



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
15 May 2020

Original: English

**For decision**

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### United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

**Second regular session 2020**

8–11 September 2020

Item 10 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Management response to the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019**

#### *Summary*

Pursuant to UNICEF Executive Board decision 2018/11, the present report provides a management response to the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019 ([E/ICEF/2020/22](#)). The report covers the main activities of the Ethics Office, namely: (a) training, education and outreach; (b) advice and guidance; (c) standard-setting and policy support; (d) the Financial Disclosure Programme; (e) protection of staff against retaliation; and (f) participation in the Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, and provides other observations, recommendations and conclusions.

Elements of a draft decision are provided in section X.

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



## **I. Overview**

1. Management is pleased to respond to the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2019 ([E/ICEF/2020/22](#)), pursuant to Executive Board decision 2018/11, and appreciates the leadership of the Ethics Office throughout the year in raising the awareness of staff regarding the values and expected standards of conduct and procedures, including through training and outreach, contributing to setting policies, providing guidance to staff members and ensuring the protection of staff members from retaliation.
2. Management commends the Ethics Office for continuing to create an environment that is ethically aware and embraces behaviour change. The Ethics Office organized and led the third organization-wide Ethics Month, held in October 2019, which consisted of coordinated activities throughout UNICEF, including webinars, the sharing of toolboxes, holding conversations around ethics, digital question-and-answer sessions and an ethics awards ceremony and hosting an open house on Global Ethics Day. Such efforts promote the core values of professionalism, respect, accountability and integrity in the actions and decisions of UNICEF staff.
3. Management notes the continued valuable contributions made by the Ethics Office to uphold the UNICEF policy of zero-tolerance towards all forms of misconduct, exploitation, abuse and harassment, including sexual harassment, workplace harassment, abuse of authority and gender discrimination.
4. The present report presents the management response to the core activities of the Ethics Office: (a) training, education and outreach; (b) advice and guidance; (c) standard-setting and policy support; (d) the Financial Disclosure Programme; (e) the protection of staff from retaliation; and (f) participation in the Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, and provides other observations, recommendations and conclusions.

## **II. Training, education and outreach**

5. Management commends the various training and outreach activities that the Ethics Office provided in 2019. It is commendable that the Ethics Office trained more than 2,300 staff members in 53 offices around the world during the Ethics Month of 2019 alone. Management appreciates the Ethics Office's effort in updating the content of the mandatory online training on "Ethics and Integrity at UNICEF" and for reaching out to various offices around the globe, in person and also via Skype, with customized sessions to address the queries.
6. It is noted with appreciation that, in 2019, the Ethics Office provided 71 group training sessions on ethics and awareness or training support. The reach of the Ethics Office spanned 19 country offices, with 851 staff members participating in face-to-face sessions and 1,972 in remote sessions, with a total of 2,823 staff members receiving ethics training. It is evident that the use of technology to aid in communication has been an integral part of the communication strategy of the Office, which included six global webinars accessible to staff members.

## **III. Advice and guidance**

7. Management notes an increase in the number of overall requests for ethics services in 2019 (2019: 788 cases; 2018: 738 cases; 2017: 634 cases). Management notes that there was a substantial increase in the number of reports to the Ethics Office regarding alleged misconduct, from 32 in 2018 to 49 in 2019, and also an increase in

the number of requests for standard-setting and policy input, from 26 in 2018 to 47 in 2019.

8. Management also notes that there has been 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. Management welcomes the continued collaboration between the Ethics Office and the Division of Human Resources to set standards and to provide support and guidance to the regional and country offices in this regard.

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

9. Management notes with appreciation the collaborative meetings held regularly between the Ethics Office and the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI), the Staff Counsellors and the Office of the Ombudsman; advice on a wide range of policy development projects including contributing to the organizational response to the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority; input into the Joint Inspection Unit reports on conflict of interest and whistle-blower protection; continued engagement with the Child Safeguarding Unit on development of relevant regulatory documents for UNICEF personnel inside and outside the workplace; and the Principal Adviser's engagement with the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee.

10. Management also welcomes the Ethics Office's input into the revised UNICEF policies and procedures on disciplinary processes and measures and the prohibition of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority.

#### **V. Financial Disclosure Programme**

11. Management appreciates the guidance and technical support provided by the Ethics Office to different offices and divisions to facilitate the registration of staff members in accordance with the Executive Directive (CF/EXD/2012-003) that stipulates that all staff members at the D-1 level and above and any staff member whose responsibilities are identified in the policy are required to file a Financial Disclosure Statement. Management notes that a total of 1,613 staff members were reviewed as part of the 2019 Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme exercise, covering the reporting year ending 31 December 2018. It was concluded that, of those participating, 95.2 percent had either nothing to declare, had no conflict of interest, had already taken mitigation steps or had declared personal circumstances in which there was some remote connection to the United Nations or UNICEF that did not currently amount to an actual potential of conflict of interest.

12. Management supports the Ethics Office's effort to streamline the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure programme by implementing the recommendations, shared by an external financial service provider, KPMG, which are namely: (a) reducing the number of filers by focusing on seniority and organizational risks; (b) tightening the compliance timelines; (c) having clear communication upfront to inform applicable staff of the consequences of non-compliance and with timelines; and (d) improving and upgrading the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure system's functionalities.

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

13. Management notes that there were 10 formal requests for protection against retaliation. Management wishes to note that in January 2019, UNICEF policy on the

disciplinary process and measures (POLICY/DHR/2019/001) was revised to clarify what would constitute misconduct and the steps staff members could take to report misconduct. It is emphasized in the revised policy that retaliation, or threats thereof, to other UNICEF personnel or other individuals constitute misconduct and has been clarified that any attempt or assistance in misconduct is considered also to be misconduct.

14. Management commends the Ethics Office's continued effort, despite the increase in the number of requests received generally on alleged misconduct, in reviewing the requests for protection against retaliation with impartial stance and for providing advice to staff and personnel on adequate measures they can take.

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

15. Management applauds the Principal Adviser's active participation in the Ethics Panel and the Ethics Network, which included bringing best practices to UNICEF. Management welcomes the discussions during the Network meeting in 2019, and expects to see developments within UNICEF regarding these topics, namely: (a) demonstrating due diligence during recruitment of new employees; (b) developing communication strategy to enhance the ethics culture in the organization; (c) protecting against retaliation; (d) analysing conflicts of interest and organizational risks; and (e) championing civility in the workplace.

## **VIII. Follow-up on 2019 observations**

16. Recognizing the importance of ethical criteria in recruitment and promotion decisions, as referenced in the Ethics Office's annual report for 2018, management welcomes the revised competency framework that includes "self-awareness and ethical awareness" as a new competency applicable to UNICEF staff members at all levels.

17. In response to the recommendations by the Ethics Office in its 2018 report, management is pleased to note that a more in-depth due diligence focused on management and leadership skills has been embedded in the recruitment process for the appointment of staff members at senior levels.

18. Moreover, management is pleased to report that many initiatives, including culture change across the organization, are under way in response to the concerns identified in the 2018 independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the 2019 report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority.

19. Management further strengthened the institutional independence of the Ethics Office.

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

20. The Ethics Office continues to systematically improve its ethics programme, incorporating best practices from other entities, and situating itself as a much more robust and proactive presence within the organization. Management and staff alike regularly reach out to the Ethics Office to consult on sensitive matters and to ensure that official decision-making and operations remain fully aligned with the ethical values and expectations of the organization. As evident in the increase in the number of requests received by the Office, UNICEF personnel are increasingly aware of the

need to consult with the Office before actions are taken in order to avoid negative or unintended consequences that could have detrimental impact on the reputation and standing of UNICEF.

21. Management notes with gratitude the services provided by the Ethics Office and is fully committed to upholding the values and principles set forth in its mandate.

## **X. 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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