



**Executive Board of the  
United Nations Development  
Programme, the United Nations  
Population Fund and the United  
Nations Office for Project Services**

Distr.: General  
1 April 2019

Original: English

**Annual session 2019**

30 May to 7 June 2019, New York

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

**UNFPA – Reports of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Ethics Offices**

**United Nations Population Fund**

**Report of the Ethics Office 2018**

*Summary*

This report is submitted to the Executive Board pursuant to paragraph 9 of Executive Board decision 2010/17: Reports of the Ethics Offices of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS. In accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin entitled United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes (ST/SGB/2007/11), the report was reviewed by the Ethics Panel of the United Nations at its 111<sup>th</sup> session on 12 March 2019 and presented to the UNFPA Executive Director.

The report provides a summary of the activities of the UNFPA Ethics Office during 2018, and describes trends in the mandated areas of its work. It also provides recommendations to management to further strengthen the organizational culture of integrity and compliance.

*Elements of a decision*

The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report, comment on the progress of the work of the UNFPA Ethics Office and offer support for the recommendations made to management.

## **I. Introduction**

1. The present report, the 11th since the establishment of the UNFPA Ethics Office in 2008, covers the 2018 calendar year. Pursuant to paragraph 9 of Executive Board decision 2010/17, the report, prepared in accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin, "United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes" (ST/SGB/2007/11), is submitted to the Executive Board at its annual session in 2019.

2. The UNFPA Ethics Office supports the Executive Director in ensuring that all UNFPA staff and other personnel perform their functions consistent with the highest ethical standards required by the Charter of the United Nations, the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, and UNFPA policies and procedures. The Ethics Office operates on principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality. Its activities aim to promote an organizational culture based on shared values of integrity, accountability, transparency, professionalism, respect and tolerance.

3. This report describes the key activities undertaken by the Ethics Office in 2018. It also suggests ways to strengthen the organization's ability to maintain the ethical standards necessary for UNFPA to continue to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

## **II. Activities of the UNFPA Ethics Office**

4. As in previous years, the activities of the Ethics Office were undertaken in the following mandated areas of work:

- (a) Providing confidential advice and guidance;
- (b) Administering the financial disclosure programme;
- (c) Taking responsibility for activities assigned to the Ethics Office under the policy for the protection against retaliation;
- (d) Developing standards, training and education on ethics issues, and conducting ethics outreach, in coordination with relevant units of UNFPA and with the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN), to ensure that there is a uniform and consistent application of ethics related issues in the UN system; and
- (e) Providing guidance to management to ensure that the organization's rules, policies, procedures and practices reinforce and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity required by the Charter of the United Nations and other applicable staff rules and regulations.

5. In furtherance of this mandate, the Ethics Office provided services on 397 occasions in 2018. This represents a 10 per cent decrease, compared to 2017. Decreases occurred primarily in advice and financial disclosure-related matters.

6. Figure 1 below shows that most of the 397 services provided in 2018 were advisory (257), followed by training-related (48) and standard-setting matters (32). Figure 2 below summarizes the services provided by the Ethics Office over the most recent four-year period, 2015-2018.

Figure 1  
Requests for services, by category, in 2018

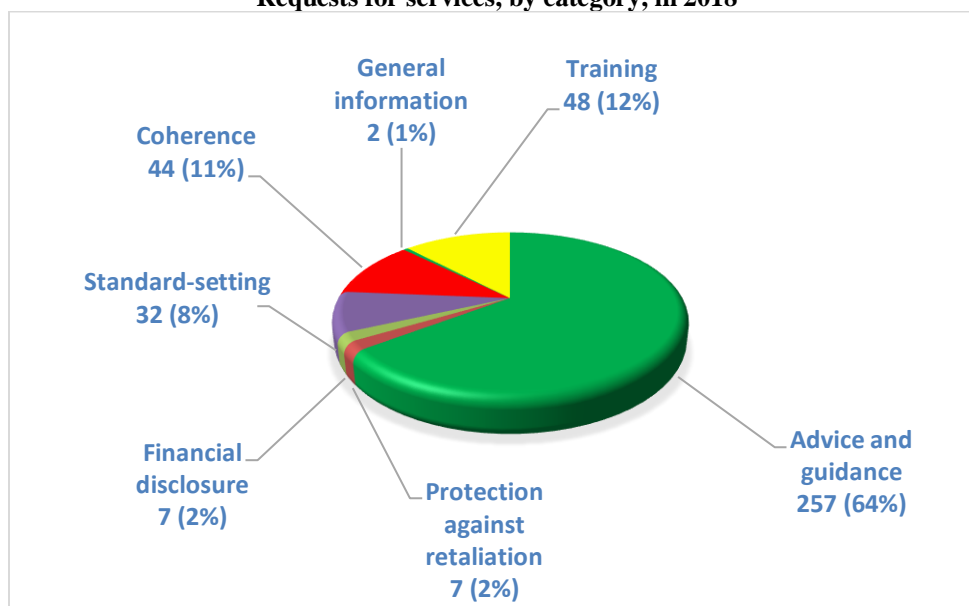


Figure 2  
Overview of services, by category, 2015-2018

Year	Advice and guidance	Retaliation	Financial disclosure	Standard-setting	Coherence	General information	Training	Total
2015	226	7	57	23	45	11	21	390
2016	237	13	26	25	36	10	25	372
2017	280	5	24	33	61	3	37	443
2018	257	7	7	32	44	2	48	397

### A. Advice and guidance

7. Confidential advice and guidance matters constituted 64 per cent of the Ethics Office's caseload. Approximately 93 per cent of the requests came from fixed-term staff, while the remainder came from non-staff personnel and other third parties. However, several requests from staff related to activities of non-staff personnel, including when managers of non-staff personnel inquired about preventing conflicts of interest related to their outside activities and personal relationships.

8. Requests for advisory services decreased by 9 per cent over 2017. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, where the Ethics Adviser conducted outreach missions to five country offices, advice increased by 65 percent (see figure 3, and further information regarding missions in Section D below). Advice nearly doubled in East and Southern Africa.

Figure 3  
Requests for ethics advice and guidance, by geographic location, 2015-2018

Year	HQ	Eastern and Southern Africa	Western and Central Africa	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia and the Pacific	Eastern Europe and Central Asia	Arab States	Total
2015	84	62	17	36	17	6	4	226
2016	113	11	35	20	31	2	25	237
2017	133	16	9	26	74	10	12	280
2018	109	31	13	41	44	9	10	257

9. Of the 257 requests for advice, 67 per cent (173 requests) concerned conflicts of interest issues (see figure 4 below). Of these, two-thirds (110 requests) related to participation in outside activities and employment, such as teaching assignments, volunteering, serving on boards of non-governmental organizations, and publishing articles or books. For about one-quarter of these, formal permission from the Division for Human Resources (DHR) was required for the activity or employment. The staff member formally requested permission; the Ethics Office reviewed the request and advised DHR as to whether the activity presented a conflict of interest or posed other ethics concerns. For activities involving publication of materials, the Ethics Office often engaged the Division of Communications and Strategic Partnerships to review the draft publication to ensure there were no conflicts with the UNFPA mandate, or presented a reputational risk.

10. Employment-related inquiries constituted 33 per cent (84 requests) of all advice. Most related to allegations or concerns about workplace conduct, including possible misconduct. Many other inquiries involved fair application of policies. Seven matters involved possible sexual harassment, while several others concerned personal relationships at work. In addition to providing substantive advice, the Ethics Office often referred staff and other personnel to the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), the Ombudsman for the Funds and Programmes, or the relevant human resources strategic partner or senior manager for further assistance.

Figure 4  
Requests for ethics advice and guidance by category

Category	Headquarters	Field	Total cases
<b>Conflicts of interest</b>			
– Outside activities	40	70	110
– Gifts, awards and hospitality	10	8	18
– Organizational conflicts of interest	8	9	17
– Other	6	22	28
<i>Subtotal</i>	<b>64</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Employment-related concerns</b>			
– Workplace conduct issues	25	26	51
– Clarification of personnel-related policies	10	11	21
– Recruitment and promotion processes	5	6	11
– Other inquiries	0	1	1
<i>Subtotal</i>	<b>40</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>257</b>

## B. Financial disclosure programme

11. Mandated by the Secretary-General, the financial disclosure programme is intended to help UNFPA to preserve and protect its integrity, thus building donor and public confidence in the organization and its staff. The programme is a primary tool for identifying and assessing conflict of interest risks arising from the private holdings and activities of staff and their immediate family members.

12. For the 2018 filing cycle, 511 staff were required to submit financial disclosure statements, which covered the 2017 calendar year (see figure 5). Of the staff required to file, 147 were based at headquarters and 364 were field-based. The staff members filing disclosures comprised 321 staff in managerial positions (63 per cent) and 190 support staff (37 per cent).

Figure 5  
Financial disclosure participation, by location and calendar year, 2014-2017

Year	Headquarters	Field	Total by year
2014	135	554	689
2015	147	365	512
2016	132	371	503
2017	147	364	511

13. Of the 511 staff members who were required to file, 18 left UNFPA during the process (and five left before submitting any form). Thus, 493 forms underwent complete reviews. As usual, the Ethics Adviser reviewed each financial disclosure statement to ensure completion, and to consider whether any of the holdings or activities of the staff member or his or her immediate family members could present a conflict of interest, given the organization's mission and activities and the staff member's role. Some 43 filers (9 per cent) certified that they had no relevant disclosures, while the other 450 staff (91 per cent) provided disclosures. The Ethics Office requested additional information or clarifications from 125 staff (25 per cent), and advised many of them on how to properly manage or mitigate potential conflicts of interest. Three of these staff members had a previously undisclosed outside activity. Two subsequently submitted a request for approval for the activity, and one stated that he/she would resign the position voluntarily to eliminate any conflict.

14. Following its review of the financial disclosure statements, the Ethics Office additionally subjected a random sample of 50 statements (10 per cent) of the entire filing population to verification of their financial disclosures. This verification process allows the Ethics Office to ensure that staff members are diligently and accurately completing their financial disclosure statements, and detect when this is not the case. An outside firm retained by the Ethics Office reviewed the documentation submitted in support of the staff members' original disclosures. The selected staff were diversified by location, grade and function.

15. During the verification phase, 33 staff members' files were reviewed, verified and closed without noteworthy concerns. However, 14 staff members' files were found to have assets or liabilities that they had not disclosed during the initial disclosure period, although no conflicts of interest were ultimately found. The Ethics Office remains concerned that consistently, a significant percentage of the verification group does not provide fully accurate disclosures. More of concern is that three staff members' files were not complete because they did not submit full documentation to support their disclosures. No conflict of interest was found in the documents submitted, however. The staff members concerned were counselled about the requirements of the financial disclosure programme to ensure full compliance in the future.

16. The outside firm recommended that the Ethics Office: (a) continue to include in the verification exercise staff who state they have nothing to disclose; (b) notify those staff members who did not submit accurate or complete documentation in support of their financial disclosures that in the future they must accurately and completely disclose all requested information; and (c) revise the instructions in the financial disclosure system to further define ‘asset’ and ‘liability’, clarify that non-United Nations income must be reported as a gross amount, and state that all types of bank accounts must be reported. The Ethics Office notes that it has already implemented the first two recommendations, and will comply with the third recommendation in advance of the 2019 cycle.

17. In addition to the standard financial disclosure programme cycle activity, the Ethics Office provided services on seven occasions related to financial disclosure matters, including processing outside activity request forms for activities disclosed during the financial disclosure cycle, and responding to OAIS inquiries about staff members’ financial disclosures (see figure 1 above).

### **C. Protection of staff against retaliation**

18. UNFPA is obligated to protect staff members who report misconduct, or who participate in an authorized fact-finding activity, from any actual or threatened detrimental action that they may face as a consequence of that report or their participation. The policy on protection against retaliation sets forth the prohibition against retaliation, the procedures for lodging a complaint, and the steps the organization may take to address retaliation. In 2018, the Ethics Office received three complaints of retaliation and four retaliation-related inquiries.

19. For each retaliation complaint, the Ethics Office undertakes a preliminary review to determine whether the complainant engaged in an activity warranting protection from retaliation and, if so, whether this protected activity was a contributing factor to the retaliation. If the Ethics Office determines that a *prima facie* case of retaliation has been established, the matter is referred to OAIS for investigation. Following completion of the investigation, the Ethics Adviser reviews the investigation report, discusses the report with the investigators, considers whether retaliation has occurred, and then makes appropriate recommendations to the Executive Director.

20. All three complaints arose in the context of actual or planned realignments and reorganizations. Two of the three complaints came from the same headquarters office. The first complaint, filed in April 2018, alleged that the staff member was retaliated against by his/her former supervisor and several others for reporting misconduct. The Ethics Office found that the staff member engaged in a protected activity and experienced detrimental action, but there was no *prima facie* evidence of a connection between the two.

21. The second complaint of retaliation was also filed in April 2018, this time by a staff member in a country office who accused his/her supervisor and other staff members of retaliating against him/her for reporting misconduct. The Ethics Office found that the staff member engaged in protected activities, but it found no *prima facie* evidence that the staff member experienced any detrimental actions that were connected to his/her protected activities.

22. The third complaint was filed by a staff member at headquarters in June 2018. The staff member alleged that he/she was retaliated against by his/her senior manager and other personnel after reporting misconduct. The Ethics Office found *prima facie* evidence of retaliation and referred the matter to OAIS for investigation. The investigation still was pending at year-end.

23. Of the four retaliation-related inquiries, two came from field-based managers and two involved advice to staff of DHR. One field-based manager expressed concern about retaliation from subordinate staff due to the manager’s enforcement of standards of conduct. The other stated that he/she believed a withholding of an entitlement was in retaliation for the staff

member's official actions in a prior role. Both managers were advised about how to file a complaint of retaliation, and counselled about additional options for addressing their concerns.

24. The third retaliation-related matter involved advice to DHR regarding a former staff member found responsible for retaliation prior to 2018. The fourth involved advice to DHR regarding how to respond to an external party's accusation of retaliation against UNFPA.

25. Looking back to the Report of the Ethics Office 2017 [DP/FPA/2018/7] (2017 annual report), one retaliation complaint was outstanding at the end of 2017. In the retaliation complaint reported in paragraph 22 of the 2017 annual report, the Ethics Office did not find a *prima facie* case of retaliation. The staff member was found to have reported misconduct, and to have experienced a detrimental action, but no *prima facie* evidence of a connection between the two was found. The matter was closed in January 2018.

#### **D. Training, education and outreach**

26. The training, education and outreach programme of the Ethics Office aims to reinforce the core values and principles of the United Nations and the international civil service, increase knowledge of and compliance with ethics-related policies, and encourage staff and management to adhere to high ethical standards.

27. In 2018, the Ethics Office provided training and training-related services on 48 occasions (see figure 1 above). Twelve of these were in-person training and education programmes that reached approximately 543 UNFPA personnel. This included a workshop led by the Ethics Office and DHR at the Global Leadership Meeting, entitled "Empowering Transformational Leadership." The Ethics Office also led training sessions for new managers and junior professional officers, the Office of the Security Coordinator, the Technical Division, and each country office visited by the Ethics Office (detailed below). The Ethics Office also conducted virtual training sessions for staff and personnel in the Arab States region, the Asia Pacific region, and the Cambodia and Papua New Guinea country offices.

28. The Ethics Adviser conducted outreach missions to country offices in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico in the Latin America and Caribbean region; and to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Asia Pacific region. These missions included training sessions on "Ethics, Values and International Civil Service", as well as confidential advisory sessions and management briefings. In addition, the Ethics Office held briefings with the country offices' programme and operations teams.

29. The Ethics Office provided four ethics briefings for new heads of office, including the Deputy Executive Director, Programme, and the incoming chief of staff. The Office also provided training materials and responded to other training-related requests on several occasions.

30. The Ethics Office also briefed new members of the Executive Board, the Oversight Advisory Committee and the Board of Auditors. Along with the Under Secretary-General for the Department of Management at the United Nations Secretariat and the World Food Programme Ethics Director, the UNFPA Ethics Adviser presented to the "Geneva Group" of Member States on the topic, "Applying an Ethical Framework to Tackle Sexual Harassment;" this was at the invitation of the United States State Department.

31. The online training programme, "Ethics and Integrity at the United Nations Population Fund", was completed by 330 staff during the year. French and Spanish versions of the course were developed in 2018; these will be made available in early 2019.

32. The Ethics Office published several items on its ethics "community" site in 2018. In addition to providing standard ethics resources and information, the site shared insights about respectful dissent, implicit bias, and not soliciting help from Governments to advance one's career.

33. The 2018 Global Staff Survey results showed gains over 2016 survey results in several categories relevant to the Ethics Office's work, including positive responses to: awareness of the Ethics Office and its services (3 percentage point increase from 79 per cent to 82 per cent); knowledge of how to report misconduct such as harassment or abuse of authority (10 percentage point increase from 80 per cent to 90 per cent); and belief that staff would be protected from retaliation for reporting wrongdoing (10 percentage point increase from 57 per cent to 67 per cent).

#### **E. Standard-setting and policy support**

34. A key function of the Ethics Office is to provide guidance to management on ethics standard-setting so that the policies and practices of the organization reflect and promote the expectations of integrity, impartiality and fairness required of UNFPA and its staff. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office collaborated with other UNFPA offices on 32 occasions to review, provide input and seek clarification on new and revised organizational policies and procedures. This work included providing input to draft policies, reports and training packages; responding to donor inquiries about UNFPA ethics practices and policies; and providing input to and commenting on Joint Inspection Unit reports.

35. The Ethics Office's standard setting work continued to include engagement on matters relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment prevention. The Ethics Adviser welcomed the addition in the Office of the Executive Director of a coordinator who is dedicated to these issues, and worked with OED on several occasions in 2018 to ensure the organization's approach is comprehensive and effective.

36. The Ethics Office commenced an extensive review of the Policy on Protection against Retaliation in 2018, and began preparing an amended policy. The Office plans to present the policy for approval in early 2019.

### **III. Coherence**

37. The Ethics Office contributed substantially to coherence in the United Nations system in 2018. Much of the coherence-related work of the Ethics Office involved interaction with EPUN, established under ST/SGB/2007/11. The Ethics Office participated in all 10 official meetings of EPUN. The Ethics Office gave substantive input to 32 other EPUN-related matters outside of EPUN meetings, and solicited much advice from EPUN in return.

38. Further information on the work of EPUN will be provided in the upcoming Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Ethics Office.

39. The Ethics Office continued its active participation in the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO). The Ethics Adviser attended the ENMO annual meeting in July 2018, and co-facilitated three sessions. The Ethics Adviser completed her one-year term as Chair of the ENMO Standing Membership Committee, which is responsible for receiving and reviewing applications from organizations for membership in ENMO, and making appropriate recommendations to the ENMO chairperson regarding their approval.



#### **IV. Observations and recommendations to management**

40. The following observations and recommendations reflect on 2018, and recommend steps to further strengthen a culture of ethics and integrity in UNFPA and the United Nations.

41. The Ethics Office commends the work of UNFPA in 2018 to strengthen its response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and considers the results of the Global Staff Survey to be a sign that these efforts are working to raise awareness among staff about these issues. The Office further commends those efforts of field offices teams to proactively address these issues, including with UNFPA partners, and encourages the collection of those stories and initiatives for consideration of system-wide possibilities.

42. The Ethics Office has highlighted for a number of years that the Office's workload has expanded to the point of being at full capacity. To this end, the Ethics Office requests that senior management approve an increase of the size of the Ethics Office by one junior-level professional staff member. If the organization believes it would be important that the incoming Ethics Adviser lead and provide input to strategic initiatives, promote meaningful policy reform, and participate in leadership discussions, it will need to demonstrate this interest by providing the appropriate resources.

#### **V. Conclusion**

43. The Ethics Office in 2018 continued its practical approach to promoting a culture of ethical behaviour. In every interaction with staff and personnel, the Office has emphasized the importance of loyalty to the vision of the United Nations, and the values of independence, impartiality, and respect and tolerance. It is hoped that this approach will continue throughout 2019 and beyond.

---