapter 13

SERVICE NOTE No. 7/2026

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS POLICY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS FINANCED THROUGH VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

This Service Note announces the introduction of the Policy on Environmental and Social Safeguards for the Implementation of Projects financed through Voluntary Contributions (ESSP) for the WMO Secretariat.

The ESSP defines the principles and mandatory requirements for identifying, assessing, treating and monitoring environmental and social risks and impacts in WMO projects. The policy ensures that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts are avoided, minimized, mitigated and managed across WMO projects. It strengthens the alignment of WMO project activities with other United Nations entities and partners in addressing environmental and social efforts.

This policy applies to all the projects funded by voluntary contributions or implemented by WMO, to all WMO staff involved in projects, and to consultants as well as implementing partners and vendors involved in the implementation of projects. The policy is operationalized through the ESSP Manual.

The Policy introduces:

- WMO commitments and articulates the objectives, principles and standards that guide its actions with regard to environmental and social safeguards. It provides the basis for organizational accountability in project implementation.
- The eight environmental and social safeguards, as well as the guiding principle applicable to WMO projects.
- The identification, assessment, treatment, monitoring and reporting of environmental and social risks and impacts throughout the project lifecycle – development, implementation and closure.

The Project Development and Management Unit (PDMU), within the Division of Development Partnerships and Program Delivery (DPPD) is responsible for the operationalization of the policy.

The ESSP is attached as an annex to the present Service Note. Standing Instructions aligned with this Policy will be updated in due course.

For projects that are ongoing or that are initiated during Q2 2026, the ESSP applies to the extent reasonably practicable. The Head of PDMU shall conduct an environmental and social policy screening of each project within six months of entry into force of these provisions, and undertake any proportionate or corrective measures that take into account project stage, remaining duration and risk related to the activities.

This Service Note enters into force on the date of its approval.

**Environmental and Social Safeguards Policy (ESSP) for the implementation of
Projects financed through Voluntary Contributions**

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Purpose

1.1 This Policy establishes the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Environmental and Social Safeguards policy (hereinafter referred to as ESSP) applicable to projects funded by Voluntary Contributions (hereinafter referred to as projects). The ESSP defines the principles and mandatory requirements for identifying, assessing, treating and monitoring environmental and social risks and impacts in WMO projects.

1.2 The ESSP is an integral part of the WMO Environmental and Social Management System. It is aligned with cross-cutting policies, as well as rules and regulations, in particular the Standing Instructions on Agreements with external entities (Chapter 12), the Management of Projects Funded by Voluntary Contributions (Chapter 13) and Risk Management (Chapter 14), as well as the WMO General Conditions of Contract for the Provision of Goods and Services, the United Nations Supplier Code of Conduct and the WMO Staff Rules and Regulations.

1.3 The policy ensures that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts are considered, minimized, mitigated and, where possible, avoided across WMO projects. the alignment of WMO project activities with other United Nations entities and partners in addressing the environmental and social consequences of our efforts.

1.4 The ESSP enhances the consistency, transparency and accountability of WMO decision-making and actions in projects, improves project performance, and strengthens the attainment of sustainable development outcomes for WMO Members.

1.5 The ESSP Manual complements the provisions outlined in this policy.

Scope of application

2.1 This policy applies to all WMO projects financed or implemented by WMO using voluntary contributions, regardless of the delivery modality.

2.2 The ESSP covers the identification, assessment, treatment, monitoring and reporting of environmental and social risks and impacts throughout the project lifecycle – development, implementation and closure.

2.3 This policy aims to be: effective; equitable; and proportionate to the nature, scale and environmental and social risk profile of each project. Environmental and social safeguard requirements are addressed through screening, assessment and management of environmental and social risks associated with project activities.

2.4 This policy applies to all WMO staff, consultants, implementing partners and vendors involved in the implementation of projects.

Roles and responsibilities

3.1 The process owner for the Environmental and Social Management System for projects is Head/Project Development and Management Unit (PDMU).

3.2 Project executives shall ensure integration of ESSP regulations in all projects.

3.3 The Project Management Board oversees the implementation of the ESSP in the WMO project portfolio.

3.4 Project managers, in collaboration with environmental & social (E&S) focal points and Head/PDMU, shall ensure compliance with ESSP requirements.

3.5 Implementing partners shall adhere to standards no less stringent than this policy.

Definitions

4.1 "Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts" shall mean potential adverse or beneficial effects on individuals, communities and the environment.

4.2 "Do No Harm" shall mean the avoidance or minimization of environmental and social harm, which is any adverse effect on the quality or physical characteristic of the environment that is conducive to ecological health, public amenity or safety.

4.3 "Stakeholders" refers to individuals or groups who are affected or are likely to be affected by the project activity, or those who may have an interest in the project activities.

Objectives and guiding principles

5.1 This policy sets out WMO commitments and articulates the objectives, principles and standards that guide its actions. It provides the basis for organizational accountability in project implementation.

5.2 The objectives of the ESSP are:

- i. Support the identification, preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of WMO projects that comply with sound environmental and social practices.
- ii. Assess the potential environmental and social risks and impacts that projects may generate on people, communities and environment.
- iii. Identify measures, specific for each project, to avoid, minimize and mitigate environmental and social impacts, and ensure the implementation of such measures.
- iv. Promote transparency, predictability and accountability in environmental and social impact classification, assessment and management across all WMO projects.
- v. Promote due-diligence and cooperation with financing and implementing partners in environmental and social protection.

5.3 In implementing this policy, WMO applies the following project guiding principles:

- i. In alignment with the WMO Staff Rules and Regulations, WMO staff members involved in projects, as well as consultants, implementing partners and vendors have a responsibility to carry out duties in a resource efficient way, preventing and minimizing environmental harm. In all activities, the following is to be considered:
 - the overall impact of the nature of activities on the natural environment;
 - nature of the harm or potential harm;
 - sensitivity of the natural environment in which the project is operating;
 - best practice;
 - appropriateness of possible measures preventing or minimizing environmental harm.
- ii. Apply the precautionary principle and mitigation hierarchy, aiming at:
 - avoiding adverse risks and impacts on people and the environment;
 - where avoidance is not possible, minimizing adverse risks and impacts through appropriate mitigation and management measures;
 - mitigating any residual risks and impacts;

- If mitigation is not possible, discontinuing implementation of the project.
- iii. Uphold and respect the principles set out in the United Nations Charter, including faith in fundamental **human rights**, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women. Respect all cultures; and do not discriminate against any individual or group of individuals or otherwise abuse the power and authority vested in them.
- iv. Promote **gender equality and the empowerment of women** through project design and ensure that project activities do not discriminate against women or girls or reinforce gender-based discrimination and/or inequalities, in alignment with the WMO gender policy.
- v. Give due **consideration to vulnerable and marginalized populations, groups and individuals, local communities, indigenous people**, and other marginalized groups of people and individuals who are affected or potentially affected by WMO projects.
- vi. Promote meaningful, effective and informed **participation of stakeholders**, and ensure transparency and due consideration of concerns raised by affected or potentially affected parties throughout the project lifecycle.
- vii. Promote **sustainability and resilience** in and through all project activities.
- viii. Ensure **accountability and transparency** towards WMO Members and partners through the provision of access to information and grievance mechanisms (as indicated in Annex A), in line with WMO regulations on the disclosure of information.

Environmental and social safeguards & application

Safeguards

6.1 The E&S safeguards applicable to WMO projects include compliance with national laws, regulations and standards relating to environmental and social protection in the countries where a project has activities. WMO applies the following environmental and social standards, aligned with good practices of other United Nations organizations and international development banks.

The safeguards are further defined and described in the ESSP Manual.

1. Reduce Climate Risks and Strengthen Disaster Resilience
2. Safeguard Community Health, Safety and Security
3. Protect Biodiversity, Restore Ecosystems and Sustainably Manage Natural Resources
4. Prevent Pollution and Improve Resource Efficiency
5. Protect and Preserve Cultural Heritage
6. Avoid, Minimize, and Mitigate Displacement and Resettlement Impacts
7. Respect, Include, and Protect Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Livelihoods
8. Ensure Fair Labor Practices and Safe Working Conditions

Application

6.2 Social and environmental opportunities and risks are addressed in an integrated manner, recognizing the interrelatedness of social and environmental issues. Opportunities to strengthen social and environmental sustainability are identified at the earliest stage of project design, realized through implementation and tracked through monitoring and evaluation.

6.3 The WMO social and environmental management system seeks to improve environmental and social outcomes of all WMO projects. It is applied in the full project lifecycle and includes the following elements, where applicable: (a) definition of risk category of a project; (b) assessment and management of social and environmental risks and impacts; (c) stakeholder

engagement and response mechanisms; (d) access to information; and (e) monitoring, reporting and compliance. The WMO mechanism for grievances with regards to E&S complaints relating to projects implemented by the WMO is applicable throughout the whole project lifecycle.

6.4 Definition of risk category: Projects are screened and categorized by risk level through the E&S focal point to determine the appropriate level of safeguard measures, including the documentation required. Detailed implementation requirements and procedures are set out in the ESSP Manual¹.

6.5 Assessment and management: Depending on the project risk category, and appropriate to the nature scale and risk profile of the project, the development of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) and Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMP), along with other documentation is required to support compliance with the requirements of this policy.

6.6 Stakeholder engagement: WMO will promote meaningful and effective engagement with stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle, in particular with those stakeholders who may be directly or indirectly affected by the implemented activities.

6.7 Access to information: WMO ensures that project stakeholders have timely access to relevant and appropriate information on the project as well as potential associated environmental and social risks and impacts.

6.8 WMO Environmental and Social Grievance Mechanism Framework: Regulations are outlined in the WMO Environmental and Social Grievance Mechanism Framework (Annex A). Stakeholders who may be adversely affected by a WMO project can communicate their complaints about the E&S performance of the project/activity through various entry points. Stakeholders are informed about available grievance redress mechanisms as part of the stakeholder engagement process.

6.9 Monitoring, reporting and compliance: Processes to oversee E&S risk management measures in alignment with this policy are detailed in the Manual. With regards to external entities, the E&S performance capacity and reputation is assessed through WMO policy and regulations on Partner Due Diligence. Where appropriate, monitoring shall engage stakeholders and third parties such as affected communities.

Environmental and social management system, manual and tools

7.1 The WMO Environmental and Social Safeguard Management System, applicable to projects, has the following components: this Policy, the Manual, and related cross-cutting Standing Instructions and tools. Together, these instruments set out the requirements, roles, responsibilities, processes and supporting templates for the management of E&S risks and impacts across the project lifecycle.

7.2 WMO ensures continuous training opportunities and awareness-raising on environmental best practices and procedures for relevant WMO staff involved in projects.

¹ Category A: Activities with potential significant adverse environmental and/or social risks and impacts that, individually or cumulatively, are diverse, irreversible or unprecedented. Category B: Activities with potential limited adverse environmental and/or social risks and impacts that, individually or cumulatively, are few, generally site-specific, largely reversible and readily addressed through mitigation measures. Category C: Activities with minimal or no adverse environmental and/or social risks and/or impacts.

Transitional arrangements

8.1 For projects that are ongoing, or that are initiated during Q2 2026, the ESSP applies to the extent reasonably practicable. The Head of PDMU shall conduct an E&S policy screening of each project within six months of entry into force of these provisions, and undertake any proportionate or corrective measures that take into account project stage, remaining duration and risk related to the activities.

Annex A: WMO Environmental and Social Grievance Mechanism Framework

Environmental and Social Grievance Mechanism Framework

1. Purpose

This policy establishes a process for receiving, reviewing and resolving environmental and social (E&S) complaints and inquiries related to project activities implemented by WMO. It aims to ensure accountability to all stakeholders, promote compliance with the WMO environmental and social safeguard standards, and support institutional learning from complaints received.

The policy does not create any right to financial compensation and does not establish any legal liability on the part of WMO.

2. Scope

This policy applies to E&S complaints relating to projects that are implemented by WMO under its Environmental and Social Safeguards Policy (ESSP). It covers complaints about potential non-compliance with the ESSP.

Time limit: A complaint will not be processed if it is submitted more than two (2) years after (a) the date on which the complainant became aware of the adverse impacts, or (b) the closure of the relevant WMO project, whichever is later.

Exclusions: This policy does not cover: (a) employment disputes, procurement complaints or allegations of fraud or corruption (handled through existing WMO channels); (b) complaints that are malicious, frivolous or vexatious or filed to gain competitive advantage; (c) complaints already concluded under this policy, unless significant new evidence is provided; or (d) complaints solely regarding the adequacy of the WMO ESSP itself.

It further does not cover complaints regarding Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment ("SEAH"), which are governed by the WMO SEAH Policy and must be referred to the appropriate WMO oversight authority.

3. Principles

This grievance mechanism is guided by the following principles, which are consistent with the effectiveness criteria for non-judicial grievance mechanisms set out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Principle 31):

Accessibility: Complaints can be submitted in writing by any reasonable means, including email, web form, post or audio/video recording. The mechanism is accessible regardless of language, literacy or location.

Fairness: All parties will be heard and decisions will be based on available facts. Complainants and project teams will have equitable opportunity to present information.

Transparency: Key procedural steps and outcomes will be disclosed publicly, consistent with data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Timely resolution: WMO commits to addressing grievances promptly, with specific timelines for different stages of the grievance process. This includes acknowledgment, investigation and resolution.

Confidentiality: The identity of complainants will be treated confidentially, subject to applicable rules. The mechanism guarantees confidentiality for complainants and protects them from retaliation. WMO provides a safe environment for individuals to raise concerns without fear of adverse consequences.

Non-retaliation: No adverse action will be taken against any person for raising a good-faith complaint. WMO will take credible allegations of retaliation seriously and respond appropriately.

No compensation: This mechanism is intended to facilitate dialogue, corrective action and improved practices. It does not provide for financial compensation or settlement payments.

Institutional learning: Complaints and their outcomes will inform improvements to the WMO ESSP, procedures and project management practices.

4. Who may file a complaint

Any individual, community or organization that believes it is, or may be, adversely affected by the environmental or social impacts of a WMO-financed or WMO-implemented project may submit a complaint.

Complaints may also be submitted by a representative, acting on behalf of affected persons, provided the representative can demonstrate authorization to act on their behalf.

If, during engagement with complainants, other similarly affected persons wish to join the complaint and the original complainant has no objection, they may be added. Otherwise, they may file a separate complaint.

In exceptional cases, where credible information from a reliable source indicates that a WMO project is causing significant direct harm to people or the environment, WMO may initiate a review on its own initiative, even in the absence of a formal complaint.

5. How to file a complaint

Complaints may be submitted by:

- **Email:** oversight@wmo.int
- **Telephone:** +41 22 730 84 72
- **Web form:** [Direct communication line webpage](#)
- **Post:**
Director, Internal Oversight Office,
WMO, 7 bis, avenue de la Paix,

Case postale 2300, CH-1211 Geneva,
Switzerland

The complaint may be filed in any language spoken by the complainant. Communications thereafter will be conducted in English or French, with translation assistance provided where appropriate.

A complaint should include, where possible:

- The complainant's name and contact details;
- The name and location of the WMO project concerned;
- A description of the E&S harm caused or expected to be caused and how it relates to project activities;
- Any allegations of retaliation based on a previous complaint (if applicable);
- Any supporting information (e.g. documents, photographs, media reports);
- Any steps already taken to resolve the issue (e.g. contact with project officials or other grievance channels).

Anonymous complaints will be accepted but may limit the ability to investigate or communicate findings.

6. Grievance process

Step 1: Receipt and acknowledgment

Upon receipt, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office will log the complaint in a confidential grievance register and send a written acknowledgment to the complainant, ordinarily within five working days. The acknowledgment will include an explanation of the next steps and the expected timeline.

Step 2: Eligibility review

The Director of the Internal Oversight Office will assess whether the complaint falls within the scope of this policy, ordinarily within 15 working days. A complaint is eligible if:

- it relates to a project implemented by WMO;
- it raises issues connected to the WMO ESSP;
- a link is indicated between the WMO project and the subject of the complaint;
- there are no grounds for exclusion (see Section 2).

During eligibility review, the complainant may be given an opportunity to provide additional information. If the complaint is ineligible, the complainant will be informed in writing with reasons and, where appropriate, be directed to a more suitable channel.

An eligibility determination is procedural in nature. It does not represent a judgement on the merits of the complaint.

Step 3: Initial assessment

For eligible complaints, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office will, ordinarily within 30 working days, engage with the complainant and relevant stakeholders to:

- understand the issues raised;
- provide information about problem-solving and compliance review options;
- ascertain the approach which the complainant would like to pursue;
- ensure that the complainant can make an informed decision.

Step 4: Problem-solving and/or compliance review

(a) **Problem-solving** is a voluntary and participatory process aimed at assisting the parties in finding a mutually acceptable solution. It does not seek to determine fault. Methods may include consultative dialogue, information-sharing, joint fact-finding or mediation by a neutral third party. Problem-solving requires the agreement of all parties and should ordinarily be completed within one year. If no progress is possible, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office may terminate the process after consulting the parties. If problem-solving does not result in an agreement, or only partially resolves the complaint, the outstanding matters may be referred to compliance review at the complainant's request.

(b) **Compliance review** examines whether a WMO project has complied with the ESSP and whether any non-compliance has caused or may cause adverse impacts. The review involves gathering information from the complainant, WMO project team, WMO Member and other relevant stakeholders. The Director of the Internal Oversight Office will request a management response within 21 working days, then prepare a draft report. The draft will be shared with the complainant and management for comments within 21 working days before finalization. A compliance review should ordinarily be completed within one year.

The process allows flexibility to move between problem-solving and compliance review as appropriate.

Step 5: Findings and corrective action

Following the review, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office will communicate a written response to the complainant setting out:

- the findings of the review;
- any non-financial corrective actions to be taken;
- recommendations for improving E&S performance;
- lessons learned for WMO policies or procedures, where relevant.

Non-financial remedial actions may include, as appropriate:

- Modifications to project design, implementation or monitoring arrangements to bring the project into compliance with the ESSP;
- Development or revision of the ESSP and related procedures based on lessons learned;
- Enhanced stakeholder engagement, consultation or disclosure measures;
- Additional environmental or social assessments or audits;
- Capacity-building or training for WMO project staff;
- Formal acknowledgment of findings and a commitment to prevent recurrence.

Where problem-solving produces an agreement, its terms will be recorded in writing. Agreements must not violate applicable WMO policies or the domestic or international legal obligations of the parties.

The response will not include offers of financial compensation or settlement.

Step 6: Escalation

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and provides written reasons, the matter may be referred to the WMO Project Management Board for further consideration.

Any Board member who has had direct responsibility for, or oversight of, the project that is the subject of the complaint shall recuse themselves from the Board's consideration of that matter. The Board's decision will be final within this grievance process. Where the Board's decision requires a remedial action plan, WMO Executive Management will develop a draft plan within 60 working days, in consultation with the complainant through the Director of the Internal Oversight Office.

Note: This internal process does not prevent any party from pursuing remedies available under applicable law.

7. Monitoring

Where a review results in agreed corrective actions or a problem-solving agreement, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office will monitor the implementation of those measures and report on their progress. Monitoring will continue until the agreed actions are satisfactorily completed, subject to a maximum period of three years unless extended.

Monitoring methods may include consultations with the complainant and project team, review of documentation, expert assessments and, where warranted, site visits. Annual monitoring reports will be prepared and made available to the parties for comments before finalization.

If at any point during the processing of a complaint, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office considers that irreversible environmental harm² may result from continued project implementation, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office may recommend to WMO Executive Management the suspension of project activities or disbursements pending the outcome of the review.

8. Protecting complainants

WMO is committed to protecting complainants from threats and retaliation. Complainants' identities will not be disclosed without their prior consent. Where a complaint is submitted through a representative, that representative must clarify their authority to act.

As part of the grievance process, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office will identify and monitor potential risks of retaliation, take preventive action to reduce those risks, and investigate and determine appropriate responses if retaliation occurs. Allegations of

² Environmental harm is any adverse effect on the quality or physical characteristic of the environment that is conducive to ecological health, public amenity or safety.

threats or reprisals connected to a complaint under this policy may themselves be the subject of a complaint.

9. Indicative timelines

The following timelines are indicative and reflect the WMO intention to handle complaints promptly. They are not binding procedural obligations, and WMO will use reasonable efforts to adhere to them.

Stage	Indicative time frame
Acknowledgment of receipt	5 working days
Eligibility determination	15 working days
Initial assessment	30 working days
Problem-solving process	Up to 1 year
Compliance review	Up to 1 year
Written response / findings	10 working days after review
Escalation to Board (if applicable)	30 working days
Remedial action plan (if applicable)	60 working days

Complex complaints may require additional time. In such cases, the complainant will be informed of the expected timeline.

10. Record-keeping and reporting

The Director of the Internal Oversight Office will maintain a confidential register of all complaints received, including their status and outcome. Key procedural steps and outcomes will be published on the WMO website in a suitably redacted form, consistent with data protection and any confidentiality agreements.

Summary statistics will be reported annually in a WMO report submitted to the Executive Council in aggregated and anonymized form. Individual complaint records will be retained for 10 years in accordance with Schedule No. LE04 of the WMO Record Management Policy and Retention Schedule.

All publicly disclosed reports relating to a complaint will be translated into the local language of the complainant where practicable.

11. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Designation	Responsibility
Director Internal Oversight Office (IOO)	IOO to be designated by the Secretary-General to retain responsibility for the implementation of the grievance mechanism	Receives, logs and acknowledges complaints; manages the eligibility review; oversees the problem-solving and compliance review process; communicates responses; monitors the implementation of corrective actions; refers matters for escalation where necessary; publishes outcomes.
Project Management Board	Standing body	Considers escalated complaints; issues final decisions within this process; approves corrective action plans where required.
Project Managers	Relevant project staff	Cooperate fully with the review process; provide access to relevant information and staff; implement agreed corrective actions.
E&S focal points	Relevant project staff	Support project managers implementing agreed corrective actions.
Project executives		Ensure implementation of agreed corrective actions.

12. Institutional learning

Based on the findings of complaint reviews, the Director of the Internal Oversight Office will advise WMO Executive Management on systemic issues affecting E&S performance, including recommendations for changes to policies, procedures, guidance and project management practices.

Learning activities may include direct communication with WMO management, training sessions for project staff, development of guidance materials and exchange on grievance mechanisms within the United Nations common system.

13. Limitations and disclaimers

This policy is an internal administrative mechanism. It does not:

- create any legal right, entitlement or cause of action against WMO;
- provide for financial compensation, settlement payments or damages of any kind;
- constitute an admission of liability, fault or responsibility by WMO in respect of any project;

- override or limit WMO privileges and immunities under [Article 27](#) of the WMO Convention, or the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialised Agencies or any other applicable international legal instrument;
- prevent any party from pursuing remedies available under applicable national or international law.

WMO reserves the right to amend or discontinue this policy at any time.