

▶ Annual report of the Ethics Officer (2020)

▶ Introduction

1. The mission of the ILO Ethics Officer is to promote a culture of integrity and respect across the International Labour Office, in line with ILO values and principles. The annual report of the Ethics Officer includes updates on the activities undertaken in 2020 in fulfilment of this mission.
2. At the heart of the Ethics Officer's work is the commitment to promote awareness and understanding of the standards of ethical conduct that all ILO staff members are expected to know and uphold. These standards are set out in the [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service](#), the [Principles of Conduct for Staff of the International Labour Office](#), the Staff Regulations and the relevant internal governance documents¹.
3. The Director-General has entrusted the ethics function, which is an integral part of the ILO's accountability framework², and the specific roles and responsibilities associated with that function, to the Ethics Officer³. In exercising this function, the Ethics Officer is independent of any other official, department or organizational entity of the ILO and reports directly to the Director-General. The responsibilities of the Ethics Officer include those set out below.

Responsibilities of the Ethics Officer

- ▶ *Ethics advice*: Providing advice for managers and staff members on questions of ethics, such as conflicts of interest, outside activities and occupations, and gifts.
- ▶ *Awareness-raising and training*: Contributing to the design, promotion and implementation of programmes to inform and educate staff with a view to increasing awareness of ethical issues.
- ▶ *Policy development*: Providing guidance to ensure that ILO internal policies and practices reinforce and promote the ILO's ethical standards.
- ▶ *Protection from retaliation*: Receiving requests for protection from retaliation from staff members who believe that action has been taken against them because they have reported misconduct or cooperated with an audit or investigation.
- ▶ *Domestic workers employed by ILO staff*: Receiving information regarding allegations of inappropriate treatment by staff members of domestic workers employed by them.

1 The relevant internal governance documents are available at the ILO Ethics Office web page, www.ilo.org/ethics.

2 Office Guideline, [The ILO Accountability Framework: Key Standards and Mechanisms](#), IGDS No. 195, 2010.

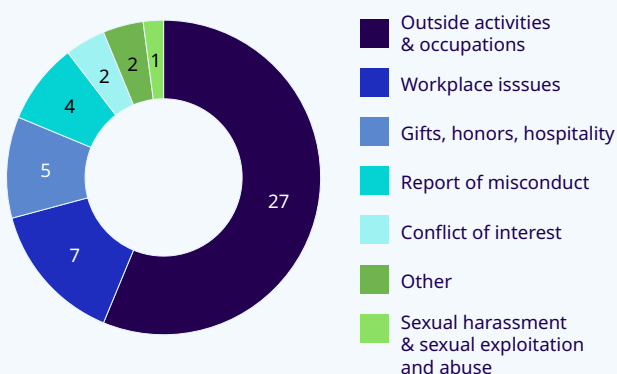
3 See Office Directive, [Ethics in the Office](#), IGDS No. 76, 2019.

▶ Ethics advice

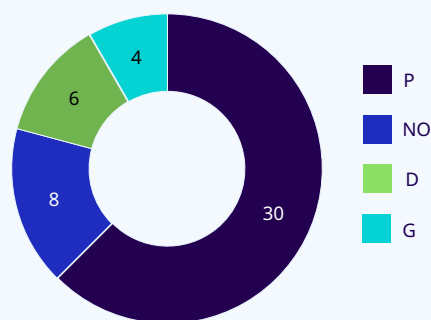
- Upon request, the Ethics Officer provides confidential ethics advice to staff members. This is a 360-degree advisory function, since it embraces both the ILO Administration and individual staff members. Ethics advice is intended to support and guide staff in making decisions in accordance with the ILO’s ethical standards of conduct.
- The number of staff members seeking ethics advice during 2020 increased to 48 compared with 36 in 2019. Teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic has thus not reduced the extent to which staff have relied on the ethics function for advice, which was already being provided primarily via email and video call prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Most requests for ethics advice (29) were made by staff at headquarters in Geneva. More than half of requests (27) related to outside activities and occupations. In seven cases, staff consulted the Ethics Officer in relation to a workplace issue (e.g. disagreements with colleagues or managers). Five requests related to gifts, honours or hospitality. Four staff members sought information on channels for reporting misconduct or wished to report misconduct. As appropriate, those staff members were referred to the Office of Internal Audit and Oversight (IAO). The figure below provides a breakdown of requests for ethics advice in 2020 by subject area, staff category, sex and region.

▶ Requests for ethics advice in 2020 Total number: 48

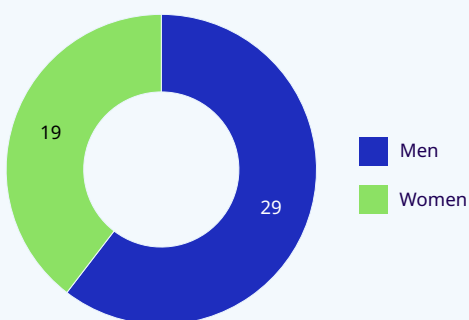
By subject area



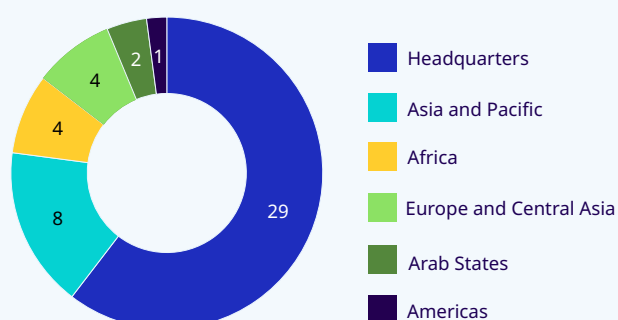
By staff category



By sex



By region



▶ Awareness-raising and training

7. The Ethics Officer delivers ethics briefings and training sessions, both at headquarters and for external offices, to raise awareness and understanding of ethical standards of conduct, the implications for managers and staff, and the role and responsibilities of the Ethics Officer. In this regard, the Ethics Officer collaborates closely with the Human Resources Development Department (HRD), the Mediator, the IAO, the Office of the Legal Adviser and the International Training Centre of the ILO.
8. The Regional Director for Africa, with the support of the Ethics Officer and in collaboration with the IAO and HRD, convened an online townhall meeting on

ethics in December 2020, which brought together almost 300 colleagues from offices across the region. The initiative enabled regional staff to discuss the ILO's ethical standards of conduct as a key tool for achieving and maintaining integrity, accountability and a respectful workplace, and included presentations by the Ethics Officer and representatives of the IAO and HRD on their respective roles and responsibilities. During the same month, the Ethics Officer participated in an online workshop for staff of the ILO Country Office for Bangladesh convened by its work environment task team.

▶ Policy development

9. In July 2020, the Director-General issued an Office Directive on prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, IGDS No. 568⁴. The Directive recalls the related obligations of ILO staff members and third parties engaged by the ILO, and sets out rules, procedures and actions for preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. Where staff members become aware of situations that

may involve sexual exploitation and abuse in the context of any ILO activity, they must report the matter promptly to the Chief Internal Auditor. Reports may also be received anonymously or be made through staff representatives. As indicated in the Directive, staff may contact the Ethics Officer with any questions⁵.

▶ Protection from retaliation

10. Ensuring a culture of integrity requires the involvement of all staff members. This includes not only knowing and complying with the ILO's internal rules and regulations, but also bringing misconduct and wrongdoing to the attention of the IAO, which is the ILO authority competent for receiving such reports⁶. Instances of harassment, including sexual harassment, are reported to HRD.
11. To enable staff to report misconduct and cooperate with investigations or audits without any fear of retaliation, the ILO has put in place a specific policy for the prevention of and protection from retaliation. This policy was strengthened with the issuance of IGDS No. 551⁷, which sets out the channels for

reporting misconduct and the available protection against retaliation for having done so.

12. IGDS No. 551 entrusts the Ethics Officer with responsibility for receiving requests for protection from staff members. In such cases, the Ethics Officer undertakes a preliminary review of the situation. Where the Ethics Officer concludes that there is a prima facie case of retaliation, the case is referred to the IAO for investigation. If it is concluded, on the basis of the investigation report, that retaliation has occurred, the Office is required to take measures aimed at correcting negative consequences suffered as a result of the retaliatory action. The case will also be referred to HRD for consideration of disciplinary action against the official who engaged in retaliation.

4 Office Directive, [Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), IGDS No. 568, 2020.

5 IGDS No. 568, para. 11.

6 Any case of fraud, presumption of fraud or attempted fraud must be reported to the IAO and the Treasurer; see Financial Rule 13.10.

7 Office Directive, [Reporting Misconduct and Protection from Retaliation](#), IGDS No. 551, 2021.

13. No complaints concerning retaliation were received by the Ethics Officer in 2020. However, with a view to preventing retaliation⁸, the Ethics Officer dealt

with four situations in which staff that had reported misconduct expressed concern about the risk of retaliation.

▶ Relations with the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee

14. The Ethics Officer has unrestricted and confidential access to the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee (IOAC), and vice versa⁹. The Ethics Officer holds regular exchanges with the IOAC.

15. The ILO's whistleblower policy provides that allegations of retaliation concerning the Director-General are to be reported to the Chairperson of the Governing Body either directly or via the Chairperson of the IOAC¹⁰.

▶ The Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

16. The ILO Ethics Officer is a member of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO), which seeks to promote system-wide collaboration on ethics-related issues, with a specific focus on the coherent application of ethical standards and policies across the United Nations system. ENMO is an important forum at which ethics officers of international organizations share their first-hand experiences and learn from each other, which is vital for maintaining and fostering a culture of ethics within the United Nations family.

17. The Ethics Officer attended the 2020 annual meeting of ENMO, hosted virtually by the World Bank Ethics and Business Conduct Department from 8 to 10 July 2020. The meeting was an opportunity for heads of ethics functions across the multilateral system to discuss the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and related developments on organizational ethics. Other topics discussed included emerging changes and innovations in ethics training and awareness, innovative practices in promoting a respectful workplace environment free of harassment, abuse or intimidation, and management of confidential information.

Geneva, 10 January 2022

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Ethics Officer

⁸ See IGDS No. 551, paras 18 and 19.

⁹ ILO, [Terms of Reference for the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee of the International Labour Office](#), 2021, para. 5; and IGDS No. 76, para. 15.

¹⁰ IGDS No. 551, para. 22.