NEIWA

Network of European Integrity and Whistleblowers Authorities

Valencia Declaration
April 19, 2024

NEIWA currently consists of the following members: *26 countries and 37 authorities.*

BELGIUM	Federal Ombudsman Office of the Ombudswoman of the Brussels Capital Region Ombudsman Service of the German-speaking Community of Belgium Ombudsman, Flemish community
BULGARIA	Commission for Anti-Corruption Commission for Personal Data Protection
CROATIA	The Office of the Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia
CZECH REPUBLIC	Ministry of Justice
DENMARK	The National Whistleblower Scheme within The Danish Data Protection Agency
ESTONIA	Ministry of Justice, Department of Criminal Policy
FINLAND	Ombudsman
FRANCE	Défenseur des droits
GERMANY	Federal Office of Justice
GREECE	National Transparency Authority
HUNGARY	Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights of Hungary
ICELAND	Prime Minister's Office
IRELAND	Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Office of the Protected Disclosures Commissioner
ITALY	Italian Anticorruption Authority (ANAC)
LATVIA	The State Chancellery (Contact Point of Whistleblowers)
LITHUANIA	General prosecutors' office of the Republic of Lithuania
MONTENEGRO	Agency for Prevention of Corruption
PORTUGAL	National Anti-Corruption Mechanism (MENAC)
ROMANIA	Ministry of Justice National Integrity Agency (ANI)
SLOVAKIA	Whistleblower Protection Office
SLOVENIA	Commission for the Prevention of Corruption
SPAIN	Ministry of the Presidency, Justice and Relations with the Parliament. Valencian Anti-Fraud Agency (AVAF) Catalan Anti-Fraud Office (OAC) Andalusian Office Against Fraud and Corruption (OAAF)
SWEDEN	The Swedish Work Environment Authority
THE NETHERLANDS	Dutch Whistleblower Authority

The representatives of NEIWA's members gathered in Valencia, Spain, for its 9th General Assembly, have approved the following Declaration:

The Network of European Integrity and Whistleblowing Authorities (NEIWA), currently representing 33 authorities, was established in May 2019 to offer a platform for cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experience in the area of integrity and whistleblowing.

In March 2023, NEIWA established its governance by approving its Constitution and appointing a Chair, Vice Chair and Board. The Network is open to Public Authorities and Public Bodies from EU Member States, EU-candidates and EFTA countries, with a national or regional mandate in the area of whistleblowing, with the *Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law* as the common basis.

According to its Constitution, NEIWA's goals are the collaboration and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the field of integrity and whistleblowing, in particular the protection and support of whistleblowers and the promotion of independent, accountable, transparent and accessible mechanism systems and structures for reporting misconduct affecting the public interest.

NEIWA aligns with international standards for the prevention and the fight against corruption, including UNCAC, and welcomes the EU *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating corruption, replacing Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA.*

NEIWA regrets that one of its members, the Office of prevention and fight against corruption in the Balearic Islands, has been dissolved by law on 26.3.2024.

NEIWA expresses its concern about initiatives that result in the weakening of whistleblowing and integrity institutions.

NEIWA, at its 9th General Assembly, modified its Constitution in Articles 4 (members), 5 (partners) and 15 (decision-making), and approved the Rules of Procedure in order to increase its governance and operational capacity.

Also, the General Assembly approved the following new members:

- The Federal Institute for the protection and promotion of Human Rights (Belgium)
- The Anti-corruption Bureau (Georgia)
- The Office for Whistleblowers (Luxembourg)
- The Ombudsman of Wallonia and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Belgium)

In regard to the support and protection of whistleblowers, NEIWA General Assembly encourages the competent authorities to:

- Develop whistleblowing guidelines to facilitate the interpretation and implementation of national laws; establish accessible, reliable and secure channels; maintain the confidentiality of information at all times and allow anonymous reporting when permitted by national legislation.

- Create work environments of trust and openness, conducive to the filing of reports and the successful conclusion of the investigations.

- Encourage whistleblowers to provide clear and complete information on irregularities known to them, advise them on available channels, procedures and protection measures.

- Inform whistleblowers and affected persons of their rights and obligations.

- Ensure that whistleblowers do not suffer any retaliation as a result of their reporting, including threats and pressure. In the case of retaliation to impose appropriate sanctions.

- Reject any stigmatisation of whistleblowers, recognise their laudable civic behaviour, and recognising them for their collaboration in the defence of the general interest.

- Collect and gather data regarding topics affecting whistleblowing, e.g. reports, retaliation, law cases and any other aspect related to whistleblowing.

NEIWA members also call upon legislators, governments, and all those involved in the implementation process, to:

- Uphold whistleblowing as an anticorruption mechanism and the exercise of the human right to freedom of expression and information, both at the very core of our democracies.

- Condemn any form of suppression or limitation of the independency and efficiency of integrity and whistleblowing authorities or similar entities.

- Strengthen their capacity through the allocation of sufficient resources and the recognition of the competencies necessary for the proper exercise of their functions.

- Assess, in accordance with the legislation of each State, the opportunity to allow the submission of anonymous reports, as anonymity is one of the best forms of protection for whistleblowers.

- Provide psychological support to whistleblowers and accompany them in the different phases of their reporting activity.

- Provide financial support to whistleblowers, in particular regarding compensation for damages caused to them and for legal expenses.

- Encourage the work and coordination of all actors within the area of integrity and whistleblowing (police, public prosecutor's offices, judiciary, other bodies, etc.), including civil society, as their contribution is essential to the establishment of a culture of integrity, transparency and accountability, which ultimately leads to the strengthening of our democracies.