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**For decision**

### United Nations Children's Fund

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Item 10 of the provisional agenda\*

### Report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted to the UNICEF Executive Board in accordance with section 5.4 of the Secretary-General's bulletin on 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) confidential 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/recommendations to management to strengthen the organizational culture of integrity and compliance. The report covers activities relating to UNICEF staff and services provided to UNICEF staff, as well as consultants and other non-staff, to the extent applicable.

The present report, the eleventh since the establishment of the UNICEF Ethics Office in December 2007, covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2019. The report, prepared in accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin on United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)), is submitted to the Executive Board at its second regular session in 2020.

Elements of a draft decision are provided in section IX.

\* [E/ICEF/2020/17](#).



## I. Overview

1. 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 in order 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;

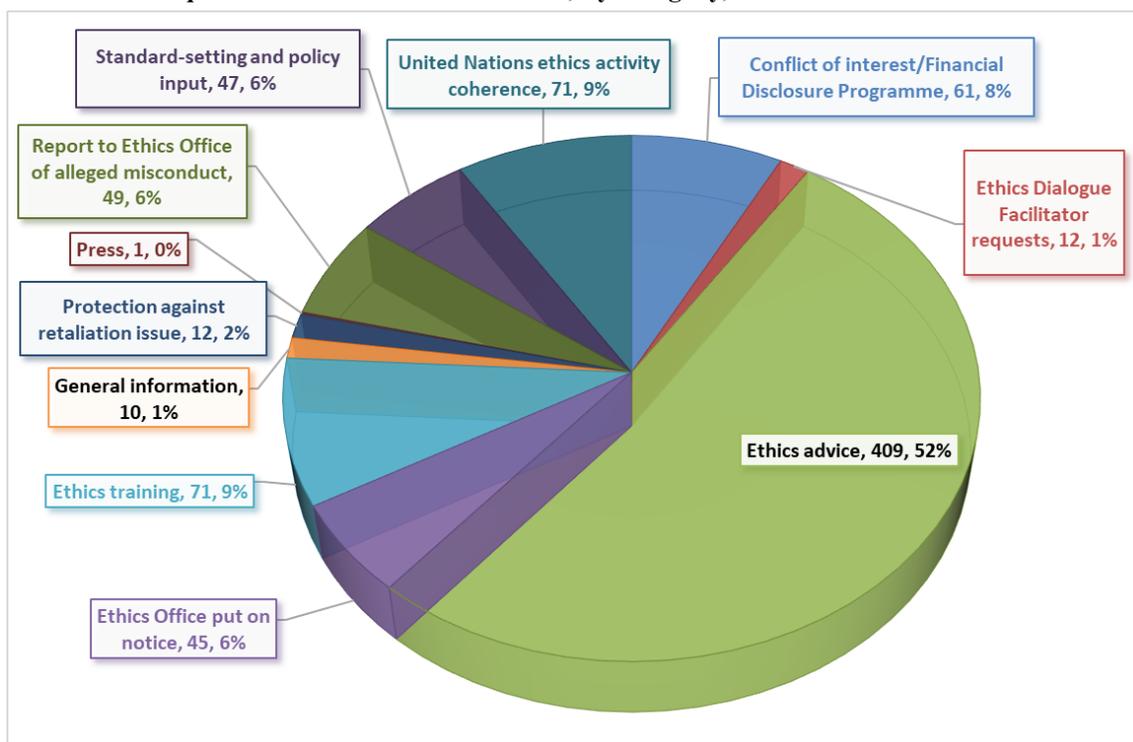
(e) Undertake assigned responsibilities under the policy on protection against retaliation;

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

2. The Ethics Office recorded and responded to 788 requests for services in 2019, compared with 738 requests in 2018 and 634 in 2017. In other words, the number of recorded requests for services continued to mark a notable increase.

3. Of the recorded requests for services in 2019, 52 per cent were requests for confidential ethics advice and guidance; 9 per cent were requests for ethics training; 9 per cent were related to the coherence and harmonization of United Nations ethics activity; and another 8 per cent were related to providing guidance on the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme.

Figure I  
Number of requests for Ethics Office services, by category, 2019



4. In line with the Ethics Office work plan, the key emphasis for its 2019 activities continued to be on further enhancing its ethics outreach, awareness, training and education initiatives, with a particular emphasis on ethical awareness and behaviour change. As further explained below, the Office continued to design and try out new models for outreach and interaction to reach as many UNICEF staff members and non-staff personnel as possible.

5. Throughout 2019, the Office continued to make every effort to work closely with offices across UNICEF to achieve seamless and cohesive support to and services for staff members seeking confidential advice on workplace and other staff conduct-related matters. This means that the Ethics Office continued the already established close collaboration with the Division of Human Resources, including the Staff Counsellors, the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI) and the Office of the Ombudsman for the United Nations Funds and Programmes.

6. In addition, following the release of the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in 2018 and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority in 2019, the Ethics Office made significant efforts and spent a significant amount of time developing an equally close and seamless collaboration with the newly created roles and units in the Office of the Executive Director, all of which have a direct reporting line to the Deputy Executive Director, Management.

7. The newly created roles and units include (a) the Senior Adviser, Child Safeguarding, who leads the Child Safeguarding Unit; (b) the Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Workplace Abuse; and (c) the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture. These new roles are clearly an important part of the organizational efforts of UNICEF to address the issues identified in the independent panel review and the report of the Independent Task Force.

8. At the same time, all three of these roles have some degree of overlap with the broadly defined mandate of the Ethics Office under [ST/SGB/2007/11](#), namely to cultivate and nurture a culture of ethics and integrity, and two of the roles (the Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Workplace Abuse, and the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture) were directly staff facing, i.e., involved in individual staff issues or cases, based either on their terms of reference or an emerging practice. While the respective incumbents worked together in a spirit of great professional respect and collegiality, and there were positive synergies in interactions with the Global Staff Association and the Regional Management Team meetings, the partial overlap between the new roles and the mandate of the Ethics Office created at times a risk of duplication and confusion.

9. At the same time, the Ethics Office continued to work closely with the Global Staff Association at the global and regional levels and the New York Staff Association, as well as with regional and country offices. In addition, the Principal Adviser, Ethics, met regularly with the Executive Director and the Chief of Staff.

Table 1  
**Comparison of the number of requests for ethics services, by category, 2017–2019**

<i>Category</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>
Confidential ethics advice <sup>a</sup>	311	352	409
Ethics Panel protection against retaliation appeal matters <sup>b</sup>	2	3	0
Ethics Office put on notice <sup>c</sup>	42	38	45
Ethics Dialogue Facilitator requests			12
Ethics training	69	116	71
Financial Disclosure Programme	42	70	61
General information requests by staff	23	20	12
Press			1
Protection against retaliation	6	12	10
Reports to Ethics Office of alleged misconduct	32	32	49
Standard-setting and policy input	32	26	47
United Nations ethics coherence (consultations within the Ethics Panel)	75	69	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>788</b>

<sup>a</sup> The Ethics Office counts as a request for confidential 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 confidential ethics advice may require multiple communications by email and/or conversations. In other instances, one request for confidential advice requires a single exchange.

<sup>b</sup> 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).

<sup>c</sup> 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.

## II. Training, education and outreach

10. The Ethics Office continued its strong focus in 2019 on further enhancing its Ethics outreach, awareness, training and education initiatives, with a particular emphasis on ethical awareness and behaviour change. The overall goal 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 2019, and in particular after the publication of the report of the Independent Task Force, the Office further stepped up its efforts to reach and engage with UNICEF leadership, to further raise awareness of the importance of tone at the top.

11. In that context, the Principal Adviser, Ethics, was invited to be a presenter/co-presenter during ethics-related sessions at three UNICEF Regional Management Team meetings in 2019. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss in a safe and confidential setting challenges and opportunities that the members of the organization's senior management encounter in promoting and modelling ethical behaviour and also an opportunity to delve deeply into the culture and values that UNICEF wishes to be identified with, both internally and externally.

12. As another key element of its 2019 global outreach activities, the Ethics Office organized, coordinated and led for the third time an organization-wide initiative branded as "Ethics Month". The initiative was held throughout October, with the key date being Global Ethics Day, on 16 October. In the context of the wider conversations around organizational culture and values, Ethics Month 2019 emphasized the organizational value of integrity and highlighted the following overarching themes: (a) ethical awareness: being aware of and demonstrating commitment to the core values and standards of UNICEF; (b) integrity: maintaining the highest standards of integrity, including impartiality, independence and incorruptibility; and (c) behaviour change: encouraging UNICEF personnel to take responsibility for their decisions and actions and to hold one other accountable for contributing to positive change in UNICEF.

13. The Ethics Month 2019 initiative encouraged UNICEF offices and divisions around the world to organize activities around ethics-related topics that they had identified as particularly relevant and important in their day-to-day work, with a particular emphasis on the value of integrity. The Ethics Office organized and hosted four webinars linked to the overall topic of integrity and shared a toolbox with presentations, case studies and suggested topics for discussion, to enable offices and divisions globally to start the relevant ethics conversations. The Ethics Office also hosted an open house on Global Ethics Day, inviting staff members based at New York headquarters to drop in to ask informal questions on ethics-related issues and learn more about the work of the Ethics Office. All in all, 59 offices participated in Ethics Month 2019 activities, including three headquarters offices, three regional offices and 53 country offices.

14. Globally, more than 2,300 staff members — 15 per cent of all staff members — participated in some form of ethics training or outreach activity during Ethics Month 2019. Staff members in 53 country offices coordinated Ethics Month events such as joint viewings of webinars and all-staff discussions using presentations and case studies. There were also creative initiatives, such as mock trial, a digital question-and-answer session and an ethics awards ceremony. Based on the analysis of the Ethics Month website, staff members generally found the case studies and visual materials, including posters, to be the most useful tools to raise awareness within offices. At the end of Ethics Month, the Ethics Office created a webpage on the UNICEF intranet to share the reflections, stories and photographs of Ethics Month activities from staff members across the globe.

15. In addition to this high-profile initiative, the Ethics Office continued throughout the year to pursue established training, education and outreach methods while further diversifying the methods and tools it used for those purposes. UNICEF continued to offer the online course entitled "Ethics and Integrity at UNICEF", which is mandatory for current staff and included in the induction package for new staff. During 2019, the Ethics Office collaborated with the Secretariat to update the contents of the training

and upgrade the software to meet revised technical specifications. The upgrade will be completed by the second quarter of 2020. In the meantime, the current version of the training remains available to all staff members in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

16. In 2019, the Ethics Office conducted a total of 71 customized ethics training and awareness sessions or training support. The trainings covered a total of 19 country offices, 17 headquarters offices or divisions and six regional offices (in many cases, multiple sessions were held in the same country office, regional office or headquarters division). The Office provided customized ethics training to a total of 2,823 staff members, with 851 participating in face-to-face sessions and 1,972 in remote sessions. Of the 851 staff members who participated in face-to-face sessions, 392 were based in headquarters locations (including new staff orientations), 341 were based in regional or country offices, 110 were members of regional management teams and 8 were representatives of the Global Staff Association.

17. Since taking office in February 2016, the Principal Adviser, Ethics, has attended Regional Management Team meetings in all seven UNICEF regions, namely, East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and West and Central Africa, connecting face-to-face with regional directors and country office representatives in each one. As in previous years, in 2019 the Principal Adviser used the official missions to the Regional Management Team meetings for face-to-face ethics training and awareness sessions in the host country and in neighbouring country offices in the regions, including face-to-face sessions in Bangladesh (Dhaka and Cox's Bazaar), Egypt, the Maldives and Senegal. The Principal Adviser gave back-to-back training sessions over one week in the country office in Dhaka and in the field office in Cox's Bazaar. She also visited three refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar, which underlined the urgency of the efforts of UNICEF regarding protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; the Principal Adviser became aware that witnessing the situation first-hand has a much bigger impact for truly understanding the scope and magnitude of the need and risks involved than all the meetings and briefings combined could ever have. In addition, following urgent requests by the UNICEF representatives of India and Yemen, respectively, remote training sessions were provided for both offices on ethical awareness.

18. In New York, the Ethics Office held six face-to-face ethics sessions for new staff at headquarters locations, two of which were joint face-to-face training sessions with the Ombudsman for the United Nations Funds and Programmes. The Office also held 38 remote ethics training sessions via Skype or video-conference customized to the needs of the recipients.

19. The Ethics Office organized and led six global webinars that were accessible to staff worldwide on the following topics, deemed to be of strong interest to staff: (a) introduction to the "UNICEF Roadmap: Where to Go When"; (b) political activities; (c) gifts and awards; (d) integrity and working with third parties; (e) moving to a culture of courage; protection against retaliation; and (f) child safeguarding. Besides colleagues from the Ethics Office, the webinars included in most instances a subject-matter expert from a regional or country office or from the respective headquarters division. Each webinar attracted up to 250 participants per session globally and 1,020 participants in total.

20. The Ethics Office continued the global roll-out of the Ethics Dialogue Facilitator model, introduced in 2014/2015 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 Ethics Dialogue Facilitators. During the second quarter of 2019, the Office conducted an activity monitoring survey of the existing Facilitators and around 100 were found to be no longer active due to change of office, new nomination or separation. Through 10 remote training sessions during the year, the Office trained 103 new Facilitators and, upon request, provided refresher training to 8 existing Facilitators. As a result, at the end of 2019, the roll-out of the Ethics Dialogue Facilitator model had been completed in 113 UNICEF country offices, in six of seven regions, with a total of 303 nominated Ethics Dialogue Facilitators around the world.

21. Overall, the number of staff members who received customized ethics training (beyond the mandatory online courses), either remotely or in person, remained stable compared with 2018. It bears noting that 2018 saw a very substantial increase compared with the year before (57 per cent increase in customized ethics training compared with 2017).

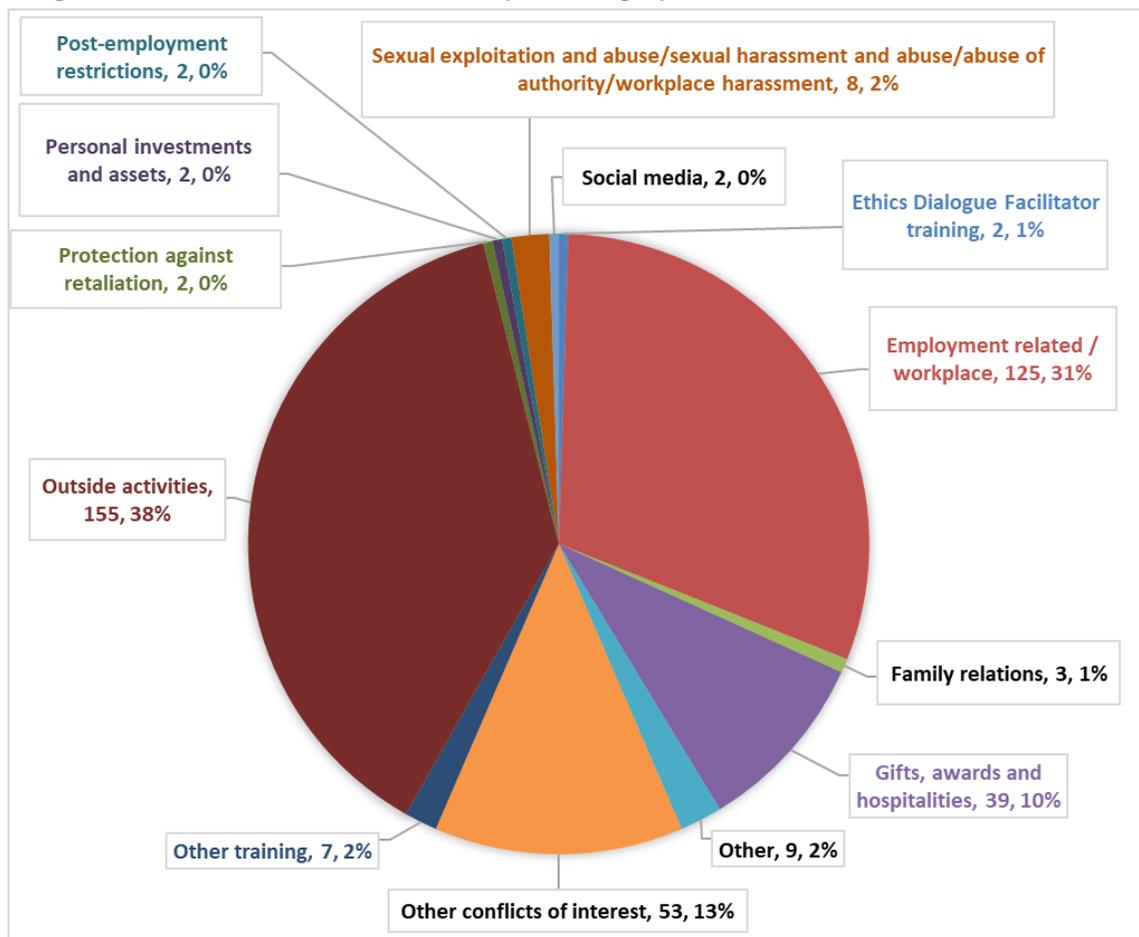
22. The Ethics Office continued to raise its profile in terms of internal communications to UNICEF personnel globally by retaining a dedicated communications consultant. In addition to co-leading the Ethics Month initiative, the communications consultant maintained the Ethics Office's internal social media presence via its internal webpage and Yammer (the UNICEF internal equivalent of Twitter). He also assisted with the launch of the quarterly Ethics Office newsletter on ethics-related topics and the "UNICEF Roadmap: Where to Go When", which provides guidance to UNICEF personnel on where to seek support, advice, guidance and resolution in cases of workplace conflict. The UNICEF Roadmap is accessible to all UNICEF personnel in electronic format and has also been distributed in printed form during face-to-face training events.

### **III. Advice and guidance**

23. The Ethics Office recorded 409 individual requests for confidential ethics advice in 2019 compared with 352 in 2018 and 311 in 2017. As shown in figure II, 38 per cent were related to the outside activities of staff members and 31 per cent to employment and workplace issues. The majority (about 50 percent) of requests came from country offices, either directly from individual staff members or from managers seeking confidential advice.

24. During the first half of 2019, the Ethics Office registered a continued strong interest for guidance on the scope of permissible outside activities and, in particular, political activities for staff members, in light of their status as international civil servants. The inquiries came, for instance, in the context of the so-called climate strikes in Europe and North America and other major policy and election campaigns. Against this background, the Ethics Office decided to address the topic individually, by responding to specific requests for confidential advice and guidance, and globally, through a webinar during Ethics Month on political activities broadcasted from the Middle East and North Africa region, held together with the UNICEF Regional Adviser, Communications, for that region.

Figure II  
**Requests for confidential ethics advice by subcategory, 2019**



#### IV. Standard-setting and policy support

25. Under [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 in order to reinforce and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity.

26. To assist the Ethics Office in meeting this mandate, the Office held regular collaborative meetings with OIAI, the Staff Counsellor and the Office of the Ombudsman. In addition, following the adoption of a standardized policy consultation and development process coordinated through the policy focal point within the Division of Financial and Administrative Management in mid-2018, the Ethics Office is now included earlier in the initial stages of policy writing and the reengineering of the regulatory framework library and is able to contribute at an early stage to the policy consultation and development process.

27. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office was consulted and provided advice on a wide range of policy development projects. The most significant and time-intensive policy development and change project in 2019 was the culture-change initiative that UNICEF started after the publication of the report of the Independent Task Force. The culture-change initiative, of course, went beyond policy development, but it was in this field and in the area of joint outreach efforts that there was the closest

coordination with the Ethics Office. The coordination of the organizational response to the report has been led by the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, whose role was created in the Office of the Executive Director in June 2019, reporting to the Deputy Executive Director, Management. As part of the organizational response, the Ethics Office was consulted on and actively contributed to the overall organizational culture-change efforts.

28. In addition, the Office was consulted on the UNICEF response and follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit reports on conflict of interest and whistle-blower protection.

29. The Ethics Office was also regularly consulted by the Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Workplace Abuse, in particular on developments within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee regarding protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The topic continued to receive significant attention among relevant UNICEF stakeholders, and the Senior Coordinator reports separately to the Executive Board on these matters. The topic of sexual harassment and abuse as well as abuse of authority and workplace harassment in the humanitarian sector continued to be an important part of the conversations and consultations among the Ethics Advisers for the Funds and Programmes within the Ethics Panel of the United Nations.

30. The Ethics Office was encouraged by the fact that UNICEF showed continued commitment to child safeguarding, in particular by creating in early 2019 a separate Child Safeguarding Unit within the Office of the Executive Director, led by the Senior Adviser, Child Safeguarding. The primary role of the Child Safeguarding Unit is policy development and advocacy to further operationalize the UNICEF Policy on Conduct Promoting the Protection and Safeguarding of Children, which was adopted in mid-2016. In that context, the Ethics Office was consulted on and welcomed the adoption of the Child Safeguarding Standards for UNICEF personnel, which apply to UNICEF personnel inside and outside the workplace.

31. In addition, the Ethics Office was consulted and advised on changes to the disciplinary process and the anti-harassment policy as well as a revised competency framework for the UNICEF performance management system, under which ethical and self-awareness will form a new competency. The Ethics Office was also consulted and advised on policy development in several new areas, such as ethics in fundraising (led by the Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division) and initial brainstorming regarding an internal data protection policy.

32. 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.

## **V. Financial Disclosure Programme**

33. The Ethics Office managed the annual Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure programme as in previous years, with the objective of protecting UNICEF against conflicts of interest and organizational risks relating to the relationships, outside activities and financial interests of staff members.

34. The Ethics Office implemented the recommendations shared in 2018 by an external financial services provider, KPMG, which had prepared a gap analysis on the programme. Hence, the office took measures to ensure the implementation of the recommendations at all stages of the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure programme cycle, namely: (a) registration of participating staff members; (b) filing by participating staff members; (c) review; (d) verification; and (e) issuance of clearance and/or guidance notes.

35. One of the key recommendations of KPMG was to 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 and impactful. The Ethics Office conducted three webinars for 60 heads of offices/divisions (focal points) and their delegates drawn from all UNICEF regional and country offices as well as headquarters divisions to ensure the implementation of this recommendation. As a result, it was possible to bring down the number of filers from 2,160 in 2018 to 1,613 in 2019 on the basis of seniority and function in accordance with the Executive Directive on Financial Disclosure and Declaration of Interest Statements (CF/EXD/2012-003). The second recommendation of KPMG was to tighten compliance timelines in all key areas (registration, filing cycle, review process) to significantly reduce programme length. In this regard, in 2019, the Ethics Office was able to reduce the programme cycle by three months compared with 2018. In 2018, the annual Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure exercise was launched on 13 February while review and verification were fully completed by 31 January 2019. In 2019, the annual exercise was launched on 19 February 2019 and review and verification were completed by 31 October 2019. This was made possible by tightening the timelines at all stages as well as by introducing system upgrades.

36. In line with the recommendations of KPMG, the Ethics Office communicated very clearly at the beginning of the filing cycle the potential consequences of non-compliance with clear timelines. In addition, the Ethics Office provided additional substantive conflict-of-interest advice from the outset to both focal points and filers. The Ethics Office also clearly communicated from the outset that the overall tightening of the programme was based on the KPMG recommendations that reflected areas for improvement identified by the firm. In collaboration with the Director of the Division of Human Resources, the Ethics Office also engaged in close follow-up, resulting, in a few instances, in the issuance of reprimand letters to ensure the compliance of staff members. As a result, the Ethics Office achieved a 100 per cent compliance rate with respect to both the filing requirement and the acceptance of the substantive advice provided.

37. Another KPMG recommendation was to further improve the information technology system used to facilitate the programme. With the very committed and effective expert support of the UNICEF Information and Communication Technology Division, the Ethics Office was able to significantly improve and upgrade the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure system's functionality, which in turn enabled a much faster review and verification process. In addition, on the basis of another KPMG recommendation, the information security of the system was thoroughly assessed and reviewed and further improved, in time for the launch of the 2019 cycle.

Table 2  
**Compliance with the Financial Disclosure Programme, 2007–2019**

<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	2160	99.9
2019	1613	100

38. The Ethics Office reviewed a total of 1,613 staff members as part of the 2019 Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure exercise, covering the reporting year ending 31 December 2018. Director-level staff comprised 8.9 per cent of the total number of reviews (up from 6.3 per cent in 2018), staff members in the international professional category 68.8 per cent (up from 59.5 per cent in 2018), staff in the national professional category 25 per cent (up from 23.7 per cent in 2018) and staff in the general service category 6.2 per cent (down from 16.9 per cent in 2018).

39. A summary of the review of the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure statements filed in 2019 indicates that 95.2 per cent of staff participating in the 2019 exercise had nothing to declare, had no conflict of interest, had already taken mitigating steps or had declared personal circumstances in which there was a remote connection to the United Nations or UNICEF that did not currently amount to an actual or potential conflict of interest; and 2.7 per cent of staff had a potential conflict of interest for which guidance was issued. In addition, about 1.9 per cent of participating staff members had recognized their own conflict of interest and had already taken proactive steps to mitigate it.

40. Among staff selected to participate in the 2019 exercise, 3.7 per cent had spouses who worked for UNICEF and 13.1 per cent had spouses who worked for other United Nations agencies or UNICEF-related entities, such as partners or non-governmental organizations. In addition, 14.8 per cent of participating staff had relatives who worked for other United Nations agencies or UNICEF-related entities.

41. Another source of potential conflict of interest is related to the outside activities of staff members. Among staff selected to participate in the 2019 exercise, 3.5 per cent were involved in such activities or had leadership roles with non-United Nations entities during the reporting period. A continued area of concern for the Ethics Office is the fact that in some instances staff members who, according to their disclosures in the 2019 exercise, were engaged in outside activities, had not sought or received the prior approval called for in Executive Directive CF/EXD/2012-009. In these instances, the Office issued specific guidance notes requesting the staff members to

seek approval, take the required measure to avoid or mitigate a conflict of interest, if any, and notify the office of the outcome.

42. Verification — an exercise in which a randomly selected sample of staff members are asked to provide supporting documents for the Financial Disclosure Statements that they have filed — is an important part of the Financial Disclosure Programme. In the 2019 exercise, about 3 percent of the participating staff members were selected for verification. All the staff members selected for verification were cleared by the Ethics Office on the basis of the supporting documentation they submitted for their Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure statements.

## **VI. Protection of staff against retaliation**

43. During the reporting period, there were 10 formal requests for protection under the UNICEF whistle-blower protection policy and an additional inquiry that did not proceed to requests for protection. The Ethics Office, on the basis of an initial examination, determined that, in 3 of the 10 formal requests, a prima facie case of retaliation had been made and the Ethics Office therefore referred those three cases to OIAI for a full investigation.

### **Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations**

44. In 2019, the Principal Adviser, Ethics, participated in 10 of the 11 meetings of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations.

45. As in 2018, the Ethics Panel members frequently consulted one another with a view to harmonizing ethics advice, guidance and practices, in particular on sensitive issues such as the scope of permissible political activities, the promotion of speak-up culture, whistle-blower protection and the independence of the Ethics Offices. Since 2019 was the fourth year in the tenure of the Principal Adviser and a year of change in the composition of the Ethics Panel, the Principal Adviser made herself available and actively contributed to the onboarding and integration of new members.

46. UNICEF also participates in the yearly meeting of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations. The meeting is an important forum for sharing experience and developing best practices. The 2019 meeting was organized and hosted by the European Patent Office in Munich and focused on five topics, namely, (a) due diligence during the recruitment of new employees; (b) communication strategy to enhance the ethics culture in organizations; (c) whistle-blower protection and retaliation; (d) analysing conflicts of interest and organizational risks; and (e) championing civility in the workplace: preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment.

## **VII. Follow-up on 2018 observations**

47. The Ethics Office is happy to report that UNICEF developed during 2019 and launched in early 2020 a revised competency framework that includes “Self-awareness and Ethical Awareness” as a new competency applicable to UNICEF staff members at all levels.

48. As part of promotion and appointment decisions, UNICEF has also started to implement at senior leadership levels a more in-depth due diligence focused on conduct and behaviour-related issues. As a part of this process, the Ethics Office is now routinely asked to express its perspective as to whether there are potential concerns that would warrant an enhanced due diligence. The Ethics Office considers this to be a constructive way to reconcile the need to preserve strict confidentiality

with respect to communications received by the Office and the legitimate interest of UNICEF to ensure that staff members appointed or promoted to senior leadership positions meet the highest standards of ethics and integrity required by the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

49. The Ethics Office therefore considers that UNICEF management has effectively responded to and implemented the observations and recommendations set out in its annual report for 2018.

## **VIII. Observations, recommendations and conclusions**

50. The following recommendations are informed by and based upon the experience of the Ethics Office in 2019 and relevant developments during the first two months of 2020.

51. The Ethics Office generally commends UNICEF for the multiple actions it has taken at different levels within the organization to address the concerns identified and the recommendations of the independent panel review and the report of the Independent Task Force as well as the forward-looking orientation it demonstrated in launching the wider culture-change initiative in 2019. Moving ahead, in 2020 and beyond, it will be important to ensure that there is a careful and robust assessment as to whether these initiatives trigger the intended change in behaviour, attitudes and perceptions among UNICEF personnel at all levels. The next Global Staff Survey, which is slightly overdue and which the Ethics Office understands will be launched in early 2020, will provide important information in that respect.

52. It will also be important to ensure that the terms of reference for the newly created roles and units in the Office of the Executive Director, namely that of (a) the Senior Adviser, Child Safeguarding, who leads the Child Safeguarding Unit; (b) the Senior Coordinator, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Workplace Abuse; and (c) the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, are carefully reconsidered and fine-tuned to ensure that they do not overlap or compete with the mandates of the independent offices, i.e., OIAI, the Office of the Ombudsman for the United Nations Funds and Programmes and the Ethics Office. This is particularly important because none of the new roles are part of an independent office, and they are therefore not covered by the confidentiality standards that apply under the mandates of the independent offices.

53. At the request of the Executive Director, following a finding by the Independent Task Force that the Ethics Office was trusted for its confidential advice but was not seen as strong enough to provide effective protection against retaliation, the Office conducted an assessment of its resources, with a view to fulfilling its mandate, and of steps that could be taken to further strengthen the Office's institutional independence. In August 2019, in response to the Executive Director's request, the Office developed a concept note based on that assessment.

54. In the concept note, the Ethics Office identified several options and recommendations for strengthening its institutional independence. The Office is encouraged by the fact that some of those recommendations have already been accepted, in particular those relating to the establishment of a five-year term for the head of the Ethics Office, renewable once, in line with the practice of other United Nations agencies; the change of title of the head of the Ethics Office to Director of Ethics; and the establishment of the Ethics Office as a separate business unit with its own budget, outside of the Office of the Executive Director. With respect to a recommended increase in the staffing of the Ethics Office, it is the understanding of

the Office that those recommendations will be considered as part of the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021.

## **IX. Draft decision**

*The Executive Board*

*Takes note* of the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019 ([E/ICEF/2020/22](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2020/23](#)).

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