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PHP 8.1: strftime and gmstrftime functions are deprecated

Version   8.1   Type   Deprecation

`strftime` and `gmstrftime` functions format a Unix timestamp based on the current locale set using the `setlocale` function. `gmstrftime` function is similar to `strftime`, except that it returns the time in Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

`setlocale` function sets the locale setting to the PHP process, rather than the current working thread. This can result in sudden change in the locale if another thread calls `setlocale` function. This can be specially troublesome if PHP is used in a multi-threaded Server API (such as `mod_php` for PHP).

PHP offers locale-independent and locale-aware time formatting APIs that are better, feature-rich, and more intuitive. In **PHP 8.1 and later**, `strftime` and `gmstrftime` are deprecated, and using them emits a deprecation notice. These functions will be removed in PHP 9.0.

```
strftime('%D');
gmstrftime('%D');
```

```
PHP Deprecated:  Function strftime() is deprecated in ... on line ...
PHP Deprecated:  Function gmstrftime() is deprecated in ... on line ...
```
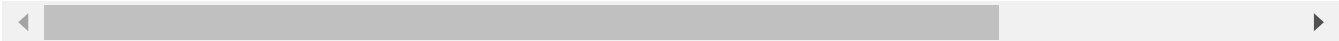
Replacements

For **locale-aware** date/time formatting, use `IntlDateFormatter::format` (requires `Intl` extension).

In a real-life and ideal use case, the `IntlDateFormatter` object is instantiated once based on the user's locale information, and the object instance can is used whenever necessary.

```php
- setlocale(LC_TIME, "en_US");
- echo strftime('%x', time());
+ $formatter = new IntlDateFormatter('en_US', IntlDateFormatter::LONG, In
+ echo $formatter->format(time());
```

For **locale-independent** date/time formatting, use the `date()` function or `DateTime::format` / `DateTimeImmutable::format`. Note that this can result in different time formats on applications that relied on `setlocale` to set the format. Explicitly setting the date format can remedy this.

```php
- setlocale(LC_TIME, "en_US");
- echo strftime('%F', time());
+ echo date('Y-m-d', time());
```

`DateTimeImmutable::format` can also format a `DateTimeImmutable` object:

```php
- setlocale(LC_TIME, "en_US");
- echo strftime('%F', time());
+ $date = DateTimeImmutable::createFromFormat('U', time());
+ echo $date->format('Y-m-d');
```

Related Changes

- PHP 8.1: `strptime` function is deprecated
- PHP 8.0: Locale-independent `float` to `string` casting

Backwards Compatibility Impact

Using `strftime` / `gmstrftime` functions result in a deprecation notice in PHP 8.1 and later. These functions will be removed in PHP 9.0.

Depending on the intended use case of functions, the replacements can provide a identical output, or a rather accurate output if the functions were used without expecting locale-aware formatting.

For locale-aware date/time formatting, `Intl` extension provides a more robust and complete solution without the undesired behavior of the `setlocale` function.

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