

REPORT OF THE ETHICS OFFICE

Organizational oversight reports

Additional documents for this item:

Report of the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services for 2023 (UNAIDS/PCB (54)/24.14)

Report of the External Auditor (UNAIDS/PCB (54)/24.15)

Report of the Independent External Oversight Advisory Committee (UNAIDS/PCB (54)/24.17)

Management Response to the Organizational Oversight Reports (UNAIDS/PCB (54)/24.18)

Action required at this meeting—the Programme Coordinating Board is invited to:

- *Take note* of the report of the Ethics Office.

Cost implications for the implementation of the decisions: *none*

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Executive summary

1. This report is submitted in accordance with the decision of the 44th Programme Coordinating Board meeting, which requested the Executive Director to ensure that the ethics function conforms to standards set by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit. The relevant decision point included the establishment of a new, independent Ethics Office and ensuring that the Ethics Office submits an annual report, unchanged by management, to the Programme Coordinating Board, as well as the inclusion of a dedicated agenda item on ethics during their meetings.
2. This is the fourth report submitted to the Board on the ethics function at UNAIDS. This report covers the 2023 reporting period and reviews:
 - background information;
 - the establishment of an independent Ethics Office;
 - functioning of the Ethics Office and activities in the areas of confidential advisory services, addressing misconduct, protection from retaliation, prevention of sexual misconduct, the declaration of interest programme, training outreach and communications, ensuring policy coherence, participation in the Ethics Multilateral Network; and
 - streamlining processes and ensuring collaboration.
3. In August 2023, the Head of the Ethics Office left the position, which resulted in the appointment of a temporary replacement—a former senior ethics officer of UNAIDS. The recruitment of a new Head of Office is currently ongoing. Additionally, to address the Joint Inspection Unit recommendation to adequately resource the Ethics Office, the Executive Director, in February 2024, approved the recruitment of an additional ethics officer at the P3 level.
4. Regarding the functioning of the Ethics Office, the provision of confidential ethics advice has continued to rise, increasing by 91% from 2021 to 2022, and by an additional 59% from 2022 to 2023. This increase in requests for confidential advice may be linked to growing staff confidence in the Ethics Office.
5. The Integrity Hotline continued to be used as a tool to facilitate reporting of allegations of misconduct or other issues involving UNAIDS by any party, internal or external. In 2023, a total of 17 reports were received on the Integrity Hotline, compared to a total of 14 reports in 2022. The matters were referred to the appropriate structures for resolution.
6. Regarding protection against retaliation, a new World Health Organization (WHO) policy on preventing and addressing retaliation, which is applicable to UNAIDS, came into force during the reporting period. The policy adopts a victim-centered approach and strengthens UNAIDS's ability to address retaliation effectively by outlining safeguards and actions to create a transparent, fair and accountable environment where allegations of retaliation are promptly addressed. During the reporting period, six requests for advice including three formal requests for protection against retaliation were received and addressed.
7. During the reporting period, a new WHO policy on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct, also applicable to UNAIDS, came into force. The policy defines "sexual misconduct" broadly to include sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and it prioritizes victims/survivors by ensuring their rights. In addition, it outlines clear reporting pathways and the rights and support mechanisms for victims, subjects of allegations,

and bystanders. Various control and training measures were put in place related to the prevention of sexual misconduct by all UNAIDS personnel.

8. The Ethics Office administered the annual declaration-of-interest programme as required. During the reporting period, a total of 374 eligible staff members were sent the declaration-of-interest form, and potential conflicts of interest were identified and resolved. Further work was done with the Compliance team to set up the declaration-of-interest programme for experts. It is noted that the declaration of interests for experts was rolled out in early 2024. The Ethics Office report to the PCB in 2025 will provide an update on its implementation.
9. The requirement for all staff members and other personnel to complete mandatory training courses to ensure that every staff member has basic knowledge of various ethics and conduct-related issues continued during the reporting period. To improve the completion rate of the mandatory courses, managers were engaged to encourage their staff members to complete the courses. In addition, management announced that staff members who fail to undertake mandatory trainings as scheduled will not receive a within-grade salary increase for that year. These efforts resulted in a high completion rate of 95–100% in 2023, compared to 69–91% in 2022.
10. Regarding training and outreach, the Ethics Office continued to participate in the #RESPECT campaign. An ethics overview briefing was conducted for each of the Deputy Executive Directors. Additionally, training sessions were conducted for UNAIDS Country Directors from the regions in Africa and for drivers in the eastern and southern Africa Region, the Information and Communication Technology team, and two Country Offices. Areas covered in the training sessions included: (i) a general ethics overview; (ii) managing and declaring conflict of interest; (iii) protection against retaliation; (iv) fraud prevention; (v) vehicle use and management; and (vi) preventing abusive conduct and sexual misconduct.
11. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office was involved in the promotion of policy coherence through providing advice and guidance to staff and management to ensure that the organization's policies and procedures are applied properly and consistently. In addition, substantive inputs were made in the development of social media screening guidelines for new recruits, as well as providing content on the mandated areas of the Ethics Office in the Field Operations Manual. The Ethics Office also participated in an external review of the organization's safeguarding policies and practices.
12. The Ethics Office continued to collaborate closely with the Office of the Ombudsperson (Ombudsperson) and the WHO Office of Internal Oversight Services (IOS). The Ethics Office held regular meetings with the Ombudsperson and referred matters requiring informal resolution to them to encourage informal resolution of disputes and a more conciliatory approach to resolving conflicts at UNAIDS. The Ethics Office also collaborated with WHO IOS, and all allegations of misconduct received by the Ethics Office were referred to IOS, as appropriate.

Introduction and background

13. This report from the Ethics Office is submitted to the Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) in response to the implementation of recommendations aimed at strengthening the accountability and ethics functions within the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Secretariat (UNAIDS).
14. Specifically, during the 44th session of the PCB, the PCB working group to strengthen monitoring and evaluation on zero tolerance against harassment, including sexual

harassment, bullying, and abuse of power within UNAIDS presented a report with recommendations concerning the UNAIDS ethics function.¹ The working group invited the PCB to formally request the Executive Director to ensure that the UNAIDS ethics function aligns with the standards set out by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU).² Based on the working group's recommendations, the PCB requested the Executive Director to ensure that the UNAIDS ethics function adheres to the JIU standards.³

15. Key among the standards was the requirement that a report be submitted directly to the PCB without any modifications by management.⁴ The JIU also issued its "Review of the management and administration of UNAIDS" in November 2019 in which it made several recommendations related to the ethics function. The recommendations included further enhancement of the ethics function by establishing a fully independent Ethics Office and the inclusion of a stand-alone agenda item on ethics during PCB meetings.⁵
16. During the 45th PCB meeting in December 2019, the PCB reaffirmed its commitment to establish a regular agenda item specifically covering ethics and other topics related to accountability.⁶ Subsequently, in May 2020, the Executive Director issued an internal memorandum outlining decisions to implement these recommendations.
17. The first report of the Ethics Office was presented to the PCB at its 48th session in June 2021.⁷ Since then the Ethics Office has submitted an annual report regularly to the PCB. This is the fourth report of the Ethics Office to the PCB. It includes information on its activities for the reporting period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Progress in establishing an independent Ethics Office

18. As noted in previous reports of the Ethics Office to the PCB, the JIU issued a report in 2021 which provides the standards on which the independence of ethics functions in the UN should be based.⁸ As noted in previous reports of the Ethics Office to the PCB, most of the standards have been implemented. With regard to matters which are outstanding, the JIU noted that the practice of failing to issue contracts for a full term to the heads of ethics functions constituted a serious impediment to the independence and security of tenure of the head of ethics office. It recommended that the contracts of newly appointed heads of ethics offices should be issued for a full term.⁹ Contrary to the JIU recommendation, the previous Head of Ethics Office held a two-year fixed term contract, with a one-year probationary period.
19. In August 2023, the former Head of Ethics Office left the position. Consequently, a temporary replacement was appointed in October 2023 to fulfill the role.ⁱ A vacancy notice for the Head of Ethics Office was subsequently published, initiating the recruitment process for a new Head of the Ethics Office. The impending recruitment of a new Head of the Ethics Office is an opportunity for management to implement the outstanding recommendation regarding contracts of the heads of the ethics function. Regarding the role of the IEOAC in the recruitment of the Head of Ethics, the impending recruitment presents an opportunity for management to continue involving the IEOAC in the recruitment process.
20. To facilitate the work of the Ethics Office, the JIU also recommended that consideration be given to "*how to best support the office with appropriate staffing and/or backup*".¹⁰

ⁱ The temporary Head of Ethics Office, who was UNAIDS Country Director in South Sudan, "backstopped" the ethics function in August–September 2023 before assuming the role on a full-time basis. The temporary Head of the Ethics Office previously served as a Senior Ethics Officer within UNAIDS.

During the reporting period, the Ethics Office continued to consist of one person, despite the JIU's recognition that the Ethics Office at UNAIDS "*performs more duties than most in the UN system without a backstop*" and its recommendation that the function be strengthened by providing additional support.¹¹

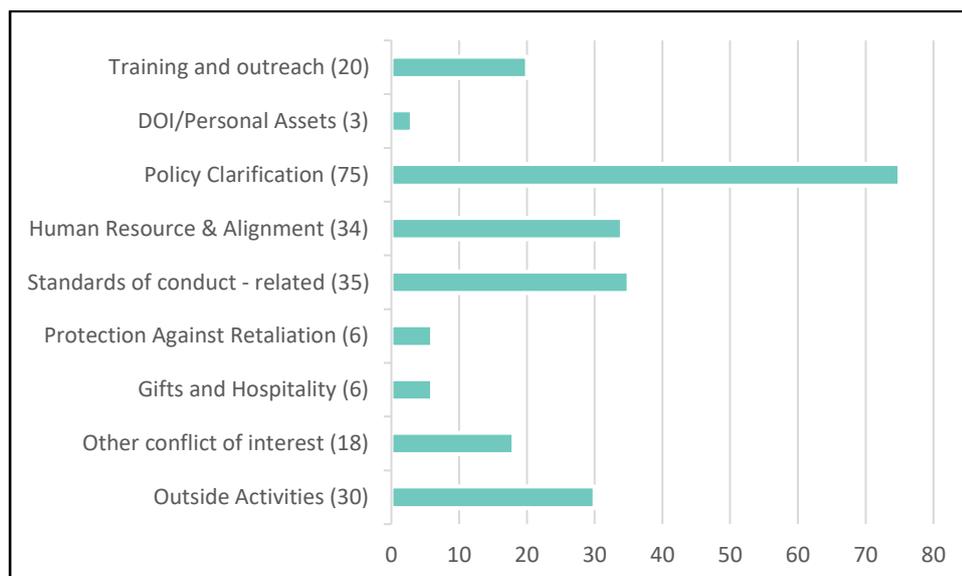
21. In line with the JIU recommendations, the Executive Director has now approved an additional ethics officer at the P3 level in February 2024. The position was subsequently established, and the vacancy notice was published. The Ethics Office appreciates this progress and believes that providing an additional resource will add significant value to the Organization.

Functioning of the Ethics Office

22. The Ethics Office promotes ethical principles and standards across the organization. It ensures that all staff members adhere to the highest standards of integrity while carrying out their duties and manage their personal affairs in ways that conform with the standards of conduct expected of international civil servants. The functions of the Ethics Office include:
 - provision of confidential ethics advice and guidance;
 - supporting staff members in reporting misconduct and reviewing reports received through the Integrity Hotline;
 - undertaking the responsibilities assigned the Ethics Office under the policy on protection against retaliation;
 - prevention of sexual misconduct;
 - administration of the declaration of interest programme;
 - promotion of ethics awareness, training and education;
 - supporting ethics standard-setting and promoting policy coherence to ensure consistent and fair application of the rules; and
 - participation in the Ethics Multilateral Network.

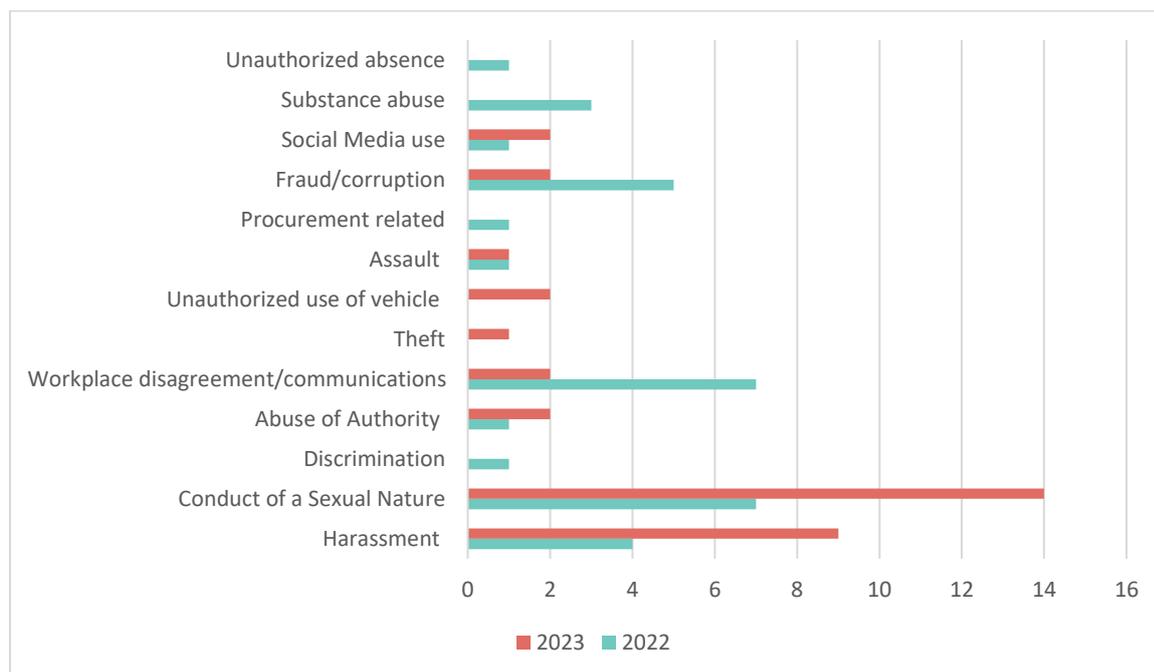
Confidential advice and guidance

23. As an independent, impartial, and confidential resource, the Ethics Office provides ethics advice and guidance on a wide range of matters to both staff and management. It helps to address potential conflicts of interest and reputational risks within the organization. Additionally, the Office clarifies the expected behaviors outlined in the Staff Regulations and Rules, as well as the standards of conduct for the international civil service. By offering such advice and guidance, the Office empowers officials to proactively make ethical decisions, thereby preventing potential misconduct and mitigating the consequences of questionable choices.
24. Overall, the Ethics Office received 227 confidential requests for ethics advice and guidance in 2023, resulting in a 59% increase from the previous year. Requests for advice and guidance have significantly increased year-on-year, from a 91% increase from 75 in 2021 to 143 in 2022, and an additional 59% increase from 143 to 227 in 2023.
25. The increase in requests may be linked to the Ethics function's improved autonomy, more efficient processes of the Ethics Office, the end of COVID-19 restrictions and the awareness created through mandatory trainings and the respect campaign activities undertaken in recent years.

Figure 1. Ethics Office advice and guidance services in 2023

26. As shown in Figure 1, the most common requests during 2023 were for policy clarification. The Ethics Office noted a strong interest among staff members in understanding and applying the provisions of the policies on prevention and addressing abusive conduct, sexual misconduct and retaliation, in particular. This may have been due to the launch of new policies in those areas.
27. The Ethics Office responded to 34 human resources related requests. Those requests were mainly related to recruitment, contract management, separation and post-employment standards of conduct. The Ethics Office provided the necessary advice, including referral to the People Management Department and other departments, as appropriate.
28. Of the 227 requests for ethics advice received during the reporting period, 33 were related to outside activities and 18 were related to other conflicts of interest. Staff members sought guidance on engagement in external activities and employment, recruitment of consultants and procurement, among other matters. When assessing these requests, the Ethics Office ensured that the external activity did not interfere with the staff members' official duties or their status as international civil servants. Additionally, the Ethics Office verified that the activities were not harmful to UNAIDS's interests and complied with local laws at the duty stations or locations where the outside activities were to be undertaken.
29. The Ethics Office responded to 35 requests for advice and guidance on standards of conduct related issues. A similar number (36) of requests were received in 2022.¹² As shown in Figure 2, significantly more requests on harassment and sexual misconduct were received, compared with 2022. All allegations regarding matters of a sexual nature were prioritized and referred to WHO IOS, as appropriate.

Figure 2. Standards of conduct advisory service provided by the Ethics Office, 2022 and 2023ⁱⁱ



Ensuring the highest standards of conduct

30. Staff members, collaborators and the general public can request advice on alleged misconduct and related matters either directly by contacting the Ethics Office or through the Integrity Hotline. The Ethics Office manages the Integrity Hotline, which is provided by a third party and serves as a confidential channel through which any party, external or internal, can report concerns related to UNAIDS. It is accessible “24/7” via a web link or telephone number which can be called from any location at no cost to callers. Administered in all six UN languages, the Integrity Hotline accepts anonymous reports, and the service provider is contractually bound not to disclose any identifying information about a user unless express permission is granted by the user.
31. The Ethics Office is bound by strict confidentiality. Any report received is confidentially processed and addressed to the relevant department, including the WHO IOS, the People Management Department or another department, as appropriate. Depending on the nature of the report, the reporter, including for anonymous reports, may be contacted directly via the platform, which preserves anonymity, for further information and/or next steps.
32. In 2022, the Integrity Hotline was placed on the external UNAIDS website, streamlining access for external parties and partners seeking to report misconduct or raise any other concerns. Additionally, flyers and posters were developed and disseminated for display in all UNAIDS offices around the globe. The Integrity Hotline is also now accessible through the UN “Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse” website.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ Please note that matters with multiple issues were counted multiple times. Retaliation is excluded, since it is addressed separately in paras 34–40.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Integrity Hotline is available at the UN system wide PSEA website: [How to Report | Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/preventingsexualexploitationandabuse/).

33. During the reporting period, a total of 17^{iv} reports were received through the Integrity Hotline, compared with 14^v in 2022 and five in 2021. It is noted that the number of spam reports increased from four in 2022 to ten in 2023. Therefore, the number of legitimate reports received declined from ten in 2022 to seven in 2023. Data from the global staff survey conducted in 2022 indicated that 85% of staff were aware of the misconduct reporting procedure, surpassing the average benchmark by about 15% points. This suggests that UNAIDS is doing better than other UN entities and similar international organizations which constitute the benchmark. Promoting the use of the Integrity Hotline continues to be a priority of the Ethics Office so that staff members, collaborators and members of the public who may have legitimate concerns about UNAIDS can access the hotline.

Protection against retaliation

34. The Ethics Office has the mandate to undertake the functions assigned to it under the policy on protection against retaliation. During the reporting period, a new WHO policy on preventing and addressing retaliation, applicable to UNAIDS, came into force.¹³
35. The new policy aligns with UNAIDS's commitment to zero tolerance for all forms of misconduct, including retaliation. It adopts a victim- and survivor-centered approach and encourages staff members and collaborators to report misconduct in good faith or cooperate with duly authorized audits and investigations without fear of retribution. Additionally, the policy strengthens UNAIDS's ability to address allegations of retaliation, manage risks and safeguard staff members and collaborators who make good faith reports of retaliation. The policy also seeks to foster transparency and accountability by setting out the safeguards and assurances that UNAIDS provides and by describing the actions that will be taken when allegations of retaliation are made.
36. Unlike in the previous policy, where the Ethics Office conducted *prima facie* reviews of retaliation cases, the new policy has consolidated all aspects of investigations under the purview of the WHO IOS. Under the policy, the Ethics Office's role focuses on recommending preventive and protective measures to prevent retaliation and to safeguard staff members and collaborators who report misconduct in good faith or cooperate with duly authorized audits and investigations from retaliation. This role involves close collaboration with IOS, the People Management Department, Staff Health and Wellbeing Services and other services, as necessary.¹⁴
37. The 2022 global staff survey noted improvements in the confidence of staff to report misconduct, compared with 2020. In the 2020 survey, 37% of respondents had indicated that they felt confident they would not face adverse consequences if they reported a case of abusive conduct. In the 2022 survey, 58% of respondents said they would feel comfortable speaking out and 57% of respondents indicated that they would feel safe reporting misconduct.
38. However, many staff members still fear retaliation. In the 2022 survey, one third of the respondents who indicated that they had experienced abusive conduct and did not report it, cited fear of retaliation as the reason for not reporting the issue. Consequently, while comparisons between the 2022 and 2020 surveys may indicate improvements in the proportion of respondents who feel comfortable reporting misconduct, enhanced efforts are still needed to ensure confidence in the systems that are established to protect people from retaliation.

^{iv} This includes ten spam reports received.

^v This included four spam reports.

39. During the reporting period, six requests for advice regarding retaliation were received, including three formal requests for protection against retaliation. The Ethics Office recommended interim measures and worked with the People Management Department to protect all the individuals concerned.
40. Training initiatives were implemented during the reporting period to enhance awareness and education regarding retaliation. These specifically emphasized the obligation to report misconduct under the legal framework. They also clarified the definition of retaliation and the procedures for seeking help and guidance if staff or collaborators fear they may experience retaliation or believe they are experiencing retaliation. It is noted that timely identification of retaliation or the risk of retaliation, and enforcement of preventive and protective measures, are critical for ensuring that UNAIDS is a safe, equal and empowering workplace.

Prevention of sexual misconduct

41. A new WHO policy on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct, applicable to UNAIDS, was launched in March 2023.¹⁵ The new policy applies the term “sexual misconduct” to include all forms of prohibited sexual behaviour: sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and sexual harassment. It adopts a victim-centered approach and reiterates the prohibition of sexual misconduct and the obligation to report such instances. The policy also clarifies that UNAIDS staff or collaborators can be subjects of allegations of sexual misconduct towards other UNAIDS staff, collaborators and members of the public in locations where UNAIDS operates. Furthermore, the policy outlines the reporting options for sexual misconduct and clarifies the organization’s responsibilities and the rights of victims/survivors, subjects of allegations of sexual misconduct, and bystanders.
42. In line with the new UNAIDS recruitment policy¹⁶ which provides for integrity screening as part of the recruitment processes, the Ethics Office collaborated with the People Management Department to develop social media screening guidelines. These require UNAIDS to search candidates’ publicly available social media accounts, news articles and other online sources during the hiring process to ensure that UNAIDS recruits people with the highest standards of integrity.
43. In connection with this, it is noted that an external review of the safeguarding policies, practices and culture in UNAIDS was undertaken and one of the recommendations in the report was for a review of the social media guidelines to encompass an online footprint and to provide clearer guidance on what may be considered unacceptable for UNAIDS.¹⁷ The Ethics Office will participate in the review of the next generation of the social media guidelines.
44. Additionally, the Ethics Office collaborated with the People Management Department to expand the use of ClearCheck to require a review of all personnel, including consultants, for broader screening and background checks to ensure that UNAIDS does not hire people who have committed sexual misconduct in the past.
45. As noted in the previous Report of the Ethics Office, an implementing partner capacity assessment form on the prevention of sexual misconduct was rolled out at country level. The assessment requires that due diligence is done prior to entering into an agreement with an implementing partner to confirm that the partner has the minimum standards set out in the UN Harmonized Implementation Tool.¹⁸
46. The Ethics Office collaborated with the Finance and Accountability Department to develop a “Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment” country risk assessment tool to

help countries to identify risk factors in the local context and in their internal operating environments, and to design measures to appropriately mitigate the risks identified. The risk assessment will be conducted annually and will help ensure that UNAIDS is taking appropriate measures to prevent sexual misconduct across all its operations. The risk assessment tool was launched in early 2024 and updates regarding its implementation will be included in the next PCB report covering January to December 2024.

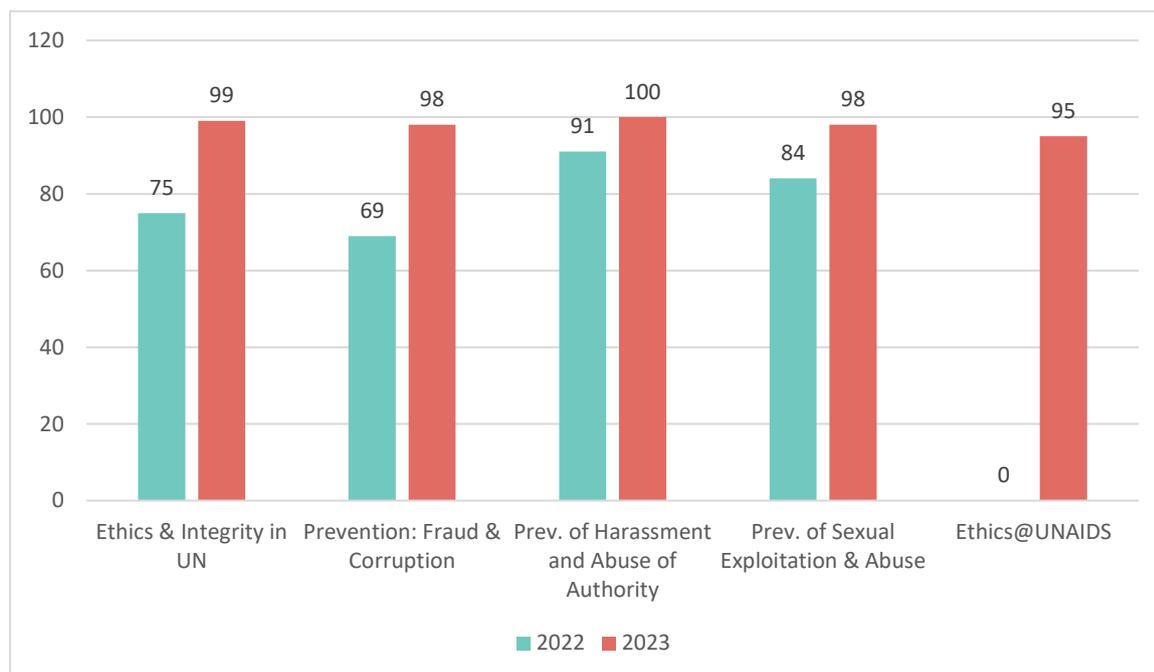
Declaration-of-interest programme

47. The Ethics Office administers the annual declaration-of-interest programme pursuant to Staff Rule 110.7.2 and WHO eManual III.1.2 (as summarized in UNAIDS Information Note 3 – 2020, PFA-FRM-IN-2020-3). The goal of the programme is to identify and mitigate any conflicts of interest that may arise from the outside activities and other interests of eligible staff members, their spouses and dependent children. In 2023, the declaration-of-interest form was sent to 374 eligible staff members. Potential conflicts of interest were addressed with the individual staff members concerned.
48. The Ethics Office also collaborated with the Finance and Accountability team to develop a declaration-of-interest programme for consultants and experts. This is to ensure that experts and consultants disclose their interests and circumstances that could give rise to potential conflict of interest in relation to an assignment they are expected to undertake for UNAIDS. This programme is expected to protect the integrity and independence of UNAIDS's work. The declaration of interest for experts was rolled out in early 2024. The Ethics Office report to the PCB, covering January to December 2024 will provide more details on the rollout of the new forms.

Ethics training, communication and outreach

49. An essential function of the Ethics Office is to contribute to fostering an ethical culture by conducting ethics training, communication and outreach across the organization. This helps to increase awareness of ethics-related matters among staff members and other personnel, as well as increase awareness of relevant policies and procedures, and enhance compliance with the organization's regulatory framework.
50. The requirement for all staff and other personnel to complete mandatory training courses to ensure that every staff member has basic knowledge of various ethics and conduct issues continued during the reporting period. Specific mandatory courses included "Ethics and Integrity in the UN", "Prevention of Fraud and Corruption" and "Prevention of Harassment and Abuse of Authority". In addition, an updated version of the UN-wide Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was introduced as a mandatory course in March 2023. The Ethics@UNAIDS course, providing an overview of all ethics and conduct related matters specific to UNAIDS policies and procedures, was also made mandatory for all personnel in February 2023.
51. To increase the completion rate of all mandatory trainings, as requested by the IEOAC, management sent several reminders to all personnel, as well as communications to managers to ensure that their personnel complete the mandatory courses.¹⁹ Management also announced that staff members who fail to undertake their mandatory training as scheduled will not receive their within-grade increase for the year. As a result of these measures, the completion rates of the mandatory training courses improved significantly as shown Figure 3 below.^{vi}

^{vi} The completion rates were calculated at the beginning of March 2024.

Figure 3. Completion rate of mandatory training courses, 2022 and 2023

52. The Ethics Office held separate face-to-face induction briefings for the two Deputy Executive Directors in February 2023. The sessions highlighted the functioning of the Ethics Office, the oath of office, and ethical considerations for addressing common conflict of interest issues. The session also covered the role of the Deputy Executive Directors in guiding staff members regarding their rights and obligations, as well as in fostering an environment of trust in which staff members can speak out. Additionally, the sessions discussed essential aspects of preventing and responding to sexual misconduct and other abusive conduct including retaliation.
53. The Ethics Office continued to collaborate with other internal stakeholders—including Internal Communications, the People Management Department, the Office of the Ombudsperson and the cultural transformation team—to implement the #RESPECT Campaign. This internal communications campaign at UNAIDS focuses on preventing and addressing misconduct, defining what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and providing examples and scenarios.
54. The Ethics Office participated in two #RESPECT training sessions in March and July 2023 on discrimination and sexual misconduct, respectively. These sessions specifically focused on the provisions of the “Policy on preventing and addressing abusive conduct” and the “Policy on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct”, their reporting mechanisms, and how staff members can seek support.
55. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office also participated in large meetings involving UNAIDS personnel to provide education and training. In October 2023, the Ethics Office undertook two separate virtual training sessions - one during the joint retreat of the UNAIDS Country Directors from the eastern and southern Africa and the western and central Africa regions, and the second for drivers from the eastern and southern Africa region.
56. Topics discussed included the functioning of the Ethics Office, how to identify and address conflicts of interest, the mechanisms for reporting misconduct, and how staff

members can seek support. The Country Directors' session explored the prevention of fraud, sexual misconduct and other abusive conduct and their roles, as managers, in preventing such conduct. The drivers' session included detailed discussion of UNAIDS's vehicle policy, including how to address instructions of their managers and other senior colleagues that are inconsistent with that policy.

57. In June 2023, the Ethics Office also held a virtual training session for the Information and Communication Technology Department. The areas covered in the session included the functioning of the Ethics Office; the oath of office; ethical considerations for addressing common conflict of interest issues, prevention of sexual misconduct; abusive conduct; fraud prevention; and reporting. Regarding the prevention of sexual misconduct, the prohibition of online sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, including child pornography, were emphasized.
58. The Ethics Office held a virtual training for the Malawi Country Office on ethics and standards of conduct in July 2023. Specifically, the training focused on the functioning of the Ethics Office and highlighted prevention of abusive conduct, fraud prevention, responsible use of social media, as well as the prevention of sexual misconduct, with an emphasis on working with implementing partners.
59. Following a request from the Kenya Country Office, the Ethics Office prepared a presentation to facilitate discussions on ethics-related matters during that Office's retreat in November 2023. The presentation covered the functioning of the Ethics Office, and the prevention and addressing of abusive conduct and sexual misconduct. Other topics included protection against retaliation and channels for reporting misconduct and seeking help.
60. The Ethics Office will continue to prioritize more interactive training for staff, with emphasis on face-to-face sessions, to ensure that training participants have greater opportunities for in-depth discussion and for understanding the application and implications of policies.

Standard setting and policy coherence

61. The standard setting and policy coherence mandate of the Ethics Office requires it to contribute ethical considerations to standards-setting in the organization, so that the policies, rules and practices of the organization reflect and promote its values and are applied appropriately and consistently.
62. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office was involved in the promotion of policy coherence through providing advice and guidance to staff and management to ensure that the organization's policies and procedures are applied fairly and consistently. As discussed above, the Ethics Office received several requests for policy clarifications. The Office provided substantive inputs in the development of social media screening guidelines for new recruitments, including clarification on the purpose and scope of screening.
63. In addition, the Ethics Office participated in an external review of the organization's safeguarding policies and practices. The review made several recommendations, including broadening the social media policy to take account of online footprint beyond social media; enhancing interactive face-to-face training to enable more in-depth discussion; and understanding the application and implications of policies. The review also resulted in recommendations, including strengthening the Ethics Office.

64. The Ethics Office also provided substantive inputs in the review of the Field Operations Manual by providing content on the role of the Office and the standards of conduct, including relevant provisions of the policies on preventing and addressing retaliation, sexual misconduct and abusive conduct.
65. As discussed above, the Ethics Office has prioritized more interactive training for staff. The Office will also work with management to address the other recommendations of the safeguarding review, as well as to define and strengthen the safeguarding ecosystem in UNAIDS.

Participation in the Ethics Multilateral Network

66. The Ethics Office interacts with other agencies through the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, comprising the Ethics Offices of UN system organizations, International Finance Institutions, and other multilateral organizations. The Ethics Network provides a forum for members to exchange information and experiences and to collaborate on issues of common interest and general applicability to their functions. The purpose is to enhance the professional capacity of the Ethics functions and to promote standards of practice and responsibilities among member organizations. The Network organizes annual conferences and other meetings that discuss issues of mutual interest.
67. In addition to the global network, UN entity ethics offices based in Geneva hold quarterly meetings to discuss matters of mutual interest. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office participated in those quarterly meetings. Going forward, the Ethics Office will attend ENMO meetings and the annual conference to encourage collaboration with the Ethics Network and to gather learnings and best practices that can be implemented in the UNAIDS context.

Streamlining processes and enhancing collaboration

68. Efforts were made to collaborate with relevant WHO Offices, including the Office of the Ombudsperson and the IOS. Matters requiring informal resolution were referred to the Office of the Ombudsperson to encourage informal resolution and a more conciliatory approach to resolving conflicts at UNAIDS. The Ethics Office held regular meetings with the Ombudsperson to discuss issues of mutual interest. The Ethics Office referred matters requiring investigation to IOS and held discussions to ensure collaboration, as appropriate.
69. The Ethics Office referred matters requiring investigation to the IOS and held discussions to find ways of strengthening collaboration between the two offices. Considering UNAIDS's commitment to a victim-centred approach in handling misconduct and its zero-tolerance stance towards misconduct, including retaliation, the Ethics Office will rely on timely information from the IOS to protect individuals who report allegations of misconduct, especially those who submit their reports directly to the IOS.
70. The Ethics Office also held a meeting with the newly elected Executive Committee of the UNAIDS Staff Association to foster collaboration during the reporting period.

Conclusion

71. There has been a significant increase in confidential advisory services provided by the Ethics Office in recent years. The Office therefore welcomes the decision of the Executive Director to recruit an additional staff member to strengthen the Ethics Office.

Significant progress has been made in ensuring the independence of the Office, as well as in the areas of training and outreach. The 2022 Global Staff Survey showed improvements in key areas. However, additional work is needed to ensure zero tolerance for all forms of misconduct. The Ethics Office hopes to continue building on the progress made thus far to foster a stronger culture of ethics and accountability at UNAIDS.

Proposed decision points

The PCB is invited to:

72. *Take note* of the report of the Ethics Office.

[References follow]

References

- ¹ Report on the Working Group of the Programme Coordinating Board to strengthen the PCB's monitoring and evaluation role on zero tolerance against harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and abuse of power at the UNAIDS Secretariat (hereinafter "2019 Working Group Report"), June 2019 (UNAIDS/PCB (44)/19.5), pp. 36 & 47 ([UNAIDS_PCB44_19.5_EN.pdf](#)).
- ² Note 1, above, 2019 Working Group Report at para 73.
- ³ Report of the 44th Programme Coordinating Board Meeting, (UNAIDS/PCB (44)/19.22), December 2019, pp. 41–42 (05112019_UNAIDS_PCB45_Report-44thPCB_EN.pdf).
- ⁴ Note 1 above, pp. 36 & 47 ([UNAIDS_PCB44_19.5_EN.pdf](#)).
- ⁵ Review of the Management and Administration of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, (JIU/REP/2019/7), at paras 101–104 and 124 ([14112019_UNAIDS_PCB45_JIU_REP_2019_EN.pdf](#)).
- ⁶ Report of the 45th meeting of the Programme Coordinating Board (UNAIDS/PCB (45)/19.38) pp. 47.
- ⁷ Report of the Ethics Office—Organizational Oversight Reports, (UNAIDS/PCB (48)/21.6) ([PCB_48_Ethics_Office_Report_EN.pdf](#) (unaids.org)).
- ⁸ Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Ethics Function in the United Nations System (hereinafter 2021 JIU Report) (JIU//REP/2021/5) ([Joint Inspection Unit on the Ethics Function in the United Nations System](#)) at pp. 24.
- ⁹ Note 6 above, at pp. 29.
- ¹⁰ Note 4 above, at para 103.
- ¹¹ Note 4 above, at p. 24. In 2022 the newly established Independent External Audit and Oversight Committee of UNAIDS (IEAOC) also recommended "that the PCB and the UNAIDS Executive Director ensure that the Ethics Office has adequate resources to carry out its functions."
- ¹² Report of the Ethics Office to the PCB, June 2023 (UNAIDS/PCB (52)/23.18) at pp. 8.
- ¹³ WHO Policy on preventing and addressing retaliation, 2023.
- ¹⁴ Note 11 above, at para 3.11–3.15
- ¹⁵ WHO Policy on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct, 2023.
- ¹⁶ UNAIDS recruitment policy and procedures, HRM/IN 2022-1 rev.1, 2022, at para 22.
- ¹⁷ Report on Safeguarding review and recommendations for strengthening, 2023 at pp. 13.
- ¹⁸ United Nations implementing partner PSEA capacity assessment tool, 2020 ([UN Harmonized Implementing Tool](#)).
- ¹⁹ Report of the 52nd Programme Coordinating Board meeting ([UNAIDS/PCB \(52\)/23.23](#)) at para 228, 238, 247–248.

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