

# 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 2022 (UNAIDS/PCB (52)/23.16)

Report of the External Auditor (UNAIDS/PCB (52)/23.17)

Report of the Independent External Oversight Advisory Committee (UNAIDS/PCB (52)/23.19)

Management Response to the Organizational Oversight Reports (UNAIDS/PCB (52)/23.20)

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

56. *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 session of the Programme Coordinating Board, which requested that the Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS ensure that the Secretariat ethics function conforms to standards set by the Joint Inspection Unit.<sup>i</sup> 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 stand-alone agenda item covering ethics.<sup>ii</sup>
2. This is the third report submitted to the Programme Coordinating Board on the ethics function at UNAIDS. This report covers the 2022 reporting period and it reviews:
  - background information;
  - functioning of the Ethics Office and activities in the areas of confidential advisory services, ensuring the highest standards of conduct, protection from retaliation, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, the declaration of interest programme, training outreach and communications, ensuring policy coherence, participation in the Ethics Multilateral Network; and
  - an update on additional issues and identified priorities.
3. In accordance with recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit, a newly independent Ethics Office was established in 2022. While many of the Joint Inspection Unit recommendations on the ethics function have been implemented, additional measures are still needed to provide sufficient support and staff to the Ethics Office. With regard to the functioning of the Ethics Office, the provision of confidential ethics advice increased significantly by 91% in 2022 compared to 2021. This increase, without the provision of additional staff to the Ethics Office, creates an area of concern.
4. With regard to ensuring the highest standards of conduct, the Integrity Hotline is still in use, enabling any party, internal or external, to report allegations of misconduct or other issues involving UNAIDS. In 2022, the Integrity Hotline was placed on the external UNAIDS website to allow for easier access by external parties and partners to raise concerns. All conduct-related policies and procedures were also placed on the external UNAIDS website to increase transparency. In 2022, a total of 14 reports were received on the Integrity Hotline, compared to a total of five reports in 2021.
5. A new Global Staff Survey was conducted in 2022. In the 2022 Global Staff Survey, 13% of respondents who participated indicated that they had experienced a form of abusive conduct in the previous year, compared to a total of 22% in the previous Global Staff Survey, conducted in 2020. While this improvement is significant, additional improvements must be made to ensure zero tolerance for all forms of misconduct at UNAIDS.
6. The Ethics Office continues to administer the World Health Organization whistleblower and protection against retaliation policy, as adapted for UNAIDS. Increasing the trust of staff members in the mechanisms in place to protect them from retaliation was identified as a key priority. In recent years, no formal requests for protection from retaliation were received by the Ethics Office. However, in 2022 a total of six requests for advice related to possible retaliation were received, including three formal requests for protection against retaliation.
7. The fact that staff members came forward during the reporting period to submit formal requests for protection against retaliation is identified as a sign of increased trust in the

independence of the ethics function. It is noted that in the 2022 global staff survey, 58% of respondents said that they would feel comfortable speaking up and 57% indicated that they would feel safe reporting misconduct, compared to 37% in the 2020 global staff survey. While these improvements are significant, additional progress must continue in this area.

8. During the reporting period, the WHO "Policy Directive on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Information Note 23/2021)" was applicable. The policy directive reiterated the standards for ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, aligned with the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on "Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13)".
9. Contractual agreements were updated to include strengthened clauses related to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment by all UNAIDS personnel. Implementing partner capacity assessment forms were also updated to include enhanced provisions on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment. Focal points in country offices were provided with terms of reference. New communications flyers on the issue were created and distributed to all UNAIDS staff. All personnel at UNAIDS were required to take the mandatory UN system-wide training on sexual exploitation and abuse, which had a completion rate of 84%. All staff were also invited to training sessions in collaboration with WHO. A new mandatory training on ethics and conduct issues at UNAIDS, emphasizing the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment, was created. In early 2023, UNAIDS adopted the new, comprehensive WHO policy on preventing sexual misconduct, which incorporates a victim-centered approach.
10. The Ethics Office continues to administer the declaration-of-interest programme. During the reporting period, a total of 457 staff members were sent the declaration-of-interest form, and potential conflicts of interest were identified and resolved. New declaration-of-interest forms were created for consultants and experts to allow for broader conflict-of-interest screening and risk mitigation. These new forms will be implemented in 2023 in collaboration with the Compliance team.
11. With regard to training and outreach, the Ethics Office continued to participate in the #RESPECT campaign, an internal communications campaign at UNAIDS that focuses on preventing and addressing misconduct. The Ethics Office conducted an ethics overview training session for junior professional officers in November 2022. Two meetings were held with the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association's executive committee, and the Ethics Office contributed to the Association's newsletter to raise awareness on ethics and integrity issues at UNAIDS. Individual ethics training sessions were also conducted in early 2023 for the new incoming Deputy Executive Directors.
12. The Ethics Office created, in collaboration with the People Management Department, a new training course entitled Ethics@UNAIDS. Areas covered in the course include: a general ethics overview; managing and declaring conflicts of interest; whistleblowing and retaliation; and preventing abusive conduct and sexual exploitation and abuse. The training modules are meant to complement the mandatory UN system-wide trainings and to emphasize the provisions of the UNAIDS regulatory framework. The training is mandatory for all UNAIDS personnel. These are the first mandatory trainings for all personnel that are tailored to UNAIDS policies and rules.
13. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office promoted policy coherence by providing advice to staff and management to ensure that the organization's policies are applied properly and consistently. The Ethics Office also participated in meetings of the Ethics Multilateral Network in an effort to gather best practices in ethics from across the UN

system that can be shared and implemented at UNAIDS. Representatives from the Ethics Office and the culture transformation teams served as co-chairs of the informal inter-agency working group on anti-racism, also in an effort to collect best practices from other UN agencies and incorporate them at UNAIDS. Drawing from these learnings, a new staff survey on global work force diversity demographics was conducted in order to better understand the workforce composition at UNAIDS, as well as inform the alignment exercise. The survey resulted in welcome commitments from management towards making UNAIDS more diverse and inclusive.

14. With regard to streamlining processes and procedures, the Ethics Office internal website was updated to allow for easy access by all internal staff and personnel to all policies and procedures related to ethics. Standardized forms were created to streamline and expedite all requests made through the Ethics Office. New standard operating procedures were put in place, which include target timelines for all requests for advice received. Finally, informal dispute resolution was encouraged through the referral of appropriate matters to the WHO Office of the Ombudsman.

### Introduction and background

15. This report is submitted to the Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) following the implementation of recommendations to strengthen the accountability and ethics functions at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Specifically, the PCB Working Group to strengthen monitoring and evaluation on zero tolerance against harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and abuse of power at UNAIDS, presented a report at the 44th PCB meeting which included recommendations on the Secretariat ethics function.<sup>iii</sup> The Working Group's report recommended that the PCB request that the UNAIDS Executive Director ensure that the Secretariat ethics function conform to the standards articulated by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU).<sup>iv</sup> Based on the recommendations of the Working Group, the PCB also requested that the Executive Director ensure that the UNAIDS Secretariat ethics function conforms to JIU standards.<sup>v</sup>
16. Key among these standards was ensuring the submission of a report, unchanged by management, directly to the PCB.<sup>vi</sup> The JIU also issued its "Review of the Management and Administration of UNAIDS", in November 2019. Its various recommendations included the further strengthening of the Secretariat ethics function by establishing a fully independent Ethics Office and ensuring the submission of an annual report directly to the PCB. It was also recommended to include a stand-alone agenda item on ethics at PCB meetings.<sup>vii</sup> At the 45th PCB meeting in December 2019, the PCB affirmed the commitment to establish a regular stand-alone agenda item to cover ethics and other topics related to accountability.<sup>viii</sup> On 26 May 2020, the Executive Director issued an internal memorandum on the ethics function, which included several decisions to implement the recommendations.
17. The first report of the Ethics Office was presented to the PCB at its 48th session in June 2021.<sup>ix</sup> The current, third report includes information on the activities of the UNAIDS Ethics Office for the reporting period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022.<sup>1</sup>

### Establishing a new, independent Ethics Office

18. The ethics function was created in the UNAIDS Secretariat in 2009 with the objective "to assist the Executive Director in ensuring that all staff members observe and perform their functions in consistency with the highest standards of integrity, as required by the Charter of the United Nations, and in accordance with the Standards of Conduct for the

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<sup>1</sup> Limited insights are shared in relation to early 2023.

International Civil Service.”<sup>x</sup> Following the recommendations of the JIU, the Executive Director, in 2020, approved the establishment of a new and distinct UNAIDS Ethics Office, to be staffed by a new head of the Ethics Office.

19. The JIU recommended that consideration be given to “how to best support the office with appropriate staffing and/or backup”. In 2020 the Executive Director agreed to provide administrative support and backup to the Ethics Office. At the time of submission of this report, the Ethics Office still consists of only one person, despite recognition by the JIU that the Ethics Office at UNAIDS “performs more duties than most in the UN system without a backstop,” and despite recommendations to strengthen the function through providing additional support.<sup>xi</sup> As stated in the previous Ethics Office reports from 2021 and 2022 submitted to the PCB, additional support and staff are still needed to ensure that the Ethics Office can fulfill its mandate and operate effectively. During the reporting period, no additional updates were made with regard to previous JIU recommendations. A new JIU report on the Ethics function was issued in 2021 with four recommendations, some of which remain outstanding.

### Functioning of the Ethics Office

20. The Ethics Office promotes ethical principles and standards throughout the organization, and assists in ensuring that all staff members observe and perform their functions in consistency with the highest standards of conduct. The Ethics Office is guided by the principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality. The Office promotes the ethical principles derived from the Standards of Conduct of the International Civil Service for all UNAIDS staff and associated personnel. The Office provides confidential advice and seeks to assist staff members to manage their personal affairs in a manner that does not interfere with their official duties. The Office engages in the following specific services and activities:

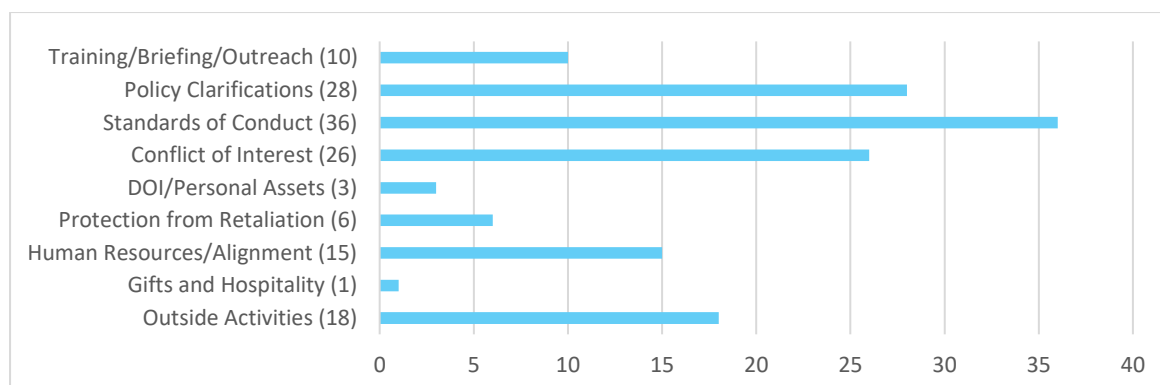
- provision of confidential and pragmatic ethics advice;
- supporting staff members in reporting misconduct and reviewing reports received through the Integrity Hotline;
- administering the whistleblower and protection against retaliation policy;
- prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse;
- review of financial disclosures and administration of the declaration-of-interest programme;
- promotion of ethics awareness, training, standards and education;
- consulting on and developing standards, policies and principles to ensure consistent and fair application of the rules; and
- participation in the Ethics Multilateral Network.

### Confidential advisory services

21. The Ethics Office provides confidential advisory services and pragmatic advice on a variety of matters, including but not limited to: conflict of interest; accepting gifts, honours and awards; engagement in outside activities; hiring and working with relatives; engagement in political activities; and upholding the standards of conduct of the international civil service. It provides confidential advisory services to both staff and management. All requests for advice and consultation by the Ethics Office are strictly confidential, to encourage individuals to come forward and seek guidance.<sup>xii</sup>
22. In accordance with the 2022 external audit recommendations, enhanced Standard Operating Procedures were developed in May 2022. They included target timelines for

responding to all requests for advice received by the Ethics Office. In 2022, the Ethics Office received a total of 143 requests for advice on the subject areas shown in Figure 1.

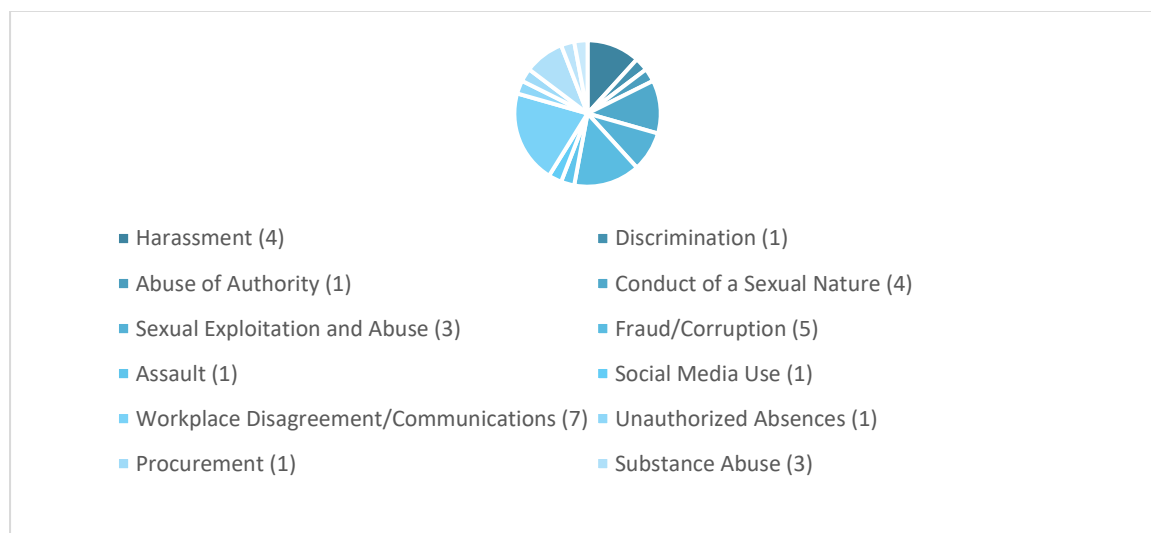
**Figure 1. Ethics Office advisory services, 2022<sup>2</sup>**



23. In 2022 there was a 91% increase in the number of requests for advice received: 143 compared to 75 requests in 2021. The increase could be attributed to the enhanced independence of the function, as well as the streamlining of processes. This increase in requests for advice, without the provision of additional staff to the Ethics Office, creates an area of concern.

24. Statistical reporting has been reviewed, in line with the 2022 external audit recommendations. Figure 2 depicts all requests for advice related to ensuring the highest standards of conduct.<sup>3</sup> All requests for advice regarding conduct of a sexual nature were prioritized. Appropriate matters were referred to the WHO Office of Internal Oversight Services for investigation and the Office of the Ombudsman for informal resolution.

**Figure 2. Standards of conduct advisory services provided by the Ethics Office, 2022<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> These figures include matters related to all UNAIDS staff, personnel, partner organizations, and collaborators. Two matters involved former UNAIDS staff. Two matters involved WHO staff. Four of the standards of conduct related matters submitted on the Integrity Hotline were spam.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that this category refers to all requests for advice related to standards of conduct and that all matters are not qualified as formal complaints of allegations of misconduct.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that matters with multiple issues were counted multiple times. Retaliation is excluded, since it is addressed separately in paras. 30–33 of the report.



## Ensuring the highest standards of conduct

25. UNAIDS uses the Integrity Hotline as an accountability tool. Any concerns regarding UNAIDS can be made by any party, external or internal, via the Integrity Hotline. The Integrity Hotline is a confidential, free, 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year service which can be accessed from any location to raise ethical concerns or report issues regarding UNAIDS. It is administered in all six UN languages. Reports can be filed directly online via this [link](#), or by telephone. The Integrity Hotline accepts anonymous reports and is contractually bound not to release any identifying information about anyone using it, unless a user provides express permission.
26. In 2022 the Integrity Hotline was placed on the external UNAIDS website to allow for easier access by external parties and partners to raise concerns. There is a QR Code which can be quickly scanned by anyone to allow for quick access to the Integrity Hotline. Flyers and posters were also created and distributed to all staff with reference to the Integrity Hotline and QR Code, to be placed in UNAIDS offices globally. In 2022 a total of 14 reports were received via the Integrity Hotline, compared to five reports in 2021.<sup>5</sup>
27. During the reporting period, improvements were noted in the 2022 Global Staff Survey. According to the survey, 85% of staff members indicated that they knew how to report instances of misconduct, which is significantly ahead of the benchmark median. The Global Staff Survey also noted that 52.4% of respondents to a particular question approached the Ethics Office for guidance on certain issues regarding standards of conduct. These results show that communications and training efforts, as described further in paragraphs 39-45 below, have been effective.
28. The 2022 global staff survey showed a decrease in instances of abusive conduct. In this regard, 13% of staff members who participated in the survey indicated that they had experienced a form of abusive conduct in the previous year, compared with 22% in the 2020 survey. This decrease indicates substantial improvement. However, additional progress needs to be made to ensure compliance with the zero-tolerance standard articulated in the regulatory frameworks of UNAIDS.
29. It is noted with concern that, based on the results of the global staff survey, the majority of staff members who experienced abusive conduct indicated that the conduct was likely committed by "a senior manager, director, or their manager". Additional measures are required to ensure that all managers adhere to the appropriate standards of conduct, as well as respond appropriately to any reports of possible violations brought to their attention.

## Protection from retaliation

30. The Ethics Office is responsible for administering the WHO whistleblower and protection against retaliation policy, as adapted for UNAIDS.<sup>xiii</sup> This policy is currently being revised by WHO and a new policy will be issued soon. The policy currently in force covers the reporting of suspected wrongdoing that implies corporate risk, as well as instances of actual or threatened retaliation. It describes the mechanisms that are in place for addressing suspected wrongdoing and how UNAIDS can protect whistleblowers. Individuals may submit requests for protection from retaliation to the Ethics Office, and the Ethics Office may issue interim recommendations to protect individuals from retaliation.

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<sup>5</sup> Four of the reports received on the Integrity Hotline were spam.

31. Increased trust of staff members in the mechanisms for protection against retaliation was previously identified as a key priority. In recent years, no formal requests for protection from retaliation were received by the Ethics Office. However, in the 2022 reporting period six requests for advice regarding retaliation were received, including three formal requests for protection against retaliation. The Ethics Office recommended interim measures for protection in relation to two of the three formal requests received. The other matter was withdrawn and resolved through conciliation. The fact that staff members came forward during the reporting period to submit formal requests for protection from retaliation is identified as a sign of increased trust in the independence of the ethics function.
32. The most recent 2022 global staff survey also noted improvement in this area, compared with 2020. In the 2020 survey, 37% of respondents had indicated that they felt confident that they would not face adverse consequences if they reported a case of abusive conduct. In the 2022 survey, 58% of respondents said that they would feel comfortable speaking up, and 57% of respondents indicated that they would feel safe reporting misconduct. In the 2022 survey, among the respondents who indicated that they had experienced abusive conduct and did not report it, 32% stated that the reason for not reporting was fear of retaliation. While comparisons between the 2022 and 2020 surveys indicate significant improvements, ensuring protection from retaliation is still identified as an ongoing priority area.
33. Additional training initiatives, discussed in paragraphs 39 - 45 below, have been deployed to enhance sensitization around what constitutes retaliation, how retaliation is prohibited conduct subject to disciplinary action, and how staff members can practically seek help and guidance when they feel they are experiencing retaliation. The enforcement and enhancement of measures to protect staff from retaliation are critical for ensuring that UNAIDS is a safe, equal and empowering workplace.

### **Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment**

34. During the reporting period, the WHO "Policy Directive on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Information Note 23/2021)" was applicable. The policy directive reiterated the standards in ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, aligned with the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on "Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13)".<sup>6</sup> The policy directive strictly prohibited all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, declaring that those violate universally recognized international legal norms and standards. Sexual exploitation and abuse are identified as acts of serious misconduct and grounds for disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal or termination of contract. The "Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct" was also applicable; it strictly prohibits all forms of sexual harassment.
35. During the reporting period, updates were made to contractual agreements to include strengthened clauses related to ensuring compliance with the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment (PSEAH) by all UNAIDS personnel. Implementing partner capacity assessment forms were also updated to include enhanced provisions on PSEAH. PSEAH focal points in country offices were provided with terms of reference. New flyers on PSEAH were created and distributed to all UNAIDS staff and to focal points for further dissemination. The flyers focus on the

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<sup>6</sup> A new WHO Policy on Sexual Misconduct was issued in March 2023 and will be covered in the next reporting period to the PCB.

prohibition of all forms of SEAH, the applicable “do’s and dont’s”, and the need for staff and personnel to report any allegations.

36. All staff at UNAIDS are required to take the mandatory UN system-wide training on sexual exploitation and abuse. The completion rate at UNAIDS is currently 84%.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a new mandatory training on ethics and conduct issues at UNAIDS was created. This course complements the mandatory UN system-wide training and is specific to the UNAIDS regulatory framework. The training covers all policies and procedures related to PSEAH. In addition, as UNAIDS applies the regulatory framework of the WHO, during the reporting period all staff were invited and encouraged to participate in PSEAH sessions covering the following subject areas: supporting implementing partners to address sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment; implementing services for victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse; assessing sexual exploitation and abuse risk on our programmes and operations; and safeguarding our programmes and operations.
37. UNAIDS adopted the new WHO Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct in early 2023. The policy focuses on incorporating a victim-centered and human rights-based approach for addressing all instances of sexual misconduct. All forms of sexual misconduct are strictly prohibited under the new policy. The policy will be rolled out at UNAIDS in 2023 and additional training will be conducted for all personnel. Updates regarding the new policy will be included in the next PCB report covering the 2023 reporting period.

#### **Declaration-of-interest programme**

38. The Ethics Office is mandated to administer the annual declaration-of-interest programme. The goal of the programme is to review any direct or potential conflicts of interest that may have adverse consequences for staff members and/or UNAIDS. The Ethics Office reviews the declarations and addresses any potential conflicts of interest with the staff member concerned. During the reporting period, the form was sent to 457 staff and potential conflicts of interest were identified and resolved. The Ethics Office also worked with the Compliance team in the Department of Finance and Accountability to create new declaration-of-interest forms for certain categories of non-staff personnel. These new measures will help identify potential conflicts of interest on a broader scale and allow for measures to be put in place to mitigate any identified risks. The new forms will be rolled out in 2023.

#### **Ethics awareness, communications and outreach**

39. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office continued to participate in 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.
40. In collaboration with various internal stakeholders (including Internal Communications, the People Management Department, the culture transformation team, and the Office of the Ombudsman), the Ethics Office participated in #RESPECT campaign training sessions for all staff in March 2022 and March 2023. These sessions specifically focused on the provisions of the "Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct", the reporting mechanisms, and how staff members can seek support. The sessions also included active bystander training, to assist witnesses and bystanders in more effectively

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<sup>7</sup> This completion rate is calculated as of the end of March 2023. A UN system-wide newly updated version 2.0 of this training will be launched in 2023.

addressing these issues. The Ethics Office provided input for the development of campaign communications materials, which are available to all staff.

41. The Ethics Office created, in collaboration with the Staff Development and Performance Team of the People Management Department, a new training course entitled Ethics@UNAIDS. Training areas covered in the new course include the following: a general ethics and integrity overview; managing and declaring conflict of interest; whistleblowing and retaliation; and preventing abusive conduct and sexual exploitation and abuse. The training modules are meant to complement the mandatory UN system-wide trainings, as well as further sensitize personnel to important ethics, integrity and conduct issues. They also emphasize provisions of the UNAIDS regulatory framework.
42. This training course was first made mandatory for all UNAIDS Country Directors in October 2022. Subsequently, the course was distributed to all UNAIDS staff globally and then to all UNAIDS personnel. These are the first globally deployed, uniform trainings that speak to specific UNAIDS policies and procedures on ethics, integrity and conduct issues and that are mandatory for all personnel. Refresher training efforts on ethics and conduct issues for broader categories of personnel, including staff and non-staff, was noted as a useful practice and recommendation in the most recent 2021 JIU Report on the ethics function.<sup>xiv</sup>
43. All individuals who participate in the training course are requested to provide a score rating the effectiveness of the course and anonymous feedback, so that the training can be periodically updated and improved. The feedback received thus far has been positive. Excerpts of anonymous feedback received include the following: “the course is well-designed and helpful to better understand the role of the Ethics Office including how to maintain the highest standards of conduct at UNAIDS which is needed to deliver on our mandate”; “concise interesting and interactive”; “excellent course made very simple”; “very focused and user friendly,” and “clear and straight forward with practical examples.” The course will be modified and improved, based on feedback received.
44. The Ethics Office also conducted an ethics overview training session for UNAIDS Junior Professional Officers in November 2022. In an effort to encourage effective collaboration with the Staff Association, two meetings were held with the Staff Association's executive committee during the reporting period. The Ethics Office also contributed to a broadly distributed Staff Association newsletter, which included a question-and-answer section that provided an overview on the ethics function, as well as answers to frequently asked questions, to help clarify the ways in which the Ethics Office can support staff. Individual ethics training sessions were also held for the incoming Deputy Executive Directors in early 2023.
45. All UNAIDS staff are also required to take the mandatory UN system-wide trainings. The completion rates for the trainings are 84% for "Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse", 91% for "Preventing Harassment and Abuse of Authority", 75% for "Ethics and Integrity in the UN", and 69% for "Preventing Fraud and Corruption". Reminders will continue to be sent to all staff to complete their mandatory UN system-wide trainings.

### **Policy coherence**

46. 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. As discussed earlier, several requests for advice were received by the Ethics Office on policy clarifications. It is also noted that, during the reporting period, the Ethics Office

continued to participate as a member of the Alignment Task Team, attending its meetings and providing inputs on the alignment restructuring process.

### **Participation in the ethics multilateral network**

47. 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. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office attended meetings organized by Network, including virtual attendance of sessions at the annual Ethics Network meeting in July 2022, hosted by UNESCO.

### **Additional issues and identified priorities**

#### **Diversity equity and inclusion**

48. The Ethics Office seeks to help promote diversity, equity and inclusion at UNAIDS by supporting the culture transformation team in creating a safe, equal and empowering work environment, and by encouraging respect for diversity as a core UNAIDS value. During the reporting period, representatives from the Ethics Office and the culture transformation teams served as co-chairs of the informal inter-agency working group on anti-racism, in an effort to learn best practices from other UN agencies and incorporate these best practices at UNAIDS. Drawing from these learnings, a new staff survey on global work force diversity demographics at UNAIDS was developed and executed. This survey collected data in relation to gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and other characteristics.

49. The purpose of the survey was to capture a more nuanced picture of the workforce composition at UNAIDS before alignment decisions were implemented, noting that one of the objectives of the alignment was to ensure UNAIDS is diverse and inclusive, and therefore legitimate and credible. To be able to measure the impact of alignment on the workforce diversity profile, a baseline had to be established through the survey showing the organizational composition before final implementation of alignment decisions.<sup>8</sup>

50. As a result of the survey, management committed to:

- repeat a workforce diversity survey either as a stand-alone survey or integrated with the biannual global staff survey to measure changes;
- identify means to share vacancy announcements open to external candidates as well as consultancy opportunities with key population networks and partner organizations;
- ensure that optional demographic questions on various diversity indicators are included in the new business management system for staff members and affiliate personnel to allow for monitoring and further data analysis; and
- in developing a comprehensive intersectional gender, diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility framework, to propose options for setting desirable targets for UNAIDS's workforce composition.

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<sup>8</sup> Certain limitations were noted in the survey, including the timing and participation levels.

51. The commitments made by management are a welcome step towards making UNAIDS a more diverse and inclusive environment. Additional and enhanced efforts are still required in this area.
52. Additional efforts are also particularly required in continuing to encourage anti-racism initiatives at UNAIDS. It is noted with concern that based on the results of the Global Staff Survey, of the 13% of staff who indicated that they experienced a form of abusive conduct, such conduct was “commonly based on race/ethnicity or nationality”. In accordance with the recommendations of the JIU in their recently issued "Note on Measures and Mechanisms for Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination in the UN System Organizations (JIU/NOTE/2022/1/Rev.1)", additional efforts are needed to address these concerns, and to implement the JIU recommendations.<sup>9</sup>

### **Enhancing outreach and streamlining processes and procedures**

53. The Ethics Office's internal and external websites were updated during the reporting period, to allow for easy access by all internal and external parties to all policies and procedures related to ethics and conduct. Standardized forms were created in order to expedite all requests made through the Ethics Office. This includes standard forms for requests for approval of all outside activities; reporting and requesting approval for gifts, honors decorations, and awards; and filing formal requests for protection from retaliation. Standardized forms have helped to expedite processes. As stated above, revised standard operating procedures were also created.
54. Efforts were made to collaborate with relevant WHO Offices, including the WHO Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Office of the Ombudsman. Matters appropriate for informal resolution were referred to the WHO Office of the Ombudsman in an effort to encourage informal resolution of disputes and a more conciliatory approach to resolving conflicts at UNAIDS.

### **Conclusion**

55. During the reporting period there was a significant increase in confidential advisory services provided by the Ethics Office. Additional support and staff still need to be provided to the Ethics Office to ensure proper functioning. Achievements were made in the areas of streamlining processes and procedures, as well as in the areas of training and outreach. The 2022 Global Staff Survey showed improvements in key areas. Additional work is needed to ensure zero tolerance for all forms of misconduct. The Ethics Office hopes to continue building on the efforts to date to encourage a strong culture of ethics and accountability at UNAIDS.

### **Proposed decision points**

56. The PCB is invited to: *take note* of the report of the Ethics Office.

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<sup>9</sup> Review of Measures and Mechanisms for Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination in United Nations System Organizations: Managing for Achieving Organizational Effectiveness, JIU/Note/2022/1/Rev.1 ([JIU/NOTE/2022/1 \(unjiu.org\)](https://www.unjiu.org)).

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> 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](#)).
- <sup>ii</sup> 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 and 47 ([UNAIDS\\_PCB44\\_19.5\\_EN.pdf](#)).
- <sup>iii</sup> See also the Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on Ethics in the United Nations System (hereinafter "2010 JIU Report") (JIU/REP/2010/3) ([Joint Inspection Unit Report on Ethics in the United Nations System](#)).
- <sup>iv</sup> Note *ii*, above, 2019 Working Group Report at para. 73.
- <sup>v</sup> Note *i*, above, at pp. 41-42.
- <sup>vi</sup> Note *ii*, above, 2019 Working Group Report.
- <sup>vii</sup> 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](#)).
- <sup>viii</sup> Report of the 45th Meeting of the Programme Coordinating Board, (UNAIDS/PCB (45)/19.38), at pp. 46, 47 ([UNAIDS\\_PCB46\\_Report-of-the-45th-PCB\\_EN.pdf](#)).
- <sup>ix</sup> Report of the Ethics Office – Organizational Oversight Reports, (UNAIDS/PCB (48)/21.6) ([PCB\\_48\\_Ethics\\_Office\\_Report\\_EN.pdf \(unaids.org\)](#)).
- <sup>x</sup> Note *vii*, above, at para. 101.
- <sup>xi</sup> Note *vii*, 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."
- <sup>xii</sup> Section 1.4 of the UNAIDS Secretariat Ethics Guide.
- <sup>xiii</sup> WHO policy on whistleblowing and protection against retaliation, 2015.
- <sup>xiv</sup> 2021 Review of the Ethics Function in the United Nations System—Report of the Joint Inspection Unit ([JIU/REP/2021/5](#)) at para. 210. ("Mandatory training on ethics and its refresher courses cannot serve their purpose unless they are completed by all personnel – staff and non-staff.")

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