

# UNFPA Ethics Office Annual Report 2020





# Ethics Office Mandate

1. Prevention – training & outreach to achieve compliance with rules, values & standards of conduct.
2. Confidential advice & guidance.
3. Administer the Financial Disclosure Program (FDP).
4. Administer the policy on Protection from Retaliation.
5. Policy guidance/standard setting.
6. UN Ethics Coherence: UNFPA Ethics Advisor is the Alternate Chair of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN).



# Categories of Ethical Risk



## INDIVIDUAL

Personal actions that can affect the UNFPA in a negative way

- Outside Activities
- Public pronouncement
- Family relationships
- Gifts, honours and hospitality
- Personal investments and assets



## PEOPLE

Inappropriate interaction with others

- Discrimination
- Racism
- Harassment
- Abuse of authority
- Retaliation
- Sexual exploitation and abuse



## OPERATIONAL

Ethical risk related to operations, projects and 3rd parties

- Bribery & Corruption
- Gift & hospitality
- Fraud
- Supply chain
- Confidentiality and Intellectual Property
- Compromising standards



## ORGANISATIONAL

Internal risks across UNFPA offices and sites

- Independence & Impartiality
- Respect for national laws
- Working with partners and donors
- Use of UN assets
- Privacy





# Operating Environment

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**Increasing complexity:** the global pandemic, proliferation of stakeholders in our work; trust crises in the finance, technology and public sectors, and global demands for action in response to human rights abuses, racism and sexual violence. These trends resulted in a shift in the way our personnel engage on the question of ethics and integrity and their expectations and demand for services from the Ethics Office.

## **2020 was marked by lively debate, reflection on personal dilemmas, and questions of institutional integrity**

- In a hyper-political environment, our personnel asked how they, as individuals, ought to operationalize the principles of independence, integrity and international loyalty (i.e. can I participate in Black Lives Matter protests?).
- Emergency ethics involves hard choices, a balance of different rights and duties, and the demand for exceptional tasks and sacrifices. Covid-19 required our managers to decide who and how we stay and deliver – to weigh the duty to care for our personnel with the duty to serve. Making high stakes decisions when there were no clear rules or “right choices” was a heavy burden.
- Staff also faced hard choices – as a single parent/breadwinner for my family, can I afford to risk exposure to the virus? What will happen to my parent if they fall ill and I can’t get back to them? My partner is working full-time from home and home-schooling our children, is it fair for me to stay and serve while they carry that burden alone? Who will care for my immunocompromised loved one? How do I support my child/children with online schooling and work at the same time? My loved one is sick, should I stay or go to them, and what if I can’t get back?
- Some essential field staff experienced family guilt, while some non-essential staff working at home experienced humanitarian guilt, and others experienced both because they were teleworking from their duty station but separated from family.
- Many personnel rose to the challenge of Covid 19, serving above and beyond the call of duty. An Ethics Office campaign in 2020 celebrated those personnel as “living our UN values”.



# Organizational Context

UNFPA created an enabling environment for ethics in UNFPA 2020, including:

- Setting the 'tone at the top': expectations for standards of conduct was consistently and clearly communicated by the Executive Director in town-halls and meetings.
- All Ethics Office recommendations on retaliation cases were implemented by management
- Management invested in a long term positive workplace culture initiative, and multiple staff well-being interventions (through the Division for Human Resources).
- Management endorsed a proposed investment in the Ethics Office in 2022 (additional P4 post).





# Request for Services

Requests for confidential advice and guidance constituted 49 per cent of the Ethics Office’s caseload.

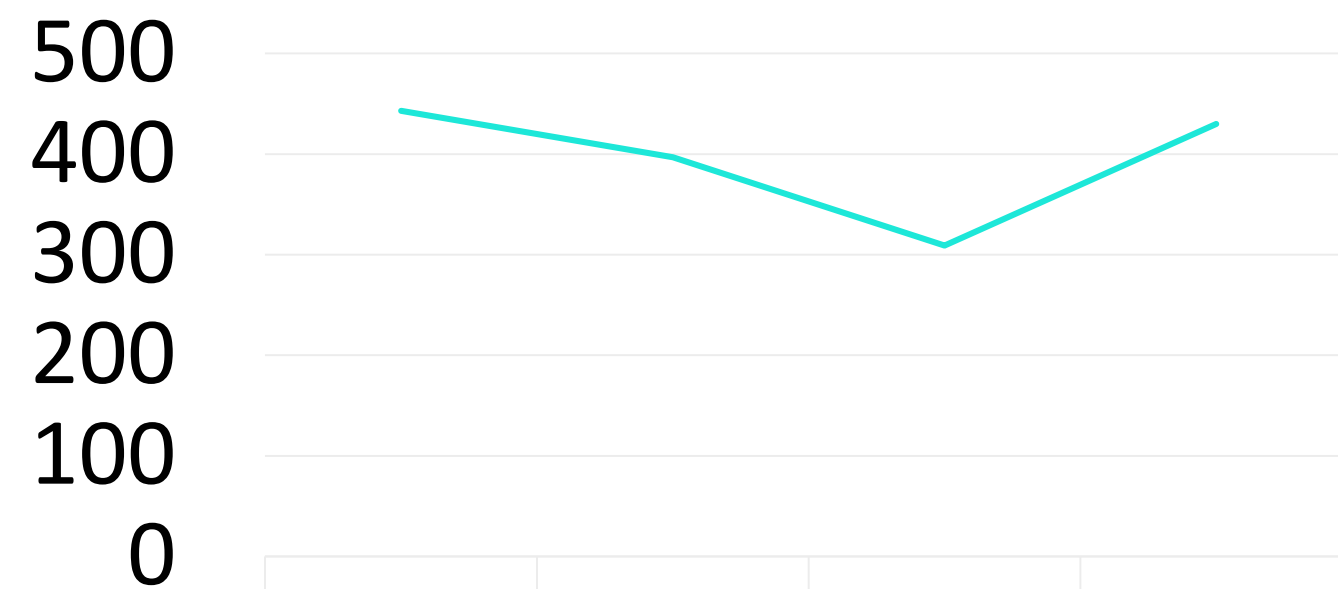
2020 saw an uptick in requests for services (430 compared with 309 in 2019).

While personnel from HQ have historically been more likely to seek advice and guidance than field personnel, this trend declined in 2020. Requests for advice and guidance in the field typically spikes in response to in-person or live online outreach by the Ethics Office. The Ethics Office extended its outreach to all UNFPA locations for the first time in 2020.

Request for services increased overall, but showed a proportionate decline for HQ personnel and increase for field personnel. 34 per cent of requests for services came from personnel in HQ, despite the fact that only 10 per cent of personnel are located in HQ. This compared with 43 per cent in 2019.

Conversely, the proportion of requests from the field increased across the board, and more than doubled in the West and Central Africa (WCARO), Latin America and the Caribbean (LACRO) and the Arab States (ASRO) regional offices.

### Request for Services



	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. Requests	443	397	309	430

# Training



A dramatic increase in persons trained live can be attributed to a greater willingness of personnel to attend live webinars in the new pandemic work environment.

In addition, the Ethics Adviser was able to dedicate more time to webinars as a result of her reduced outreach travel schedule.

**2020**

↑ 262% in No. of People Trained Live  
(1,150 up from 317)

↑ 22% Compliance with Online Training  
(72% of personnel completed)



# The Importance of Face to Face Outreach

1. The Ethics Office is a gatekeeper for whistleblowing, reporting misconduct, conflict resolution, conflicts of interest and resolution of administrative issues.
2. Effective, timely and confidential advice, guidance and referral can prevent unnecessary escalation of issues, ensure compliance and mitigate risks.
3. For reasons to do with trust, fear of retaliation, language and logistics, many staff will only flag concerns if provided with the opportunity to do so face to face. This is why requests for advice and guidance are consistently higher in HQ relative to personnel numbers.
4. However, visits are costly and time and resource intensive. The Ethics Office has one staff member serving the entire UNFPA population. As a result, some personnel may only benefit from a face to face engagement once every two to three years.
5. There were no field visits after March 2020 due to the pandemic. Yet, as a result of an intense program of virtual engagement, the Ethics Office achieved an uptick in requests for services. This suggests that there are important gains to be made in the virtual space.







# Outreach

The Ethics Office re-launched the ethics intranet page over a three-month period in 2020 with a new, informal virtual blog approach to information sharing.

Topics covered included managing conflict, ethical dilemmas, and ethical standards and obligations.

This method of outreach was well received, achieving 6,114 page views during the three-month period, and 95 per cent more views than in 2019.

In addition, the Ethics Office sent out 21 informational emails to all staff emails on a range of ethics-related topics.

Finally, the Ethics Office participated as a panel member in a global town hall hosted by the United Nations on United Nations values in practice during COVID-19.

## Ethics Community Posts 2020

6,114 Page Views in 3 months

9th Most Popular Page  
(of 77 Communities)

↑ 95% More Views  
(than in 2019)



# Advice & Guidance

Of the **209 requests for advice**, 74 per cent (154 requests) concerned conflicts of interest issues. Of these, 90 per cent (139 requests) related to participation in outside activities and employment.

Employment-related inquiries constituted 26 per cent of all requests for advice, concerning allegations or queries about workplace conduct, including possible misconduct, harassment and sexual harassment and fair application of policies.

The Ethics Office provided substantive advice, and referred 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.

## 209 Requests for Advice & Guidance in 2020

Guidance that related to harassment, SH, abuse of authority, incivility, discrimination, or misconduct	2018	2019	2020
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>34</b>



# Requests for Protection from Retaliation

The Ethics Office received two complaints of retaliation in 2020. Both complaints arose in the context of the staff members' reports of misconduct. One matter was closed due to insufficient evidence. The second matter was referred for investigation, with recommendations for protective measures.

The Ethics Office received one investigation report in 2020, relating to a 2019 complaint of retaliation. The Ethics Office made an independent finding that retaliation had not been established, and the matter was closed.

The Ethics Office responded to seven retaliation-related inquiries, including questions about the policy, procedures and specific instances of alleged retaliation.



# Financial Disclosure



542 staff were required to submit financial disclosure statements, covering the 2019 calendar year. Of those, six left before submitting any form. Thus, 536 forms underwent a complete review.

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 their immediate family members could present a conflict of interest, given the organization's mission and activities and the staff member's role.

Following review of the financial disclosure statements, the Ethics Office additionally subjected a random sample of 51 statements of the entire filing population to verification of their financial disclosures.

In ten cases (21%) staff had failed to disclose financial assets with balances greater than \$10,000 (bank accounts; money market funds; share certificates); non-financial assets (real estate) and liabilities from a single source (loans). However, No conflicts of interest were identified.



# Coherence & Policy



On 01 September 2020, the UNFPA Ethics Officer was elected as the Alternate Chair of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations.

In this capacity, the Ethics Officer will, upon the request of United Nations Secretariat staff, conduct a review of retaliation cases when the UN Ethics Office has determined that there is 'no prima facie case' of retaliation or threat of retaliation (meaning there is insufficient information to support the claim of retaliation or threat of retaliation).

## Coherence & Policy in 2020

- UNFPA Ethics Office Reviewed 2 Appeals to UN Ethics Office PaR Decisions.
- UNFPA Ethics Office provided advice on 7 Decisions by the former Alternate Chair of EPUN.
- UNFPA Ethics Office provided support to the Culture Change initiative and Strategic Partnerships (due diligence process).
- The Ethics Office collaborated with other UNFPA offices on 58 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; and responding to donor inquiries about UNFPA ethics practices and policies.



**Thank You**

