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

**United Nations Population Fund**

**Report of the Ethics Office 2025**

*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 section 3(h) of the Secretary-General's Bulletin entitled United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes (ST/SGB/2007/11, and as amended, ST/SGB/2007/Amend.1), the report was reviewed by the Ethics Panel of the United Nations in March 2026 and presented to the UNFPA Executive Director.

The report summarises the activities of the UNFPA Ethics Office during 2025 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 outlines the outputs and impact of the Ethics Office in 2025 and makes recommendations to management to maintain the ethical standards necessary for UNFPA to continue delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.
2. The UNFPA Ethics Office was established pursuant to the Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/2007/11. 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 trust and credibility in UNFPA, both internally and externally. The Ethics Office operates on the principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality.
3. The present report is submitted to the Board at its annual session, as 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).
4. The Ethics Office, headquartered in New York, provides comprehensive services to approximately 5,322 UNFPA personnel across 364 duty stations in 144 countries. This global workforce comprises 3,519 staff members and 1,803 non-staff members, including 1,061 individuals on local service contracts and United Nations Volunteers assignments, 634 international consultants and 108 interns.
5. The mandated activities and results of the Ethics Office in 2025 included:
  - (a) *Confidential advice and guidance.* In 2025, the Ethics Office provided confidential guidance on 703 distinct matters—a notable increase from the 624 cases handled in 2024. These inquiries spanned a broad range of ethical considerations, including conflicts of interest, outside activities, and employment-related concerns. This also includes inquiries received from staff emerging from the assessment of cases from the financial disclosure programme. This consistent demand for services, compared to the previous year, underscores the Office's reliable service delivery and the sustained trust staff place in the Office's advisory function.
  - (b) *Protection against retaliation.* In 2025, the Ethics Office received 11 formal requests for protection against retaliation and a further eight requests for advice related to the scope and the applicability of protection against retaliation for individual cases. The protection against retaliation programme supported UNFPA speak-up culture by allowing UNFPA personnel to raise formal complaints without fear of retaliation. Over recent years, the number of protection against retaliation requests tripled from four in 2023 to 12 in 2024 and remained steady at 11 in 2025, showing increased awareness among UNFPA personnel of the availability of whistleblower protection and trust in the protection the Ethics Office can offer.
  - (c) *Training and awareness-raising.* The Ethics Office significantly expanded its training outreach in 2025, conducting 83 live training sessions (53 in-person and 30 virtual). This hybrid approach resulted in a 135 per cent increase in participation, reaching 2,514 personnel compared to 1,070 in 2024. To maximize impact, the Ethics Advisor undertook strategic missions to the Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, and Latin and Central America regional, delivering in-person training across eight countries, as well as Geneva and New York. The Office leveraged diverse technological tools, from targeted webinars to interactive digital platforms, to maintain a global awareness-raising footprint.
  - (d) *Financial disclosure programme.* The Ethics Office maintained full oversight of the end-to-end planning, implementation and follow-up of its financial disclosure and conflict of interest programme. In 2025, the programme saw the participation of 950 staff members, achieving an exemplary 100 per cent compliance rate again. This rigorous process remains a critical safeguard for identifying and mitigating previously undisclosed conflicts of interest.

Throughout the cycle, the Office ensures strict confidentiality—most notably, financial statements are only disclosed for investigative purposes following formal authorisation by the Executive Director.

- (e) *Policy and standard-setting.* The Ethics Office provided critical ethics feedback on 11 organizational policies. By providing feedback, the Ethics Office ensures that the UNFPA policy framework follows ethical principles and is values-driven. This included substantive inputs on:
  - (i) Division for Human Resources: six policies, including the Policy for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and the Policy for the Employment of Retirees;
  - (ii) Division for Management Services: four key policies, notably the Anti-Fraud Policy and the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Policy; and
  - (iii) Division for Communications and Strategic Partnerships: one strategic policy.
- (f) *Intra-organizational coordination.* In 2025, the Ethics Office strengthened institutional integrity through active collaboration with various UNFPA business units, providing substantive contributions to the Division of Human Resources (DHR) culture initiative and leading specialized sessions during global town halls. Following the Ethics Advisor’s mission to Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, and Latin and Central America, the Office initiated bilateral meetings to address systemic ethical issues. These dialogues were conducted in coordination with the Integrity Group—including the Directors of Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS) and DHR, the Chief of the Legal Unit, the Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, and the inter-agency Ombudsman’s Office—ensuring a harmonized and multi-disciplinary approach to addressing organizational risks.
- (g) *Engagement with the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN), the Ethics Network for Multilateral Organizations (ENMO) and other external entities.* The Ethics Office ensures collaboration and harmonization across the United Nations system by collaborating with other organizations within the United Nations system and in the multilateral sector. The Ethics Office recorded 53 interactions with EPUN and attended two ENMO sessions. Furthermore, the Ethics Advisor and the Ethics Officer attended the 25th anniversary of the ethics function of the International Monetary Fund. These high-level engagements facilitated critical peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and allowed for the alignment of UNFPA ethics frameworks with global best practices across multilateral institutions.

## II. Administration of the Ethics Office

### A. Composition

6. In 2025, the Ethics Office operated with a core team consisting of the Ethics Advisor at the D-1 level, one Ethics Officer at the P-4 level, one Ethics Associate at the G-7 level and, since October 2025, one Ethics Analyst (Junior Professional Officer) at the P-2 level. This totals four fixed-term staff positions. The Ethics Office was also supported on a rotational basis by short-term junior consultants and interns throughout the year. At the time of the writing of this report, the Ethics Office is fully staffed.

7. The operational budget for the Ethics Office in 2025 was \$108,677 (excluding staff but including non-staff personnel costs), which was utilized in full to achieve the Office’s mandate and strategic targets. Although UNFPA globally had to reduce its budget in 2025 to be commensurate with the available resources, the Office of the Executive Director decided not to apply this measure to the Ethics Office, underlining the importance UNFPA leadership assigns to the ethics function and the criticality of its mandate and to safeguarding the Ethics Office's independence. Similarly,

the Ethics Office was exempt from travel restrictions in 2025, enabling the necessary field missions to ensure in-person interactions with colleagues outside of New York.

8. In 2025, the Ethics Office optimized its existing budget by prioritizing direct engagement with personnel in the field and the modernization of its communication tools. Consequently, the Office did not attend the annual ENMO session in Beijing to prioritize the limited travel funds for strategic and critical outreach activities. By focusing resources on regional missions and bolstering human capital through the intern and consultant programmes, the Office maximized its immediate impact on UNFPA staff. Going forward, securing the necessary resources for ENMO attendance will be vital for maintaining UNFPA leadership in inter-agency ethics dialogues.

## **B. Confirmation of independence**

9. The UNFPA Ethics Office confirms compliance with the standards on independence recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit in its review of the ethics function in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2021/5). The Office affirms that it remained entirely free from external interference in the execution of its mandate, maintaining full authority over its mandate, budget, work programme and priorities during the 2025 reporting period.

## **C. Oversight and structure**

10. The Ethics Advisor reports directly to the Executive Director and supports the work of the Executive Director to nurture a culture of integrity and accountability in UNFPA. To do so, the Ethics Advisor had direct and unhindered access to the Executive Director. The Ethics Office maintained an active relationship with the Office of the Executive Director through bilateral meetings with the Executive Director and the deputy executive directors and monthly meetings with the Chief of Staff. These meetings provide the Executive Director with a status of the activities of the Ethics Office, sharing of systemic and non-confidential issues, while also providing a forum to respond to requests for advice on important ethical matters.

11. While not a standing member of the Executive Committee, the Ethics Advisor was invited to participate in three Executive Committee sessions during 2025 in an ex officio advisory capacity. These engagements provided a high-level platform for the Ethics Advisor to brief UNFPA directors on strategic ethics initiatives and to lead substantive discussions on emerging ethical considerations, ensuring that integrity remains a core focus of executive-level decision-making.

12. In the context of the Business Model Review, the Ethics Office engaged extensively with external evaluators to provide substantive inputs on its mandate and organizational structure. These consultations focused on optimizing the Office's institutional placement within UNFPA to safeguard its independence, strengthen its integrity framework, and ensure the effective delivery of its global mandate.

13. The Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC) provides oversight by reviewing the Ethics Office's activities and structure and assesses whether the Ethics Office has the requisite autonomy and support to carry out its work without restrictions or limitations. The Ethics Office had three meetings with the OAC, responded to requests for comments and welcomed its feedback and recommendations.

14. Externally, the Ethics Advisor participated in 10 monthly meetings with the EPUN that enabled better coordination of ethical working culture across the United Nations system. The Ethics Advisor also attended two ENMO meetings.

## **D. Strategic focus**

15. The Ethics Office developed a new strategy for 2025, which included, for the first time, the use of concrete, measurable key performance indicators. This strategy aimed to develop and promote a positive and supportive ethics framework at UNFPA, establishing the Ethics Office as a valuable service provider, implementing a data-driven approach and benchmarking against best

practices, both internally and externally. To achieve these goals, the strategic focus was split into four pillars:

- (a) *Fit for purpose*: In 2025, the Ethics Office prioritized the strategic alignment of its resources with the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, positioning the ethics function as a core contributor to organizational effectiveness. Through a robust global outreach strategy and targeted missions by the Ethics Advisor, the Office successfully bridged the gap between headquarters and the regional and country offices. Consequently, more than half of UNFPA global personnel benefited from in-person engagement and ethics training, fostering an environment where ethical considerations are integrated into the daily implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- (b) *Hub for excellence*: The Ethics Office is envisioned as a recognized centre of excellence on ethics-related matters, fostering a culture of 'positive ethics' that moves beyond a traditional policing image toward one of trusted partnership. This transition was marked by a commitment to transparency, impartiality and approachability, ensuring staff view the Office as a valuable resource for guidance. Operational excellence was demonstrated through measurable benchmarks: the Office maintained an average response rate of under three working days for outside activity requests. Furthermore, the Office remained fully compliant with the 30-day mandate for assessing prima facie cases of retaliation, including the timely issuance of temporary protective measures. Visibility was further enhanced through a modernized, accessible ethics portal and monthly newsletters featuring interactive articles, quizzes and illustrative content.
- (c) *Inclusive ethics*: This pillar underscores the importance of delivering ethical guidance and support that is inclusive of diverse perspectives, particularly cultural differences, and being receptive to feedback from all stakeholders. This recognizes that a truly ethical organization must consider the diverse experiences and backgrounds of its staff. All levels of staff were encouraged to contact the ethics office through Ask Myriam Anything or any other channel and take part in its global training sessions. To ensure this inclusivity, global training sessions were preceded by confidential surveys designed to gauge specific staff concerns and interests beforehand. Furthermore, the Ethics Office delivered scenario-based interactive sessions that were carefully tailored to be sensitive to the local culture where the training was performed. This pillar was further achieved by translating 23 ethics documents into languages other than English, i.e. Arabic, French and Spanish. In addition, the Ethics Office ensured diversity and inclusion in all its written materials.
- (d) *Accessible communication*: In 2025, the Ethics Office utilized proactive communication as a primary driver for fostering a culture of integrity and enhancing its institutional mark. By ensuring that ethical standards were both accessible and easily understood, the Office successfully positioned itself as an approachable and trusted resource for all staff. During the reporting period, the Office disseminated 20 global communications addressing core ethical themes. The subsequent increase in staff engagement (noted through a higher volume of advisory requests) underscores a heightened awareness of the Office's mandate and a strengthened sense of 'psychological safety' among staff seeking guidance.

16. The Ethics Office also focused on collaborating with other UNFPA business units to increase the Office's approachability, visibility and relevance and to highlight the importance of a harmonized approach to issues of common concern. These efforts included a partnership with the Information Technology Solutions Office on the topic of artificial intelligence (AI) and ethics, which resulted in the guidance brochure entitled, *AI Ethics at UNFPA: Using AI Responsibly*, for staff. The Media and Communications Branch also included the brochure in the updated UNFPA Brand Guidelines. Furthermore, the Office collaborated with psychosocial counsellors, which resulted in a dedicated newsletter and joint training sessions. In addition, ongoing bilateral engagement with the members of the Integrity Group led to the development of the "Support and Connect" tool. The tool is a new resource for staff, scheduled to be launched in the first quarter of

2026 launch, which allows personnel to identify which options are available for their specific concern by following a decision tree format.

17. Expanding field-level engagement was a cornerstone of the 2025 strategy. The Ethics Advisor conducted missions to eight countries across three regions, ensuring the most efficient travel itinerary by combining countries in the region to help minimize the organization’s carbon footprint. These missions provided invaluable insights that allowed the Ethics Advisor to identify recurring systemic concerns and emerging trends. On return from her mission, the Ethics Advisor conducted high-level debriefings with the Office of the Executive Director, regional directors and country representatives, informing them of her observations so that necessary action could be taken by the relevant business units.

18. To enhance institutional visibility and approachability, the Ethics Office piloted the Ethics Champions network, currently comprising nine Champions across eight UNFPA offices. Serving as localized focal points, these Champions act as the first point of contact for field personnel, navigating them toward appropriate ethics resources and support channels. The success of this pilot is evidenced by a measurable increase in queries referred directly through the network. Identified and appointed by their respective country representatives, the Champions also collaborate with the Ethics Office to deliver joint messaging, ensuring that ethical considerations are seamlessly integrated into the daily operations of the UNFPA global workforce.

19. This network has been a result of successful consultations with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), where such a network has been in place for several years. It drew inspiration from their Ethics and Culture Champions terms of reference, frameworks and lessons learned.

20. The Ethics Office ensured the efficient stewardship of its resources, focusing on global outreach and the enhancement of its communication tools. Mid-year financial support from the Office of the Executive Director provided the necessary fiscal flexibility to implement several strategic priorities that exceeded the capacity of the Office's core structure. Without this additional support, the Ethics Office would not have been able to achieve the number of initiatives it has in 2025.

21. In October 2025, the Ethics Office welcomed a Junior Professional Officer sponsored by the Government of Finland. This strategic addition to the team underscores the high value Member States place on the ethics function. The Ethics Office is grateful for this partnership, which significantly bolsters the Office’s capacity to deliver on its global commitments.

### III. Enhancing delivery on the Ethics Office mandate

22. In 2025, the Ethics Office responded to 703 matters out of which 390 (55.48 per cent) were related to ethics advice and guidance, 108 (15.36 per cent) to Financial Disclosure Programme requests, 79 (11.24 per cent) to coherence and coordination, 53 (7.54 per cent) to training, awareness raising and outreach, and 43 (6.12 per cent) to policy support and standard-setting. The Ethics Office also handled 18 (2.56 per cent) protection against retaliation enquiries, out of which 11 were formal requests for protection. The remaining 12 (1.70 per cent) matters were related to other issues.

**Table 1**  
**Requests for advice and guidance 2025**

Advice categories	Number of requests	Per cent
Ethics advice and guidance	390	55.48
Financial Disclosure Programme-related communications	108	15.36

Coherence and coordination	79	11.24
Training, awareness-raising and outreach	53	7.54
Policy support and standard-setting	43	6.12
Protection against retaliation enquiries	18	2.56
Other issues	12	1.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>703</b>	<b>100</b>

23. Excluding the interactions related specifically to the Financial Disclosure Programme, the Ethics Office handled a diverse range of submissions from both internal and external stakeholders. Of these, 63.87 per cent (380 submissions) originated from staff at the professional level and above. Engagement from inside and outside the organization, including from EPUN and ENMO, accounted for 20.84 per cent (124) of inquiries. General service staff contributed 10.08 per cent (60) of the volume, while other personnel categories accounted for 4.54 per cent (27). A negligible 0.67 per cent (4) originated from unidentifiable sources. This distribution highlights the Office's broad visibility across different contract modalities and external inter-agency bodies.

#### **A. Confidential ethics advice and guidance**

24. The Ethics Office provides actionable, timely and strictly confidential guidance to UNFPA staff, serving as a proactive safeguard against misconduct and the escalation of workplace conflict. By fostering an environment where staff feel safe to share concerns, the Office ensures rigorous compliance with ethical standards and encourages the reporting of serious wrongdoing. This advisory function is essential to protecting the well-being of staff, mitigating institutional risks and preserving UNFPA credibility and reputational integrity both internally and externally.

25. The obligation to identify and proactively disclose actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest is a key duty of UNFPA staff. Where a conflict of interest is identified, it must be resolved in the best interests of the organization while considering the interests of UNFPA staff to the extent possible. While conflicts of interest should be disclosed in the first instance to the head of the unit or office, the Ethics Office is often consulted and provides advice to staff and management to prevent and manage such conflicts. The Ethics Office aims to find safeguards that allow for mitigating conflicts of interest as much as feasible.

26. Compared to 2024, the requests for ethics advice, specifically regarding conflicts of interest and employment-related concerns, have remained stable. Requests were received from all levels of staff, for all contract types, duty stations or grade levels, including senior leadership. Conflicts of interest requests typically include outside activities, personal relationships potentially affecting work decisions, and political and social media activities. Employment-related concerns typically involve questions around termination of employment, non-selection for decisions, or workplace conflicts involving supervisors or colleagues.

27. The Ethics Office provides staff seeking advice with comprehensive, confidential guidance. A confidential ethics discussion typically takes around 60 to 90 minutes and is undertaken in person or through video call. Often there is additional follow-up, either through email exchanges or direct meetings, depending on the needs of the staff member. By evaluating the specific merits of various recourse options, the Office empowers staff to make informed decisions while reinforcing the organization's zero-tolerance policy regarding fraud, corruption and sexual exploitation and abuse. Beyond reporting duties, the Office facilitates access to informal conflict resolution through the Ombudsman's Office, provides pathways for challenging administrative decisions, and ensures staff are aware of available psychosocial support. With the consent of the individual, the Ethics Office acts as a strategic bridge, directly connecting staff with specialized business units, such as the Division for Human Resources, the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment Division, OASIS, the Legal Unit, the Ombudsman's Office, or any other relevant counselling services to ensure timely and appropriate intervention.

28. Some issues may not be related to individual circumstances, but to global developments or to specific organizational decisions. In such cases, when approached by staff, the Ethics Office offers a safe and confidential space to voice concerns and dissent, while advising on various options.

**Table 2**  
**Requests for advice and guidance: 2022-2025**

Advice categories	2022	2023	2024	2025
Conflict of interest	178	184	237	275
Employment-related concerns	195	138	74	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>375</b>

29. To safeguard institutional integrity and ensure that staff remain fully dedicated to the mission of UNFPA, all outside activities are governed by a strict approval process. Under the outside activity policy framework, staff must obtain prior authorization for external engagements, including the receipt of gifts or honours. This process mitigates risks of perceived or actual conflicts of interest, protecting both the individual and the organization from reputational harm.

30. The Ethics Office reviews outside activity requests from all UNFPA staff members for conflicts of interest. The resulting conflicts of interest assessment and recommendations on possible safeguards are submitted to the Director, Division for Human Resources, for review and decision.

31. In 2025, the Ethics Office received 215 requests for outside activities. Guidance in this area usually includes advice and recommendations for authorization of outside employment or other types of occupation, memberships on external boards, committees or similar bodies, teaching and speaking engagements, and publications. Fifty-six of these requests were also subsequently withdrawn or otherwise not submitted to the Director, Division for Human Resources, for approval. The reasons were that staff members opted out of the outside activity due to personal time commitments or did not wish to proceed, given the limited possibility to discuss their current roles in a personal capacity. Efforts will be undertaken in 2026 to routinely obtain the approval rates of advice provided to the Division for Human Resources to track approvals and understand trends in approvals and mitigating measures.

32. The Ethics Office made sustained efforts to streamline its practices further and promote coherence with the guiding principles of the EPUN on outside activities while swiftly reviewing the requests received, adhering to the Office strategy’s key performance indicators to process all requests within three business days.

33. The 2025 reporting cycle saw a moderate increase in the volume of ethics inquiries, which might be a direct outcome of the Office’s enhanced visibility and proactive training. Furthermore, the Office’s thorough review of the Financial Disclosure Programme submissions successfully identified several previously undisclosed outside activities. These findings prompted staff to seek formal guidance and approval, demonstrating a shift towards a more transparent and compliant ethical culture.

*Gifts, honours, remuneration or benefits*

34. Obligated to refuse gifts, honours, decorations, favours or any form of non-United Nations remuneration or benefits in the course of their official duties, with limited exceptions allowed by the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules, UNFPA staff must be mindful that such benefits may create expectations that could lead to conflicts of interest. Preventative advice and training in this area continues to be provided by the Ethics Office, and all receipts of gifts and honours by UNFPA personnel must be disclosed to the Ethics Office. The Ethics Office received 24 enquiries on gifts, honours, and hospitality to which it provided guidance to resolve any potential or actual conflicts of interest. In addition, the Ethics Office discussed the current UNFPA hospitality policy

with the policy owners, the Facilities and Administrative Services Branch, to determine what levels of hospitality would be acceptable without running counter to the limitations on gift-giving. The Ethics Office provided guidance on how hospitality policy provisions can be interpreted in line with UNFPA ethical principles, made suggestions on which areas could be reviewed going forward, and provided input into a frequently asked questions document to help with the interpretation of the policy.

35. During the holiday season in 2025, the Ethics Office launched the UNFPA Gift-Giving Hacks interactive course on gifting guidelines to remind staff of the existing rules and procedures regarding receiving gifts from vendors, suppliers, contractors, non-vendors, non-governmental organizations, or non-vendor sources. These guidelines were published in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. The guidelines were also broadcasted to all personnel via email.

## **B. Protecting against retaliation**

36. Undertaking the responsibilities assigned to the Ethics Office in accordance with the policy for the protection of personnel against retaliation continues to remain an indispensable part of the mandate of the Ethics Office to protect whistleblowers and thereby strengthen UNFPA speak-up culture.

37. Overall, in 2025, the Ethics Office handled 11 formal protection against retaliation submissions, all of which were received from colleagues on staff contracts. The breakdown by regional division was three submissions from headquarters, two from the Arab States region, and five from the Asia and the Pacific region. One complaint was external, reviewed on behalf of a member from EPUN, due to a potential conflict of interest. Six complaints were received from international staff, and five from national staff. In three cases, a prima facie of retaliation was found, in three other cases no prima facie was found, and five cases were withdrawn as they filed preemptively, and no detrimental actions materialized.

38. Three of the formal protection against retaliation submissions were received following a referral by OAIS, underscoring the importance OAIS attributes to protection of complainants or victims during an investigation. It also exemplifies the strong and seamless collaboration between the Ethics Office and OAIS, both on this essential protection tool as well as in other areas of oversight functions.

39. All cases where prima facie was found are currently under investigation with OAIS. All three cases where no prima facie case was found were referred to the Chairperson of EPUN. In two of these subsequent reviews, the Ethics Office's determination was upheld. For the third case, the EPUN Chair found a prima facie case, but ultimately, the resulting in-depth OAIS investigation concluded that no retaliation took place. The Ethics Office confirmed OAIS findings. In addition, there were eight other instances where the Ethics Office was approached, and colleagues raised their concerns regarding potential retaliation, which did not lead to filings of protection against retaliation requests, as the issues raised did not fall under the UNFPA retaliation policy. In most cases, this was due to the lack of a protected activity undertaken by the requester. In one case, a person from outside UNFPA reached out to the Ethics Office to inquire about protection against retaliation but could not be accepted as the scope of UNFPA whistleblowing protection is, ipso facto, limited to personnel working for UNFPA.

40. In all cases where a prima facie determination was made, the Ethics Office recommended to the administration the implementation of specific temporary protective measures. The administration followed these recommendations in all cases, and the Ethics Office was satisfied that the interests of the requesters were sufficiently protected. This included one case from 2024, where the Ethics Office had found a prima facie case of retaliation, which was confirmed by the subsequent OAIS investigation. In this case, the Ethics Office recommended remedial measures to ensure that any negative effects of the retaliation would be mitigated, and future disadvantages could be prevented.

41. The Ethics Office noted that all requests for protection it received related to underlying workplace conflicts or individual administrative decisions, such as non-selection or termination of appointments. None of the underlying protected activities related to whistleblower activities impacting UNFPA financially or reputationally, such as financial irregularities or systemic malfeasance.

42. The Ethics Office also noted the limitations of existing whistleblower mechanisms when threats against the staff members come not directly from the alleged retaliator, but from somebody close to them, who is outside of UNFPA. While coordination with Office of the Security Coordinator colleagues can help in those cases, there are limited means to ensure that the alleged retaliator addresses those issues directly with the sources of the threats.

### **C. Training and awareness-raising**

#### *Mandatory online training*

43. In November 2024, the Ethics Office launched the extensively updated mandatory course, Ethics and Integrity at UNFPA, achieving a high baseline completion rate of 86.2 per cent among staff. The training course is mandatory for all new staff members, with a three-year refresher requirement for existing staff. In 2026, the Ethics Office will endeavour to increase compliance by collaborating closely with the Division for Human Resources.

#### *Online "bite-sized ethics" interactive courses*

44. As part of its strategy to modernize digital learning, the Ethics Office updated its suite of 11 "bite-sized ethics" interactive courses designed for self-paced training. Available in all six official United Nations languages, these modules cover a broad spectrum of ethical issues (including conflicts of interest, misconduct and personal relationships) and were actively promoted throughout the year to maximize organizational reach and accessibility.

45. In the final quarter of 2025, the Office further expanded its digital catalogue by developing five new modules covering critical themes: Social Media Usage; How to be an Empowered Bystander Intervention; Protection against Retaliation; Ethics for Managers and Leaders; and UNFPA Gifting Hacks. To ensure operational relevance and drive wide-scale adoption, two modules underwent a rigorous review process with technical input from relevant units (the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment Division, the Media and Communications Branch and Office of the Security Coordinator). These new resources are scheduled for official launch in 2026.

#### *Live training sessions*

46. In 2025, the Ethics Office achieved a notable milestone in its training outreach, more than doubling its delivery from 1,070 participants in 2024 to 2,514 personnel in 2025. This significant increase reflects a robust commitment to live and hybrid engagement, with 83 sessions conducted across all regions in English, French and Spanish. The Office addressed critical themes such as ethical leadership in crisis, conflicts of interest, and protection against retaliation. These sessions were frequently tailored to meet the specific operational needs of requested offices, ensuring that ethical guidance was both practical and contextually relevant.

47. The Ethics Office delivered highly customized training sessions tailored to the specific operational needs of requested offices both at headquarters and globally. Moving beyond generic modules, the Office utilized pre-session consultations and surveys to align content with the specific inquiries and cultural contexts of requesting office. These sessions were designed as interactive forums, allowing for direct questions and answers and the resolution of localized ethical dilemmas. By maintaining continuous engagement through post-training follow-ups, including by nominating new Ethics Champions, the Office has built a more responsive and trusted relationship with the offices, ensuring that ethics is seen as a practical tool for everyday operational excellence.

48. In 2025, the Ethics Advisor undertook missions to eight countries across three regions: Arab States (Lebanon, Syria), Latin America and the Caribbean (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador), and Asia and the Pacific (Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, and a virtual engagement for Malaysia). By engaging directly with diverse stakeholders—such as protection against sexual exploitation and abuse focal points and local women’s groups, the Ethics Advisor was able to gauge organizational climate and identify emerging systemic concerns. Complementing these group sessions, the Ethics Advisor set aside some dedicated time, providing staff with a secure and confidential space for one-on-one meetings. Insights into ethical trends were systematically shared with the regional directors and country representatives at the end of the mission. During the mission to APRO, the Regional Director led an evaluative exercise where staff shared their perspectives on the value of the Ethics Advisor’s presence. These testimonials were captured in a short video and disseminated through the regional portal, effectively amplifying the message of accountability and transparency across the region and reinforcing the Office’s visibility as a trusted resource.

49. Beyond regular staff training, the Ethics Office contributed to several strategic initiatives from other business units, such as Division for Human Resources and the Staff Council. These included in-person ethics sessions during UNFPA global onboarding weeks, providing an ethics induction to the respectful workplace facilitators, and contributing to the UNFPA “Supporting Six” and “Induction for You” series. Additionally, the Office facilitated an ethics session in the Emerging Leaders training and for new Junior Professional Officer at headquarters.

50. In 2025, the Ethics Office strengthened its collaboration with key business units by contributing to the strategic retreats of OAIS and the Office of the Security Coordinator. By providing an ethics lens during these work planning sessions, the Office helped align the objectives of audit, investigation and security functions with UNFPA broader ethical standards, reinforcing a multi-disciplinary approach to risk management.

51. Data collected from post-session surveys indicate high levels of engagement and utility. On average, 97.35 per cent of respondents categorized the sessions as a “good use of their time”, while 89.38 per cent confirmed the acquisition of new knowledge. Participants specifically reported that the case studies and interactive scenarios were highly effective for practical application and learning.

#### *Awareness-raising*

52. The Ethics Office introduced a new visual identity and logo in line with the organization’s revised branding guidelines. This update provides a consistent and recognizable look for all Ethics Office resources, from newsletters to training modules. This new identity supports the Office’s goal of being seen as an accessible, professional and contemporary resource for all staff.

53. In 2025, the Ethics Office revamped the existing Ethics Portal. The newer version offers a more intuitive structure on all major ethics topics and is easy to navigate and uses simple language that staff can understand. The portal received over 11,000 views in 2025, showing that staff proactively accessed information on ethics topics, regardless of location or time zone.

54. The Ethics Office issued 10 newsletters, each issue focusing on a specific thematic topic in response to critical interests at the time of publication, such as the Financial Disclosure Programme during its launch, workplace issues in response to increased inquiries, and ethics in challenging times and leadership during the headquarters optimization initiative. The newsletters were published in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

55. The Ethics Office maintained active participation in the EPUN Communication sub-group, exchanging ideas, tools and materials to increase impactful communication across the United Nations ethics offices.

56. As part of an effort to communicate widely through various multimedia formats, the Office developed materials to raise awareness about ethics and integrity, most of which were published in multiple United Nations languages:

- (a) *Questions and Answers* posters to guide personnel to the Ethics Portal;
- (b) The *Workplace Conflicts and Prohibited Conduct* brochure to provide practical tips to address issues and support sources;
- (c) *Think Before You Click* social media flyers to remind personnel of social media rules and guidelines;
- (d) The *W.A.R.P. (Who, Aim, Risks, Perception)* flowchart as a short guideline on whether personnel may attend demonstrations;
- (e) The *Ethically Navigating a Changing Landscape* brochure on how to maintain ethics in all situations, no matter how challenging;
- (f) The *Resources* brochure to provide a summary of all available resources; and
- (g) *UNFPA Values* posters to remind staff of the core ethics values: integrity, respect and accountability.

#### **D. Financial Disclosure Programme**

57. The purpose of the Financial Disclosure Programme is to assist designated United Nations personnel in identifying, mitigating and managing conflict-of-interest risks arising from their financial interests, personal affiliations or outside activities, as well as those of their immediate family members. Participants who fulfil their financial disclosure obligation contribute to enhancing the credibility of, and public trust in, the organization. In 2025, the platform used was updated by Information Technology Solutions Office to ensure it met heightened data security requirements identified in 2024.

58. During the 2025 filing cycle, which was conducted from 12 May until 30 October 2025, a total of 950 submissions were finalized. The initial number of required filers was 998, which reduced to a final number of 950 participants (20.7 per cent of all staff). The reduction was due to staff having retired or separated from UNFPA, the removal of ineligible individuals (e.g., consultants), and duplicate names of filers. Following the initial review of all disclosure statements, 50 submissions (approximately 5 per cent of the initial number of required filers) were assessed in a second-level verification process by an independent external company.

59. The 2025 review identified 45 unauthorized outside activities and several instances of potential conflicts of interest. These cases primarily involved external professional engagements, financial interests, or family relationships (specifically relatives employed by the United Nations or affiliated entities). Potential conflicts related to outside activities constituted many of these cases, a trend that remains consistent with the risks identified and managed under the Financial Disclosure Programme. These issues were resolved by the implementation of appropriate mitigating measures.

60. The 2025 Financial Disclosure Programme cycle served as a vital mechanism for identifying and resolving potential conflicts of interest, enabling the Office to implement effective mitigation strategies. To support this process, the Office published a brochure, providing staff with guidance on how to navigate the Financial Disclosure Programme platform.

61. Following the conclusion of the review, a detailed report was developed, which will be used to support the launch of a new Financial Disclosure Programme platform in 2026. The underlying comprehensive analysis of the current exercise identified a large volume of interactions required with individual staff to ensure complete submissions and to achieve full compliance. Specifically, the exercise generated 959 participant interactions with an 'interaction' being defined as a communication exchange on a single topic (e.g., responses to requests for clarification, and requests for additional information or reminders). A primary objective of the new 2026 platform is to automate repetitive workflows, thereby reducing the manual workload and allowing the Office to focus resources on higher-level advisory functions.

## **E. Policy and standard-setting**

62. A core responsibility of the UNFPA Ethics Office is to develop standards on ethics-related issues and to provide guidance to management so that UNFPA rules, policies, procedures and practices reinforce and promote applicable standards of integrity. The Ethics Office continued advocating for a consistent and transparent application of the existing policy framework for downsizing exercises, so that these are not used to rationalize retaliation.

63. In 2025, the Ethics Office commenced a review of the current outside activity policy. This review process focused on identifying areas for streamlining and clarification, establishing the foundation for a revised policy issuance in 2026.

64. The Ethics Office successfully developed the prototype for the Support and Connect tool in 2025. This inter-divisional collaboration involving the Integrity Group—the Division for Human Resources, OAIS, the Legal Unit, the Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment Coordinator, and the Ombudsman—ensures that the tool effectively maps out all available internal support pathways. The tool is designed to provide staff with a clear, direct, and confidential route to the appropriate business unit for any given workplace concern.

## **F. Coordination and collaboration internally and externally**

65. In 2025, the Ethics Advisor prioritized high-level engagement through ten bilateral meetings with five regional directors. These strategic dialogues served as a critical opportunity for advancing the Office's mandate and promoting the full spectrum of available ethical services. Furthermore, these meetings allowed for the delivery of substantive observations and mission debriefings.

66. The Ethics Office reinforced its commitment to inter-agency collaboration through its membership in EPUN. Throughout 2025, the Ethics Advisor participated in the exchange of strategic policies and technical guidance, ensuring that the UNFPA approach to ethics remains at the forefront of the United Nations system's efforts to modernize and unify its accountability standards. This partnership enables the Office to leverage system-wide expertise while contributing the unique UNFPA perspectives to the broader United Nations ethics community. In addition, as mentioned above, the Ethics Office supported another EPUN organization by reviewing a protection against retaliation request on their behalf, due to a perceived conflict of interest.

67. The Ethics Office maintained its commitment to system-wide coherence through active participation in ENMO. These consultations ensure that UNFPA ethical policies remain in step with evolving best practices across the United Nations.

## **IV. Conclusion**

68. Throughout 2025, the Ethics Office made significant strides in outreach, utilizing innovative and diverse communication channels and conducting personalized visits to three key regions. These efforts successfully increased the Ethics Office's footprint and visibility, ensuring that ethics remains an essential standard for UNFPA, particularly during challenging periods.

69. Building on this momentum in 2026, the Ethics Office will focus on further enhancing management's capacity to lead ethically. Simultaneously, the Ethics Office will provide staff with the necessary support to navigate ethical dilemmas autonomously and speak up safely. A central theme for 2026 will be maintaining the fine balance between staff rights and their obligations to integrity, professionalism and loyalty to UNFPA and the United Nations system, especially during phases of organizational transition and restructuring.

70. In light of these objectives, the Ethics Office's recommendation to senior management is to continue supporting the unique function of the Ethics Office. It is vital that the Ethics Office's

impartial and independent advice to both staff and management remain safeguarded. This support is essential to reinforcing the integrity and credibility of the organization throughout 2026.

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