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Ethics

Report on the UN-Women Ethics Function for 1 April– 30 June 2023

Summary

Pursuant to decision 2022/5 of the Executive Board, the Ethics Advisor submits the present report covering ethics activities for the period 1 April through 30 June 2023. Data related to UN-Women participation in the United Nations Financial Disclosure Programme administered by the United Nations Ethics Office is for the 2022 filing cycle.

As set forth in section 5.4 of the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)), this report has been reviewed by members of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations at its 157th meeting on 12 June 2023.

This is the first report presented by the Ethics Advisor since the first incumbent in the role was appointed on 1 April 2023, following the creation of the ethics function in 2022.

The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report and the management perspective.



I. Introduction

1. The first report on the activities of the Ethics Advisor is submitted in accordance with Executive Board decision 2022/5. It describes the activities of the Ethics Advisor from 1 April through 30 June 2023 in accordance with the mandate as set forth in the Secretary-General's bulletin on the United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes ([ST/SGB/2007/11](#)) to "cultivate and nurture a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, and thereby enhance the trust in, and credibility of, the United Nations, both internally and externally."
2. The objective of the ethics function is to assist the Executive Director in ensuring that all UN-Women personnel observe and perform their functions consistent with the highest standards of integrity, as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. A workforce that upholds the principles of integrity, impartiality, independence, and accountability increases trust and credibility with our partners and stakeholders in support of UN-Women's vision of achieving transformational results for gender equality and women's empowerment. The role of the Ethics Advisor is to support UN-Women personnel in achieving this vision, by promoting, strengthening, and sustaining a culture that embraces the highest standards of ethical conduct.
3. In accordance with the principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality and consistent with [ST/SGB/2007/11](#), the Ethics Advisor implements its mandate across the following areas: (a) providing confidential ethics advice and guidance to personnel and management, (b) ethics training, awareness-raising, and outreach, (c) standard-setting and policy support, (d) managing UN-Women's Financial Disclosure Programme, in line with the agreement between UN-Women and the United Nations Ethics Office, in accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin on Financial disclosure and declaration of interest statements ([ST/SGB/2006/6](#)), and (e) administering UN-Women's Protection against Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct and Cooperating with Duly Authorized Audits or Investigations Policy. The report also includes the engagement of the Ethics Advisor with the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN) and application for membership in and engagement with the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO).

II. Establishment of the ethics function

4. The ethics function at UN-Women has one staff member, the Ethics Advisor at the P-5 level, who entered on duty on 1 April 2023. The Ethics Advisor is tasked with providing ethics related services to approximately 3,700 UN-Women personnel, including approximately 1,200 staff members.
5. During the reporting period, the Ethics Advisor focused her efforts on establishing the ethics function within UN-Women, ensuring its confidentiality and independence. The Ethics Advisor engaged in consultations with managers, stakeholders, and the ethics functions of other United Nations system entities, to develop a preliminary workplan aimed at launching the UN-Women ethics function. Initial steps included raising awareness among personnel regarding the role of the ethics function and establishing channels and procedures required to ensure that the ethics function could immediately begin delivering services to UN-Women personnel.
6. In this regard, in cooperation with the Human Resources Division and the Information Systems and Telecommunication Division, the Ethics Advisor ensured the transfer of the domain ethics@unwomen.org to the ethics function. It is now a dedicated and confidential electronic mailbox to receive requests for ethics services and allow the Ethics Advisor to correspond with personnel. Additionally, to protect the confidentiality of matters brought to the Ethics Advisor's attention and track data,

and in cooperation with the United Nations Ethics Office, a secure database was installed. Only the Ethics Advisor has access to both the mailbox and the database.

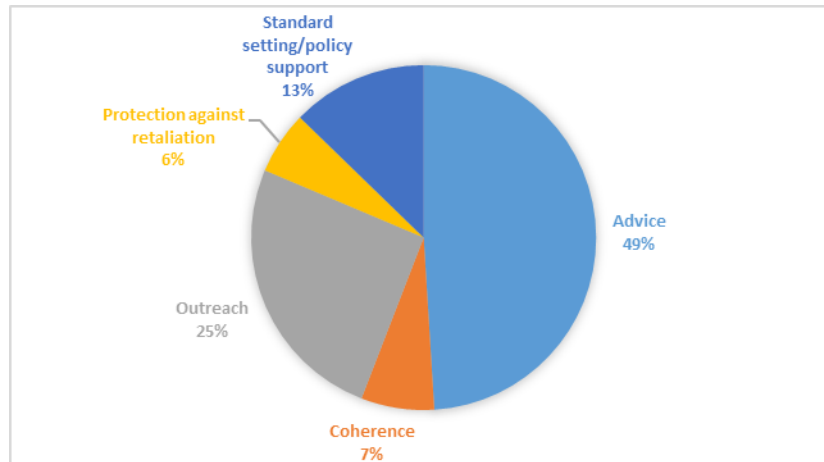
7. During this establishment period, the Ethics Advisor routinely consulted with EPUN members, who provided tools, written materials and guidance, which enhanced efficiency and was critical in ensuring the successful launch of the function at UN-Women.

8. In 2021, the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) issued a report based on a review of the ethics functions in the United Nations system.¹ At the time the report was issued, UN-Women did not yet have its own dedicated ethics function. However, the Ethics Advisor has been guided by the principles of independence set forth in the report while establishing the function. The report noted that independence is a “prerequisite for the effective delivery of the ethics function’s mandate” and defined independence as “... the freedom from conditions that threaten the ability of a person to carry out his or her responsibilities in an unbiased manner, with sufficient autonomy and in the absence of external influence.”² In establishing the function, the Ethics Advisor has received support from management while being allowed to conduct activities free from external interference. The Ethics Advisor will continue to monitor the approaches of other comparable organizations and relevant oversight recommendations to ensure that it maintains robust practices with respect to independence.

9. During the first three months of operation, the Ethics Advisor conducted the establishment activities while responding to requests for services, which totalled 102 by the end of June 2023. As shown in Figure 1, requests for services fell into the following categories: ethics advice (50, 49%), protection against retaliation (6, 6%), outreach, training, and awareness raising (26, 25%), standard-setting and policy support (13, 13%) and coherence (7, 7%).

¹ Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2021/5](#)).

² Review of the ethics function in the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2021/5](#)), section III.A and para. 98, quoting from [JIU/REP/2018/4](#), para. 127.

Figure 1: Requests for services by category

III. Activities

A. Standard-setting and policy support

10. The Ethics Advisor provided advice and support to other divisions in developing and updating policies and standards relating to ethics and integrity. During the reporting period, the Ethics Advisor participated in or commented on several policy matters, including UN-Women's Internal Control Policy, the Private Sector Engagement Strategy, and the General Conditions of Service for Consultants. The Ethics Advisor also initiated a review of the Protection against Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct and for Cooperating with Duly Authorized Audits or Investigations Policy, with the goal of updating the existing policy to reflect the role of the ethics function at UN-Women, clarify its application, and incorporate best practices from United Nations system organizations. The Ethics Advisor is also collaborating with the Human Resources Division on revisions to the Outside Activities Clearance Procedure.

11. The Ethics Advisor contributed to the review of the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service led by the International Civil Service Commission, in collaboration with UN-Women's Human Resources Division and EPUN.

12. The Ethics Advisor provided information regarding the ethics function to assist in the management response regarding the implementation of recommendations contained in the JIU's report on its review of the ethics function in the United Nations system and the response to the 2022 report of the Advisory Committee on Oversight. Input was also provided to the JIU with respect to its review of the governance and oversight functions of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women.

B. Training, outreach and awareness-raising

13. As UN-Women operates in many high-risk locations through its offices and presence in 83 locations around the world, personnel must follow coherent ethical standards to protect UN-Women's reputation and ensure programme implementation is delivered with integrity. Training, outreach and awareness-raising activities are

essential to ensure that all personnel observe the highest standards of ethical conduct in performing their functions.

14. During the reporting period, the Ethics Advisor focused on introducing the function to UN-Women personnel and raising awareness on the applicable framework and standards of conduct. In this regard, the Ethics Advisor hosted a global meeting on ethics and integrity, providing an overview of the relevant framework and mandate of the new in-house ethics function and highlighting common areas of ethical risk. Approximately 480 UN-Women personnel attended the meeting, both in-person and online. Prior to the session, the Ethics Advisor conducted a “pulse” survey to gauge personnel awareness of ethics policies, procedures and standards to inform future training and awareness-raising sessions.

15. The Ethics Advisor also participated in the in-person induction session of 16 Junior Professional Officers, providing information on the standards of conduct expected of international civil servants, the services provided by the Ethics Advisor and highlighting areas where conflicts of interest may arise during the course of their work for UN-Women.

16. Given the small size of the ethics function at UN-Women, collaboration with the ethics functions of other United Nations system organizations on training and outreach activities is vital for broadening the reach of the function and promoting ethics awareness among UN-Women personnel. During the reporting period, the Ethics Advisor collaborated with the UNDP Ethics Office, who invited UN-Women personnel to attend an ethics awareness session to be delivered to UNDP personnel in Panama in July. The session will be delivered in Spanish and will focus on public pronouncements, engagement in political activities and outside activities.

17. When joining UN-Women, all personnel are required to complete an online training course on ethics and integrity. The course was designed by UNICEF and is hosted on UNICEF’s Agora learning platform and UNDP’s Quantum platform. As of the end of 2022, approximately 80% of UN-Women staff members had completed the mandatory course.

18. The Ethics Advisor also (a) updated relevant information on UN-Women’s “Accountability” tab of its website, ensuring translation of the English text into French, Spanish and Russian, (b) created an “ethics” tab on UN-Women’s intranet and began to populate it with relevant information, (c) ensured the distribution to all personnel via UN-Women’s “Internal Update” of an article authored by the Ethics Advisor on protection against retaliation that appeared in the May 2023 edition of UNtoday. The article discusses the United Nation’s framework for protection against retaliation, including the various avenues available to personnel to seek support to encourage a “speak up” culture.³

19. Given the importance of ethical leadership, the Ethics Advisor conducted 16 meetings with UN-Women leaders to learn more about the operational environment at UN-Women, relevant policies and procedures, and to explain the roles and responsibilities of the new ethics function. In an effort to positively influence the “tone at the top”, the Ethics Advisor plans to deliver ethics briefings to the two new Deputy Executive Directors during their induction programme.

20. The Ethics Advisor also participated in the UN-Women Global Leaders Retreat, co-chairing a session with the Human Resources Division on organizational culture. The session was anchored in a case study focused on issues of ethical leadership, integrity, conflicts of interest, workplace relations, standards of conduct and the

³ The article was written while the Ethics Advisor was a staff member at the United Nations Ethics Office and was published shortly after entrance on duty with UN-Women.

prevention of harassment and abuse of authority. Over 100 UN-Women leaders from the field and headquarters attended the in-person retreat held in New York.

21. The United Nations Leadership Dialogue is an initiative of the United Nations Secretariat, where managers are asked to host a yearly conversation with their direct reports related to ethical challenges personnel face in their day-to-day work. The United Nations Ethics Office provides managers with a Leader's Guide and a model presentation as well as the participants with a Participant's Guide. The Ethics Advisor will assist the Executive Director in launching this year's Leadership Dialogue on the topic "Personal use of social media: How is my online behaviour?"

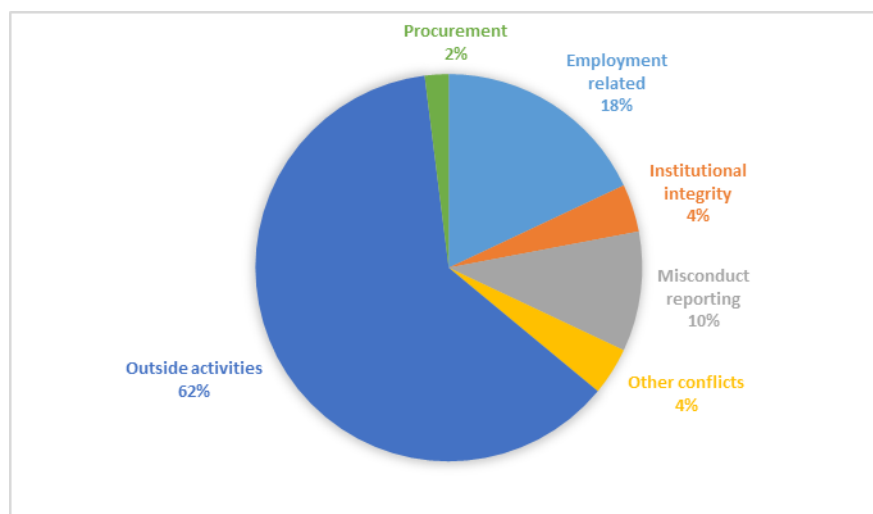
22. In the interest of regular engagement with Members States and oversight bodies and to promote an understanding of the ethics function at UN-Women, the Ethics Advisor provided four briefings for Member States. The Ethics Advisor will also meet with the Advisory Committee on Oversight for the first time at its session to be held in July 2023.

C. Confidential advice and guidance

23. Providing confidential, accurate and timely advice to UN-Women personnel is an essential component in the Ethics Advisor's mandate to foster a culture of ethics, accountability, and transparency. The advisory role is preventive and proactive, assisting personnel in making informed decisions in accordance with applicable ethical standards. In providing well-reasoned, timely, actionable, and impartial guidance to personnel and management on how to resolve possible conflicts of interest, the Ethics Advisor supports appropriate decision-making that contributes to accountable mandate delivery.

24. The provision of ethics advice has an awareness-raising component, by positioning personnel to be able to identify and resolve conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas before they become issues of serious concern for UN-Women, such as misconduct, fraud or corruption. The function also assists in risk management, by advising against engagement or proposing mitigation measures to guard against conflict-of-interest risk.

25. During the reporting period, 49% of requests for ethics services were requests for advice. As shown in Figure 2 below, the Ethics Advisor provided advice on a range of topics including: outside activities (31, 62%), internal procedures for reporting misconduct (5, 10%), conflicts of interest (2, 4%), ethics-related employment concerns (9, 18%), institutional integrity (2, 4%) and procurement ethics (1, 2%). For matters raised that did not fall within the mandate of the ethics function, personnel were directed to the appropriate offices including the United Nations Secretariat's Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Human Resources Division, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of Staff Legal Assistance and the joint UNDP/UNFPA/UN-Women/UNOPS Staff Council.

Figure 2: Requests for ethics advice by category

26. The largest number of advisory requests related to engagement in outside activities in a personal capacity, which includes leadership roles in non-profit organizations such as board membership, part-time outside employment such as teaching courses at a university, social and charitable activities, the difference between official and personal capacity, and publications such as articles, blogs and other social media engagement.

27. As a proactive risk prevention measure, the Ethics Advisor reviews outside activities to ensure that the proposed outside activity is not against the interests of UN-Women, does not conflict with the individual's UN-Women function, or the core obligations of all UN-Women personnel to uphold independence, impartiality and loyalty to UN-Women. Where the Ethics Advisor recommends that the individual seek approval from the Human Resources Division through their supervisor, the Ethics Advisor includes a list of conditions that the individual requesting advice must adhere to in order to mitigate and manage any possible conflict-of-interest risk during engagement.

28. The ethics function at UN-Women also plays an important risk prevention role with respect to a sub-set of advice on proposed outside activities related to governments. Consistent with the core obligations of independence, impartiality and loyalty to UN-Women, the Ethics Advisor advised several UN-Women personnel not to serve in a personal capacity with governments or affiliated entities while concurrently serving at UN-Women.

D. United Nations Financial Disclosure Programme

29. The purpose of the United Nations Financial Disclosure Programme (UNFDP) is to identify, mitigate, and manage conflict of interest risks arising from the financial holdings, personal affiliations or outside activities of UN-Women staff members and their immediate family members. The UNFDP is administered by the United Nations Ethics Office in accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin on Financial disclosure and declaration of interest statements ([ST/SGB/2006/6](#)). UN-Women staff members at the D-1 level and above, those whose principal duties involve procurement and investment or who have access to confidential procurement or investment information, are required to file an annual financial disclosure statement.

30. Participation in the UNFDP assists UN-Women in the mitigation and management of possible or actual conflicts of interests with the goal of ensuring that UN-Women staff members observe and perform their functions consistent with the highest standards of integrity required by the Charter of the United Nations, the Staff Regulations and Rules, and relevant UN-Women guidelines and policies.

31. During the 2022 annual filing cycle, conducted from 1 March 2022 until 31 December 2022, 169 filers from UN-Women participated in the UNFDP. All UN-Women filers submitted their statements by the end of the filing cycle, with 113 filers (66.86%) submitting their disclosure statements within the deadline of 31 March 2022, and 56 filers (33.14%) submitting after the expiration of the 30-day deadline. Of the 169 filers, three files were considered incomplete at the end of the reporting cycle.

32. Following a review of the submitted financial disclosure statements, four possible conflicts of interest were identified, including two possible conflicts of interest involving family relationships and two possible conflicts of interest involving outside activities. In addressing the four possible conflicts of interest, the United Nations Ethics Office recommended the following mitigation measures, all of which were accepted and implemented by the concerned filers by the end of the filing cycle:

- (a) Resignation from a position with an outside entity;
- (b) Recusal from working with particular vendors or in specific job functions; and
- (c) Requesting and receiving approval to engage in their outside activity.

33. In 2022, the United Nations Ethics Office also conducted a verification process of the declarations submitted. Eight UN-Women filers were selected for the verification process. One out of the eight selected filers did not provide all of the required verification documents and their file was considered incomplete. This filer will be included in the 2023 verification process.

34. Staff members at the Assistant Secretary-General level and above were invited to participate in the annual voluntary public disclosure initiative of the Secretary-General. Following a review by the United Nations Ethics Office, summaries of these confidential disclosures were posted on the website of the Secretary-General.⁴ The Executive Director and the two then Deputy Executive Directors of UN-Women participated in the initiative, which is designed to provide assurance to Members States that senior officials are not influenced by their private interests in the performance of their official duties.

E. Protection against retaliation

35. The Ethics Advisor has assumed the responsibilities assigned to the United Nations Ethics Office under UN-Women's Protection against Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct and for Cooperating with Duly Authorized Audits or Investigations Policy. In providing protection, the policy encourages all UN-Women personnel to report misconduct and wrongdoing and fully cooperate with audits and investigations (referred to as protected activities), enhancing UN-Women's ability to address conduct that could otherwise cause significant reputational damage. The ability of personnel to report and cooperate without fear of retaliation is an essential element in building a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability.

⁴ Available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/public-disclosure.

36. Pursuant to the policy, the Ethics Advisor conducts a preliminary review of a request for protection to determine whether the complainant engaged in a protected activity and whether the protected activity was a contributing factor in causing the alleged retaliation. If the Ethics Advisor determines that the complainant has not raised a prima facie case of retaliation, the complainant may request further review by the Chairperson of EPUN.

37. If the Ethics Advisor determines that there is a prima facie case of retaliation, the matter is referred to OIOS for investigation. OIOS is the external service provider of investigations services for UN-Women. The Ethics Advisor may recommend protective measures designed to safeguard the complainant during the investigation. Upon referral, the burden of proof shifts to UN-Women to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that UN-Women would have taken the alleged retaliatory action absent the protected activity and that the alleged retaliatory action was not taken for the purpose of punishing, intimidating or injuring the complainant. Following an independent review of the OIOS investigation report and supporting documents, the Ethics Advisor will make a final determination as to whether retaliation has occurred in accordance with the burden of proof and will make appropriate recommendations.

38. During the reporting period, the Ethics Advisor received six inquiries under the policy. These were requests for advice rather than requests for protection. Personnel who raised concerns not covered by the policy were referred, as appropriate, to the Ombudsman or the Human Resources Division, or were advised to report misconduct to OIOS.

39. In 2022, the United Nations Ethics Office referred one UN-Women retaliation matter to OIOS for investigation. All recommended protective measures were promptly implemented by UN-Women. The United Nations Ethics Office has since transferred the matter to the Ethics Advisor, who will conduct the review of the OIOS investigation report and make a final determination and recommendations in accordance with the policy.

IV. The Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

40. As set forth in the Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2007/11](#), EPUN is mandated to create a unified set of ethical standards and policies and to consult on complex ethics matters that have system-wide implications. EPUN is composed of the head of the ethics offices of the Secretariat and the separately administered organs and programmes. The Panel is chaired by the Director of the United Nations Ethics Office.

41. Collaboration with other ethics functions including sharing best practices and promoting coherent standards is crucial to enhancing ethical conduct, transparency and accountability at UN-Women. In this regard, during the reporting period, the Ethics Advisor attended three monthly meetings of the Panel and actively participated in working group discussions on conflicts of interest and gifts, favours, honours, and awards.

42. ENMO includes over 100 senior ethics officials from more than 40 multilateral institutions. This includes organizations belonging to the Chief Executives Board (CEB), which has a dedicated group within the network. On behalf of UN-Women, the Ethics Advisor applied for membership in and was accepted as a member of ENMO and attended a CEB Chapter meeting on organizational conflicts of interest.

V. Conclusion

43. Trust in UN-Women as an institution is vital to ensuring its vision of achieving transformational results for gender equality and women's empowerment. An independent ethics function enhances this trust by promoting adherence to the highest standards of ethics and integrity. Building on the initial establishment period and with continued collaboration with other United Nations system ethics functions, the Ethics Advisor will continue efforts to raise awareness of ethics standards, with the goal of enhancing knowledge of the standards of conduct expected of UN-Women personnel and positively influencing UN-Women's organizational culture.
