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Annual report of the Ethics Office for 2023

Executive summary

This annual report is submitted to the Executive Board for its 2024 annual session, having been provided directly to the Executive Director pursuant to paragraph 6.2 of Executive Director's circular 2008/002, entitled "Establishment of Ethics Office in WFP".

The report provides an overview of the activities and achievements of the Ethics Office during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023. It is organized according to the office's mandated areas of work, as follows:

- A. Advice and guidance;
- B. Annual conflicts of interest and financial disclosure programme;
- C. Protection against retaliation – whistleblower protection policy;
- D. Standard setting and policy advocacy; and
- E. Training, outreach and awareness raising.

In addition, the report covers the activities of the Ethics Office on the prevention of and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse because the office has been WFP's organizational focal point for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse since mid-2018. The report also contains a section on United Nations coherence and ends with observations related to the work of the Ethics Office and to ethics within WFP.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the annual report of the Ethics Office for 2023 (WFP/EB.A/2024/4-B).

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

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I. Introduction

1. This report covers the work of the Ethics Office for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023, providing analysis, including information regarding some of the activities planned for 2024, where relevant.
2. Pursuant to Executive Director's circular 2008/002,¹ the Ethics Office is required to provide an annual report on its work to the Executive Director for submission to the Executive Board. The office is also required to submit a draft annual report to the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN) for the panel's review.²
3. The Ethics Office is an independent office whose director is accountable and reports to the WFP Executive Director. The office also delivers regular briefings to the Board and to the Independent Advisory Oversight Committee. All activities of the office are based on the principles of confidentiality and independence.

II. Background

4. The Ethics Office was established in January 2008 by Executive Director's circular 2008/002, "Establishment of Ethics Office in WFP", in alignment with the Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2007/11.³
5. The office nurtures a culture of ethics and accountability and is mandated to ensure that all WFP employees⁴ perform their functions in accordance with the highest standards of conduct, in accordance with WFP's values, the standards and principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations, the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service,⁵ the WFP Code of Conduct⁶ and other relevant policies and practices.
6. The Ethics Office strategy for 2021–2022 and its extension until 2023 were endorsed by the Executive Director. A new strategy will be put in place for 2024–2026.
7. A separate strategy on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) for 2021–2023 was also issued to identify the strategic and technical actions to be taken by the Ethics Office in that area. That strategy has been extended for six months so that the new PSEA strategy for 2024–2026 can take into consideration the findings from a strategic evaluation on PSEA, which were finalized at the beginning of 2024.

III. Activities of the Ethics Office

8. The building and maintenance of an organizational culture of ethics and integrity requires constant cultivation and advocacy. During 2023 the Ethics Office continued to raise awareness and advise WFP and its employees on the prevention, mitigation and management of ethical and reputational risks, which is essential to the effective performance of WFP programmes and operations.

¹ Executive Director's circular ED2008/002, *Establishment of Ethics Office*.

² Secretary-General's Bulletin. 2007. *United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes* (ST/SGB/2007/11).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ As of 31 December 2023, the Ethics Office was serving 23,955 employees in more than 120 countries and territories.

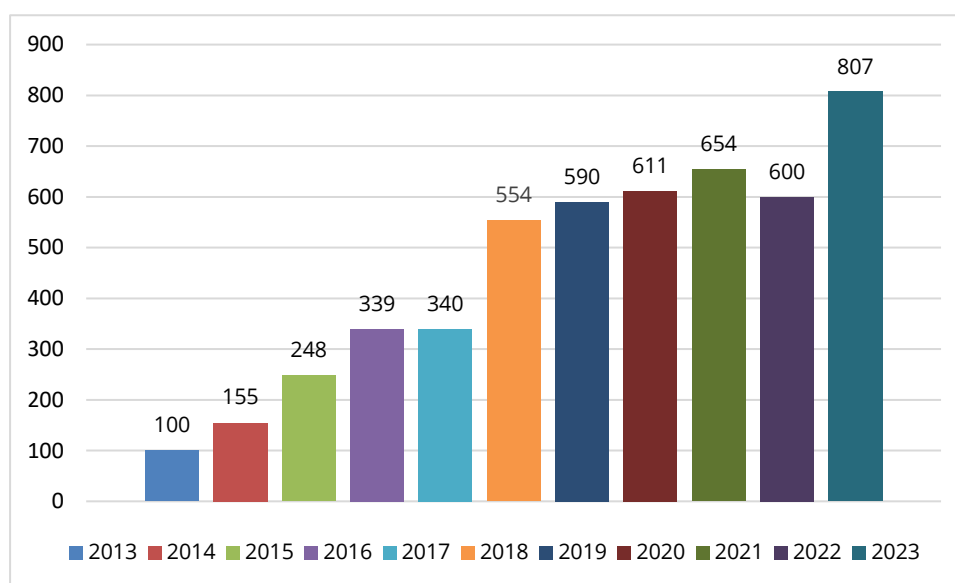
⁵ International Civil Service Commission. 2013. *Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service*.

⁶ Executive Director's circular OED2022/014, *WFP Code of Conduct*.

A. Advice and guidance

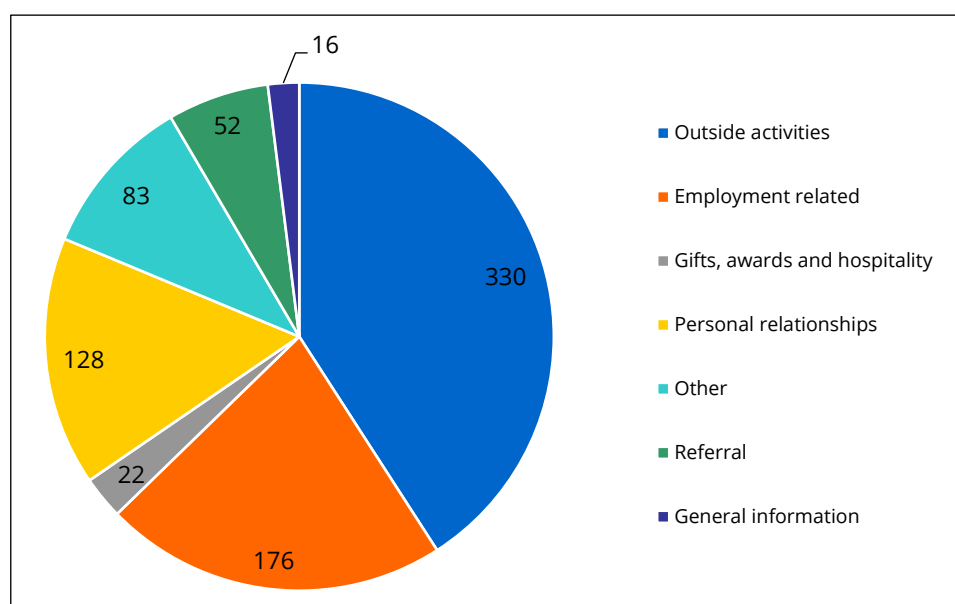
9. Confidential advice and guidance is one of the key areas of the office's mandate as it directly supports WFP employees at all levels in navigating ethical risks and making informed decisions.
10. The advisories provided by the Ethics Office support the management of potential conflicts of interest and adherence to applicable rules and standards of conduct while being an important means through which the office develops trust.
11. In 2023, the Ethics Office registered a total of 807 requests for advice and guidance (figure 1). This represents a 34.5 percent increase from the total number of advisories registered in 2022.

Figure 1: Advisories issued, 2013–2023*



* Excluding advisories related to the annual disclosure programme and PSEA.

12. Despite this increase, advice continued to be provided in an efficient and timely manner, with the majority of advisories requested being completed within 48 hours or, where more information was required, five days. The voluntary satisfaction surveys, in use since October 2022, showed that 96 percent of respondents were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with both the advisory received and its timeliness.
13. The increase in requests is likely due to a combination of the positive results of the office's increasingly proactive engagement with country offices, which started in 2022, and the 2023 increase in in-person missions to regional bureaux and country offices. In-person training sessions were particularly effective in raising awareness about WFP's ethical framework and encouraging a more thorough disclosure of conflicts of interest, as indicated by the increases in the contacts with, and requests for advice from, the Ethics Office following such sessions and by feedback from post-training surveys (please see section E below).

Figure 2: Requests for ethics advice by category, 2023*

* Excluding advisories related to the annual disclosure programme and PSEA.

14. Figure 2 summarizes requests for advice by category. In 2023, the Ethics Office made minor revisions to the categories used to record its advisories in order to track trends more precisely. The category “Family relationships” was expanded and renamed as “Personal relationships” so as to cover disclosures related to acquaintances and friends that may constitute a personal conflict of interest. The category “Allegations of wrongdoing” was replaced by the category “Referral” because the office refers such allegations to the appropriate channels and mechanisms available in WFP. A new category of “General information” was created to capture requests for information on ethics-related matters in policies, guidelines and the internal website.
15. As in previous years, the highest number of requests for advice, accounting for 41 percent of the total, concerned outside activities, with 330 requests (up from 228 in 2022), mostly related to writing, speaking or teaching engagements. The Ethics Office appreciates the benefits for employees of maintaining contacts and involvement with professional, academic or research networks through such engagements, and the advisories it provided concerned the activity’s compatibility with WFP’s interests, and the steps taken to mitigate any actual, potential or perceived conflict with the requestor’s function or commitment to impartiality, independence and loyalty to WFP.
16. In September 2023, the office introduced a revised and digitized version of the form through which employees request advice on outside activities, thus contributing to a more efficient process and facilitating enhanced data analysis. Work continued on a revised Executive Director’s circular clarifying WFP’s rules and procedures regarding outside activities, including through consultation with other United Nations entities, and WFP is leading an EPUN working group on outside activities.
17. “Employment-related” matters were the second most frequent category of requests for advice, with 176, down from 190 in 2022. The majority of those requests were from the Human Resources Division (HRM) regarding the assessment of potential conflicts of interest identified through the pre-appointment conflict of interest disclosure forms submitted by candidates during the recruitment process. The robust and consistent review of disclosure forms enables WFP to detect potential conflicts of interest at an early stage of the process and to offer potential mitigation options prior to appointment. In 2023 the Ethics Office

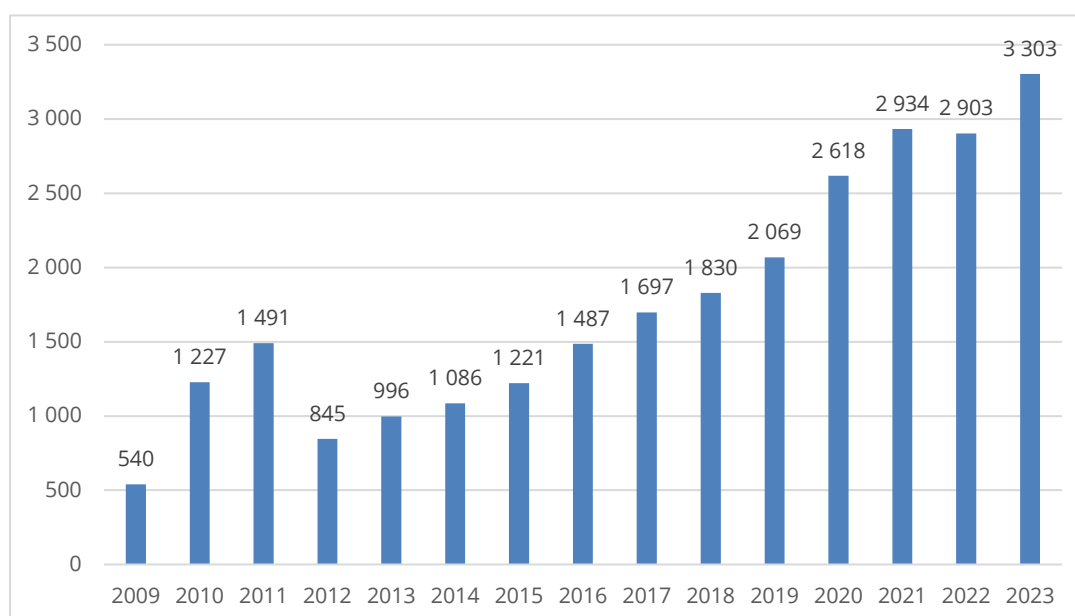
delivered several briefings to HRM aimed at strengthening HRM's capacity to use the form and assess potential conflicts of interest; this collaboration is continuing in 2024.

18. Requests for advice related to the "Personal relationships" category increased notably in 2023, reaching 128 compared with 27 in the former "Family relationships" category in 2022. The increase is due to the inclusion of requests related to acquaintances, friends and other individuals who are not family members.
19. In addition to the 22 requests received in 2023 for advice regarding gifts, favours, remuneration, honours, awards or hospitality, or disclosure procedures, 150 disclosures were made through the electronic gift register,⁷ down from 214 in 2022. Disclosures made through the register were reviewed and advice was provided accordingly, but these disclosures have not been counted as requests for advice. Good coordination with the Management Services Division facilitated the streamlining of the physical handling and disposal of gifts, which were auctioned by WFP at the end of 2023.

B. Annual conflicts of interest and financial disclosure programme

20. The Ethics Office administers the annual disclosure programme⁸ (ADP), which is a preventive safeguard and risk management tool that helps WFP to meet its commitment to transparency and build public confidence. The ADP assists in identifying and mitigating or eliminating personal conflicts of interest so as to serve the best interest of WFP. It is not a tool for uncovering fraud or unjust personal enrichment.

Figure 3: Employees required to participate in the disclosure programme, 2009–2023



21. The fifteenth ADP exercise was launched on 19 April 2023. Of 23,853 WFP employees,⁹ 3,303 (13.8 percent) were eligible and were required to participate in the exercise (figure 3). As 37 of those eligible employees were exempted for various reasons, including separation, retirement or extended leave, 3,266 employees completed the ADP.

⁷ Executive Director's circular OED2017/002, *Disclosure of Gifts*.

⁸ Secretary-General's Bulletin. 2007. *United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes* (ST/SGB/2007/11). Executive Director's circular OED2020/007, *Conflicts of Interest and the Annual Conflicts of Interest and Financial Disclosure Programme*.

⁹ Total number of employees as of 31 March 2023.

22. As part of the fruitful collaboration between the Ethics Office and the Staff Relations Branch (HRMSR) on following up with eligible employees who did not submit the required questionnaire, in August 2023, 41 cases of non-compliance were referred to HRMSR for further action and, by 31 December 2023, only one employee was still non-compliant and administrative actions were under way. As a result, by the end of the year the completion rate was 99.9 percent compared with 99 in 2022.
23. In 2023, additional efforts were undertaken to improve the timeliness of participants' responses, such as the use of more effective materials and messages to participants, including personalized reminders, a video message for senior managers prepared in collaboration with the Workplace Culture Department, and an additional deadline extension for those assigned to duty stations under corporate emergencies.
24. The Ethics Office outsources the review of the questionnaires to an external company, which identified 166 questionnaires (5 percent of respondents) that required further review by the Ethics Office regarding potential conflicts of interest. Of those, 56 related to outside activities and 110 to other matters, including gifts, personal or family relationships and financial investments. Having reviewed the questionnaires, the office provided 111 advisories: 33 related to outside activities and 78 to other matters. Some questionnaires did not require advice from the Ethics Office because they presented no material change from past disclosures or because no conflicts of interest were found after the office received additional clarification.

C. Protection against retaliation: whistleblower protection policy

25. The primary objective of the whistleblower protection policy is to encourage employees to report allegations of wrongdoing and misconduct without fear of retaliation. The whistleblower protection policy¹⁰ applies to all WFP employees (current and former) who allege that they have been subjected to or threatened with retaliation as a consequence of reporting alleged wrongdoing or misconduct or cooperating with a duly authorized audit, inspection, investigation, proactive integrity review or evaluation.
26. The Ethics Office is responsible for conducting a preliminary review of each request for protection against retaliation to determine whether there is a prima facie case of retaliation and, if there is, referring the case to the Office of Inspections and Investigations (OIGI) for investigation. Before, during and after the preliminary review the Ethics Office may recommend interim protective measures to protect the affected employee. If retaliation is substantiated the Executive Director, after taking into account any recommendations made by the Ethics Office, and in consultation with the person affected by retaliation, will take appropriate redress measures.
27. After it is determined that there is no prima facie case of retaliation, the affected person may request the Executive Director to refer the office's decision for a secondary review. In July 2023, the Executive Director formalized the decision that the chair of EPUN be the designated body for such secondary review, as is already the case for other EPUN members.
28. In 2023 the Ethics Office received 30 enquiries related to protection against retaliation. Of those, 13 resulted in requests for protection against retaliation under the whistleblower protection policy. Eight of the 13 were not prima facie cases of retaliation and were closed; three were received at the end of 2023 and were still under review at the time of writing; and two were determined to be prima facie cases of retaliation and were referred to OIGI for investigation. The Ethics Office recommended protective measures for the affected person in one of those cases.

¹⁰ Executive Director's circular OED2020/022, [Protection against Retaliation Policy \(or Whistleblower Protection Policy\)](#).

29. The other 17 matters were requests for advice and guidance that related to concerns about workplace reprisal, allegations of abusive conduct or disagreement regarding work performance and hence did not involve retaliation as defined under the whistleblower protection policy. In those instances, the complainant was provided with information on the relevant internal avenues for further support, including channels for reporting allegations of misconduct or other recourse mechanisms, or – with the complainant’s consent – the Ethics Office referred the matter directly to appropriate internal avenues.
30. All seven requests for protection against retaliation still open at the end of 2022 were closed in 2023: three were closed because no prima facie case of retaliation was established; one because the complainant did not wish to proceed further; and one because the complainant failed to respond to the Ethics Office’s requests for information. Two prima facie cases of retaliation referred to OIGI for investigation were also closed as the investigations did not yield sufficient evidence to substantiate retaliation.
31. The average time taken by the Ethics Office to conduct a preliminary review was 15.5 working days from the receipt of all the information requested. This is consistent with the 45-day timeline for the completion of a preliminary review as set out in the WFP circular.
32. The Ethics Office considers the number of requests received and the percentage of those requests that fall under the policy to be lower than might be expected. Although a training module on this topic is a standard part of the outreach conducted by the office, a key area of focus in the coming year will be continued collaboration with HRMSR, OIGI and the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services aimed at facilitating employees’ understanding of the policy and increasing their trust in its effectiveness.

D. Standard setting and policy advocacy

33. Providing advocacy and guidance on the incorporation of ethical standards into WFP policies, practices and operations is another way in which the Ethics Office supports WFP in integrating ethical considerations throughout the organization, thereby nurturing an ethical culture that enables WFP to function in an open, transparent and fair manner.
34. In 2023, the Ethics Office continued to support policy development through active membership in the Oversight and Policy Committee and by providing input for or responding to the findings of various policy and process reviews. Examples include the proactive integrity review on personal conflict of interest with vendors and partners, the conflict sensitivity mainstreaming strategy, the pilot course on foundation data literacy, the draft enterprise risk management policy and the draft Executive Director’s circular on the WFP framework on talent pools. The Ethics Office was consulted on the Joint Inspection Unit’s review of the internal pre-tribunal-stage appeal mechanisms available to staff members in United Nations system organizations, and the review of the use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities in the United Nations system organizations. The office also continued to coordinate with HRM and provide expertise and recommendations for the ongoing review of the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service.
35. In 2023, the Ethics Office fostered collaboration with the various actors in the internal justice system – including HRMSR, the Legal Office, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services and OIGI – and the Workplace Culture Department. This collaboration continued to be reinforced following the arrival of the new Director of the Ethics Office in June 2023.
36. Collaboration and interaction with the risk management and communication divisions continued to increase, including on matters of organizational conflicts of interest and reputational risk.

37. Building on work initiated in 2022 and following the Oversight and Policy Committee's endorsement of some of the recommendations presented at its 134th session in 2023, the Ethics Office drafted guidance for risk officers on assisting management in identifying organizational conflicts of interest. Work will continue in 2024, jointly with the Risk Management Division and taking into consideration the results of an advisory note on the topic being finalized by the Office of Internal Audit.

E. Training, outreach and awareness raising

38. As WFP works in high-risk environments and has a diverse, dynamic and multicultural workforce spread across more than 120 countries and territories, its good reputation and effectiveness depend on all employees understanding and adhering to its ethical principles and expectations. Hence, training, outreach and awareness raising are critical components of the Ethics Office's mandate.
39. Following the shift in strategic approach to outreach and training that began in 2022, in 2023 the Ethics Office continued to apply a proactive, targeted and tailored approach to its outreach and training. Two key tools were developed to support this:
- An ethics risk map: A weighted risk model based on quantitative and qualitative variables that helps to identify the country offices and regional bureaux with the highest likelihood of ethical challenges and to prioritize outreach initiatives was developed in 2022 with the support of the Innovation and Knowledge Management Division. In 2023, the map was updated to take also into account the reassurance action plan.
 - A short anonymous survey was sent to all employees in country offices to collect information on areas of interest or concern. The information is used as a basis for planning outreach and training and ensuring that relevant topics are covered, in addition to those indicated by country directors.
40. Through that approach, and using those tools, the Ethics Office provided targeted field-oriented support to four regional bureaux and 17 country offices, the majority of which were considered to be at high ethical risk based on the ethics risk map. The training sessions focused on the WFP Code of Conduct, conflicts of interest, the whistleblower protection policy and the ethical use of social media, in addition to other topics requested or prioritized by country offices.
41. In-person sessions continued to be an essential means of expanding awareness of ethics and the Ethics Office's services and engaging directly with employees on their ethics-related concerns. In-person training was provided in six country offices,¹¹ including at one or more sub-offices in each country, and in two regional bureaux.¹²
42. Where it was not possible to conduct in-person missions, virtual training sessions were delivered in multiple languages, including in 11 country offices¹³ and two regional bureaux.¹⁴
43. In addition, the Ethics Office delivered training to other divisions and units, including HRM, the Inspector General and Oversight Office, the Procurement Branch and the Analysis and Early Warning Unit. Using a virtual format, the office also continued to deliver the ethics induction briefing for headquarters employees, which is considered compulsory for

¹¹ Burundi, Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya, Mozambique and Somalia.

¹² Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific.

¹³ Bangladesh, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Mauritania, Ukraine and the United Republic of Tanzania.

¹⁴ Southern Africa and Western Africa.

- employees who are new to headquarters, whether they are newly recruited to WFP or reassigned from other WFP offices.
44. To continue to improve training and measure its impact, anonymous feedback surveys were used to gather insight into the effectiveness of the delivery and content of the training sessions. Ninety-one percent of respondents indicated that they felt more knowledgeable about the topic concerned after the session, and 94 percent felt that the content was relevant to their jobs.
 45. The Ethics Office continually keeps track of upcoming national elections and, well in advance of an election, provides the relevant country office with a toolkit on political activities and the principles of neutrality and impartiality, to be shared with all employees. In 2023, the toolkits were provided to 23 country offices, and on several occasions the office concerned took up the Ethics Office's offer of further support on communicating with their teams ahead of elections.
 46. As a central component of efforts to nurture an organization-wide ethical culture, including by continuously reminding employees of key aspects of the WFP Code of Conduct, during the year the Ethics Office also developed and launched a variety of outreach tools and campaigns aimed at reaching more WFP employees. Outreach materials included intranet articles, videos, all-staff emails, Yammer posts and electronic posters.
 47. The new mandatory e-learning course on ethics at WFP was launched in November 2023 in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish and was accompanied by a robust communication campaign. The course reflects WFP's updated policies and contains highly interactive activities featuring ethical dilemmas covering conflicts of interest involving personal relationships, favouritism in procurement, political activities and whistleblower protection. The course continues to be part of employees' personal performance and competency enhancement assessments and probationary processes and must now be re-taken every three years as a refresher. As of 31 December 2023, 84 percent of WFP employees had completed the course, which is a good completion rate considering that it was launched in November.
 48. The Ethics Office worked closely with the communications team in the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa to develop an animated video on the ethical use of social media, reminding WFP employees of their ethical responsibilities when using social media in their personal capacity. The video, which includes subtitles in all the official languages of WFP, was launched in all regional bureaux with the support of regional directors, and in headquarters and all global offices.
 49. Training on ethical leadership encourages management to think about and promote positive and harmonious workplace behaviour. The Ethics Office led a session entitled "Tone at the top: leading ethically" as part of the annual induction programme for country directors and deputy country directors organized by HRM. The session used real-life case studies to focus on how to handle complex ethical dilemmas in country office settings and outlined the role of the Ethics Office in providing country directors and deputy country directors with guidance on making ethically informed choices. Given the importance of leaders acting as role models for ethical behaviour, in 2024 the office plans to continue providing the annual induction and ethics briefs to employees appointed as country directors for the first time.
 50. The Ethics Office conducted its annual end-of-year awareness campaign on policies and practices related to the handling of gifts, providing guidance to prevent the occurrence of conflicts of interest when employees may be offered or accept gifts. The campaign reminded employees that they are required to decline any gift promptly and reminded partners about that obligation, encouraging them not to offer gifts to WFP or its employees. The campaign included sample communications for country and division directors to share with local partners; an all-staff email sent by the Director of the Ethics Office; and thousands of emails

sent jointly by the Ethics Office and the Supply Chain Operations Division to business partners worldwide and to local partners at headquarters. In 2023, the office piloted a new localized awareness campaign targeting country offices in territories where Diwali is a national holiday. The campaign was adapted to local contexts and was well-received by country directors. The Ethics Office plans to identify other festive or local occasions or seasonal events and adapt the material for relevant country offices.

IV. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

51. As the organizational focal point for PSEA, the Ethics Office continued to support safe programming at WFP by addressing the prevention of and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) holistically through a victim/survivor-centred approach and by taking steps to ensure a sustainable long-term approach to PSEA. Throughout 2023, this work has included addressing the factors contributing to SEA, cultivating safer environments for the people whom WFP assists and focusing on activity-based interventions that mitigate SEA risks proactively.
52. Policy and strategy form the overarching framework for work on PSEA. In May 2023, the Ethics Office launched an updated Executive Director's circular on PSEA.¹⁵ The issuance of the circular was accompanied by a WFP-wide multilingual-awareness raising campaign with supporting documents, and a webinar series conducted for all regional bureaux and country offices.
53. Under the new circular, WFP continues to have an obligation to take action and all reasonable measures against SEA as part of a broader duty of care to communities receiving assistance from WFP and to promote the safety of those communities and ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect. The circular formalized WFP's adoption of the shift in the United Nations system from a policy of zero tolerance for SEA to one of zero tolerance for inaction on all forms of SEA. This means that WFP continues to take a zero tolerance approach to SEA and, if an allegation of SEA comes to the attention of the organization, it should be addressed as promptly, justly and effectively as possible.
54. The number of PSEA-related advisories increased in 2023, with more than 400 enquiries received. These included requests for capacity-building support, training tools and resources; guidance on SEA incidents and victim assistance; and support for the drafting and review of policy-related documents such as standard operating procedures and country office PSEA workplans.
55. The prevention of SEA continues to be at the centre of the Ethics Office's strategy, a key component of which is a focus on capacity and knowledge building for WFP employees and cooperating partners through ongoing and project-based initiatives in all regions. A key initiative in this area is the "PSEA at the Frontline" project.
56. The project is a joint initiative by WFP and the International Office for Migration, in partnership with Translators Without Borders, aimed at providing frontline workers, such as drivers, security guards, enumerators, translators, aid distributors, financial service providers and other contractors, with critical knowledge on PSEA in an accessible and easy-to-understand way. Under the tagline "Together we say no", the campaign materials include illustrated print, audio and multimedia resources in 22 languages.
57. After the global launch of phase I of the PSEA at the Frontline project in October 2022, in 2023 the Ethics Office conducted country-level roll-outs in Kenya and South Sudan and additional events were organized locally by other country offices during the "16 days of activism against gender-based violence" campaign, including Bangladesh, Ecuador, Lebanon

¹⁵ Executive Director's circular, OED2023/011, [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).

- and Rwanda. Considering the project's success, the Ethics Office resumed its partnership with the International Office for Migration and started working on phase II of the project, which aims to develop multilingual, multimedia tools on PSEA focused on beneficiaries and communities.
58. The Ethics Office also continued to work on "SaferShare", a project on developing a prototype tool to support local communities in finding local assistance services and PSEA focal points in managing and referring SEA allegations. In partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the project will be piloted in 2024 in the country offices for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and South Sudan.
 59. In close collaboration with the Risk Management Division, the Ethics Office updated and rolled out a mandatory e-learning course entitled "Prevention of fraud, corruption and sexual exploitation and abuse at WFP", which has to be completed by all employees within their first months of working with WFP and repeated every three years. The performance review process for all employees includes a mechanism that automatically reflects the status of the completion of mandatory online courses, including on PSEA, which supervisors can monitor and take into consideration during performance reviews.
 60. Throughout the year, the Ethics Office continued to strengthen the coordination and outreach of PSEA initiatives through active engagement with a network of more than 500 PSEA focal points located in every country office and regional bureau and provided prompt support through awareness-raising and onboarding sessions for new focal points, as well as regular interaction and responses to their queries.
 61. In 2023, the office updated the online training course for PSEA focal points and launched it in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. The course now features more real-life scenarios, a simplified explanation of the role of focal points, and a practical and comprehensive toolkit with easy-to-use outreach materials.
 62. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the organizational response to SEA. Leaders and managers at all levels must show a clear commitment to PSEA and are responsible for creating an inclusive and respectful environment that prevents SEA and embedding a culture of zero tolerance for inaction on SEA. To equip senior leaders, the Ethics Office launched a new interactive and scenario-based training course specifically for the senior management of country offices. The course was piloted in the Colombia and Yemen country offices and subsequently delivered to all country directors and deputies in the Asia and the Pacific region and to all country directors attending the biannual leadership meeting of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa. The training was also incorporated into the induction programme for country directors and deputy country directors organized by HRM. Additional regional roll-outs are planned for 2024.
 63. PSEA also requires a strong and unwavering focus on and commitment to confronting SEA and mainstreaming prevention throughout all operations and programmes. To this end, the Ethics Office supported regional bureaux and country offices in integrating PSEA into the design and drafting of the country strategic plans (CSPs) and annual country reports submitted to headquarters, highlighting the PSEA risks, challenges and achievements faced in the country concerned. Guidance documents on how to mainstream PSEA into CSPs and annual country reports were developed by the Ethics Office and integrated into the respective manuals. From March 2023, when the office was included in the CSP review process, it reviewed all 21 CSPs received. The integration of PSEA into these operational documents through the revision of CSPs and annual country reports will continue in 2024.
 64. Identifying, mitigating and managing SEA risks among cooperating partners and strengthening their capacity to ensure safe programming is another priority area for the Ethics Office. Through the office, WFP continued to play a lead role in the inter-agency

roll-out of the United Nations implementing partners PSEA capacity assessment.¹⁶ Since June 2023, all partner organizations registered in the United Nations Partner Portal are to complete a digitized version of the PSEA capacity assessment. This represents a key step towards the harmonization and coordination of United Nations entities in managing SEA risks with partners and protecting communities.

65. The inclusion of the PSEA capacity assessment as a digitized tool of the United Nations Partner Portal was launched during a side event in the humanitarian affairs segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council meeting in Geneva, along with an inter-agency training session held at the headquarters of the World Health Organization. The launch was accompanied by a series of inter-agency multilingual webinars, co-led by WFP and reaching more than 3,000 United Nations staff and non-governmental organization partners globally.
66. As a follow-up to the launch, and to support the implementation of the digitized tool in the field, the Ethics Office conducted a regional “train the trainers” event for the Western Africa region. The office will explore opportunities to conduct similar events with other regional bureaux in 2024.
67. As part of the roll-out of the PSEA capacity assessment, more than 500 WFP employees – PSEA focal points and cooperating partner management focal points – and approximately 700 staff from cooperating partners were briefed on the United Nations Implementing Partner Protocol, trained on the PSEA capacity assessment tool and provided with guidance on how to develop implementation plans for capacity strengthening on PSEA. In addition, 34 country offices have been onboarded, of which around 30 are at various stages of implementing the PSEA capacity assessment tool, with support from the Ethics Office. The office also conducted in-person missions to the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa and the country offices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lebanon and South Sudan. These in-person outreach and support missions are expected to continue in 2024, with a focus on high-risk areas.
68. Continued engagement with Member States, civil society and international and national experts at all levels is essential to ensuring that they all “speak with one voice” and act together. Of note is the inclusion of a PSEA session chaired by the Executive Director as part of the 2023 annual partner consultation. The session brought together key representatives from World Vision International, the Global Women Institute, Empowered Aid and the WARDA Association (a local non-governmental organization partner of WFP in Cameroon) and provided an opportunity to discuss the key drivers of positive culture change in partnerships.
69. Lastly, through its Executive Director, WFP continued to participate in the High-level Steering Group on SEA, enabling the Executive Director and other WFP leaders to be directly involved in the strengthening and alignment of the system-wide response to SEA. WFP also actively participated in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) technical advisory group on PSEA, the United Nations working group on SEA, the reference group of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and other ad hoc United Nations and inter-agency groups. In January 2024, the Executive Director took on the IASC Championship on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. The championship provides an excellent opportunity for WFP to lead and bolster collective efforts to create a humanitarian system free from sexual misconduct and strengthens the organization’s commitment to serving affected people. As

¹⁶ The United Nations implementing partner PSEA capacity assessment is a screening tool for partner organizations, developed by WFP, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in coordination with IASC and members of the United Nations working group on SEA. It is aimed at strengthening the accountability and capacity of cooperating partners and ensuring that they have sufficient mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to SEA.

such it will be a major focus for the Ethics Office in 2024. Preparation for this important role began in 2023 through consultations with previous IASC champions and a comprehensive handover with the 2023 champion, enabling WFP to finalize its championship priorities and ensuring a smooth transition.

V. United Nations coherence: the Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

70. Comprising the heads of the ethics offices of the United Nations Secretariat and separately administered organs and programmes, and chaired by the Director of the Ethics Office of the United Nations Secretariat, EPUN is mandated to establish a unified set of ethics standards and policies and to consult on complex ethics matters that have system-wide implications. The chair of EPUN is also mandated to review, in consultation with EPUN's members, any determination related to whistleblower protection made by other EPUN ethics offices that is being contested. The Director of the WFP Ethics Office continued to engage with EPUN, actively participating in its monthly meetings and providing expertise for consultations on issues of common interest.
71. As part of its role as a member of EPUN, the Ethics Office also reviewed a request for whistleblower protection received by another EPUN member owing to the recusal of the director of the ethics office of that EPUN member.
72. In 2023, the Ethics Office was actively engaged in an EPUN subgroup focused on strengthening collaboration on communication, outreach and training. The subgroup continued to be a forum in which the communication officers of EPUN members can discuss communication and outreach matters and share successes, challenges and best practices, while also promoting increased collaboration and harmonization and more efficient use of resources among EPUN members. In late 2023, WFP assumed the lead of another working group tasked with reviewing policy and practices related to outside activities.
73. The Ethics Office remained an active member of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO), which comprises ethics officers from United Nations system entities, affiliated international organizations and international financial institutions and was created to support the Secretary-General's promotion of system-wide collaboration on ethics-related issues within the United Nations system. ENMO serves as a forum for exchanging information, good practices for professional development and benchmarking. Ethics Office representatives attended the ENMO annual conference and engaged extensively with other ethics offices on topics of common interest, including conflicts of interest and outside activities, the use of behavioural science to increase ethical behaviour and the use of data analytics.

VI. Observations and conclusions

74. The year 2023 was a successful and productive one for the Ethics Office as it continued to deliver on a more field-focused approach while successfully responding to the substantial increase in requests for advice and strengthening its collaboration with other offices and functions. The launch of updated mandatory e-learning courses on ethics and PSEA, and the issuance of the updated Executive Director's circular on PSEA were major achievements during the year. Recruitment processes for two fixed-term staff members were launched in 2023 and will be completed in 2024 as part of the change in the staffing structure under the WFP people policy.
75. The Ethics Office confirms its organizational independence for this reporting period and that it was able to perform its activities free from interference. The office's budget for 2023 was sufficient to cover all key activities and staff, and to carry out its responsibilities during the reporting period. Recognizing budgetary pressures, the Ethics Office will actively seek cost

efficiencies and, where possible, secure alternative funding, as is already the case for some PSEA activities.

76. As implementation of the Ethics Office's strategy for 2021–2023 drew to a successful close, the office continued to look for innovative, impactful and cost-effective approaches that could be scaled up and increase the effect of the office's efforts and initiatives. Following the onboarding of the new director in June, the team reflected on ways to increase effectiveness and efficiency and on its priorities and objectives for the coming years and began to develop a new mid-term strategy for 2024–2026.
77. The increased focus on in-person outreach and interaction, and the emphasis on country offices, especially those at high ethical risk, reflect the strategic direction that the Ethics Office will continue to follow. The office will also expand the type and level of data analysis it carries out with a view to better understanding where challenges or gaps may lie and continuing to provide proactive outreach and support. The strategic evaluation on PSEA, finalized in early 2024, will further inform the design of the PSEA strategy and planning for the coming year.
78. WFP's current operational environment is one of unprecedented levels of need coupled with dwindling resources to meet those needs. Often combined with a highly charged political context, this puts enormous pressure on all employees, which may affect the impartiality and neutrality of WFP employees as international civil servants and can increase the risk of compromising internal controls or of engaging in behaviours and decision-making driven by expediency without due consideration of WFP's values and ethical standards. These pressures may also increase employee vulnerability, potentially having a chilling effect on the willingness of employees to speak up or report concerns. In this environment, constant recurrent preventive messaging; timely practical guidance and support for managers and colleagues in embodying ethical leadership; and effective collaboration within WFP and across the United Nations system will be the fundamental ways in which the Ethics Office can nurture a culture of ethics and inspire all WFP employees to be vigilant in preventing and mitigating ethical, reputational and SEA risks.

Acronyms

ADP	annual disclosure programme
CSP	country strategic plan
ENMO	Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations
EPUN	Ethics Panel of the United Nations
HRM	Human Resources Division
HRMSR	Staff Relations Branch
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
OIGI	Office of Inspections and Investigations
PSEA	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
SEA	sexual exploitation and abuse
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund