



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 April 2019

Original: English

For decision

United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

Annual session 2019

11–13 June 2019

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2018

Summary

The present report is submitted to the UNICEF Executive Board in accordance with section 5.4 of the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)). The report was reviewed, and recommendations were provided by the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, as envisaged in the bulletin.

The annual report covers each of the mandated areas of work for the Office: (a) standard-setting and policy support; (b) training, education and outreach; (c) advice and guidance; (d) the Financial Disclosure Programme; (e) the protection of staff against retaliation; and (f) participation in the Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations. In accordance with Executive Board decision 2014/12, the report also presents observations and recommendations to management to strengthen the organizational culture of integrity and compliance. The report covers activities relating and services provided to UNICEF staff as well as consultants and other non-staff, to the extent applicable.

Elements of a draft decision are provided in section X.

* [E/ICEF/2019/9](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report, the tenth since the establishment of the UNICEF Ethics Office in December 2007, covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2018. The report, prepared in accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes (ST/SGB/2007/11), is submitted to the Executive Board at its annual session in 2019.

II. Overview and general information on the activities of the Ethics Office

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

(a) Provide guidance and policy support to management on ethics standard-setting by reviewing and advising on the rules, policies, procedures and practices of the organization to reinforce and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity as required by the Charter of the United Nations, other applicable staff rules and regulations, the directives of UNICEF and the standards of conduct for the international civil service;

(b) Raise the awareness of staff regarding the values and expected standards of conduct and procedures of the United Nations, through training and other outreach;

(c) Provide confidential advice and guidance to staff and management, at their request, on ethical issues;

(d) Administer the Financial Disclosure Programme;

(e) Undertake assigned responsibilities under the policy on protection against retaliation;

(f) Contribute to harmonized approaches to ethics issues within the United Nations system.

3. The Ethics Office recorded and responded to 738 requests for services in 2018, compared with 634 requests in 2017 and 321 in 2016. In other words, the number of recorded requests for services in 2018 more than doubled compared with 2016 and continued to mark a notable increase compared with 2017. This continued increase in requests for services can be attributed to three main factors:

(a) Based on the experience gained in 2016 and 2017, the Ethics Office continued and further enhanced its efforts in 2018 to increase its visibility and accessibility to all UNICEF personnel worldwide. The Office engaged in numerous outreach and awareness initiatives, such as rolling out the second Ethics Leadership Month initiative in October 2018, building a more consistent internal social media presence and working on a further enhancement of its UNICEF intranet presence, with a strong emphasis on accessibility and user-friendliness;

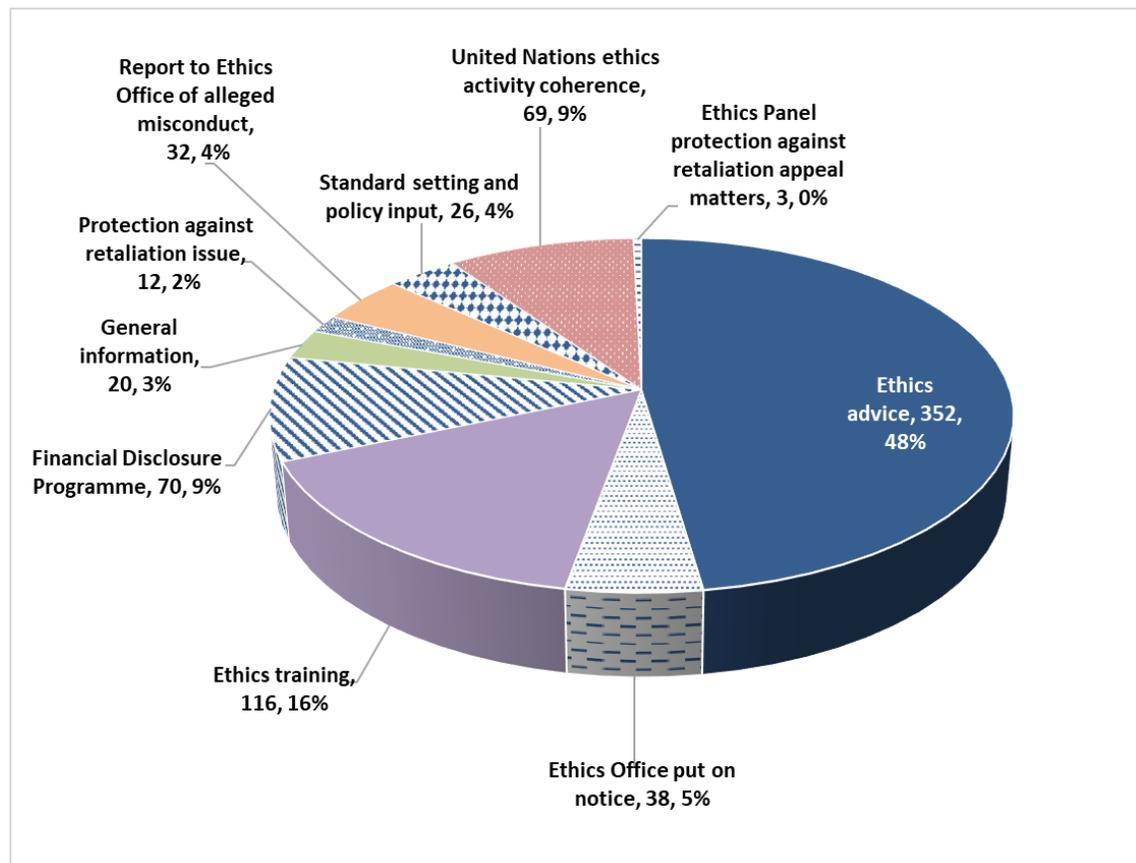
(b) Following changes in the senior leadership of UNICEF at the beginning of 2018, there was additional momentum and interest at all levels globally in discussing, supporting and advancing the Ethics Office mandate, namely to cultivate and nurture a culture of ethics and integrity. This coincided with the reach of the #MeToo movement into the humanitarian sector, including the United Nations system. A visible expression of this additional momentum and interest was the

Executive Director's decision to commission three independent reviews to examine issues relating to gender equality and sexual misconduct. Their subjects include the UNICEF system for the protection of beneficiaries from sexual exploitation and abuse; how UNICEF has handled matters relating to sexual harassment; and gender discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Two of the panels of expert advisors delivered their final reports, with recommendations for UNICEF, before the end of 2018. The third panel, the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender Discrimination, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, is expected to complete its work in June 2019. The Ethics Office was consulted, interviewed and/or briefed on the work of each panel;

(c) The Ethics Office also made considerable efforts in 2018 to further grow the ethics dialogue facilitators community, particularly in country offices, which led to an increased number of requests for services following the dialogues.

4. Of the recorded requests for services in 2018, 48 per cent were requests for confidential ethics advice and guidance (area 2 (c)); 16 per cent were requests for ethics training (area 2 (b)); 9 per cent were related to the coherence and harmonization of United Nations ethics activity (area 2 (f)); and another 9 per cent were related to providing guidance on the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme (area 2 (d)). The most notable increases were in the number of requests for ethics training as well as inquiries and requests in relation to protection against retaliation.

Figure I



Number of requests for Ethics Office services, by category, 2018

5. In line with its work plan, the key emphasis for the activities of the Ethics Office in 2018 continued to be on further enhancing its ethics outreach, awareness, training and education initiatives, with an emphasis on ethical leadership. As further explained below, the Office continued to try out and design new models for outreach and interaction to reach as many UNICEF staff members and non-staff personnel as possible.

6. Throughout 2018, the Office continued to work closely with offices across UNICEF to achieve seamless and cohesive support to and services for staff members seeking advice on workplace and other staff conduct-related matters. Collaboration was particularly close with the Division of Human Resources, the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI), the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, the Staff Counsellors, and the Information and Communication Technology Division as well as the Staff Association at the global and regional levels and the New York Staff Association. On prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse policy-related matters, the Ethics Office was regularly consulted by relevant stakeholders in the Division of Human Resources, the child protection team in the Programme Division and the Head of the newly created Child Safeguarding Unit under the Deputy Executive Director, Management. The Ethics Office also worked closely with the regional offices and country offices. In addition, the Principal Adviser, Ethics, met regularly with the Executive Director and the Chief of Staff. The Ethics Office was also consulted on the terms of reference for two new positions relevant to its mandate, namely those of the Senior Coordinator, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Workplace Abuse, and the Special Adviser, Organizational Culture, each reporting directly to the Executive Director. The positions had been advertised, but not yet filled by the end of 2018.

Table 1
Comparison of the number of requests for ethics services, by category, 2016–2018

<i>Category</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>
Ethics advice ^a	141	311	352
Ethics Panel protection against retaliation appeal matters ^b	2	2	3
Ethics Office put on notice ^c	10	42	38
Ethics training	66	69	116
Financial Disclosure Programme	17	42	70
General information requests by staff	11	23	20
Press	2	0	0
UNICEF protection against retaliation	5	6	12
Report to Ethics Office of alleged misconduct	5	32	32
Standard-setting and policy input	28	32	26
United Nations ethics coherence (consultations within the Ethics Panel)	34	75	69
Total	321	634	738

^a The Ethics Office counts as a request for ethics advice any individual request for advice and guidance by one staff member or non-staff personnel, in relation to a set of facts. In many instances, one request for ethics advice may require multiple communications by email and/or conversations. In other instances, one request for advice requires a single exchange.

^b This refers to consultations by the Chair of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations with members of the Panel, in relation to the function of the Chair as the reviewer of determinations in protection against retaliation cases. In essence, the members of the Panel exercise a peer-review function in relation to cases that are determined by another member. Such review is triggered upon request by a complainant (staff member or non-staff personnel).

^c This category refers to situations in which the Ethics Office is notified of a particular situation by a staff member or non-staff personnel, but the individual specifically requests the Office not to take any action.

III. Training, education and outreach

7. The overall goal of the continued strong focus in 2018 on ethics outreach, training and education initiatives and ethical leadership was to further raise awareness and understanding of the applicable United Nations staff regulations and rules and UNICEF rules and standards of conduct as well as the mandate of the Office. In 2018, the Office continued to step up its efforts to reach and engage with UNICEF leadership, and to continue to raise awareness regarding the importance of the “tone at the top”.

8. In that context, the Principal Adviser, Ethics, was invited to be a presenter/co-presenter during ethics-related sessions at two UNICEF Global Management Team meetings in 2018. They provided an opportunity to discuss challenges and opportunities encountered by the members of UNICEF senior management in promoting and modelling ethical behaviour. The meetings were also occasions to discuss the culture and values that UNICEF wishes to be identified with, both internally and externally, going forward.

9. As another key element of its 2018 global outreach activities, the Ethics Office organized, coordinated and led for the second time an organization-wide initiative branded “Ethics Leadership Month” (ELM 2018). The initiative took place

throughout October 2018; the key date was Global Ethics Day on 17 October. The emphasis of ELM 2018 was the complementarity of ethics and UNICEF culture and values, in particular the core ethics values of integrity, respect and accountability; these are based on and derived from the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and the standards of conduct for the international civil service, which, together with care and trust, constitute the UNICEF core values.

10. ELM 2018 encouraged UNICEF offices throughout the world to organize activities around ethics-related topics that they had identified as particularly relevant and important for the day-to-day work of their respective offices and divisions. The Ethics Office designed and shared a toolkit, with presentations, case studies and suggested topics for discussion, to enable offices and divisions globally to start the relevant ethics conversations. In total, 65 offices participated in ELM 2018 activities, including 10 headquarters offices, five regional offices and 50 country offices. Based on the results of the survey of Ethics Leadership Month participants, staff members were most interested in discussing (in order of significance) respect, conflict of interest, abuse of authority, integrity and accountability.

11. Globally, at least 2,700 staff members — over 18 per cent of all staff members — participated in some form of ethics training or outreach activity during the month. Staff members in 50 country offices coordinated ELM events, such as brown bag lunches, film screenings, role playing and all-staff discussions. On Global Ethics Day, many staff members retook the oath of office in an initiative led by the Executive Director as a reminder of the importance of their commitment to the UNICEF core values.

12. In addition to this high-profile, high-visibility initiative, the Ethics Office continued to both employ the established training, education and outreach methods and tools and to diversify them. UNICEF continued to offer the online course entitled “Ethics and Integrity at UNICEF”, adapted from the e-learning course of the Secretariat and introduced in June 2015. The course, which is available in English, French and Spanish, is mandatory for current staff and is included in the induction package for new staff members.

13. In early 2018, the Division of Human Resources, at the request of the Executive Director and with the support of the Ethics Office, launched an organization-wide campaign within UNICEF to achieve 100 per cent completion rates by 1 April 2018 for the mandatory online courses on the prevention of sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of power and on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. While this ambitious goal was not fully met, the UNICEF-wide campaign contributed to a significant rise in completion rates. By 6 April 2018, 84 per cent of all staff had completed the prevention of sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of power course and 91 per cent of all staff had completed the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse course. By 20 February 2019, these numbers had risen to 92 per cent and 94 per cent, respectively. At the time of its launch in August 2017, the latter course was available only in English, but since December 2018 has also been available in Arabic, French and Spanish.

14. In 2018, 53 group training sessions for ethics and awareness or training support were provided by the Ethics Office. In line with the renewed focus on ethical leadership, there was also a strong emphasis on individual training for managers and supervisors; approximately 30 managers and supervisors were trained in person by the Principal Adviser. Training sessions for 19 country offices, 16 headquarters offices or divisions and six regional offices were carried out during 2018. Depending

on the size of the respective office, the Ethics Office held multiple sessions to reach the maximum number of staff members. Besides the online ethics and standards of conduct courses, the Office provided tailored ethics training to a total of 2,786 staff members, with 1,510 participating in face-to-face sessions and 1,276 in remote sessions. Of those who participated in face-to-face sessions, 803 were based in headquarters locations (including new-staff orientations), 453 were based in regional or country offices, 214 were members of regional or global management or operations teams and 40 were representatives of the Global Staff Association.

15. In 2018, the Principal Adviser attended the Regional Management Team meetings for Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia and Latin America and Caribbean. With her attendance at these meetings, the Principal Adviser has now, since taking office in February 2016, attended Regional Management Team meetings in every UNICEF region, connecting face-to-face with regional directors and country office representatives. The Principal Adviser combined these official missions with face-to-face ethics training and awareness sessions at headquarters locations in Copenhagen and Geneva; the Latin America and Caribbean and Europe and Central Asia Regional Offices; and the Panama and Ethiopia Country Offices. In addition, following a request by the representative of Mali, the Principal Adviser undertook a one-week mission to the Mali Country Office to provide face-to-face ethics training and awareness sessions in French as well as a French-language global webinar on ethics, culture and values (*éthique, déontologie, culture et valeurs*). The webinar was well attended by staff in the Country Office, while also being accessible to staff worldwide, and was subsequently recorded and posted on the Ethics Office's intranet site.

16. In New York, the Principal Adviser held a session for the annual general meeting of the Global Staff Association and three Regional Staff Association trainings remotely for the West and Central Africa, Europe and Central Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa regions. An induction course for new representatives was also provided. The Ethics Office held six in-person ethics sessions for new staff at headquarters locations and seven joint face-to-face training sessions with the New York-based staff of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes.

17. The Ethics Office organized and led four global webinars accessible to staff worldwide on the following topics deemed to be of strong interest to staff: (a) Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; (b) Abuse of authority and workplace harassment: what each of us can do to prevent, stop and respond to it; (c) Whistle-blower protection against retaliation: what it is, why it matters and what changes with the revised policy of UNICEF; and (d) Ethics, culture and values (*Ethique, déontologie, culture et valeurs*). The webinars included internal stakeholders and, for the webinars on whistle-blower protection against retaliation and ethics, culture and values, external subject-matter experts. Each webinar attracted up to 161 participants per session globally, and 561 participants in total.

18. The Ethics Office further accelerated the global roll-out of the ethics dialogue facilitator model, which was introduced in 2014 and based on the "train the trainer" model. The role of the ethics dialogue facilitator is to raise understanding and awareness for ethics and integrity issues in relation to staff conduct by holding regular (at least quarterly) meetings for all staff members in a particular country office and to facilitate a conversation around a particular ethics topic, using case studies and presentations accessible to all trained facilitators. Through remote sessions, the Office trained 106 new facilitators in 2018. As a result, at the end of 2018, the roll-

out of the model had been completed in 92 UNICEF country offices in six out of seven regions, with a total of over 310 active facilitators around the world.

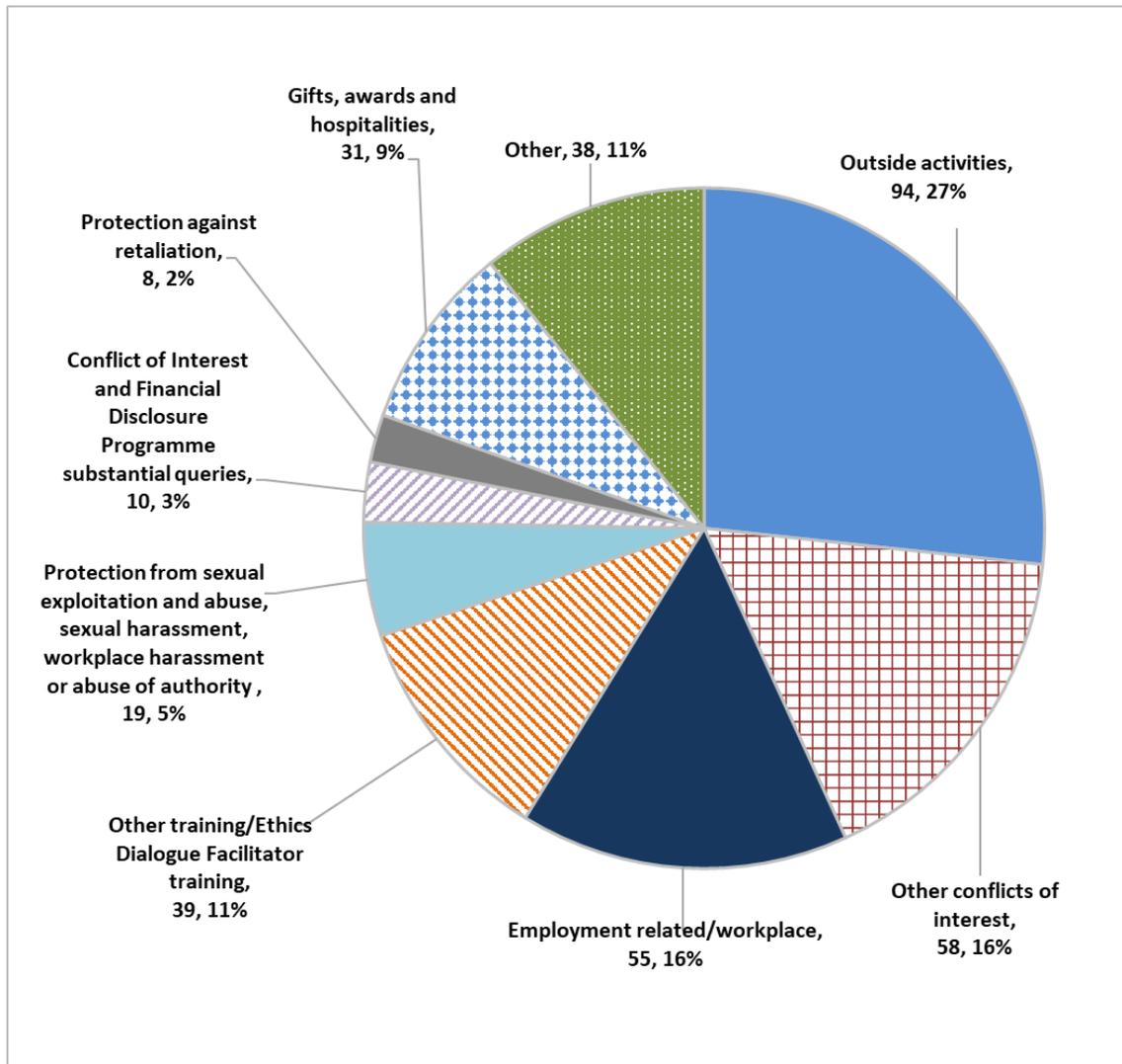
19. Compared with 2016 and 2017, the number of customized, face-to-face ethics training sessions increased significantly, achieving 117 per cent growth (from 30 to 65 sessions). From the perspective of the Ethics Office, this was attributable to an increased awareness of the importance of and interest in face-to-face ethics training, particularly among senior managers. There was also a renewed interest in face-to-face ethics training for senior leaders who had newly joined UNICEF or for existing staff moving into more senior roles. In general, the number of staff members who received customized, face-to-face ethics training by the Ethics Office in 2018 increased by 59 per cent compared with 2017 (from 947 to 1,510), while the number of staff members who received customized, remote ethics training decreased by 16 per cent (from 1,514 to 1,276). Overall, the number of staff members who received customized ethics training (beyond the mandatory online courses), either remotely or in person, increased by almost 13 per cent (from 2,461 to 2,786).

20. Finally, the Ethics Office retained, for part of the year, three graduate students from UNICEF programme countries in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East as ethics communications interns to assist in further developing and using electronic and social media communications tools to reach as wide a range of UNICEF personnel as possible, with a particular focus on national staff, UNICEF personnel from programme countries and younger UNICEF personnel.

21. The Ethics Office recorded 352 individual requests for ethics advice in 2018 compared with 311 in 2017 and 141 in 2016. As shown in figure II, 27 per cent were related to the outside activities of staff members and 16 per cent to other conflicts of interest. The majority (about 58 per cent) of requests came from country offices, either from staff members or from managers seeking advice.

22. Against the background of organizational change, as referred to above, the Ethics Office noticed, in the first and second quarter, an increase in requests for advice and guidance on reporting alleged misconduct and on obtaining protection from retaliation. This also led to a significant increase in the submission of requests for protection against retaliation. From the Ethics Office perspective, it seems plausible and in fact likely that this significant increase was related to changes in the UNICEF policy on whistle-blower protection against retaliation, which came into effect in June 2018 and provided for the first time the possibility to obtain, under certain conditions, preventive measures against retaliation. In addition, the changes in the UNICEF policy on whistle-blower protection against retaliation included the abolishment of the previous statutory limitation, meaning that there is no longer a time limit for requesting protection against retaliation. Another policy matter that triggered additional requests for advice and guidance by staff was related to the changes in the Executive Directive on the prohibition of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority (CF/EXD/2012-007), which was revised in April 2018 to remove time limits and to allow anonymous reporting.

Figure II
Requests for ethics advice by subcategory, 2018



IV. Standard-setting and policy support

23. Under the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)), the Ethics Office provides guidance and policy support to management on ethics standard-setting by reviewing and advising on the rules, policies, procedures and practices of the organization to reinforce and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity.

24. To assist the Ethics Office in meeting this mandate, the Office held regular collaborative meetings with the Policy and Administrative Law Section in the Division of Human Resources, OIAI, the Staff Counsellor and the Office of the Ombudsman.

25. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office was consulted and provided advice on a number of important policy development projects. In particular, the Office was consulted by the Division of Financial and Administrative Management (DFAM) on a draft of the

UNICEF anti-fraud strategy. Furthermore, the Office provided input for the design of the 2018 Global Pulse Survey, launched in March 2018.

26. The Office was consulted by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) prior to the finalization of its report on whistle-blower protection. UNICEF management also consulted the Ethics Office, since UNICEF management provided input and comments on that report. In addition, UNICEF management consulted the Office regarding the UNICEF report on the recommendations of the JIU. The latter is a document that UNICEF management prepares annually on all recent JIU reports.

27. The Ethics Office was consulted on further steps to accelerate the operationalization of the UNICEF policy on conduct promoting the protection and safeguarding of children (child safeguarding policy), adopted in mid-2016. In an important step forward, UNICEF established, in May 2018, a Child Safeguarding Unit, as part of the Office of the Executive Director under the guidance of the Deputy Executive Director, Management. According to its terms of reference, the unit was created to coordinate the operationalization of the child safeguarding policy and the completion of a robust child safeguarding framework. Following the establishment of the unit, the Ethics Office was consulted and provided comments on drafts for a UNICEF child safeguarding framework and for UNICEF personnel standards on child safeguarding.

28. The Ethics Office is encouraged by the progress made in 2018 in relation to the operationalization of the child safeguarding policy. Since the policy specifically envisages that UNICEF division directors will issue appropriate procedures and guidelines with regard to the implementation of the policy, within the scope of their respective accountabilities, it is helpful for the Child Safeguarding Unit to support the coordination of the promulgation of standards under the child safeguarding framework. This is because the framework provides for a legislative model that is comprehensive but at the same time highly complex, due to its decentralized nature.

29. In that context, and besides the items already referred to above, the Child Safeguarding Unit kept the Ethics Office apprised of its work in 2018, namely (a) the creation of a network of child safeguarding focal points; (b) the recruitment of a global data protection specialist to assist with the development of a global data protection/privacy framework; (c) the development of a child safeguarding training plan; (d) child safeguarding-related amendments to implementing partner agreements; and (e) improvements to child safeguarding risk planning. The Ethics Office is looking forward to continuing to work with the Unit to ensure that consistent, interlocking and comprehensive standards are implemented. The Office is also encouraged by the fact that the UNICEF child safeguarding framework was discussed during a side meeting of the Global Management Team in February 2019.

30. UNICEF action in 2018 in relation to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse was presented to the Executive Board in the management response to the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (E/ICEF/2019/6). Throughout 2018, the Ethics Office continued to be briefed and/or consulted as a sounding board on UNICEF initiatives relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

31. As part of its ethics standard-setting and policy support functions, the Ethics Office provided a briefing on its programme activities at the annual meeting of the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee.

32. In mid-2018, standards were established by the Deputy Executive Director, Management, for ensuring the effective consultation of the Ethics Office on regulatory framework documents, with a view to enabling the Office to provide substantive and consultative input at an early stage on new or revised policies and procedures in UNICEF that have any bearing on or are otherwise related to the standards of conduct for UNICEF personnel and/or implementing partners. The policy consultation and development process is coordinated through the DFAM policy focal point. As a result, the Ethics Office has been included in the initial stages of policy writing and the reengineering of the regulatory framework library and in the policy consultation and development process.

V. Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme

33. The Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme, as stated in the Executive Directive on financial disclosure and declaration of interest statements (CF/EXD/2012-003) is designed to mitigate the risks to the organization that result from a staff member's conflict of interest (both actual and potential) by helping staff members to understand, identify and avoid situations leading to actual, potential or perceived conflicts between their personal interests and those of the organization. As in the preceding years, all five stages of the Programme ((a) registration of participating staff members; (b) filing by participating staff members; (c) review of disclosure statements by the Office; (d) verification by the Office; and (e) issuance of clearance or guidance notes by the Office) were executed in 2018.

34. In accordance with the Executive Directive, all staff members at the D-1 level and above and any staff member whose responsibilities are identified in the policy are required to file a financial disclosure statement. For each yearly filing cycle, heads of offices/divisions are responsible for identifying and registering staff members who are required to file due to their level or functional title, in line with the policy, under the guidance of the Ethics Office. The Office provided guidance and technical support to offices/divisions to facilitate the registration of staff members in accordance with the policy. It also issued updated registration guidelines to ensure the registration of staff members based on their seniority and the level of organizational risk linked with their functions. In 2018, it was possible to maintain the number of filers at about the same level as in 2017, with an overall number of filers of between 2,100 and 2,200. In the view of the Ethics Office, as reaffirmed by the recommendation of an external evaluator (KPMG), it is important to further increase the risk-based focus of the Programme by reducing the number of staff members who file and refocusing their profile.

35. A total of 2,160 staff members were reviewed as part of the 2018 Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme exercise, covering the reporting year ending 31 December 2017. Director-level staff comprised 6.3 per cent of the total number of reviews; staff members in the international professional category, 59.5 per cent (up from 53.6 per cent in 2017); staff in the national professional category, 23.7 per cent; and staff in the general service category, 16.9 per cent (down from 18 per cent in 2017).

Table 2
Compliance with the Financial Disclosure Programme, 2007–2018

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of staff required to file</i>	<i>Compliance (percentage)</i>
2007	2 545	82.8
2008	2 556	83.8
2009	2 536	100.0
2010	2 365	99.6
2011	2 592	99.7
2012	2 694	99.9
2013	2 498	100.0
2014	2 594	100.0
2015	2 549	98.9
2016	2 524	99.3
2017	2 067	99.9
2018	2 160	99.9

36. Of the total filers in 2018, about 5.4 per cent, compared with 7.6 per cent in 2017, had nothing to declare. This means that they answered “no” to all questions, i.e., they neither had assets at the threshold level nor any situation that could amount even to a potential conflict-of-interest situation that would need to be reviewed and considered by the Ethics Office. About 0.8 per cent of participating staff, a slight increase over 2017, had recognized their own conflict of interest and had already taken mitigating steps.

37. The outcome of the review led to the conclusion that there was no conflict of interest for about 95 per cent of the participating staff, including those with nothing to declare and those who had taken mitigating steps. About 5 per cent of the participating staff members were given guidance to avoid or mitigate conflicts of interest.

38. Among staff selected to participate in the 2018 exercise, 3.8 per cent had spouses who worked for UNICEF and 11.5 per cent had spouses who worked for other United Nations agencies or UNICEF-related entities, such as partners, non-governmental organizations, Governments or vendors. In addition, 19 per cent of participating staff members had relatives who worked for UNICEF, other United Nations agencies or UNICEF-related entities.

39. Based on the statements filed in 2018, about 4 per cent of the participating staff members disclosed their engagement in outside activities. As in the previous year, some staff members were engaged in outside activities without the prior approval called for in the Executive Directive on outside activities (CF/EXD/2012-009). In those instances, the Ethics Office issued specific guidance to the concerned staff members, which was acted upon by all.

40. The Ethics Office conducted a verification exercise on 64 randomly selected staff members, amounting to about 3 per cent of the staff member total. It was possible to confirm the completeness and accuracy of the disclosure statements by reviewing them against the supporting documentation provided by the selected staff members.

41. The Ethics Office followed up on and implemented an existing internal audit recommendation by engaging an external financial services provider (KPMG) with experience in managing financial disclosure programmes to undertake a gap analysis

and develop recommendations to further strengthen the programme. The Ethics Office will be working in 2019 to implement the following key recommendations:

(a) Refocus the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme by reducing the number of filers, focusing on seniority and organizational risk, to make the exercise more meaningful;

(b) Tighten compliance timelines in all key areas (registration, filing cycle, reporting process, review process) to significantly reduce programme length;

(c) Introduce clear consequences for non-compliance, with both compliance timelines and substantive conflict-of-interest advice, to make the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme more credible and useful;

(d) Further improve and update information technology security, with the help of the Information and Technology Division and an information technology consultant, to enhance and maintain trust in the information technology security of the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme.

VI. Protection of staff against retaliation and review of the UNICEF whistle-blower protection policy

42. As discussed above, there was a significant increase in requests for protection against retaliation in 2018: during the reporting period, there were 12 formal requests for protection under the UNICEF whistle-blower protection policy and an additional three requests for interim protective measures. The Ethics Office, on the basis of the initial review at the prima facie level, envisaged under the UNICEF whistle-blower protection policy, referred one case to OIAI for a full investigation. The outcome of the investigation was that no misconduct or retaliation was established. With respect to the additional three requests for interim protective measures, it became apparent that preventive measures had already been taken by the Division of Human Resources on the basis of a request by OIAI.

43. From the Ethics Office's perspective, the increase in requests for protection against retaliation is in itself not a cause for concern, since it would seem implausible to conclude that retaliation increased within UNICEF in 2018. In the view of the Office, it instead seems to signal that awareness among UNICEF personnel of the whistle-blower protection policy has increased as well as the willingness to use the mechanisms under the policy; this would be a positive development. However, the Office perceived that there still seemed to be a relatively limited understanding among staff as to how the whistle-blower protection mechanism worked, what it covered and what fell outside its remit, which is a potential cause for concern. In the view of the Office, this would seem to be one of the reasons for the relatively low number of prima facie referrals in 2018. The Office has therefore, especially after the changes to the UNICEF whistle-blower protection policy, increased its outreach efforts, via webinars, Yammer, frequently asked questions and face-to-face training, to further develop understanding among UNICEF personnel of what needs to be substantiated when filing a request for protection against retaliation.

44. It also seems likely that this significant increase was related to the changes in the policy on whistle-blower protection against retaliation, which came into effect in June 2018 and provided for the first time the possibility of obtaining, under certain conditions, ex ante preventive measures against retaliation. The changes also included the abolishment of the previous statutory limitation, which means that there is no longer a time limit for requesting protection against retaliation.

45. Following the 2017 Global Staff Survey, UNICEF moved forward with the Global Pulse Survey in 2018. The Ethics Office is looking forward to working with the Division of Human Resources to provide input to the Global Staff Survey 2019.

46. Throughout 2018, the Global Staff Association continued its speak-up culture campaign under the tag line of “Voice”, with the Ethics Office providing input and support, to the extent possible. Throughout 2018 and through the various avenues identified in this report, the Office continued its work with stakeholders throughout the organization, in particular the Division of Human Resources, OIAI, the Staff Counsellor, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Global Staff Association as well as those at the regional- and country-office levels, to increase staff trust in creating a speak-up culture.

VII. Ethics Panel of the United Nations and Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

47. In 2018, the Principal Adviser participated in 10 of the 11 meetings of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, missing one meeting due to official travel. A highlight of the 2018 meetings was an externally facilitated session held to discuss ways in which to strengthen interactions among Panel members.

48. As in 2017, the Ethics Panel members frequently consulted one another with a view to harmonizing ethics advice, guidance and practices on sensitive issues such as the scope of permissible outside activities, the promotion of a speak-up culture, whistle-blower protection and the independence of the Ethics Offices. While the members of the Panel continued to be good sources of peer support for the Principal Adviser, she was also able to contribute proactively within the Panel, in particular in light of her role as Alternate Chair, which she held for a one-year term from October 2017 to October 2018. In that capacity, the Principal Adviser, among other duties, oversaw the independent review of determinations by the United Nations Ethics Office. The review is instigated when that Office has determined that there was no prima facie case of retaliation against a Secretariat staff member, and the staff member decides to request an independent review. In 2018, the Principal Adviser worked on three such review cases. Further information on the work of the panel will be made available in the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Ethics Office in 2018, which will be presented at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly.

49. UNICEF also participates in the yearly meeting of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations. The Principal Adviser held the role of Vice-Chair of the Network for the period from July 2017 to July 2018. The meeting is an important forum for sharing experience and developing best practices. The 2018 meeting was organized and hosted by the Secretariat and focused on important and highly relevant topics such as conflicts of interest, protection against retaliation and protection from sexual harassment, harassment, discrimination and/or abuse of authority. With the Secretariat acting as host, the meeting benefitted from number of discussions with high-profile stakeholders within the Secretariat, including the Chef de Cabinet of the Office of the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Management, the Executive Director of the Office of Administration of Justice and the Victim’s Rights Advocate.

VIII. Follow-up on 2017 observations and Executive Board decision 2018/11

50. In its annual report for 2017, the Ethics Office recommended that ethical competency be included as a criterion in recruitment and promotion decisions as well as in performance appraisals for all staff members, the Office is happy to report that significant progress has been made in this area. In response to the recommendation, the annual 360-degree assessment has been made mandatory for all staff at the D-1 level and above, including all country office representatives, regardless of grade level, starting in 2019. The Executive Director has also committed, in her communications to the Global Management Team, to ensure that, in selecting and promoting the most senior leaders, UNICEF emphasizes the ways in which current and aspiring directors are managing their staff and achieving results. The intention is for the leadership competencies to strike a better balance between engaging and nurturing staff members and delivering results and driving change.

51. The Ethics Office has also been informed by the Division of Human Resources that the Performance Management and Career Development Section continues to work on a revision of the overall competency framework, which will include ethical competency as a separate criterion. It is anticipated that this will be introduced for the 2020 performance management cycle and could be articulated, for instance, along the lines of “recognizes ethical issues when they arise, demonstrates integrity and skilfulness in addressing them”.

IX. Observations, recommendations and conclusions

52. The following observations and recommendations are informed by and based upon both the experience of the Ethics Office in 2018 and relevant developments during the first quarter of 2019.

53. The Ethics Office commends the sustained and multiple efforts and initiatives that UNICEF took in 2018 to strengthen its response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as concerns related to harassment, abuse of authority and any form of workplace abuse. These efforts, together with the strong focus on organizational culture and values, have created momentum among staff.

54. For 2019, it will be important to maintain the momentum and demonstrate, both internally and externally, that it leads to specific follow-up action. In that respect, the Office is encouraged by the improvements that UNICEF has already implemented or is in the process of developing in responding to sexual misconduct, workplace gender concerns and any form of workplace abuse.

55. The Ethics Office is also encouraged by efforts to further improve coordination among the relevant stakeholders, in particular OIAI, the Division of Human Resources, the Child Safeguarding Unit, the Child Protection Unit and the Division of Communication, and the Ethics Office. The Office stands ready and is looking forward to continuing its outreach to and engagement with all relevant internal stakeholders and to continue its efforts to cultivate and nurture a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, according to its mandate as set out in the Secretary-General’s bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)).

X. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2018 (E/ICEF/2019/18) and its management response (E/ICEF/2019/19).
