



Distribution: A

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## Guidelines for the Use of E-mail

### Purpose and Definitions

1. The introduction of E-mail at Headquarters and in the field has raised the urgent question of how best to safeguard the ILO's institutional memory and ensure that all official correspondence and records are maintained in an easily retrievable form for any member of the staff requiring access to them in the course of his/her official business. As it may not be apparent that existing administrative procedures and rules automatically apply to an electronic communication system, there is a very real danger of the Office losing its ability to filter, channel, record and control messages of a formal nature. Because it is quick, effective and inexpensive, E-mail is likely to become one of the main means of communication both within the ILO and with external contacts. Hence, with the new information environment, a coherent policy is being established and procedures laid down which are designed to meet the requirements of the ILO.

2. Pending the introduction of a new Office-wide document management and filing/retrieval system and the establishment of related procedures, care must be taken to ensure that office E-mail correspondence be treated in an analogous way to other written communications, and thus will be subject to the same rules with regard to contents, approval, confidentiality, preservation and access<sup>(1)</sup>. In this respect, it is important that a clear distinction be made among the three categories of E-mail communications:

A) **official communications**: like minutes, memoranda, facsimiles or letters on ILO paper, they refer to written communications made in an official capacity.

B) **informal communications**: they may be considered as having the same status as a telephone conversation, routing slips<sup>(2)</sup> or notes which are of an informal nature and do not have the status of an official communication; they are used as a working tool in routine office activities and do not formally commit the ILO or the unit concerned.

C) **personal communications**: they are understood to be messages unrelated to the performance of official duties; they are permitted as a convenience to staff, subject to certain conditions.

3. **Note** : If, by error, no category is indicated for the message, it will be assumed to have *informal* status.

### General Guidelines

4. Staff members should be familiar with the ILO procedures for E-mail and are required to observe the guidelines below. It should be recalled that communications involve not only the responsibility of the individual official preparing, signing or vising them, but also that of the Office and the Director-General<sup>(3)</sup>.

5. E-mail should be checked at least twice a day, while you are in the office. [ITCOM](#) has implemented a solution to access Geneva's [GroupWise](#) E-mail via the Internet

Web when you are away from the office. If the Windows PC in use is capable of running several programs at the same time, it is recommended to keep the [GroupWise](#) 'In Box' open at all times (see however para. 7.v below).

6. It is impossible to guarantee the privacy, security and integrity of E-mail transmitted via the Internet; no messages should be sent which, if disclosed, could be harmful to the ILO. In general, confidential messages should not be sent by E-mail. However, when confidential information has to be sent by E-mail, this should be contained in a password-locked word-processing attachment; the password should be communicated by telephone to the recipient. However, it must be noted that the best protection is provided by encryption mechanisms, which are not yet in use at the ILO.

7. In today's information-centric environment, a **password** is the vital and only key to protect and access one's financial and professional records. Just as one safeguards one's bank account personal identification code, the same care should be exercised with the network logon password. It is assumed that an E-mail message signed **userx@ilo.org** was indeed sent by the ILO official with the network username (id) of 'userx'. Similarly, it is assumed that an E-mail message addressed to **userx@ilo.org** will be read by that official or authorized proxy. The following common sense rules should be followed:

i) Do not give your password to anyone, even your secretary or close associate. If you expect to be absent and would like someone to check your E-mail, use the proxy feature of [GroupWise](#) instead of giving out your password.

ii) Change your password at least once every two months, or more often if you suspect a problem.

iii) When choosing a password, do not use your spouse's, children's, or pet's name; similarly, avoid any recognizable numbers such as your birthday or vehicle license plate. A well chosen password will consist of an unrecognizable combination of letters and numbers with a minimum length of six characters.

iv) If you forget your password, no one can 'bring it back'. The network administrator can only remove your old forgotten password to allow you to log on with a new one.

v) Do not leave your PC unattended during the day unless you have enabled a password-protected screen saver. Logoff from the network when you leave for the day.

8. Not all E-mail programs are able to decode font changes, subscripts, superscripts, accents, special characters (for instance the French or Portuguese cedilla (ç) or the Spanish opening question mark (¿)). Therefore, unless it is known in advance that the recipient's E-mail software is able to decode them (as is the case with [GroupWise](#) users), their use should be avoided in the body of the E-mail message. When sending a message to a correspondent whose E-mail cannot decode special formats and characters, messages can be conveyed as word-processed attachments. It must be noted that attachment viewers are not suitable for printing files containing special formats or characters; the attachment must be saved on disk and opened with a word processing package.

9. Questions about the technical aspects of E-mail should be addressed to the HelpDesk ([ITCOM](#)).

## **SPECIFIC GUIDELINES**

### **10. Official communications**

i) Sending an official E-mail: Indicate<sup>(4)</sup> in the *subject* field the word "OFFICIAL", followed by the file reference(s) and an identifying word or short phrase. The text of the message should end with the full name and organizational unit of the sender, and if appropriate the full address, telephone and fax numbers<sup>1</sup>.

ii) Official communications should be drafted with normal courtesies appropriate for the nature of the message and the intended recipient, as is the case with traditional paper correspondence<sup>(5)</sup>. All messages should conform to the minimum courtesy and drafting care, even if the same communication by telephone would have been given in an informal fashion. Messages are to be structured, using both upper and lower case letters and the spell-check applied to the message and to the attachment (see para. 8 above).

iii) A mail receipt should be requested to ensure the item was delivered and opened (*Send, Send Options, Return Notification, When Opened, Mail Receipt*); it must be noted that, since not all E-mail systems understand this receipt option, they may not generate the requested receipt automatically.

iv) Incoming E-mail should be replied to quickly or given a response, indicating that the message is pending and will be answered by a specific date. When the E-mail cannot be dealt with by the recipient it should be copied or forwarded to those officials/units directly involved with the substance of the message. When forwarding a message to someone else, it should be borne in mind that unnecessary copying/forwarding wastes staff time and computer disk space and should be avoided. As with paper carbon copies (for information), action should **not** be expected to be taken on messages copied to third parties except if otherwise requested.

v) E-mail and E-mail attachments should **not** be used to transport official correspondence, including documents of a legal, financial, personal or contractual nature, requiring holographic (handwritten) **signature** or which are subject to specific formalities stipulated in prevailing Office rules and regulations. However, E-mail may be used to provide advance notice of such communications, but only **original signed hard copies** are formally / officially recognized documents, which should be forwarded by mail or pouch; the recipient should be informed accordingly.

vi) It is the responsibility of both the sender and the recipient to ensure that **all official E-mail messages are printed out and placed on the relevant Registry file(s)**. It is recalled that paper copies of communications are placed on Registry files in chronological order; outside correspondence (such as letters, memoranda, faxes and telexes) on the right side of the file, while in-house messages (such as minute sheets) are filed on the left<sup>2</sup>.

vii) Official E-mail should be stored (e.g. archived in WP files, GroupWise folders) in a safe and easily retrievable form.

## 11. Informal communications

i) Sending an informal E-mail: Indicate in the subject field the word "INFORMAL" followed by an identifying word or short phrase. When sending messages outside the Office, the name of the sender and organizational unit should appear. The assignment of a file reference in the *Subject* field is advisable when the message's contents are relevant for the comprehension or better understanding of the Registry file concerned<sup>(6)</sup>.

ii) Informal E-mail is more like a telephone conversation or a written note on a routing slip than a formal letter or memorandum.

iii) Informal communications with external correspondents should be drafted with

care; if in doubt, apply the procedure for official messages. As far as the form is concerned (please refer to para. 10.ii above), irrespective of the official or informal character normal courtesies should be observed. Indeed, unlike the telephone, there is no guarantee that the correspondent him/herself is going to read the message: authorized proxies can read them or, in the event of a misreading or a wrong address, third parties.

iv) Any informal communication which would have been placed on file, had it been sent or received on paper, should be treated in the same way when in the form of E-mail (see para.10.vi above).

v) Informal messages should only be stored for a short, convenient period and subsequently deleted to save disk space.

## 12. Personal communications

i) Officials using this facility are expected to keep the frequency and duration within reasonable limits (as in the case of telephone service, see circulars 9/16, 10/41 and 10/83) and to do so in the official's own time. In no event should the use of this convenience be detrimental to Office work.

ii) Personal messages should always open with the word "PRIVATE" in the subject field <sup>1</sup> and should in general be given "low" priority (Send Options).

iii) Since the E-mail address bears the name of the ILO, personal messages must be drafted in a language appropriate for an ILO official and conform in its contents to the Standards of Conduct of the International Civil Service, 1982 Edition. Sending on chain mail, private commercial transactions and material in violation of law are examples of what is obviously inadmissible.

iv) Messages cannot be considered secure and private confidential information, such as bank and credit card numbers, should not be transmitted. Their transmission will accordingly be under the sole responsibility of the official. The ILO shall not be liable for any direct or indirect loss or damage arising out of the use of the E-mail for private purposes.

v) The E-mail facilities are official ILO property. Staff are reminded that the Office may be required to access mailboxes (malfunctioning of the system, security reasons, etc.). While staff may store personal E-mail in folders marked "PRIVATE", they are requested to keep this practice to a minimum and to avoid storing personal messages for any length of time.

13. These guidelines may be revised periodically in view of experience gained and administrative and technical developments. Suggestions and comments are welcome.

A. Ahmad

Treasurer and Finance Comptroller

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1. See Circular 9/24 (Outgoing communications) and other relevant circulars.

2. See Circular 9/25.

3. See also Circular 9/3.

4. This manual function will be replaced by an automatic choice by selecting the

relevant key, once the new [GroupWise](#) (version 5) has been introduced.

5. See also Circular 9/28.

6. For rules regarding filing, see also Circular 9/38 (Rev.1).

Attachments:

*None*