

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

Phil Linnard at Slaughter and May
Clare Fletcher at Slaughter and May

06. Can co-workers be compelled to act as witnesses? What legal protections do employees have when acting as witnesses in an investigation?

Greece

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Indirectly involved employees may be interviewed as witnesses in the context of the investigation, as the employee has a duty of loyalty towards the employer originating from the employment relationship. However, they cannot be forced to do so (in contrast with criminal procedures). Any harmful act that could be considered retaliation against witnesses in the context of violence or harassment or whistleblowing investigation is prohibited. In addition, the identity of any employees as witnesses is also covered by the principle of confidentiality.

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Netherlands

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There is no statutory regime for employee witnesses in internal (workplace) investigations and, hence, no specific statutory regime for legal protection. However, as part of the idea that employees have to act in line with good employment practices (section 7:611 DCC), employees, who potentially acquired knowledge in a work-related context on the subject matter of an investigation, are typically required vis-à-vis their employer to participate in such internal investigations. The required degree of cooperation will depend on the type and nature of the investigation and the matter that is being investigated. The principle of “good employment practices” in turn requires the employer to be guided by proportionality and subsidiarity considerations: which information is relevant to the investigation and what is the least burdensome means of collecting such information?

This may also impact the degree to which an employer can involve employee witnesses in an investigation. Increased prudence should be observed, among other things, if the relevant employee witnesses may themselves become implicated in the investigation or when the employer envisages sharing certain investigative findings with regulatory or criminal authorities, for instance as part of cooperation

arrangements in an ongoing investigation. In such cases, the relevant employee should at least be allowed to retain legal counsel before continuing interview procedures.

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Switzerland

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Due to the employee's duty of loyalty towards the employer and the employer's right to give instructions to its employees, employees generally must take part in an ongoing investigation and comply with any summons for questioning if the employer demands this (article 321d, Swiss Code of Obligations). If the employees refuse to participate, they generally are in breach of their statutory duties, which may lead to measures such as a termination of employment.

The question of whether employees may refuse to testify if they would have to incriminate themselves is disputed in legal doctrine.^[1] However, according to legal doctrine, a right to refuse to testify exists if criminal conduct regarding the questioned employee or a relative (article 168 et seq, Swiss Criminal Procedure Code) is involved, and it cannot be ruled out that the investigation documentation may later end up with the prosecuting authorities (ie, where employees have a right to refuse to testify in criminal proceedings, they cannot be forced to incriminate themselves by answering questions in an internal investigation).^[2]

^[1] Nicolas Facincani/Reto Sutter, *Interne Untersuchungen: Rechte und Pflichten von Arbeitgebern und Angestellten*, published on [hrtoday.ch](https://www.hrtoday.ch), last visited on 17 June 2022.

^[2] Same opinion: Nicolas Facincani/Reto Sutter, *Interne Untersuchungen: Rechte und Pflichten von Arbeitgebern und Angestellten*, published on [hrtoday.ch](https://www.hrtoday.ch), last visited on 17 June 2022.

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