

ANNEX

ISAU COMMENTS ON THE IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ETHICS OFFICE AND THE FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT OMBUDSPERSON'S OFFICE

1. We were told that the comments of the staff associations related solely to the terms of employment and working conditions of the staff, and that the independence of the Ethics Office had to be preserved. In accordance with this request, the following remarks relate exclusively to the actions of the Office which have an impact on the terms of employment and working conditions of the staff. The ethics report and the feasibility study provide information that the staff associations cannot ignore without failing in the mandate entrusted to them by the Member States.

A. Annual report of the Ethics Office (2024) (document [221 EX/30](#))

2. A significant increase is noted in the number of approaches made to the Ethics Office in 2024, with advice issued on 421 occasions compared with 283 in 2023. One wonders whether this increase can be explained by a greater visibility of the Office and an improved speak-up culture, or whether it expresses a deterioration in the working climate, as reflected in the feedback we receive from colleagues. In any event, efforts to disseminate a genuine culture of ethics are confirmed as a priority, in that they meet the expectations of the staff as a whole.

3. The Ethics Office's awareness-raising and training efforts are all the more noteworthy as they reveal an increase in requests for ethical advice. Among these initiatives, the Ethics Kit helps to raise staff awareness of the ethical issues that concern them directly. However, ISAU notes a lack of understanding of the reporting procedures and mandate of the Ethics Office, in particular its role vis-à-vis the Investigation Office of the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS).

4. We note that the main concerns of staff remain unchanged: conflicts in the workplace, harassment and job-related concerns, and that no tangible improvement has been observed. The summary report on harassment issues should therefore give us cause for alarm, with 65 requests for advice under the Anti-Harassment Policy.

5. Finally, concerning another important aspect for staff, we fully support the Ethics Office's recommendation to integrate ethical performance indicators into supervisors' evaluations, and to take action in the case of shortcomings. This approach is in line with our demand for transparent and meaningful 360° evaluation, enabling us to identify management shortcomings and prevent inappropriate behaviour. We also support the idea of systematically assessing managers' ability to manage a team during the recruitment process. Let us stress that improvements in this area will only be possible if the Administration works to change recruitment practices, which are still too often considered a prerogative of the sectors. Too often, HRM is seen as a secondary player whose concerns are contingent.

6. The summary report (Annex to the Annual Report of the Ethics Office) is also of interest to staff, as it clearly shows the persistence of a deleterious and hostile working environment, which continues to deteriorate. IOS, whose detailed annual report we welcome, only confirms this regrettable observation. Figures 18 and 19 show:

- A worrying rise in the number of allegations in 2024 (55 versus 35 in 2023)
- A significant increase in the number of investigations carried out and cases substantiated after investigation (26 in 2024 versus 6 in 2023).
- An increase in allegations of moral harassment (22 in 2024 versus 15 in 2023).

This points to the existence of a systemic problem within UNESCO calling for an urgent response from the Administration.

7. In the face of harassment and abuse of power, it is more necessary than ever to better train supervisors and establish a genuine culture of accountability. We reiterate the importance of 360° evaluation as a tool for identifying problem behaviour and guaranteeing quality management.

8. We also note the low rate of disciplinary action taken following IOS investigations in 2024. Out of 29 substantiated allegations, only 4 had resulted in concrete action at the time of reporting (so 25 were still pending). It would be useful to have explanations for the reasons for this discrepancy and the delays in processing by the Administration.

9. Finally, we note that the Ethics Office has raised the issue of disproportionate use of affiliated personnel. We share its view that, in addition to being a source of insecurity for staff, these contracts lead to high staff turnover and a loss of institutional memory. As mentioned in our comments on the Human Resources Strategy 2023–2027, over-reliance on this type of contract must not be generalized.

10. UNESCO must adopt a proactive approach to curb the deterioration of the working climate and ensure a respectful and equitable professional environment, enabling the Organization to carry out its mission. As the Ethics Office points out, supervisors and managers have a key role to play in building a strong ethical culture. Their commitment and responsibility must be clearly demonstrated. Above all, a genuine ethical culture cannot exist without a firm commitment on the part of the Administration to adopt a policy of zero tolerance of unacceptable behaviour.

B. Feasibility study on the establishment of an independent ombudsperson's office
(document [221 EX/27](#))

11. ISAU fully supports the establishment of an independent ombudsperson's office, and will closely monitor its independence and effectiveness. Reform was needed, as the current mediation system has demonstrated its flaws and limitations, failing to meet colleagues' needs. It is essential for UNESCO to have a reliable platform for informal conflict resolution, both for staff and for the Organization, as it avoids lengthy procedures, high costs for the Organization, and above all stress that is not conducive to maintaining trust between staff and the Administration.

12. We recommend waiting for the findings and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) review of the ombudsperson and mediation function before establishing an ombudsperson's office, determining its structure and defining its mandate, to ensure that the initiative is based on best practice. To guarantee his or her independence, the ombudsperson should have a single, non-renewable term of office, with a ban on holding a UNESCO post for a certain period after the end of his or her term. It is also essential that the office is able to operate autonomously, without interference from the Administration.

13. The report rightly emphasizes that the ombudsperson's role is to act as an impartial intermediary between staff and Administration. Given that this impartiality is a prerequisite for the ombudsperson's ability to win the confidence of both staff and Administration, we consider that it is essential that the holders of this position be recruited according to a procedure in which the staff associations themselves are involved. It goes without saying that the appointment decision will always rest with the Director-General, but the fact remains that an independent ombudsperson's office would be unable to fulfil its mandate effectively if its incumbent were perceived solely as a player who owes his or her appointment to the Administration alone.

14. With regard to the role and responsibilities of the ombudsperson's office, we regret that the study does not sufficiently emphasize the importance of the office's accountability. Similarly, regular, detailed reports are needed in order to be able to monitor trends and systemic problems in workplace

conflicts and their evolution. These reports should be communicated to the Director-General, HRM and the Executive Board, so that appropriate solutions can be put in place.

15. In conclusion, we reaffirm our support for the establishment of an independent ombudsperson's office, convinced of its usefulness in informal conflict resolution. However, the Administration also plays a crucial role in the prevention and informal resolution of conflicts in the workplace. In some cases, we have observed that the Administration refuses to resolve problems despite its non-compliance with the rules, persisting in its approach even when it is obvious that a case before the Administrative Tribunal of the International Labour Organization (ILOAT) will result in the Organization being sanctioned, entailing substantial compensation. These costs underline the need for greater accountability and sanctions against those responsible for decisions taken in violation of the rules in force.



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221 EX/30

Executive Board

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ETHICS OFFICE (2024)

SUMMARY

The Annual Report of the Ethics Office presents the key activities of the Ethics Office for the reporting year 2024 and is submitted pursuant to Executive Board decision 219 EX/Decision 19, in order to provide updated information to the Executive Board on the achievement of establishing and maintaining an ethical working environment within the Organization.

The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report and endorse the comment on the progress made by the Ethics Office in strengthening the ethical culture at UNESCO by way of training and outreach (raising of ethical awareness), ethics advice, as well as policy development and review.

Decision required: paragraph 47.



Job: 2500051E



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ETHICS OFFICE

2024

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I. Mission Statement

1. The Ethics Office is responsible for providing confidential advice on Ethics and Standards of conduct to the Organization and all its employees and has become a key component to enhance compliance with the Organization's ethical standards.
2. The Office aims to prevent and resolve potential or actual unethical behaviour and promotes ethical awareness and a 'speak up' culture through training and general outreach activities.
3. The Ethics Office is also mandated to support and guide internal stakeholders in the development and review of policies, procedures and agreements to ensure that these engender the Organisation's core ethical values.
4. The Ethics Office is the Organization's focal point for the provision of advice and guidance on all matters relating to conflicts of interests. It has responsibility for the ongoing development, review and implementation of the Financial Disclosure Programme and is in charge of the management of the Gifts and favours Registry.
5. The Ethics Office is responsible for providing advice and guidance on the Organization's Anti-harassment policy.
6. In addition, the Ethics Office is the UNESCO Focal Point for the implementation of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy and oversees a network of PSEA focal points in each and every field office and category 1 institute.
7. Finally, the Ethics Office is in charge of reviewing requests for protection from retaliation under the Whistleblower protection policy.
8. The Ethics Office is independent from all Programme Sectors, Support Sectors and other Central Services, and reports directly to the Director-General.

II. Ethical Core Values

9. Ethics refers to the basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct. At the organizational level, it relies on UNESCO's three core values: Integrity, Professionalism and Respect for diversity.
10. Integrity is a core value in all aspects of our professional and personal life. Integrity includes, but is not limited to, loyalty, impartiality, fairness and honesty.
11. High standards of professionalism are required to fulfil our duties at UNESCO. We should show pride in our work, demonstrate the highest standards of competence, be conscientious and efficient in meeting goals and commitments, and be motivated by professional objectives rather than by personal concerns.
12. Finally, we should take pride and embrace the diversity of our colleagues, which brings together people from varied cultures and experiences. We should work constructively with people from all backgrounds, examine our assumptions and (unconscious) biases, avoid stereotypes, and show no discrimination against any individual or group.

III. Human Resources of the Ethics Office

13. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office had three established posts: an Ethics Advisor (P-5 – vacant since August 2023), a Senior Ethics Officer (P-4) and an Ethics Assistant (G-5). Following the departure of the Ethics Advisor in July 2023, the Senior Ethics Officer assumed the duties of Ethics Advisor ad interim starting on 1 August 2023. In order to overcome the critical staffing

shortage and face the significant increase in the workload of the Ethics Office, two colleagues were employed on temporary contracts, one since December 2023, and one of whom joined in October 2024. While the Organization’s workforce has more than doubled since the establishment of the Ethics Office, and the request for services increased by over 200%, the number of established posts in the Ethics Office has remained unchanged. Moving forward, strengthening the Ethics Office appears to be an essential step to enable the Office to effectively fulfil its mandate in the years to come.

IV. Requests for Services

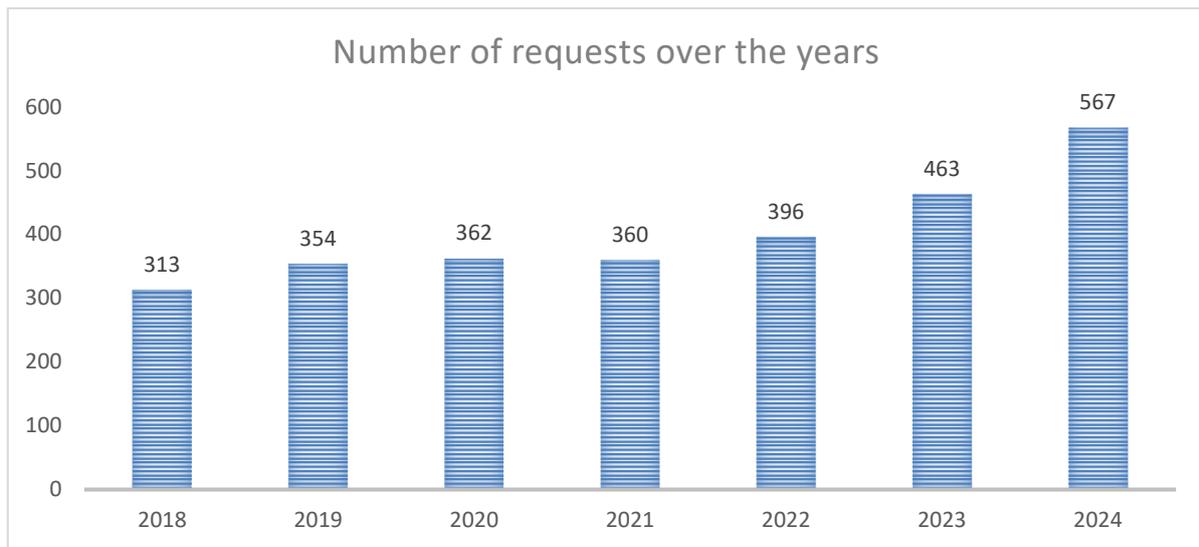
14. The following section provides data illustrating the range of ethical issues for which the Ethics Office was contacted in 2024. The category “requests for services” dealt with by the Ethics Office has been re-assessed and grouped into four main sub-categories in order to more closely illustrate the work of the Ethics Office.

Figure 1 - Distinction between ethics advice, standard setting and policy review, formal requests for protection and PSEA report

Ethics Advice	Provide confidential ethics advice to staff and management. Review and handle requests for informal resolution of harassment cases. Provide advice and guidance on workplace conflict. Advise on issues of conflicts of interest and manage the implementation of the Gift policy.
Standard Setting and Policy Review	Draft and/or review ethics related policies and support internal stakeholders in the development of policies and agreements to ensure that these engender the Organization’s core ethical values.
Formal Requests for Protection	Review formal requests for protection from retaliation under the Whistleblower Protection Policy.
PSEA Report	Action taken as part of the Ethics Office’s role as UNESCO’s PSEA Focal Point upon receipt of information concerning allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving UNESCO personnel or Implementing Partners.

15. The Ethics Office addressed a total of 567 matters during the course of 2024, which represents a 22% increase compared to the previous year (and a 43% increase compared to 2022). In 421 instances, it provided confidential advice to managers and employees at all levels on a variety of ethical issues, covering mainly standards of conduct, conflicts of interest, workplace conflicts, employment-related concerns as well as advice and guidance under the Anti-Harassment Policy. To provide additional information concerning the practical actions taken as a result of these requests, it shall be noted that the matters addressed in the course of the reporting year resulted in nearly 800 consultations and exchanges dealt with by the Ethics Office – the highest number recorded since its establishment in 2009. This milestone is a strong indicator of the growing trust placed in the Ethics Office and highlights the positive impact of its work in promoting and enhancing UNESCO’s speak up mechanisms.

Figure II – Evolution of requests for services throughout the years



16. In 2024, the Ethics Office provided advice and guidance on matters related to the Anti-Harassment Policy in 65 cases. For a more detailed report on harassment matters dealt with by the Organization in 2024, please refer to [Annex I](#), provided by the Ethics Office pursuant to HR Manual Chapter 16.2, section J, para. 81.

17. Additionally, the Ethics Office addressed 104 requests related to standard setting and policy review (compared to 89 in 2023). Two formal requests for protection under the Whistleblower Protection policy were also submitted to the Ethics Office in 2024. Both cases were subject to a thorough preliminary review by the Ethics Office and the conclusion of the reviews determined that investigations were not warranted due to the lack of “prima facie” – a key requirement under the Policy. Furthermore, in 2024, and in accordance with UNESCO’s PSEA Policy, the Ethics Office wishes to report that two situations were screened by the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS). After IOS’ screening, it was determined that the allegations did not amount to sexual exploitation and abuse in the first instance while in the second instance, the allegations ultimately concerned a different United Nations agency who was then put in charge of the investigation. Lastly, in 2024, the Ethics Office was solicited for and responded to 38 requests for information.

Figure III - Requests for services by category (2024)

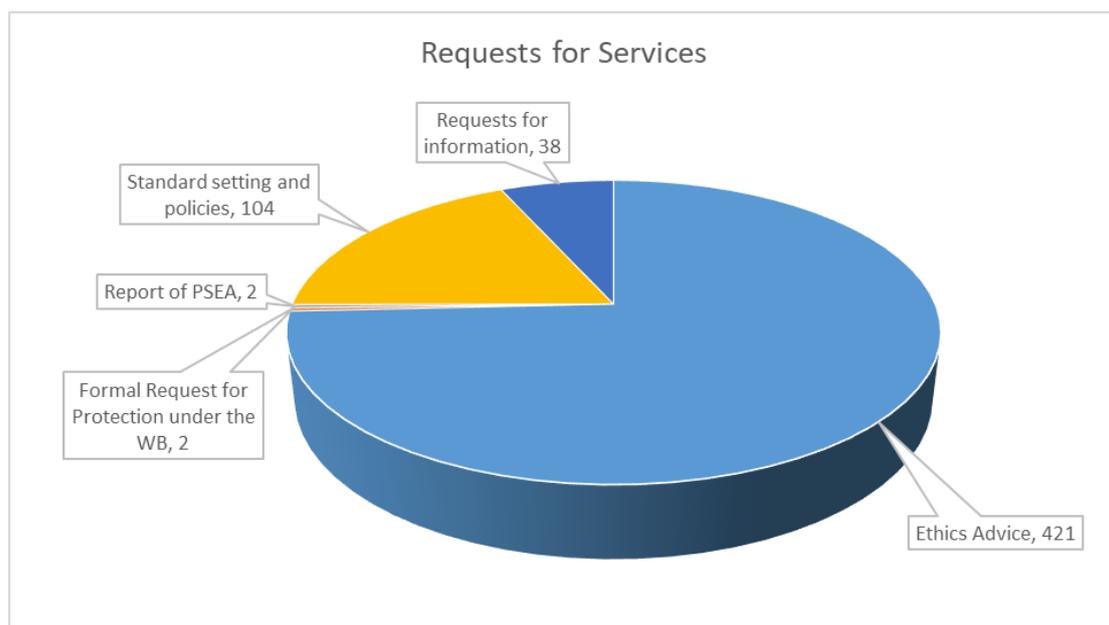


Figure IV - Breakdown of Ethics Advice (2024)

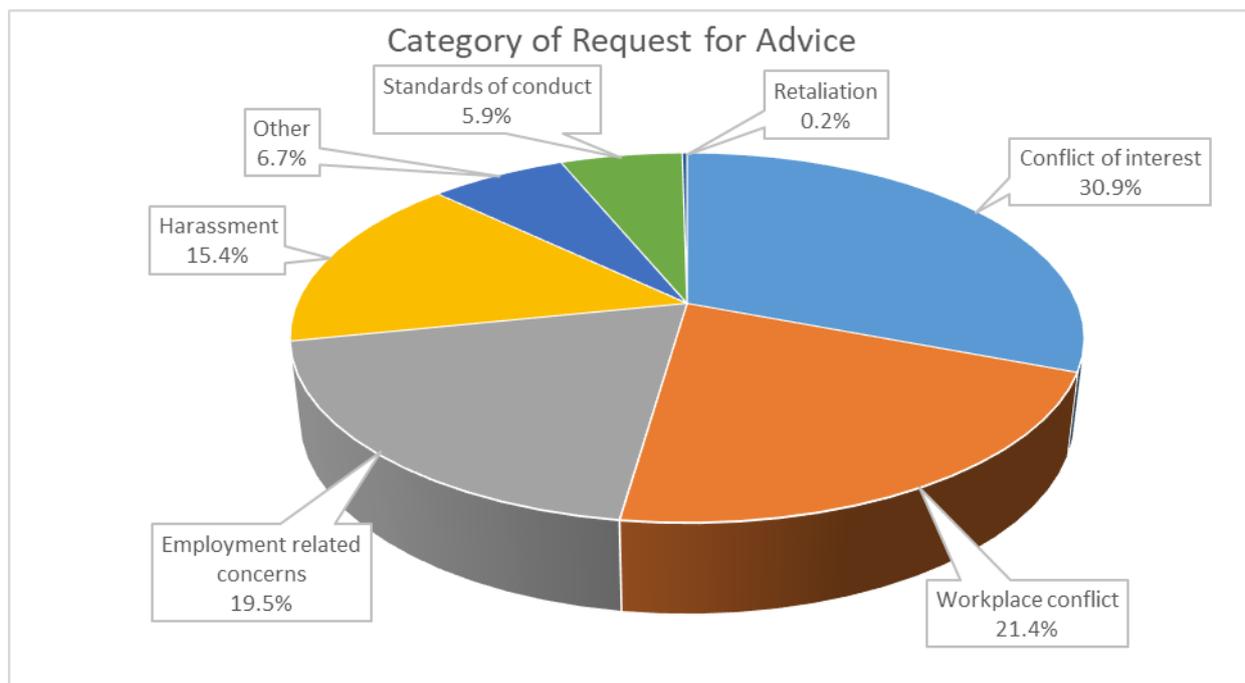
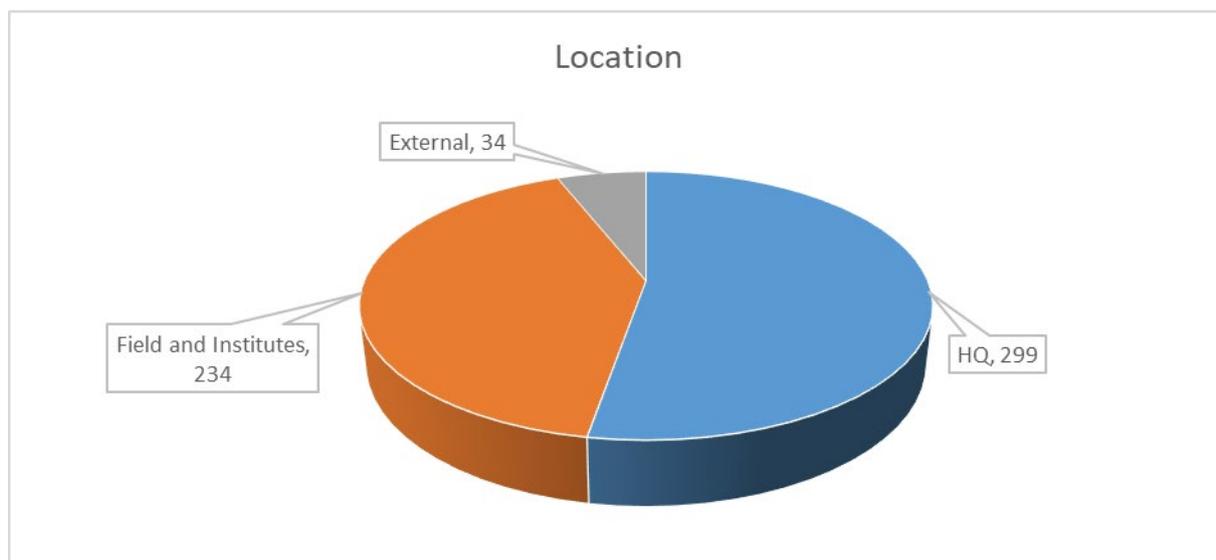


Figure V - Requests for services by location (2024)



18. In 2024, the Ethics Office advised 299 employees from Headquarters, 234 employees from field offices and institutes and responded to 34 requests from non-UNESCO personnel. The data shows that requests from Headquarters and the field were in a similar range, reflecting a balanced distribution between colleagues at Headquarters and those serving abroad. This illustrates the global reach of the Ethics Office, and the level of trust placed in its services, as well as the added value of its in-person training and outreach missions to UNESCO’s field network.

V. Training and Outreach

19. In 2024, the Ethics Office continued carrying out in-person trainings outside Headquarters, combined with continued training activities using a virtual format to align with UNESCO’s environmental efforts to reduce carbon emissions. The Ethics Office issued a total of 3,114 training

certificates covering the full spectrum of trainings under its purview. Training was delivered to 13 offices away from Headquarters in 2024 and one antenna, in either an in-person or virtual format.

20. Throughout 2024, the Ethics Office also continued to conduct ethics induction briefings with senior leaders, on a one-to-one basis. Six briefings were conducted in 2024 with a specific focus on addressing personal ethical awareness and responsibility, recognition and management of potential conflicts of interest, prevention and protection from retaliation, as well as the importance of creating a safe environment for employees to “speak up”.

21. Targeted outreach and communication material has been equally deployed in 2024, with the purpose of strengthening staff’s capacity to address situations proactively. Initiatives in this regard included the deployment of the Ethics Kit with a special focus on UNESCO’s field presence, posters aimed at clarifying reporting procedures as well as key messages and articles on topics such as PSEA, Gifts and conflicts of interests, etc.

22. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office also held meetings with the UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC) to provide updates on the work of the Ethics Office, and engaged in workshops and inductions organized by other internal stakeholders, for the benefit of newly recruited young professionals, administrators as well as a refresher on whistleblower protection during a workshop on anti-fraud and corruption.

23. In general, in 2024, the record amount of training and outreach conducted by the Ethics Office resulted in a very high satisfaction rate among participants. The results of the anonymous feedback surveys conducted in 2024 highlighted that 92% of respondents “would recommend the training to others” and 94% fully agreed that “the course goals – to raise awareness, understand concepts, (self) reflect and make commitments individually and as a team to contribute more effectively to an ethical working environment – were achieved”. This very positive feedback was coupled with a list of personal remarks made by participants throughout the training cycle and extracted below:

“The training (on-site) was of extreme importance as it provided real case examples of ethical and unethical behaviors.”

“The course was refreshing and a reminder of very pertinent ethical considerations as one executes the duties at hand.”

“Very informative and interactive, providing an opportunity for staff to reflect on their blindspots.”

“The course was very useful as it empowered us as staff to know our duties and rights. It allowed us to better identify abusive situations, unethical behaviour and situations. The training also offered the path for witness and support colleagues on a difficult situation.”

“Your work is very important, thank you for your commitment for the organization. An on-site training is fundamental to build trust and get to put faces behind an online course. In case we need to reach out, it will definitely be easier. Thank you”

“The training was very useful for being reminded again of the diverse options to confront harassments in all its forms and ensure ethical behavior across the organization. Above all, it created a good space to discuss issues of concern with all colleagues.”

VI. Standard setting and Policy Development

24. A key function of the Ethics Office is to develop and provide input to UNESCO policies and agreements to make sure they reflect ethical standards in line with best international practices.

Policy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

25. As part of the Ethics Office's mandate as UNESCO's PSEA Focal Point, it continued to actively participate in regular Task Force meetings under the auspices of the United Nations Special Coordinator on Improving United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

26. To further ensure effective implementation of the PSEA policy throughout UNESCO, in 2024, the Ethics Office organized three information sessions with the network of PSEA focal points in the field. Throughout 2024, the Ethics Office dealt with 38 PSEA-related advisories (equal to over a third of all Standard Setting and Policy Review matters addressed in 2024), which illustrates the increasing awareness and the growing role of the Ethics Office as PSEA Focal Point.

27. In the course of 2024, the Ethics Advisor a.i. represented UNESCO at various international fora on PSEA including the Meeting of the DAC Reference Group on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment at the OECD, as well as the Stakeholder review conference in Geneva, Switzerland convened by WHO bringing together officials, practitioners, experts and advocates from United Nations agencies, humanitarian actors, academia, civil society, governments and independent experts. Bilateral meetings were also held between the Ethics Advisor a.i. and the United Nations Victims Rights Advocate, in order to discuss future cooperation by leveraging UNESCO's programmatic expertise in providing skills and assistance to the benefit of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

28. Throughout 2024, the Ethics Office has also provided extensive inputs and information to the JIU for their "Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in United Nations system organizations", and has focused on the development of a UNESCO-specific Toolkit for Directors/Heads of Field Offices, which will be rolled out during the first quarter of 2025.

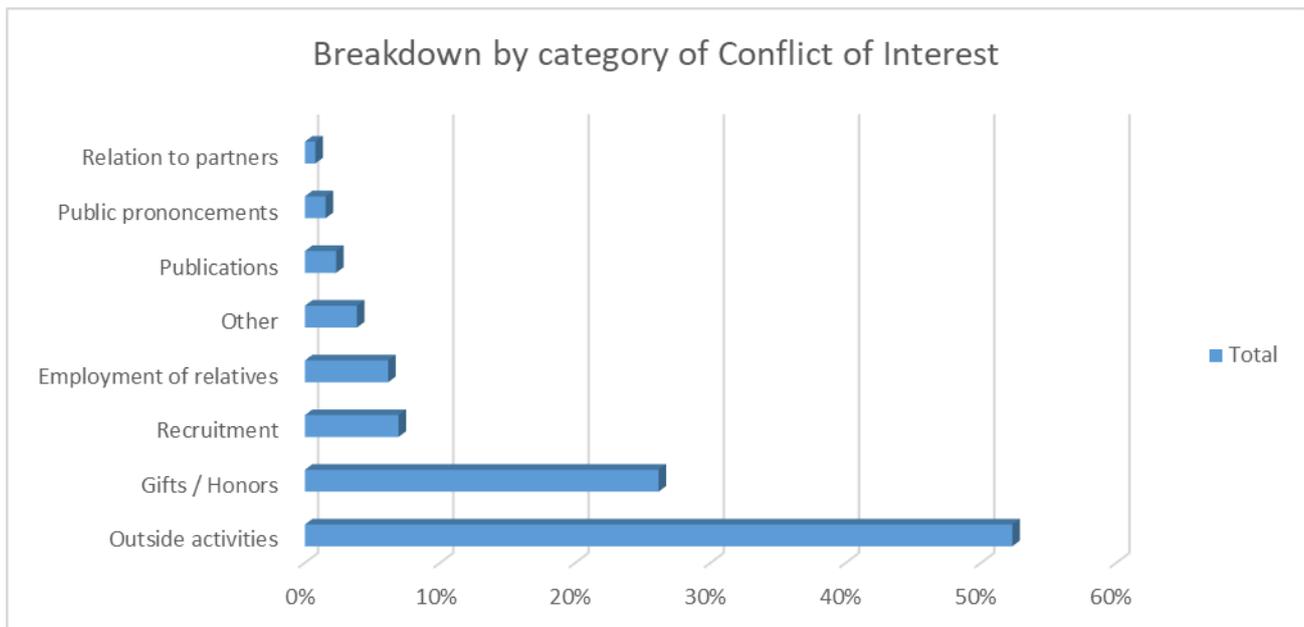
29. Over the past years, the Ethics Office has led UNESCO's PSEA action, drafted the first-ever UNESCO PSEA Policy, established a global network of field focal points and participated in numerous outreach and coordination activities. However, to date no dedicated budget for PSEA-related activities has been allocated to the Ethics Office since it took up this additional important responsibility. As the Organization's workforce is growing and more and more projects are being implemented, the need for sustainable funding for PSEA remains a critical risk area. In practical terms, allocating the equivalent of 0.1% of funding destined to extrabudgetary projects, would provide the Ethics Office with the necessary resources to significantly strengthen the Organization's overall action both in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Conflicts of interest (COI)

30. The Ethics Office acts as focal point on all matters concerning conflicts of interest (COI) at UNESCO, mainly relating to gifts, honours and decorations, outside activities and financial disclosure. By acting as a trusted consultative resource, the Ethics Office thus plays a fundamental risk-management role for the Organization.

31. The chart below provides statistics on the type of matters addressed by the Ethics Office in 2024 concerning COI. The important increase of requests for advice concerning COI over the past years shows that the Ethics Office's role as focal point in this matter has been further consolidated.

Figure VI - Conflicts of Interest (2024)



Declaration of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme

32. Since 2013, the Ethics Office has implemented a policy on the Declaration of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme (FDP), as an honour-based risk management tool for UNESCO which helps to ensure transparency and increase public confidence.

33. Employees at the P-5 level and above, all employees whose principal duties include the procurement of goods and services or relate to investment of UNESCO assets, are required to disclose all relevant information to the Ethics Office on an annual basis. In addition, all employees of the Ethics Office need to complete an annual questionnaire, which is reviewed by DIR/IOS.

34. In 2024, a total of 540 employees were requested to complete the questionnaire, in English or French, for the reporting period ranging from 1 January to 31 December 2023. Among the 540 respondents, 40% were based at Headquarters and 60% in the field.

35. Out of the 540 employees who responded to the questionnaire, 453 indicated not having anything to declare while 87 provided a positive answer to at least one question. Upon review of these 87 questionnaires, the Ethics Office noted 45 situations of potential conflict of interest requiring further information. While the additional information provided in six cases allowed to conclude that no risk of conflict of interest (COI) actually existed, for those remaining, upon assessment of the totality of the information received, the Ethics Office provided guidance on how to deal with an actual, potential or perceived COI in the best interest of the Organization.

36. Finally, in terms of cost-efficiency, it shall be noted that while several United Nations agencies have outsourced their FDP, the UNESCO Ethics Office fully conducts the entire review in-house. With an average cost of outsourcing amounting to between \$400-\$500 per questionnaire, the savings for UNESCO to have the FDP conducted entirely by the Ethics Office amounts to over \$200,000 per year.

Outside activities

37. Since employees are expected to devote their time and energy to the work of the Organization, engagement in employment and activities outside UNESCO, whether paid or unpaid, may interfere with that expectation. It shall be noted that outside activities may, of course, be beneficial both to staff members and to the Organization as they may serve to maintain and enhance professional and

technical competencies. However, even when potentially beneficial for the Organization, they are not permitted unless prior approval is given by the Administration. In 2024, the Ethics Office responded to 68 requests for advice on matters concerning outside activities, mainly from the Administration. This corresponds to 52% of the total advice provided for COI during the reporting year. In terms of trends, in 2024, the Ethics Office provided advice concerning authorization of outside activities as follows: 37% were deemed advisable, 43% not advisable; and 20% not advisable as an outside activity but to be given consideration as an official function. In addition to the advice provided to the Administration, the Ethics Office equally referred matters to HRM and directly guided personnel on the procedure to follow in order to seek authorization to engage in an outside activity.

Mapping of Organizational Conflicts of Interest

38. In 2024, the Ethics Office hired an external expert to assist with the implementation of an outstanding recommendation by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) recommending that the organizations of the United Nations system conduct a mapping exercise to identify their respective organizational conflicts of interest (OCIs). The overall conclusion was that UNESCO has adopted a strong individual ethics framework with robust building blocks for developing a comprehensive organizational ethics framework. While UNESCO has demonstrated overall a strong commitment to ethics, the review also identified several United Nations system-wide risks that give rise to OCIs for UNESCO and other organizations of the United Nations system, including insufficient and unpredictable regular budget; emerging threats from artificial intelligence and cyber-crime as well as the lack of ethical guidelines for delegates, presiding officers and other members of the bureaux of the governing bodies.

39. In accordance with the principle of “do no harm”, UNESCO should ensure that its activities, operations and choice of partners are mindful of the environment, of ethics and of social and corporate responsibility. The review highlighted concerns that despite the efficient due diligence measures undertaken, UNESCO may end up partnering with entities that could violate ethical principles or whose values may conflict with those of the Organization. This risk is particularly heightened in a climate of financial austerity. The Ethics Office appreciates that the Organization is required to explore diverse partnerships and alternate funding models to supplement constrained budgets, but as previously noted by the JIU, such partnerships may “have ethical implications and expose both the staff and the overall organizational integrity to new types of risks, such as regarding the neutrality of the parties involved, the soundness of the value proposition, and possible favouritism or conflicts of interest”.

40. The review also highlighted a risk related to the current practices surrounding the use of affiliate personnel. Prioritizing cost-efficiencies and zero-nominal growth budgets may be interpreted as outweighing the importance of an international civil service and erodes the independence and exclusively international character of the Secretariat. Moreover, the over-reliance on affiliate workforce is unfortunately coupled with a perceived discrimination between staff and long-serving affiliate personnel. Lastly, the disproportionate use of affiliate personnel also leads to high turnover which in turn leads to constant training needs, redundant efforts to instil a culture of ethics and a loss of institutional memory.

41. No organizational ethics framework is complete without ethical guidance for Member States, their delegates, presiding officers and other members of the bureaux of the governing bodies. While there is a United Nations system-wide Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment, at United Nations System Events, there is a need for broader guidance and training on a range of ethical standards, values and principles, as well as a UNESCO-specific framework. To remedy this, briefings and voluntary trainings could be developed to inform delegates as well as presiding officers and other members of the bureaux to ensure that they too are fully cognizant of UNESCO’s ethical standards, values and principles. In this regard, the Ethics Office wishes to highlight the current development of UNESCO-specific guidelines based on the United Nations

system-wide Code of Conduct, and stands ready to develop any additional guidance that could benefit the Organization.

Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

42. The Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO) counts 55 member organizations, including the United Nations system, international financial institutions, as well as several other intergovernmental organizations, and promotes a system-wide collaboration on ethics-related issues with a specific focus on coherent application of ethical standards and policies. In 2024, the ENMO annual conference was hosted by the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, and the Ethics Advisor a.i., delivered a presentation on the use of the Ethics Kit – an innovative learning tool developed by the UNESCO Ethics Office, and moderated a panel of experts to discuss the topic “How to bring about culture change through ethics programmes (and measuring impact)”. The ENMO Conference in Geneva brought together expert ethicists from across the multilateral system and led to the concrete advances towards the materialization of a first set of standards of practice for ethics officers.

VII. Outlook

43. In 2024, the Ethics Office began the enhancement of its “speak up” tools and is currently in the process of developing a new kit aimed at clarifying processes and procedures and rendering reporting even more user-friendly for personnel seeking solutions to workplace issues. This new system is currently being implemented and will be finalized before the second quarter of 2025.

44. In 2024, the Ethics Office also embarked on a major project, entailing the creation of a UNESCO Conflict of Interest Policy. The policy will compile, streamline, and update existing UNESCO rules and guidance on the topic and it is an important step towards further strengthening and enhancing the Organization’s internal controls. In developing the policy, the Ethics Office is in the process of conducting extensive research on system-wide best practices and developments on conflicts of interest. It is reviewing policy documents from across the United Nations, and beyond (e.g. multilateral development institutions), in order to group together existing elements on the subject and provide additional guidance and clarity on key issues which form best practice across the international arena. Additionally, the Ethics Office is currently finalizing a pre-employment conflicts of interest form which will be rolled out in cooperation with HRM and will be applicable to all personnel joining the Organization.

45. The UNESCO Ethics Office is confident that it continued to make progress in the strengthening and implementation of its mandate. However, there is a shared understanding among ethics practitioners that it is difficult to measure the impact of an ethics program. While internal surveys and evaluations relating to the work of the Ethics Office have been conducted in the past years, highlighting a very positive image of the Office, it became evident that an external assessment was necessary in order to measure the quality, impact and overall maturity of the ethics programme within UNESCO. For this reason, in 2024 an external organization with profound expertise in ethics and compliance, was hired to assess UNESCO’s ethics programme and determine its quality. The assessment was based on a well-established maturity framework covering over 100 leading practices categorized into 27 supporting objectives, grouped into the five principles indicative of an exemplary ethics programme. The assessment also measured the ethics programme against five maturity levels. The result of the assessment showed that UNESCO’s ethics programme scored higher than the benchmark in all categories, with the exception of one – culture – where an area of opportunity for enhanced strengthening was identified. More specifically, an emphasis was placed on the need to ensure that supervisors and managers across the Organization clearly demonstrate ownership and accountability for building a strong ethical culture.

46. Taking stock from these findings, the Ethics Office will continue strengthening even further its outreach and training for employees in a position of leadership. However, it is convinced that other actions need to accompany this process, notably the inclusion of ethical leadership performance

indicators in supervisors and managers' annual performance evaluations to ensure accountability in creating and maintaining an ethical working environment for their teams. This should be coupled with action taken by the Organization in case of shortcomings. The Ethics Office is convinced that recruitment processes for managers should systematically include an external assessment of their capacity to manage individuals. By focusing on prevention, the Ethics Office is convinced that a number of risks can be avoided from the outset. Lastly, while the Ethics Office is a firm believer in the importance of diversity and the need to hire staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible, as stated in the UNESCO Constitution, the paramount consideration must always be securing the highest standards of integrity, efficiency and technical competence above all.

Proposed draft decision

47. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 221 EX/30,
2. Takes note of its content and expresses support for the work of the Ethics Office in fostering a culture of ethics, transparency and accountability across the Organization;
3. Invites the Ethics Advisor to report to it at its 224th session through the annual report of the Ethics Office.

UNESCO Ethics Office

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ANNEX

SUMMARY REPORT ON HARASSMENT MATTERS

Pursuant to HR Manual Chapter 16.2, section J, para. 81, the Ethics Office is mandated to share an annual summary report on harassment matters, with the following report concerning the reporting period from 1 January to 31 December 2024. The report includes statistics and information concerning harassment matters dealt with by the Organization during the reporting period, as provided by the Ethics Office and key internal stakeholders.

Ethics Office

In 2024, the Ethics Office received a total of 65 requests for advice concerning its role under the Anti-Harassment Policy. In fifty-six cases, advice and guidance was provided with regards to moral harassment, while in nine cases it concerned sexual harassment. Fifty-two percent (52%) of requests for services stemmed from Headquarters, 46% from either field offices or category 1 institutes, while 2% came from non-UNESCO sources.

Figure I – Breakdown of Advice and guidance by category



For the 65 matters dealt with by the Ethics Office in 2024, it provided a safe space to listen, provide support and quality advice on the options and procedures available to address the situation, or coaching. With the permission of the visitor, the Ethics Office reached out to the alleged harasser or their hierarchy for appropriate action. The Ethics Office was again able to provide a filtering role to analyse the nature of the matter being reported and advise on the best way to resolve it. It did so with the understanding that it is paramount to first and foremost respect the will of the affected individuals and the confidentiality of its mandate. Therefore, no action was taken without the consent of the visitor. Concretely, this aspect reflects certain practical limitations for the Ethics Office to actively address matters reported to it where action on its part is possible, but at the same time provides the necessary reassurance to the affected individual concerning the informal confidential advisory role of the Ethics Office and its strict respect of a victim-centred approach. For what concerns matters linked to moral harassment/abuse of authority, it shall be noted that out of the 56 matters dealt with in 2024, the Ethics Office was authorized to intervene directly in 16% of cases through its informal resolution role. For sexual harassment, while a victim-centred approach is paramount, the advice to lodge a formal report with IOS remains a key aspect of the guidance

provided by the Ethics Office in 100% of cases, accompanied with information on the process and rights of the affected individuals.

Figure II – Action taken by the Ethics Office in 2024 (moral harassment)

Outcome	Moral Harassment
Ethics Advice	47
Advised to report to IOS	16
Advice provided but no action requested	17
Advised to escalate to supervisor/management	7
Affected individual coached to speak to alleged harasser directly	7
Intervention	9
Resolution sought by involvement of ETH with the Administration	5
Resolution sought in consultation with hierarchy	4
Grand Total	56

Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS)

As focal point for the receipt of all formal reports of harassment at UNESCO, and according to data consulted for the 2024 reporting period, IOS processed 36 allegations of harassment, including five which were carried forward from previous years. Thirty-one allegations concerned moral harassment, four concerned sexual harassment while one allegation included a combination of both. As of 31 December 2024, IOS had opened investigations leading to substantiation of the allegations in 21 cases, eight were not investigated due to either the investigative threshold not being met or determination that the allegations did not actually amount to misconduct. One case was found to be unsubstantiated after having been duly investigated. At the end of the reporting period, two cases were still being screened by IOS to determine whether a formal investigation would be warranted, and four matters were pending finalization.

In order to showcase the link between the Ethics Office’s work under the Anti-Harassment Policy and IOS, it shall be noted that in 24 cases out of 36, allegations were brought to IOS’s attention following prior advice and guidance provided by the Ethics Office.

Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM)

In 2024, the Administration received investigation reports from IOS under the Anti-Harassment Policy against eight perpetrators. At the end of the year, all were pending a final decision based on the various administrative steps required by UNESCO’s internal processes, and the fact that the vast majority of the cases (seven out of eight) have been received during the second half of the year. One case from November 2023 concerning moral harassment was dealt with by HRM in 2024 and resulted in termination of the perpetrator’s contract.