



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 March 2021

Original: English

For decision

United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

Annual session 2021

1–4 June 2021

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Management response to the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2020

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 2020 (E/ICEF/2021/16). The annual report covers each of the mandated areas of work for the Office: (a) standard-setting and policy support; (b) training, education and outreach; (c) confidential advice and guidance; (d) the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme; (e) the protection of staff against retaliation; and (f) participation in the Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations. In accordance with Executive Board decision 2014/12, the report also presents recommendations to management to strengthen the organizational culture of integrity and compliance. The report covers activities relating to UNICEF staff and services provided to UNICEF staff, as well as consultants and other non-staff, as applicable.

Elements of a draft decision are included in section VIII.

* E/ICEF/2021/9.



I. Overview

1. Management is pleased to respond to the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2020 (E/ICEF/2021/16), pursuant to Executive Board decision 2018/11. With the guiding principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality, the Ethics Office cultivates and nurtures a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, and thereby enhances the trust in and the credibility of UNICEF, both internally and externally.
2. Management welcomes the appointment of a new Director, Ethics, and supports the status of the Ethics Office as an autonomous office with a separate budget and greater independence.
3. Management recognizes and sincerely thanks the dedicated staff of the Ethics Office for yet another successful year despite operating with a reduced complement of staff, not only to support its various work programmes but also to respond to a spike of new activities and institutional demands as a result of the various organizational culture and transformational change initiatives that are under way.

II. Training, education and outreach

4. Management greatly values the Ethics Office's strong focus on training, education and outreach as the office reached more than 6,300 personnel through ethics training and awareness-raising activities in 2020.
5. Management continues to appreciate the mandatory and customized training courses offered to UNICEF staff, the annual Ethics Month initiative and the variety of outreach and communications material produced by the Ethics Office. Management is very encouraged to learn that more than 5,000 personnel participated in some form of outreach activity during Ethics Month in October 2020.
6. Management appreciates that the Ethics Office is part of the internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, areas that are, and will continue to be, priorities for management. The key themes for Ethics Month 2020 were the core values of care and integrity in the context of racism and discrimination and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The Ethics Office provided advice and guidance on political activities linked to engaging in protests and demonstrations against racism and discrimination, and made contributions to office and divisional-level conversations when requested. The Ethics Office will take forward the action plan prepared by the Task Team once it has been finalized.

III. Advice and guidance

7. Management notes that the Ethics Office received and responded to 555 requests for services in 2020, which continues to show continued engagement with and appreciation for the Ethics Office by UNICEF staff.
8. While management observes that there was a decrease in the number of requests received in 2020 as compared to 2019, this was expected due to decreased face-to-face interaction among personnel due to COVID-19 pandemic as well as reduced opportunities to provide in-person training.

IV. Standard-setting and policy support

9. Management welcomes the collaboration between the Ethics Office and the Division of Human Resources on promotion and appointment decisions, wherein the Ethics Office is now consulted on the need to undertake an in-depth due diligence review of conduct and behaviour-related issues to ensure that all staff members

appointed or promoted to senior leadership positions meet the highest standards of ethics and integrity.

10. Management appreciates the commitment made by the Ethics Office to contribute to the development of a safeguarding and accountability framework that will clarify the different roles and responsibilities within UNICEF.

11. In response to UNICEF Executive Board decision 2020/19, which requested a review of the accountability framework structure, management would like to inform the Executive Board that a revised accountability framework will be presented to the Executive Board in 2022. The accountability framework will take into account the organizational improvement initiatives that are under way. Management assures the Executive Board that the revision of the framework will be fit for purpose and responsive to the changes in the external environment, thus positioning UNICEF well for the future. The various elements of accountability will effectively be monitored, communicated and reported on.

12. Management also recognizes the Ethics Office's continued strong collaboration with the cross-divisional task team on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the Child Safeguarding Unit, and the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture.

V. Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme

13. Management appreciates the Ethics Office's continued implementation of the 2018 recommendations made by the external financial services provider KPMG on the Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme. A total of 1,626 staff members were registered in the 2020 programme cycle. The Ethics Office managed to complete the full cycle by 31 October 2020, despite the challenges encountered by participating staff members to get updated information on their assets and finances in time due to COVID-19 related restrictions.

VI. Ethics Panel of the United Nations, Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, Joint Inspection Unit reports and Audit Advisory Committee of UNICEF

14. Management commends the Ethics Office's contribution to the UNICEF response to and follow-up steps related to the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) reports on conflict of interest and whistle-blower protection against retaliation; its response to enquiries from United Nations Member States on whistle-blower protection against retaliation; its response to the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network on a range of issues; and its provision of a written update on the activities of the Ethics Office during the year to the Audit Advisory Committee of UNICEF.

VII. Observations, recommendations and conclusions

15. Management notes the concerns raised by the Ethics Office in regard to its already overstretched resources considering the additional workload related to several initiatives and recommendations following the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority, JIU reports and observations from 2020 Global Staff Survey follow-up actions.

16. Management recognizes with gratitude the services provided by the Ethics Office and looks forward to continued collaboration to uphold the values and principles set forth in its mandate.

VIII. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2020 ([E/ICEF/2021/16](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/17](#)).
