

STOP WORKPLACE ABUSE! PLEX Rights Are Non-Negotiable.

Once again, CCOO is speaking out against the cases of abuse of power that we continue to detect in some Foreign Service posts. These abuses are committed by those who, shielded by their hierarchical position, violate the rights of PLEX (locally hired staff overseas).

★ **IMPORTANT:** The content of this information note is of the utmost importance for the entire PLEX community in general and especially for service staff, attendants and drivers, so we kindly ask that you share this widely.

[Madrid, June 16th, 2026] In September 2022, CCOO-Exterior warned of a growing pattern of labor abuses in the Foreign Service. We documented practices such as the arbitrary imposition of working schedules, the denial of statutory leave and entitlements, acts of harassment, excessive workloads, and retaliatory measures against workers who sought to exercise their rights.

A growing concern in some locations

Today, nearly three years later, certain practices and behaviors that are incompatible with respect for labor rights and the principles of responsible public management continue to occur. Although the reality is far from uniform and there are many workplaces where these standards are routinely followed and respected, the cases that continue to reach our organization highlight the need to continue making progress in preventing, detecting and reporting these types of situations. Among the irregularities we have documented are the following:

Excessive working hours and rights violations

▪ Excessive working hours

Service staff and drivers have been **systematically forced to extend their workdays far beyond legal limits**, in some cases reaching absolutely disproportionate hours, even exceeding 12 hours a day, working unrecorded overtime without any compensation and with a complete disregard for their most basic labor rights.

▪ Lack of information

Furthermore, **they are denied clear and accurate information about their work schedules and hours**, keeping them in a state of constant uncertainty that

prevents any personal planning and is incompatible with orderly, predictable, and respectful management of labor relations in the public sector.

▪ Shifts without rest

The imposition of endless shifts without respecting the mandatory minimum rest period of 12 hours between workdays constitutes a very serious violation, which eliminates any real possibility of balancing work and family life and represents a flagrant breach of occupational safety regulations.

These practices not only violate basic labor rights but also generate clear psychosocial risks, contributing to chronic stress, professional burnout, anxiety, and the deterioration of workers' mental health. Furthermore, the consequences for the health, safety, and well-being of affected staff can become particularly severe when these situations persist over time or occur in high-pressure environments with strong hierarchical dependencies.

▪ Negative time balance

One of the most widespread (and most serious) practices we have been detecting in various facilities is the **imposition of forced time off during the manager's absences due to travel or other circumstances**.

This completely arbitrary measure has no backing whatsoever from the Administration, directly contravenes current labor regulations, and effectively creates **a negative time bank**: the worker is forced to "owe" hours due to a unilateral decision by the manager. We are thus faced with an irregular mechanism that distorts the principle of the workday



and harks back to a logic of modern slavery, unbecoming of public service, which must be governed by the principles of legality, equity, and respect for labor rights.

▪ **Overtime compensation**

We continue to see workplaces where overtime compensation is treated as a personal favor rather than a legal obligation subject to local law and clearly defined limits. This practice creates inequalities, uncertainty, and abusive situations that are incompatible with a modern and respectful approach to labor relations. The organization of the working time and the compensation of overtime must be based on objective, transparent criteria that are clearly communicated to staff, rather than on unilateral decisions made by those in management positions.

▪ **Operational needs**

We want to make clear that overtime must be based exclusively on duly substantiated and justified service needs. **Under no circumstances may personal, family, or private activities be covered under this concept.**

Inappropriate Treatment

We also wish to draw attention to the humiliating, demeaning and authoritarian treatment that, in certain workplaces, drivers, attendants and other support and service staff continue to endure through practices that undermine their most basic rights and should have no place in any public administration:

▪ **Lack of professionalism and respect**

They are often given instructions through informal and unofficial channels, such as WhatsApp messages, voice notes or verbal instructions relayed through third parties, with no real opportunity to respond, seek clarification or ensure a formal record of the communication.

▪ **Denial of basic working conditions**

Workers are denied access to basic rest and meal facilities and are, in some cases, subjected to treatment that falls far short of the minimum standards of dignity and respect that should prevail within any public institution.

▪ **Abuse of power and Family interference**

They are treated as servants rather than as workers with rights, with the abuse committed in certain locations by the spouses of some high-ranking officials being particularly severe; these spouses issue orders directly to staff as if they were private domestic

servants, in clear violation of labor law and the principle of legitimate authority.

What we are denouncing are not mere isolated incidents, but practices that occur in certain workplaces and constitute **genuine abuses of power**, inconsistent with a modern, democratic administration that respects its workers and with the principles of a true rule of law.

Public Office is not private property: Learning to recognize workplace abuse

This is the crux of the problem: staff employed by the Foreign Service are there to serve the public interest, not to handle personal matters or run private errands for others, whether colleagues, supervisors or diplomatic authorities.

It must be stated plainly: no job, without exception, may involve the provision of personal, domestic, or private services unrelated to the public interest. We cannot continue to normalize or tolerate this type of order.

The use of staff, official vehicles, or publicly funded resources to serve strictly private interests is incompatible with the principles of legality, objectivity, efficiency, and service to the public interest that must govern all administrative actions. This is not merely a labor issue, but also a basic requirement of integrity in the management of public resources.

Therefore, it is essential to learn to identify which tasks fall outside our contractual obligations. Here are some real-life examples of abusive, inappropriate, and unjustifiable tasks:

- Care of children or dependents of other employees.
- Walking or caring for pets.
- Cleaning, washing, or maintaining personal vehicles.
- Washing and ironing clothes belonging to visitors, friends, or family members.
- Travel in an official vehicle for non-work-related purposes: picking up family members at the airport, transportation for tourism, accompanying them on shopping trips or social activities, etc.

These examples, all of which are documented, are just a sample of a much more widespread problem, and none of these tasks have a place in public service.



The rules exist, but clarity, oversight and effective enforcement are still lacking

Many of the situations we have reported are difficult to reconcile with the very standards of conduct that the Administration has sought to promote in recent years. A clear example is the “**Guidelines for Labor Relations**” issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 2021, which expressly call for respect and dignified treatment among all members of staff, zero tolerance for abuses of power, participatory leadership, respect for rest periods, and the resolution of conflicts through dialogue. However, some of the cases that continue to come to our attention suggest that practices and behaviors still exist that are difficult to reconcile with these principles.

Similarly, the new Resolution on Working Hours and Schedules of April 14, 2026, establishes clearly defined limits and guarantees regarding working hours, breaks, work-life balance, and overtime. **The regulation makes it clear that overtime is exceptional in nature, must respond to real and duly justified service needs, and cannot become a routine management tool or a means of imposing abusive work schedules or arbitrarily restricting rights.**

The continued occurrence of such situations highlights the need to strengthen existing oversight, prevention and corrective mechanisms, ensuring the effective and consistent application of regulations across the entire Foreign Service network.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: We demand clear and immediate institutional responses

In light of all these situations, CCOO-Exterior calls for the immediate adoption of the following measures:

- A formal directive to all Foreign Service offices reminding them of the full applicability of local labor laws, the new AGE Resolution on Working Hours and Schedules, as well as the Labor Relations Guidelines published by the MAEC in February 2021.
- The initiation of disciplinary proceedings when actions that violate the fundamental rights of our workforce are demonstrated.
- The implementation of a training and awareness program for personnel exercising managerial responsibilities within the Foreign Service, focusing on leadership, labor relations and the prevention of psychosocial risks.
- The effective protection for workers who report abuses, irregularities, or rights violations,

guaranteeing their confidentiality and freedom from retaliation, in line with the principles established in Law 2/2023 on whistleblower protection.

We will not remain silent

We will continue to report, expose and challenge these practices wherever necessary. We will do so with the legitimacy conferred by the law and with the support of an organization that is clear about its purpose: **to defend rights, uphold respect and prevent abuse from becoming normalized.**

We wish to state clearly that, from now on, we will identify those officials who promote, tolerate or enable abusive practices of this kind (whether Ambassadors, Consuls, civil servants or administrative personnel) and we will not hesitate to bring such conduct to the attention of the relevant authorities, as well as public opinion and civil society in Spain and the host country. **There can be no impunity for those who violate labor rights while serving as public officials and representatives of the Spanish State.**

Those of us who work for the General State Administration abroad deserve to do so under dignified conditions, and the rule of law cannot depend on the whims of whoever is in charge.

Because another way of doing things is possible, and it is practiced by those who view public service as a commitment rather than a privilege

We want to make it clear that this complaint is not directed indiscriminately at the entire diplomatic corps or managers of the General State Administration serving abroad. **There are Ambassadors, Consuls and civil servants who apply the rules rigorously, exercise their responsibilities with integrity and demonstrate genuine respect for the rights of staff.**

To all of them, we express our appreciation. Their example shows that **it is entirely possible to serve abroad with professionalism, respect for the law and regard for the dignity of others.**

Precisely because we know that another way is possible, we cannot remain silent in the face of those who disregard rights, normalize abusive practices or allow arbitrariness to become a method of management.



You are not alone

At CCOO-Exterior, we remain actively engaged in monitoring and addressing these situations, both from our headquarters in Madrid and through our Occupational Health and Psychosocial Risks Secretariat, as well as our network of Health and Safety Representatives.

We remain fully committed to listening to you, supporting you and helping you address any questions, concerns or difficulties related to the issues covered in this communication, as well as any other matter affecting your working conditions or labor rights. Consistent with this commitment, we encourage you to contact us through any of the following channels:

CCOO Foreign Service Trade Union Section



www.exterior.fsc.ccoo.es



+34 91 535 52 31



+34 689 31 54 89 / +34 689 44 73 37



cco-servicioexterior@fsc.ccoo.es

Occupational Health and Psychosocial Risks Secretariat



saludlaboral.exterior@fsc.ccoo.es

Also, anyone who is experiencing workplace abuse, or who becomes aware of such situations, may submit a confidential and secure report through the Labor Inspectorate Reporting Mailbox of the Spanish Ministry of Labor and Social Economy.

This official channel allows potential labor law violations to be reported while ensuring the confidentiality of the information provided and facilitating the intervention of the competent labor authority where appropriate.

The reporting channel can be accessed via the following link:



<https://oeitss.gob.es/tramites/personas-trabajadoras/denuncia>

It is equally important to note that the protection of individuals who report regulatory breaches or abusive practices is now a legal obligation for public administrations. Law 2/2023, on the protection of persons who report regulatory violations and the fight against corruption, establishes specific mechanisms to

safeguard those who report irregularities in good faith, guaranteeing the confidentiality of their identity and expressly prohibiting any form of retaliation.

These principles must also guide the actions of the Administration throughout our overseas network. No worker should be forced to choose between keeping their job and defending their rights. At CCOO-Exterior, we will continue to stand alongside those facing these situations and to work tirelessly to ensure that such practices have no place anywhere in our Foreign Service.

