

WIPO Coordination Committee

Eighty-Sixth (57th Ordinary) Session
Geneva, July 7 to 15, 2026

ANNUAL REPORT BY THE ETHICS OFFICE

prepared by the Secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is submitted to the WIPO Coordination Committee, through the Director General, in accordance with paragraph 2 of Office Instruction No. 03/2025 entitled “Terms of Reference of the WIPO Ethics Office”. It describes the key activities undertaken by the Ethics Office in 2025.
2. Since its establishment in 2010, the Ethics Office has been assisting the Director General in ensuring that all WIPO personnel maintain the highest ethical standards, as required by WIPO’s regulatory framework, including the WIPO Convention, the WIPO Staff Regulations and Rules, the WIPO Code of Ethics, and the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service.
3. The objective of the Ethics Office is to promote an organizational culture of ethics based on the shared values of independence, loyalty, impartiality, integrity, accountability, and respect for human rights. In achieving this mission, the Ethics Office provides services to all WIPO personnel¹, in the following broad areas of responsibility:
 - (a) Confidential advice and guidance;
 - (b) Awareness-raising, training and outreach;

¹ This includes all staff and non-staff personnel of WIPO and the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) based in WIPO/UPOV headquarters and elsewhere.

- (c) Monitoring and standard-setting;
- (d) Review of retaliation complaints in accordance with WIPO's Policy to Protect against Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct and for Cooperating with Duly Authorized Audits or Investigations; and
- (e) Administration of WIPO's Policy on the Disclosure of Financial and Other Interests.

4. The Ethics Office is headed by the Chief Ethics Officer, appointed by the Director General, who is functionally and operationally independent from WIPO management.

5. Throughout 2025, the Ethics Office also included an external reviewer on a long-term agreement contract to review disclosure statements under the Policy on the Disclosure of Financial and Other Interests, an intern, and an agency worker providing management, administrative and technical support. In the fourth quarter of 2025, two individual consultants were engaged part-time on short-term contracts to format the revised content of the mandatory training on ethics and integrity for virtual delivery.

II. REPORT ON 2025 ACTIVITIES

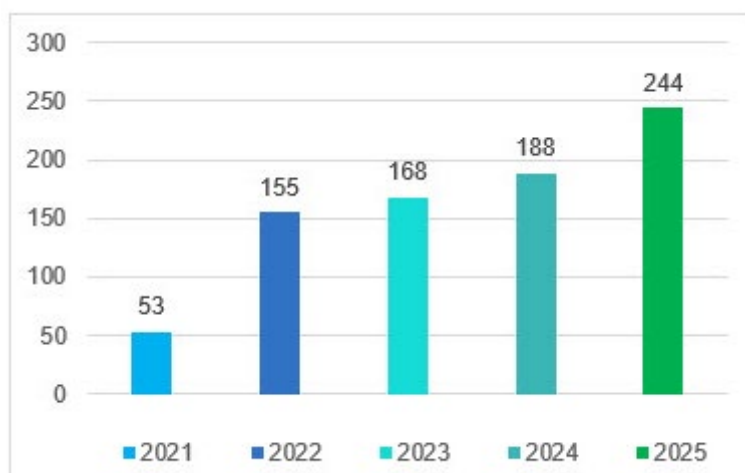
6. Throughout 2025, the Independent Advisory Oversight Committee (IAOC) received quarterly updates on the ethics function's performance, engaged in constructive discussions, and provided valuable guidance to the Ethics Office.

A. CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

7. In providing confidential guidance to WIPO personnel on situations raising ethical dilemmas, the Ethics Office plays a key role with a view to: (i) supporting the consistent interpretation of, and compliance with rules, standards of conduct as well as ethics-related policies; (ii) identifying, monitoring, and mitigating risks that could cause reputational damage to WIPO; and (iii) promoting a culture of integrity and self-responsibility throughout the Organization.

8. **Figure 1** provides an overview of the number of complaints received and addressed by the Ethics Office spanning from 2021 to 2025.

Figure 1. Comparison of complaints per reporting year, 2021 to 2025



9. In 2025, the Ethics Office responded to 244 individual requests² through in-person meetings, virtual consultations, and written advice. Compared to 188 requests received and addressed in 2024 (see Figure 1), this represents a continued upward trend, reflecting sustained trust in the Ethics Office as a reliable source of ethical guidance and a confidential forum for practical support.

10. Requests for ethics advice in 2025 covered various categories (see Figure 2).³ As in previous years, the majority concerned participation in outside activities (103 or approximately 42 per cent) such as external studies, teaching assignments, membership on executive or advisory boards, remunerated and unremunerated occupations, speaking engagements and publishing activities. Just over one-third of these requests (37) were referred by the Human Resources Management Department (HRMD), whose Director holds delegated authority to authorize such activities. The other requests (66) were received directly from members of personnel, who were seeking clarification prior to submitting their request for authorization to the Director of HRMD.

11. Other major categories of requests included workplace conflicts (45 or 18 per cent), and miscellaneous ethical issues (36 or 15 per cent). This last category encompasses adherence to ethical standards in various contexts such as information confidentiality, award decisions, or organizational restructuring.

12. The Ethics Office also recorded requests in the following categories: gifts, honors, favors and hospitality⁴ (17, or 7 per cent), other conflicts of interest⁵ (14, or 6 per cent), disclosure of financial and other interests (16, or 7 per cent), fraud and/or corruption (6, or 2 per cent), and retaliation and reprisals (7, or 3 per cent).⁶

² The Ethics Office counts as one request any request for confidential advice submitted by one or more personnel members concerning the same situation. A subsequent request involving new facts related to the same underlying situation is counted as a separate request.

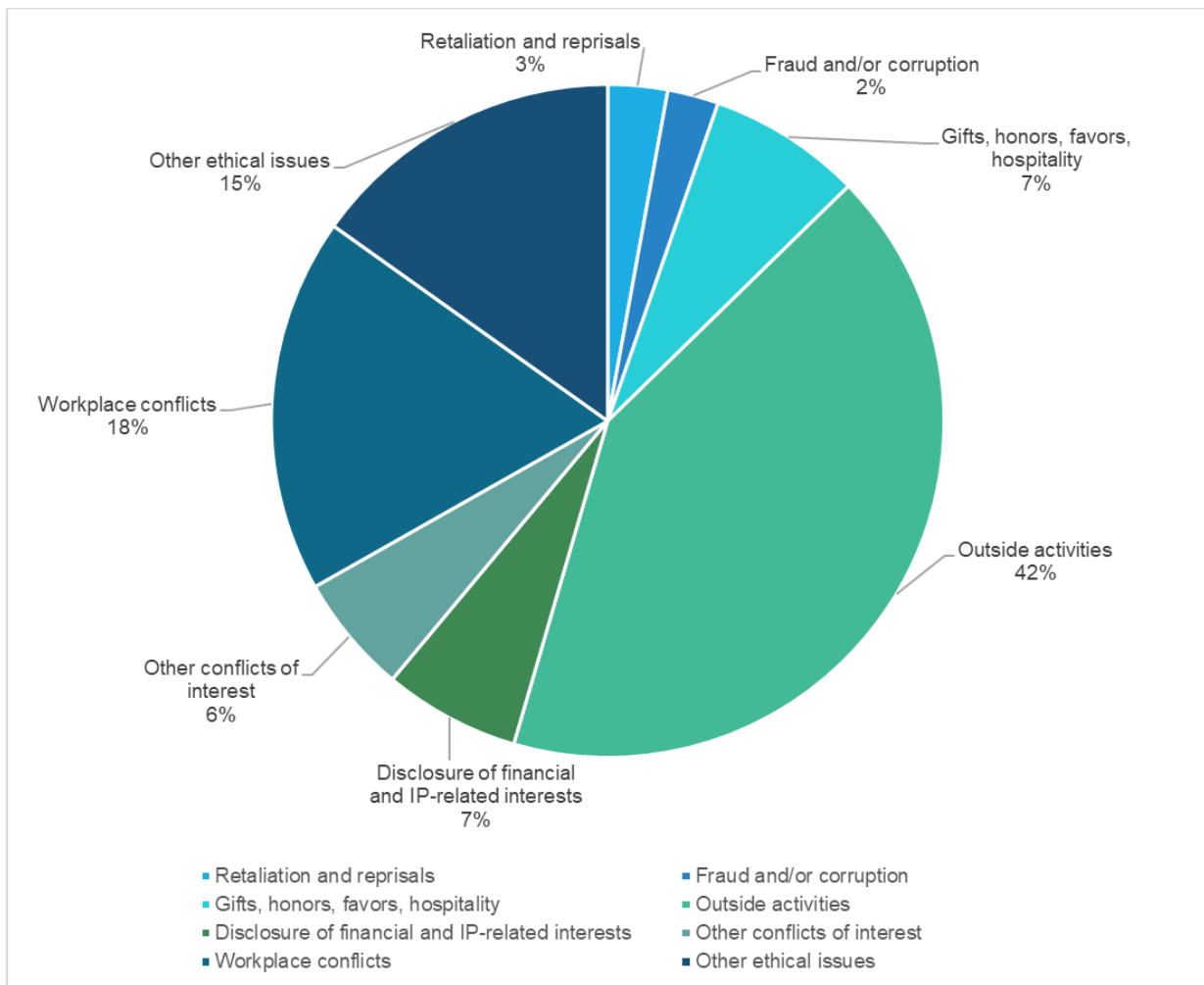
³ Previously, the ethics advisory categories were as follows: “outside activities”, “honors and gifts”, “standards of conduct”, “retaliation”, “financial disclosure/declaration of interests”, “political activity”, “family and close relationships”, “other conflicts of interest” and “other ethics advice”. In agreement with the IAOC, these categories have been reviewed and redefined as follows: “outside activities” (which includes political activities), “gifts, honors, favors and hospitality”, “fraud and corruption”, “retaliation and reprisals”, “disclosure of financial and IP-related interests”, “other conflicts of interest”, “workplace conflicts”, and “other ethical issues”. These new categories better reflect the various areas in which the Ethics Office is consulted in line with its mandate (particularly workplace conflicts with an ethical dimension) and cover essential areas that were not previously captured, such as allegations of fraud and corruption, or reprisals.

⁴ For the purposes of WIPO’s Policy on Honors and Gifts, “gift” also includes any favor, remuneration, benefit or other compensation of a financial value in excess of a nominal value of: (i) 200 Swiss francs for staff based in Geneva, New York, Japan and Singapore, as well as staff on mission to these locations; and (ii) 100 Swiss francs for staff based in any other location.

⁵ A conflict of interests occurs when personal interests or relations interfere with the performance of official duties (actual conflict of interest), may be inconsistent with the interest of the Organization (potential conflict of interest) or may reasonably be perceived as improperly influencing judgment in performing official duties (perceived conflict of interest).

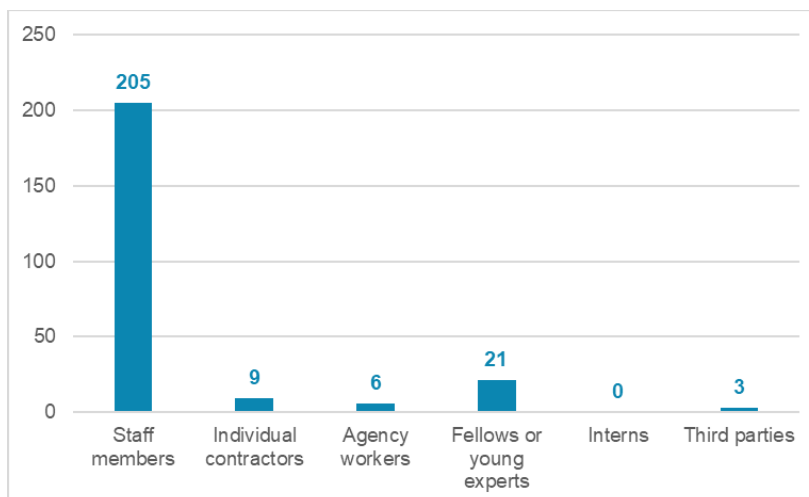
⁶ These requests sought clarifications on applicable procedures, or advice on protection either in anticipation of reporting misconduct or after having engaged in a protected activity.

Figure 2. Breakdown of advice by category



13. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of requests were submitted by staff members (205), nine from individual contractors, six from agency workers, 21 from fellows or participants in the Young Experts program (YEP), and three from third parties external to WIPO (e.g., users of its services).

Figure 3. Origin of requests



14. In September 2025, the Ethics Office launched a survey to gather anonymous feedback from members of personnel who had sought and obtained ethics advice. The results demonstrated strong confidence in the Ethics Office as a trusted advisor and confidential resource: 95.7 per cent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the timeliness and relevance of advice, 95.6 per cent with its clarity, and 91.5 per cent reported feeling strongly welcomed, heard, and supported.

B. AWARENESS-RAISING, TRAINING AND OUTREACH

15. Through awareness-raising, training and outreach activities, the Ethics Office seeks to enhance knowledge and understanding of ethics-related policies and promote adherence to high ethical standards at all levels of the Organization.

16. In 2025, the Ethics Office significantly increased and diversified its outreach activities (organizing 13 initiatives compared to eight in 2024 – see Figure 4). This was achieved through a multi-channel outreach strategy encompassing large-scale events, targeted presentations, and specialized sessions, generating over 3,000 engagements across all activities.

17. Large-scale initiatives included a townhall presentation on “Belonging and Connecting at WIPO”, which attracted 837 members of personnel; the Global Ethics Day celebration, which generated 1,529 clicks; and the celebration of the Ethics Office’s fifteenth Anniversary, attended by approximately 600 members of personnel.

18. Targeted presentations addressed specific needs and emerging requirements, in particular: two presentations to staff in the Brands and Design Sector (BDS) and the Patents and Technology Sector (PTS) on the annual exercise of disclosure of IP-related interests which reached 173 staff members (representing 72 per cent of the 241 staff subject to the new IP-related disclosure requirement); two induction sessions introducing 34 new recruits to ethics policies and resources; one visit to the WIPO China Office; a joint presentation with the Ombudsperson which engaged 17 YEPs; two information sessions conducted for all personnel assigned to WIPO’s External Offices in China and Japan.

19. The Ethics Office Intranet pages, redesigned in 2024 for enhanced clarity and accessibility, were regularly updated throughout 2025 to reflect evolving ethical guidance and requirements, notably to provide practical and background information related to the introduction of the new IP-related disclosure requirement.

20. Lastly, the mandatory training on ethics and integrity achieved a 98 per cent completion rate among staff, reflecting strong organizational commitment to ethical standards.

21. In the second half of 2025, the Ethics Office undertook, in coordination with the WIPO Academy, a comprehensive revision of the training in advance of the 2026 certificate expiry. The updated version incorporates new and expanded modules addressing contemporary ethical challenges, including the ethical use of artificial intelligence and social media, personal data protection, and responsible use of organizational resources.

Figure 4. Outreach initiatives by the Ethics Office and personnel engagement



C. MONITORING AND STANDARD-SETTING

22. The Ethics Office's monitoring and standard-setting function serves to strengthen the ethical foundation of the Organization by: (i) assessing the effectiveness of ethics-related policies; (ii) developing and interpreting such policies; and (iii) advising management to ensure that all organizational policies and related practices align with and advance ethical standards throughout WIPO.

23. In 2024, the Ethics Office had undertaken a review in collaboration with the BDS and PTS Sector Leads, the Office of the Controller and the Office of the Legal Counsel to expand the scope of the annual disclosure exercise to cover IP-related conflicts of interest, in line with two recommendations from WIPO's (former) External Auditor. Building on this review, in 2025 the Ethics Office revised the Policy on the Disclosure of Financial and Other Interests and associated guidance materials, including the Intranet page and frequently asked questions (FAQs). These revisions reflect the expanded scope of the annual disclosure exercise, which now includes staff members in BDS and PTS whose occupational duties involve processing applications for intellectual property protection or ensuring their compliance with the applicable legal framework.

24. In parallel, following a recommendation from an external fraud risk assessment, the Ethics Office worked with the BDS and PTS Sector Leads and the Central Services Division to review the onboarding process for staff members and individual consultants. As a result, new provisions were introduced into the oath that staff members must sign upon joining WIPO and into the terms of reference for individual consultants assigned to BDS and PTS with access to confidential information relating to international applications for IP protection. These provisions clarify obligations to (i) preserve the confidentiality of non-public IP-related information and (ii) declare and manage conflicts of interest as they arise.

25. In addition, the Ethics Office revised its terms of reference. While such revision was initially prompted by a recommendation from the Internal Oversight Division (IOD) to include a specific provision for regular quality assurance reviews, the Ethics Office took this opportunity to comprehensively update and modernize its terms of reference.

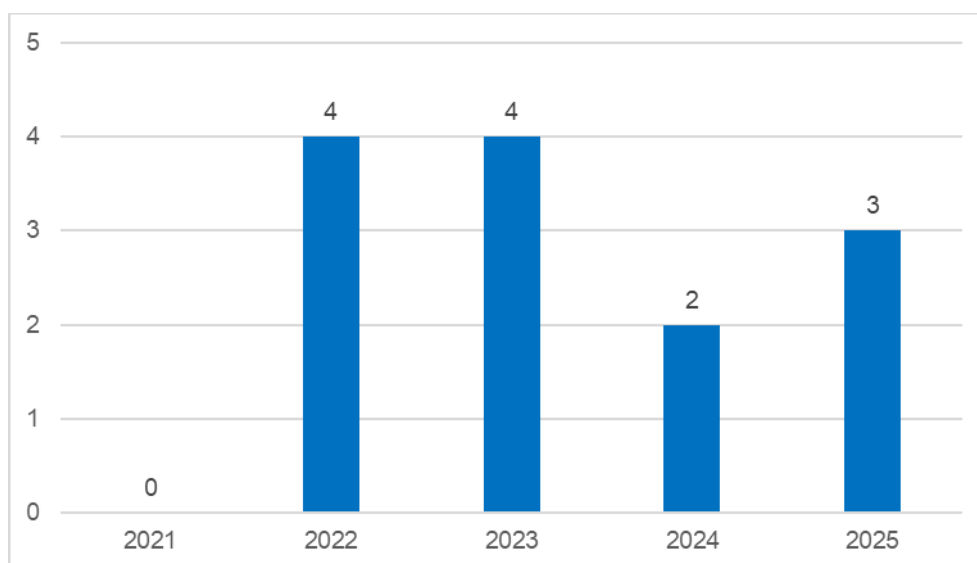
26. Lastly, the Ethics Office continued to provide input on several policies or guidance documents developed by other internal stakeholders.

D. REVIEW OF RETALIATION COMPLAINTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIPO'S POLICY TO PROTECT AGAINST RETALIATION

27. The Ethics Office administers WIPO's Policy to Protect against Retaliation, which aims at protecting from retaliation those who, in good faith, make a report of misconduct or cooperate in an oversight activity. Upon receipt of a formal complaint of retaliation, the Ethics Office undertakes a preliminary review of the request, and if a *prima facie* case of retaliation is established, the matter is referred to IOD for investigation. Following completion of the investigation, the Ethics Office reviews the investigative findings, seeks clarification if needed, and determines whether retaliation occurred.

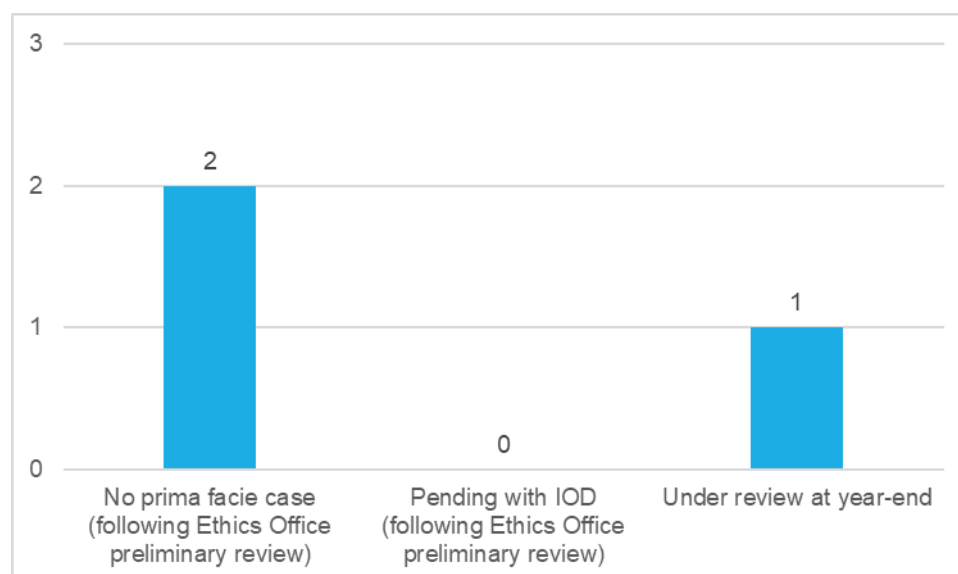
28. In 2025, the Ethics Office received three formal complaints of retaliation. Its preliminary review of the first two complaints resulted in a finding that there was no *prima facie* case of retaliation. The third complaint remained under review at year-end.

Figure 5. Number of formal complaints received from 2021 to 2025



29. Figure 6 shows the status of the complaints that were received by the Ethics Office in 2025.

Figure 6. Status of formal complaints at the end of 2025



30. The formal complaint submitted in 2023 and still pending in 2025 was found by IOD to be unsubstantiated. Upon review, the Ethics Office determined that no retaliation had occurred. The Director General endorsed this determination, and the complaint was dismissed accordingly.

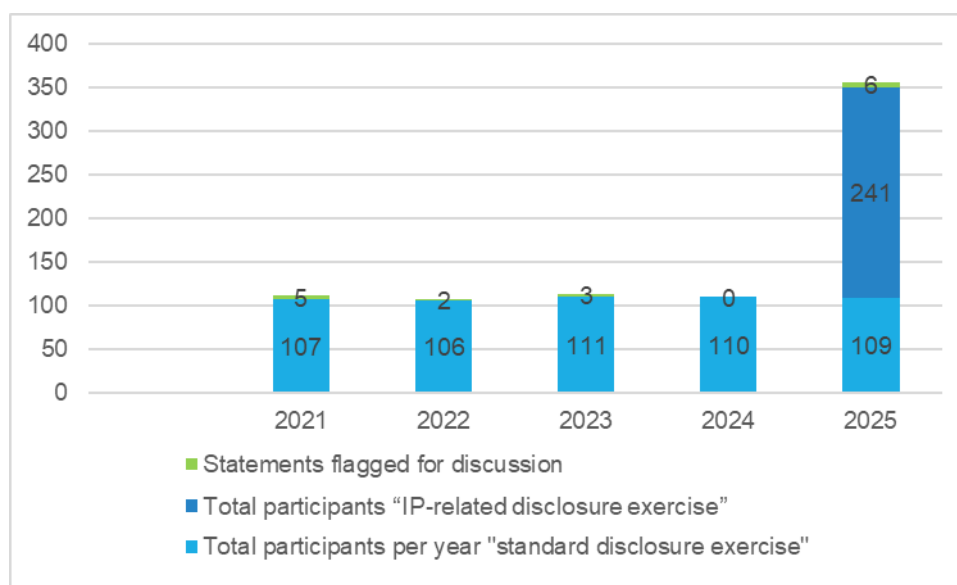
31. In anticipation of the expiry of the Agreement between WIPO and the United Nations Ethics Office (UNEO) on the provision of review services for certain *prima facie* determinations of the WIPO Ethics Office, the latter drafted a new Agreement, which was signed by UNEO and the WIPO Director General in October 2025, and entered into force on January 19, 2026.

E. ADMINISTRATION OF THE POLICY ON THE DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIAL AND OTHER INTERESTS

32. The purpose of the disclosure program administered by the Ethics Office is threefold: (i) promoting transparency and personal accountability; (ii) enhancing internal and external public trust in WIPO's integrity; and (iii) assisting the Organization to manage the risk of actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest through disclosure, mitigation and prevention, by requiring selected members of personnel to report annually on their financial and other interests.

33. In 2025, 350 staff members in total were invited to participate in the annual disclosure exercise, covering the 2024 calendar year. This comprised 109 staff members at level D1 and above along with other staff in designated categories ("standard disclosure exercise"), and 241 staff members in PTS and BDS ("IP-related disclosure exercise", introduced for the first time on a voluntary basis). 106 staff members⁷ took part in the standard disclosure exercise, and 130 in the IP-related disclosure exercise.

Figure 7. Staff members invited to participate in the annual disclosure exercise, 2021 to 2025



34. After assessing and analyzing the statements submitted during the standard disclosure exercise, the external reviewer identified three cases that could raise potential conflicts of interest (due to spouse occupation or outside activities). Following careful review, the Ethics Office issued precautionary guidance to concerned staff members. Subsequently, nine participants were randomly selected for the verification process outlined in the applicable guidelines to ensure accurate completion of statements. All were found to be compliant.

35. Regarding the IP-related disclosure exercise, the external reviewer flagged three additional cases also of potential conflicts of interest. However, further review determined that none resulted in actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest.

36. At the end of October 2025, the external reviewer submitted an anonymized report to the Director General. Following this submission, both the standard and IP-related annual exercises were closed with no outstanding issues.

⁷ Out of the 109 staff members invited to participate in the program, three could not complete the exercise as they either separated from WIPO or were on extended sick leave.

37. In anticipation of the current external reviewer's contract expiry, discussions were initiated with four other United Nations (UN) agencies to launch a joint tender for review services related to the annual disclosure exercise. This collaborative initiative aims to reduce unit and administrative costs while ensuring high-quality services and greater UN system coherence. The Ethics Office prepared the initial terms of reference, and the joint tender was launched in December 2025.

38. In 2025, the Ethics Office also administered the annual disclosure exercise under the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). Staff members at level D2 and above were required to disclose transactions between their close family members and the Organization, as well as transactions with entities in which they or their close family members hold substantial ownership interests or exercise significant influence. All participants responded and the IPSAS exercise was closed with no issues identified.

39. Lastly, the Ethics Office continued to enhance the IT platform regularly throughout 2025 to improve the overall functionality, efficiency, accuracy, user experience and security of the system.

III. OTHER ACTIVITIES

40. Throughout 2025, the Ethics Office pursued its active engagement with the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO), and it took part in its annual conference in October 2025.

41. In the fourth quarter of 2025, the Ethics Office prepared a job description for a temporary position of Ethics Assistant, which was advertised in December. Operating with only one fixed-term staff position and facing a significantly increased workload, the Ethics Office had been relying on an agency worker to provide essential support. The new budgeted position will ensure greater operational effectiveness.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

42. The year 2025 represented a period of significant additional workload for the Ethics Office. The Office responded to a sustained increase in requests for confidential advice, comprehensively reviewed the mandatory training on ethics and integrity, while outreach initiatives and participants in the annual disclosure exercise more than doubled. Concurrently, the Ethics Office actively engaged in discussions with four UN agencies and prepared terms of reference for a joint tender to secure review services for the annual disclosure exercise, negotiated a new agreement with UNEO, and initiated the recruitment process for the newly created temporary position of Ethics Assistant. These strategic initiatives required substantial resources and careful coordination, while maintaining the quality and responsiveness of core ethics services.

43. The Ethics Office is encouraged by the strong positive feedback received on its confidential advisory services and the sustained support from management throughout 2025. Through the structural and operational improvements achieved during the year, the Office is well-positioned to focus in 2026 on its core functions: delivering responsive confidential advice, strengthening ethics policies and standards, and conducting targeted outreach to promote integrity across the Organization.

44. A one-page snapshot of this report is available in the Annex.

[Annex follows]

Ethics Office

2025 in numbers

13 outreach activities



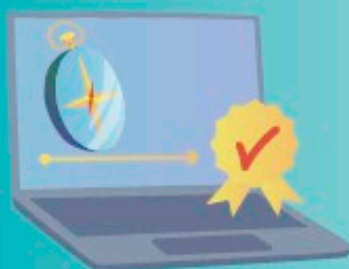
244 requests for advice received and addressed



3 formal complaints of retaliation received



100% response rate for annual disclosure exercise without any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest identified



98% completion rate on mandatory Ethics and Integrity training

100% response rate for IPSAS annual exercise without any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest identified

