

# ► Annual report of the Ethics Officer (2021)

## ► 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 provides updates on the activities undertaken in 2021 in fulfilment of this mission, as well as related institutional developments.
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 documents<sup>1</sup>.
3. The Director-General has entrusted the ethics function, which is an integral part of the ILO's accountability framework<sup>2</sup>, and the specific roles and responsibilities associated with that function, to the Ethics Officer<sup>3</sup>. 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.
4. Since the establishment of the ILO's ethics function in 2006, the Ethics Officer has assumed the responsibilities related to the function on a part-time basis. The Programme and Budget proposals for 2022–23 submitted by the Director-General to, and subsequently adopted by, the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (2021) provide for the establishment of a dedicated full-time position of Ethics Officer, as recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit<sup>4</sup>. This is a significant development

### 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](http://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.

4 See [ILO, Programme and Budget for the Biennium 2022–23](#), 2021, para. 53.

that will support the further strengthening of the ethics function and increased reliance on ethical standards of conduct as a means for achieving and

maintaining accountability and integrity, as well as a respectful and productive work environment.

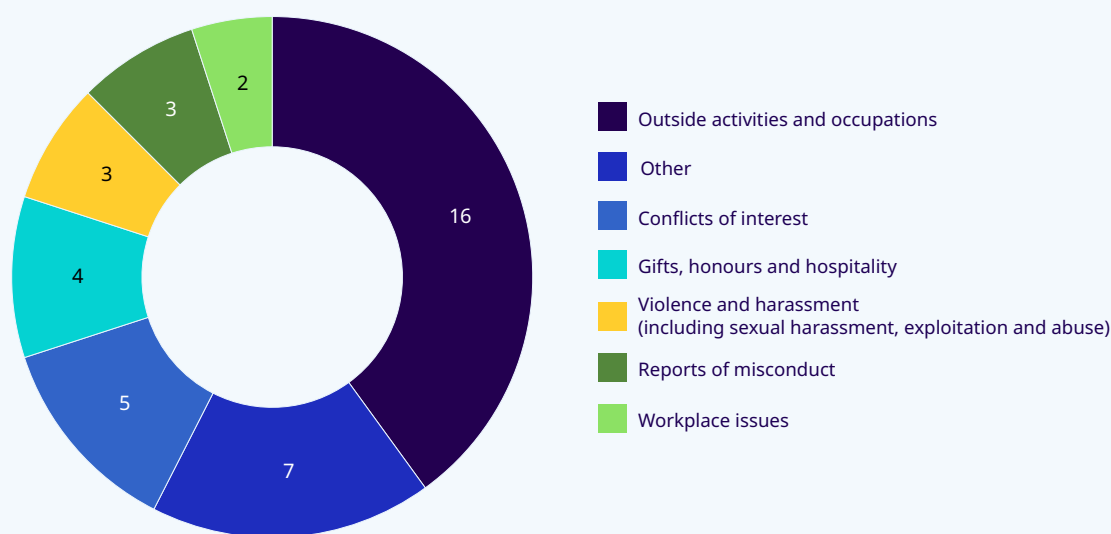
## ► Ethics advice

5. 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.
6. The number of staff members seeking and receiving ethics advice during 2021 was 40, compared with 48 in 2020. Of the 40 colleagues who consulted the Ethics Officer in 2021, half were from headquarters, where 34 per cent of ILO staff worked as at 31 December 2020, and the other half were from field offices, where 66 per cent of staff worked<sup>5</sup>. Nine requests for advice were made by management.
7. During 2021, 16 requests for ethics advice concerned issues related to outside activities and occupations. Advice related to conflicts of interest, and gifts, honours and hospitality was sought in five and four cases, respectively. Fewer colleagues inquired about other issues, as shown in figures 1–5 below. Three 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).

## ► Awareness-raising and training

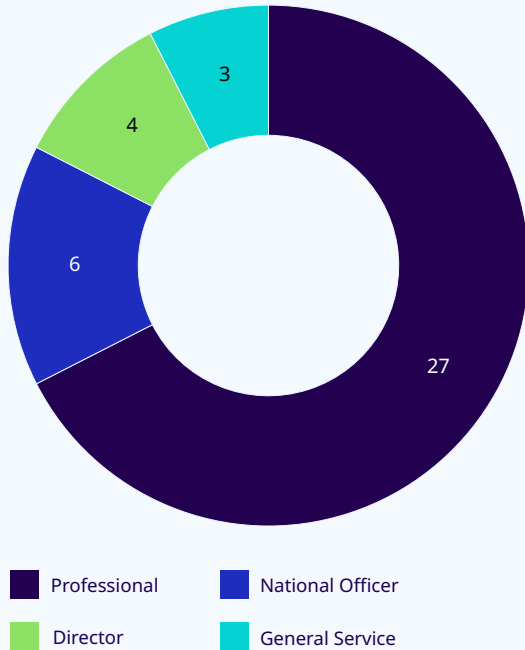
8. The Ethics Officer delivers ethics briefings and training sessions, both at headquarters and for external offices, to raise awareness and understanding of ethical standards of conduct, the implications for managers and staff, and the role and responsibilities of the Ethics Officer. In this regard,

► Figure 1. Number of requests for ethics advice, by subject area, 2021

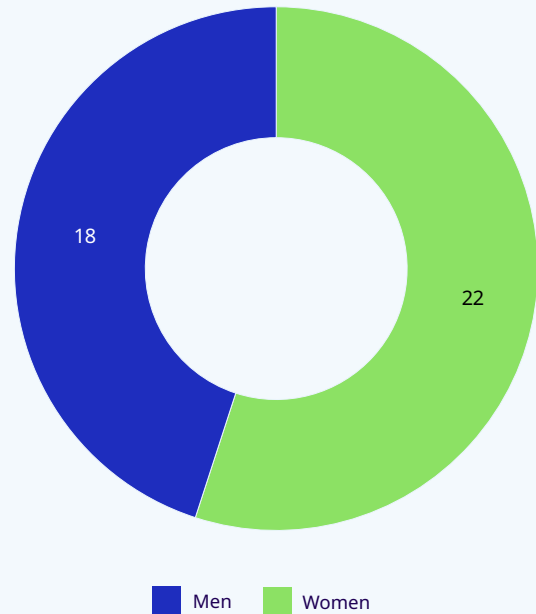


<sup>5</sup> As at 31 December 2020, the ILO had 3,381 staff members, of which 1,162 were based at headquarters and 2,219 in field offices. See [GB.341/PFA/INF/5](#).

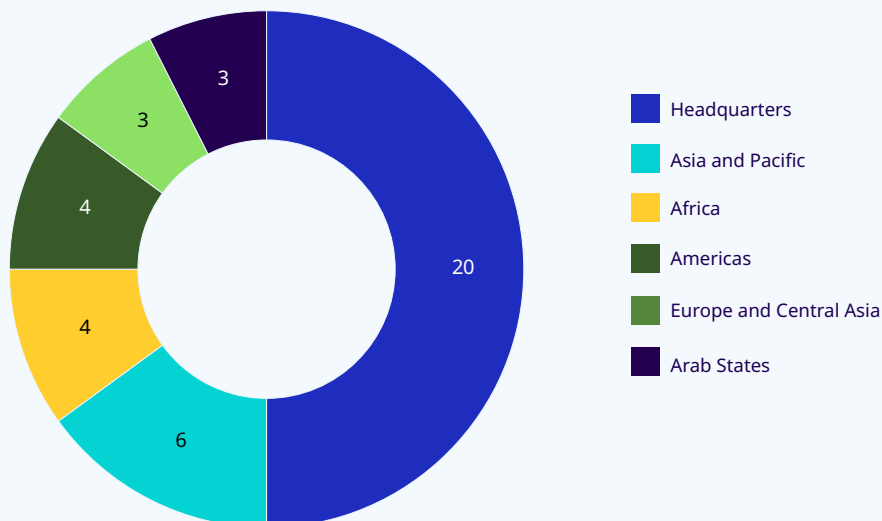
► **Figure 2. Number of requests for ethics advice, by staff category, 2021**



► **Figure 3. Number of requests for ethics advice, by sex, 2021**



► **Figure 4. Number of requests for ethics advice, by region, 2021**

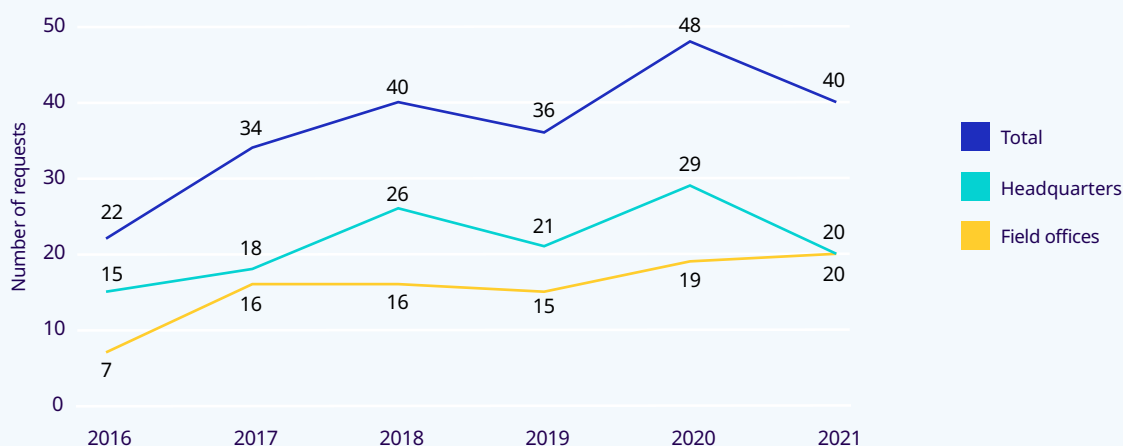


the Ethics Officer continued to collaborate with the Human Resources Development Department (HRD), the IAO and the Office of the Legal Adviser.

9. The Ethics Officer accompanied and supported an initiative by the ILO Decent Work Team and the Country Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia to develop an ethics booklet as a resource for raising

awareness of ILO standards of conduct and their importance for ethical decision-making. The booklet was developed through a participatory process involving managers and staff. It aims to encourage conversations, engagement and dialogue on ethics, respect and integrity.

► Figure 5. Number of requests for ethics advice, 2016–2021



## ► Policy development

10. A review was completed of the ILO's whistleblower policy, led by the Ethics Officer, with a view to its further strengthening, resulting in the issuance by the Director-General of version 2 of Office Directive, *Reporting Misconduct and Protection from Retaliation*, IGDS No. 551, on 5 March 2021. Features of the revised policy include the possibility for staff to request a review of their retaliation complaint by an external expert in cases where the Ethics Officer concludes that there is no prima facie case; the possibility for the Ethics Officer to make recommendations to the Director-General in cases where no prima facie case is found but a managerial problem appears to exist; formal extension of protection from retaliation to staff that have lodged a complaint of harassment; the responsibility of the

Ethics Officer, following investigation by the IAO of prima facie cases, to make a determination on whether retaliation occurred; and the possibility to appeal final decisions on retaliation cases taken by the Director-General to the Joint Advisory Appeals Board and the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO.

11. In July 2021, the Ethics Officer and the Chief Internal Auditor jointly issued guidance concerning ethical conduct in connection with the election of the Director-General, which will take place in March 2022. Under the applicable rules and standards, staff members are required to abstain from any action that amounts to, or may be perceived as, supporting or disapproving any nominated or potential candidate.

## ► Protection from retaliation

12. 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 reports<sup>6</sup>. Instances of harassment, including sexual harassment, are reported to HRD.

13. 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. 551, which sets out the channels for reporting misconduct and the available protection against retaliation for having done so.

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

14. IGDS No. 551 entrusts the Ethics Officer with responsibility for receiving complaints from staff members concerning retaliation. 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.

15. One complaint concerning retaliation was received by the Ethics Officer in 2021. After undertaking a preliminary review of the case, the Ethics Officer concluded that there was no prima facie case of retaliation.

## ► Relations with the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee

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16. The Ethics Officer has unrestricted and confidential access to the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee (IOAC) of the International Labour Office, and vice versa<sup>7</sup>. The Ethics Officer holds regular exchanges with the IOAC.

17. 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 IOAC<sup>8</sup>.

## ► The Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

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18. 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.

19. The Ethics Officer attended the 2021 annual meeting of ENMO, hosted virtually by the European Central Bank from 7 to 8 July 2021. The discussions at the meeting focused on two thematic areas, namely ethical challenges and risks related to increased reliance on teleworking and the "new normal", as well as strategies for nurturing the internal "speak-up culture" and for promoting and measuring the workplace climate.

Geneva, 10 January 2022

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Ethics Officer

<sup>7</sup> ILO, [Terms of Reference for the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee of the International Labour Office](#), 2021, para. 5; and IGDS No. 76, para. 15.

<sup>8</sup> IGDS No. 551, para. 22.