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

**United Nations Population Fund**

**Report of the Ethics Office 2022**

*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/Amend.1), the report was reviewed by the Ethics Panel of the United Nations in February 2022 and presented to the UNFPA Executive Director.

The report summarizes the activities of the UNFPA Ethics Office during 2022 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 and welcome continued progress in the work of the UNFPA Ethics Office.

## I. Introduction

1. This report (a) outlines outputs and impacts achieved by the Ethics Office in 2022; (b) provides an analysis of the operating environment for adherence to the Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants; and (c) suggests strategies 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.
2. The report is submitted to the Board at its annual session in 2023, per paragraph 9 of Executive Board decision 2010/17. The report's contents align with the Ethics Office mandate detailed in the Secretary-General's bulletin, "United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes" (ST/SGB/2007/11 as amended).
3. The mission of the Ethics Office is to assist the Executive Director in cultivating and nurturing a culture of ethics, integrity, and accountability, thereby enhancing the trust in and the credibility of the UNFPA, both internally and externally. The Ethics Office operates on the principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality.
4. Taking note of the standards and recommendations provided by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the UNFPA Ethics Office confirms its organizational independence for this reporting period. The Office performed its activities free from interference. The Office will continue to monitor other organizations' approaches and relevant oversight recommendations to maintain strong practices. On this issue, the Office is mindful and notes with appreciation the Executive Board's decision to encourage direct and independent communication with the Executive Board, as needed.

### *Highlights*

5. The Ethics Office aimed to foster a culture of integrity, accountability, fairness, and safety for all UNFPA personnel in 2022. Our strategic focus was to identify barriers that hinder constructive dissent and reporting of wrongdoing. Over the past three years, UNFPA has introduced several initiatives to promote a psychologically safe and positive organizational culture, which has resulted in unprecedented staff engagement with the Ethics Office. However, despite our efforts, some UNFPA and United Nations personnel still fear reporting. This is partly because the decision to speak up is often influenced by complex socio-cultural, political and economic environments beyond the organization's reach.
6. In communities where information networks or clan/tribal affiliations play a significant role, reporting wrongdoing against members of that community can come with significant personal consequences. In some countries, whistleblowing is linked to grave consequences, such as torture and disappearance. The impact of caste on speak-up culture remains largely unexplored, despite its relevance to over one billion people worldwide. Additionally, poverty and inequality can create a culture of survivalism, making it difficult for individuals to report wrongdoing and risk job loss. United Nations organizations operate in conflict and post-conflict settings, and many of our personnel are trauma survivors who face psycho-social challenges drawing boundaries, asking for help, and reporting wrongdoing. Furthermore, an individual's social identity, including gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality and disability, can significantly impact whether they feel comfortable speaking out.
7. While these contextual challenges are not unique to UNFPA, the Ethics Office believes that addressing them is essential to the creation of a speak-up culture. In this regard, the Ethics Office has developed an inclusive ethics framework to address these challenges, called the 'ecological' model of psychological safety. This model considers various factors contributing to speak-up behaviour, such as individual factors, country context, organizational factors and leadership and team dynamics, within the entire organizational ecosystem. In 2023, the Ethics Office will be committed to ensuring that our ethics programme meets the diverse needs of the people we serve. Other notable outputs in 2022 were as follows:

8. *Promoting ethical awareness and decision-making.* The Ethics Office achieved record levels of live training for the third year. Three thousand one hundred thirty participants attended live training, representing 69% of the total workforce (up 163% from 2019). The Ethics Advisor delivered all training. The training was highly rated in feedback polls: 92% of respondents said they learned something new, 95% said they identified practical applications for ethics in their workplace, and 97% said the training was a worthwhile use of their time (47% response rate). 74% completed the newly launched mandatory online ethics training course, which included a statement of commitment to abide by the Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants.

9. *Online engagement has increased by 372 per cent since 2019.* The Ethics Office aims to build an infrastructure of online ethics content to empower self-driven learning. In 2022, this included 189 posts to the Ethics Intranet page, resulting in 32,100 views and 2,292 hours spent reaching ethics content. In addition, personnel viewed the Ethics YouTube channel 5,090 times, and 15 online micro-ethics courses were published in every UN language (Bite-Size ethics). The Ethics Advisor ran in-person workshops for the Arab States Regional Office, Egypt Country Office, Jordan Country Office, and personnel attending a regional meeting of Country Directors and Security personnel in Jordan.

10. *Confidential, independent advice and guidance.* The Ethics Office has observed a notable rise in requests for advice and guidance since 2019. In 2022, 373 personnel received confidential advice from the Ethics Office, representing a remarkable 44 per cent increase in demand over the past four years. There was a slight reduction in requests in 2022 compared to 2021 (18 per cent), which may reflect the results of extensive outreach and communication on frequently asked questions. The Ethics Office aims to service low-risk transactional queries through self-guided online content.

11. *Protecting personnel from retaliation.* The Ethics Office received nine requests for protection from retaliation in 2022. Three requests (relating to the same subject) were investigated, and retaliation was established in those cases. Two matters are currently under investigation. Two matters were closed because there was insufficient information to support a prima facie determination of retaliation, and two were withdrawn by the complainants. All recommendations for protective measures were swiftly actioned by the Administration.

12. *Advice to management.* The Ethics Office proposed and led the establishment of the UNFPA “Integrity Group,” a strategic initiative to promote a more survivor-centred accessible, data-driven, transparent, accountable, and trusted internal justice system. The Office of the Executive Director coordinates the group. It includes Ethics, Ombudsman, Human Resources, Audit and Investigation Services, and the coordinator for Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Sexual Harassment. A detailed action plan was approved, which includes coordinated staff outreach and engagement efforts, joint analysis of trends and risks, and review of best practice approaches to internal justice. Initial outputs in 2022 included joint outreach and online engagement by all internal justice actors. The Ethics Office also supported the review and development of ethics-related policies, procedures, and programs.

13. *Coherent application of ethical standards.* The Ethics Office notes, with appreciation, the vital contribution that the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (chaired by the United Nations Ethics Office) made to achieving coherence in ethics standards and practices in 2022. The Ethics Advisor was an active member of EPUN in 2022, which included review of protection against retaliation matters, consideration of ethics policy and practice matters, and shared training and outreach. Notably, UNFPA training and outreach products were utilized by several sister UN organizations.

14. *Financial Disclosure Programme.* The Ethics Office reviewed 974 disclosures and achieved 100% compliance. The Ethics Office reviewed all disclosures and identified and resolved 167 potential conflicts of interest concerns. No notable conflicts of interest were identified upon review or third-party verification of a random sample of statements. The Ethics Office completed a review of the Financial Disclosure Policy and made recommendations to modernize the language, include

references to digital currencies, include additional conflict of interest questions, and remove disclosure requirements for junior-level staff members who are not substantively involved in procurement activities.

## II. Activities of the UNFPA Ethics Office

15. The Ethics Office serves a global workforce of approximately 4,500 personnel in more than 150 countries and territories. The office is staffed by an Ethics Advisor (D1), Ethics Officer (P4) who was on-boarded in June 2022, and an Ethics Associate (G7). Activities of the Ethics Office align with six mandated areas:

- (a) Confidential advice and guidance to all personnel;
- (b) Addressing requests for protection from retaliation;
- (c) Training and outreach to achieve compliance with UNFPA values, standards and rules and promote mechanisms to resolve complaints (including protection from retaliation);
- (d) 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 standards in the United Nations system;
- (e) Guiding 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 United Nations Charter and other applicable staff rules and regulations; and
- (f) Administer the Financial Disclosure Programme.

16. To execute this mandate, the Ethics Office provided services on 857 occasions (see table 1 below). As detailed below, the overall rate of service requests declined by 14 per cent from 2021. The slight decline in requests can partly be attributed to changes in the Ethics programme of activities. For example, a 32 per cent decline in 'coherence-related requests' reflects the fact that the Ethics Advisor completed her term as the Alternate Chair of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations in 2021. In addition, a 53 per cent decline in 'standard setting' requests (compared to 2021) reflects the significant support the Ethics Advisor provided to the UNFPA culture change initiative design in 2021, compared with 2022.

17. While there was a 15 per cent decline in 'training-related requests,' training outputs actually increased in 2022, reflecting that the Ethics Office was actively pursuing training opportunities.

Table 1  
Ethics services delivered, 2019-2022

Year	Advice	Retaliation	Financial disclosure	Standard-setting	Coherence	General information	Training	Total
2019	186	9	9	14	68	2	21	309
2020	209	9	55	58	54	3	42	430
2021	455	10	117	150	93	6	165	996
2022	373	12	195	71	63	2	141	857

### A. Advice and guidance

18. Advice and guidance constituted 44 per cent of all services delivered in 2022. Practical, timely, and confidential advice and referral can prevent unnecessary escalation of issues, ensure compliance, promote reporting of serious wrongdoing, protect the well-being of UNFPA personnel and mitigate risks.

19. The Ethics Office has observed a notable rise in requests for advice and guidance since 2019. In 2022, 373 personnel received confidential advice from the Ethics Office, representing a remarkable 44 per cent increase in demand over the past four years; 48 per cent of queries related to potential conflicts of interest and outside activities and 52 per cent to employment-related concerns, including alleged wrongdoing.

20. Notwithstanding the overall growth in requests over the past four years, there was an 18 per cent decline in requests for advice in 2022, compared with 2021. This included a 14 per cent decrease in requests for advice on conflicts of interest and outside activities and a 12 per cent decrease in requests on employment-related concerns. The decline in requests can most likely be attributed to the success of an intense campaign to empower self-driven learning through online ethics content. Specifically, the provision of micro-training modules on conflicts of interest and outside activities and consistent awareness raising on the roles of the Office of Ombudsman, human resources, investigative services and the Office of Staff Legal Assistance in resolving employment-related concerns.

21. It is anticipated that continued outreach and communication on frequently asked questions related to conflicts of interest and employment-related concerns will further reduce the number of low-risk informational requests.

Table 2  
Requests for Services: 2019-2022

Advice categories	2019	2020	2021	2022
Conflict of interest	132	139	206	178
Employment-related concerns	54	55	222	195
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>373</b>

## B. Protection from retaliation

22. UNFPA is obligated to protect personnel who report misconduct or participate in an authorized fact-finding activity from any actual or threatened detrimental action 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.

23. The Ethics Office undertakes a preliminary review of requests for protection. If a *prima facie* case of retaliation is established, the matter is referred to the UNFPA Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS) for investigation.

24. The Ethics Office received nine formal requests for protection from retaliation in 2022 and responded to eight retaliation-related inquiries, including questions about the policy, procedures and specific instances of alleged retaliation.

25. Three requests for protection (relating to the same subject) were investigated, and retaliation was established. However, because the subject of the complaint committed the retaliatory acts after separating from service, the administration was unable to action any accountability measures. Two matters are currently under investigation. Two matters were closed because there was insufficient information to support a *prima facie* determination of retaliation. Two were withdrawn by the complainants (one for unknown reasons and the other because the subject of the complaint retired). All recommendations for protective measures were swiftly actioned by the administration.

## C. Training

26. The Ethics Office achieved record levels of live training for the fourth consecutive year, with 3,130 participants attending live training, representing 69 per cent of the total workforce (up 163 per cent from 2019). The Ethics Advisor delivered all training.

27. Training topics included: essential ethics; public pronouncements/social media; civility; speaking up; retaliation and psychological safety; ethics for managers and leaders; and ethics induction. Guest experts spoke on psychological safety and civility at regional and global workshops.

28. Ethics training was highly rated in feedback polls (47 per cent response rate): 92 per cent of respondents said they learned something new, 95 per cent said they identified practical applications for ethics in their workplace, and 97 per cent said the training was a worthwhile use of their time.

29. The vast majority (74 per cent) of personnel completed the newly launched mandatory online ethics training course, which included a mandatory statement of commitment to UNFPA standards of conduct.

Table 3  
Number of participants trained live

2019	2020	2021	2022
317	1150	2164	3,130

#### D. Outreach

30. The Ethics Office aims to build an infrastructure of engaging, relevant and accessible online ethics content to empower self-driven learning. Online engagement has increased by 372 per cent since 2019. In 2022, this included:

- (a) 189 posts to the UNFPA Ethics Office Intranet page, resulting in 32,100 views and 2,292 hours spent reaching ethics content (translated into all six United Nations languages);
- (b) 5,090 views on the UNFPA Ethics Office YouTube channel;
- (c) 15 online micro-ethics courses ('bite-size ethics') published in all six United Nations languages.

31. The Ethics Advisor delivered in-person workshops to the Arab States Regional Office and the Egypt and Jordan country offices, as well as one for personnel attending a regional meeting of country directors and security personnel in Jordan.

#### E. Standard-Setting and Policy Support

32. The Ethics Office provides ethics-related guidance to management to ensure that the policies and practices of the organization reflect and promote the expectations of integrity, impartiality and fairness required of UNFPA and its personnel.

33. During 2022, the Ethics Office collaborated with other UNFPA offices on 71 occasions. This included proposing the establishment of the UNFPA "Integrity Group," a strategic initiative to promote a more survivor-centred accessible, data-driven, transparent, accountable and trusted internal justice system. A detailed action plan was approved, and initial outputs in 2022 included joint outreach and online engagement by all internal justice actors.

34. The Ethics Office also supported the review and development of various ethics-related policies, procedures and programmes and provided expertise and input to United Nations system entities and review processes (including the Joint Inspection Unit).

#### F. Coherence

35. The Ethics Adviser contributed to coherence in the United Nations system in 2021, principally through her participation within EPUN, established under ST/SGB/2007/11/Amend.1. The Ethics Office participated in 11 official EPUN meetings in 2022.

36. The Ethics Office notes, with appreciation, the vital contribution EPUN (chaired by the United Nations Ethics Office) made to achieving coherence in ethics standards and practices in 2022. This includes inputs to policies and procedures on outside activities, conflicts of interest and retaliation. The UNFPA Ethics Office benefitted significantly from having access to comparative ethics guidance, information and practice tools through its participation with this inter-agency panel.

37. The Ethics Advisor supported reviews of determinations by the United Nations Ethics Office on retaliation matters and participated in the review of determinations conducted by the Chair and Alternate Chair of EPUN.

38. The Ethics Office continued its active participation in the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, including in its annual meeting.

### **G. Financial Disclosure Programme**

39. Mandated by the Secretary-General, the Financial Disclosure Programme is the primary tool for identifying and assessing conflict-of-interest risks arising from the private holdings and external activities of staff and their immediate family members.

40. Within UNFPA, 974 individuals were required to submit financial disclosure statements to the Ethics Office, and all complied. The Ethics Office reviewed all disclosures and identified and resolved 167 potential conflicts-of-interest concerns (relating to 16.3 per cent of those that filed disclosures). Potential conflicts of interest primarily involved previously undeclared outside activities, such as business ownership interests, board memberships or family members employed with government agencies, non-governmental agencies or UNFPA partners and suppliers. A random sample of 45 statements from the filing population was subject to third-party verification. Of this group, the verification exercise identified a discrepancy with respect to seven disclosures. Specifically, seven persons (13 per cent) omitted to declare all of their financial assets. No conflicts of interest were identified when the financial assets of these seven individuals were declared and reviewed.

## **III. Observations and Recommendations to Management**

41. In its decision in 2011/24, the Executive Board called on the Ethics Office to make recommendations to management to strengthen the organizational culture of integrity and compliance. The Ethics Office engages regularly in an ongoing dialogue with management regarding opportunities in this regard.

42. For this reporting period, the Ethics Office is not submitting any management recommendations to the Executive Board.

## **IV. Conclusion**

43. The Ethics Office is proud to serve UNFPA and promote loyalty to the organization's vision and mandate while ensuring adherence to the Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants. With the assistance of the Ethics Office, UNFPA maintains its reputation as a trusted and respected institution, enabling the organization to continue to positively impact the lives of women, girls and young people around the world. The Ethics Office understands that it is crucial to sustain this progress and remains committed to supporting the organization in upholding the values of integrity, transparency and accountability.

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