



29 April 2022

UNFPA management response

to

Report of the Ethics Office 2021 DP/FPA/2022/7

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

UNFPA – Reports of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Ethics Offices

**Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS
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- 1) UNFPA management acknowledges with appreciation the work of the UNFPA Ethics Office, and the continuous support to the Executive Director to ensure that UNFPA staff and personnel perform their functions with 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.
- 2) Management congratulates the Ethics Office in the accomplishment of its mandated activities for 2021 and commends the Ethics Office for its continuing work to promote a culture of integrity, accountability, transparency, professionalism, respect, and tolerance.
- 3) Management takes note of the threefold objectives for the Ethics Office in 2021 and commends their work to (a) increase the visibility and accessibility of ethics services; (b) promote confidence in ethics as a practical, necessary, and trusted resource; and (c) extend the reach of the office to more personnel (through training, virtual engagement and delivery of services).
- 4) We would like to commend the Ethics Office for responding to 996 requests from across the organization regarding ethical issues in 2021, compared to 430 in 2020.
- 5) Further, we would like to share our appreciation for the work of the Ethics Office, which has included providing guidance and advice to staff, personnel and management; interpersonal conduct, fair application of rules and policies, and wrongdoing. We take note of the reported increase in requests for advisory services from 34 in 2020 to 119 in 2021, which represents, *inter alia*, a continued sign of trust and confidence among staff in the function.
- 6) Management commends the Ethics Office for achieving a new milestone in the number of personnel who participated in live training and notes the total number of personnel trained increased by 129 per cent, from 1,150 in 2020 to 2,641 in 2021. The Management appreciates the uptake of these trainings by the Ethics Advisor that included three core units on: essential ethics; public pronouncements/social media; and civility. The high percentage of advancement of knowledge in these core areas are well-acknowledged.
- 7) Management also notes with great appreciation the focus on training, education and outreach activities, which assisted in reinforcing the core values and principles of the United Nations and the international civil service, as well as increased knowledge of ethics-related policies. Management appreciates that due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, the Ethics Office increased its virtual presence through an expanded outreach and training programme with the addition of live translation that was provided for all regional training sessions.
- 8) One of the most challenging management efforts is encouraging healthy conflict in the workplace. We appreciate the work of the Ethics Office in addressing this complex management problem by running a proactive, open, approachable, empathetic function that has made great strides in building awareness of the need for integrity, civility and respect in the workplace. We congratulate the Ethics Office with its successful

awareness and training-related achievements, which included the new outreach initiatives of an anonymous ‘ask ethics’ virtual portal, an intranet page with extensive guidance, and a ‘bite-size ethics’ information campaign. The positive impact of this virtual outreach strategy has resulted in sustained staff engagement on a variety of ethics topics and the increase in views of ethics-related content on the Ethics Vlog by 544 per cent from 6,798 in 2020 to 43,814 is well-noted.

- 9) With increased awareness comes increased reporting. Management welcomes this increase in transparency facilitated by the Ethics Office. Management notes that the Ethics Office received increased requests for protection from retaliation, from 2 in 2020 to 8 in 2021. Management also notes that a significant effort has gone towards reviewing the merits of the allegations and areas of concern resulting in an assessment of insufficient information to support a *prima facie* determination of retaliation for five complaints and three complaints referred for investigation with recommendations for interim protective measures. Management values the contribution of the Ethics Office in helping to root out abuse of office and retaliatory behaviour in the workplace, and will continue to work with the Ethics Office to raise awareness and increase the reach of the Ethics Office and to encourage the use of these services.
- 10) We would like to commend the Ethics Advisor, who in her capacity as Alternate Chair of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, conducted 9 reviews of determinations by the United Nations Ethics Office on retaliation matter in addition to the participation in 8 reviews of determinations conducted by the Chair of the Ethics Panel.
- 11) The Ethics Office’s strong collaboration within EPUN and Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO), has been of benefit to UNFPA through the access to peer reviewed ethics guidance, information and practice tools. Through its participation with this interagency panel, the Ethics Office has contributed to areas of mutual benefit to the wider UN. We appreciate that the Ethics Office participated in 10 official EPUN meetings in 2021.
- 12) Informal conflict resolution is an approach that allows the parties involved to stay in control of the process and to negotiate and settle on solutions that work for everyone. The success of this process depends on the good faith of all the parties involved and their willingness to resolve the conflict peacefully. In UNFPA, we encourage staff and managers to explore this path, whenever possible, to find new understandings, build stronger work relations and resolve work conflict. Management notes that there are several offices, informally known as the ‘integrity family’, available to support staff and management on such matters. Management takes note of the good cooperation of the Ethics Office with the ‘integrity family initiative’ to promote the informal resolution of interpersonal conflicts, greater reporting of misconduct and a victim/survivor-centred approach to the administration of justice. Management also notes with appreciation the Ethics Office continued commitment to workplace enablers such as the organization culture change initiative.

- 13) Management notes the Ethics Office's role of managing the financial disclosure programme; the financial disclosure programme is an important tool for UNFPA to help identify, resolve and mitigate conflict of interest risks arising from staff members' personal financial assets, liabilities, investments, and outside activities. Management is pleased to note that there was 100 per cent compliance with the financial disclosure programme and no notable conflicts of interest were identified upon review or verification of a random sample of statements. Management acknowledges the high caseload in 2020 and looks forward to the proposal of a policy revision for the Financial Disclosure Programme, as anticipated in 2022.
- 14) Further, management recognizes the work of the Ethics Office for the stable compliance with mandatory online training remained at 72 per cent. We note that the total number of persons trained did not change from 2020 to 2021, the compliance rate, relative to personnel numbers, declined slightly due to an increase in personnel numbers. However, management notes the cooperation of the Ethics Office with the UNFPA Learning teams and the development of a new Learning platform developed in 2021 and looks forward to this improvement in technology and eventual launch in 2022. Management will support the Ethics Office to increase the compliance rate in 2022 to above 90 per cent.
- 15) We thank the Ethics Adviser for providing her ethics expertise to the United Nations system entities and review processes, and the draft terms of reference for the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) review on measures and mechanisms for preventing and addressing racism and racial discrimination in the institutions of the United Nations system, and the JIU's review of the current state of the ethics function in the United Nations.
- 16) Management also takes note of the observations outlined by the Ethics Office indicating a higher demand for services from the Ethics Office owing to the disruption caused by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notable concerns include the challenges posed by the pandemic on staff wellbeing, including mental health, and the direct link to an increase in the risk for interpersonal misconduct. Management agrees with this observation and commits to continued support of staff, managers and teams and notes the valuable contributions of the Ethics Office in these matters.
- 17) As in previous years, UNFPA compliments the Ethics Office on continuing to strengthen the services that it provides under its mandated areas of work and will continue to provide strong support to its work. Management looks forward to a continuing fruitful collaboration to foster a culture of ethics and integrity in UNFPA.