



United Nations Office for Project Services

Ethics Office

Statement in response to:

“Independent review of the UNOPS Ethics function: to ensure the independence and impartiality of its work”

April 2023

Introduction

1. At its Annual Session 2022, the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS (“Executive Board”) reaffirmed, at paragraph 7 of decision 2022/16, *“the need of the full independence of the UNOPS ethics function”*, and requested *“an independent review of the ethics function to ensure the independence and impartiality of the work”*.
2. The UNOPS Ethics Office welcomed this decision as a valuable step to transparently review its practices and strengthen the independence of the office.
3. Consequently, two Ethics Offices of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organisations (ENMO) were identified to jointly conduct such independent review; namely, the Ethics Offices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
4. The aim of the independent review was to advise the UNOPS Ethics Office on best practices in regards to its independence, by reference to comparable Ethics Offices within ENMO. In particular, the review took into account relevant reports by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), including JIU/REP/2021/5 (“Review of the ethics function of the United Nations system”), JIU/REP/2019/6 (“Review of audit and oversight committees in the United Nations system”) and JIU/REP/2018/3 (“Review of management and administration of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)”).
5. The review (“Independent review of the UNOPS Ethics Function”, referred to as “independent review” hereinafter) was completed on 31 March 2023.

Response

6. The UNOPS Ethics Office welcomes the report and the findings outlined therein.
7. The UNOPS Ethics Office appreciates the independent review noting that some of the issues identified have recently been addressed, including: (a) refining the mandate of the UNOPS Ethics Office to exclude “compliance” matters, consistent with the approach taken by other members of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations pursuant to ST/SGB/2005/22 (“Ethics Office - establishment and terms of reference”) and ST/SGB/2007/11 (“United Nations system-wide application of ethics: separately administered organs and programmes”); (b) revising the terms of reference for the UNOPS Audit Advisory Committee to explicitly include coverage of the Ethics Office; (c) submission of an updated recusal statement on 17 March 2023; and (d) direct approval of the Ethics Office budget by the Executive Director.
8. The independent review also identified opportunities to further strengthen the independence of the UNOPS Ethics Office. The UNOPS Ethics Office welcomes these findings and recommendations which will not only strengthen the independence of the UNOPS Ethics Office, but also improve its efficiency and efficacy in the long-term, including: (a) adopting terms of reference based on ST/SGB/2007/11; (b) further strengthening the link to EPUN (Ethics Panel of the United Nations); (c) discontinuing doubling of functions and ensuring

adequate resourcing of the Ethics Office; (d) ensuring additional checks and balances in future recruitment processes for the Head of the Ethics Office; (e) reviewing reporting arrangements for the Head of the Ethics Office; and (f) ensuring confidentiality safeguards for requests for advice and guidance addressed to the Ethics Office.

Conclusion

9. The recommendations identified by the independent review which fall within the mandate of the Ethics Office will be incorporated into the Ethics Office's work plan. More broadly, the findings of the independent review will be used to guide the Ethics Office's approach to delivering its mandate and performing its activities with the utmost impartiality and independence.
10. Consistent with the independent review's recommendation "*that the Ethics Office further strengthen its existing links to the EPUN*", it will continue to ensure that the implementation of recommendations is aligned and harmonized with the institutional arrangement and practices of EPUN members.
11. The UNOPS Ethics Office will continue to regularly update the Executive Board on the progress in maintaining and further strengthening arrangements to ensure its independence in the context of its annual activity report submitted to the Annual Session of the Executive Board.