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## **Annual report on the activities of the IFAD Ethics Office for 2024, including an update on IFAD's approach to preventing and responding to sexual misconduct**

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### **FOR: INFORMATION**

**Action:** The Executive Board is invited to take note of the annual report on the activities of the IFAD Ethics Office for 2024, including an update on IFAD's approach to preventing and responding to sexual misconduct.

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# Annual report on the activities of the IFAD Ethics Office for 2024, including an update on IFAD's approach to preventing and responding to sexual misconduct

1. The Annual Report of the Ethics Office (ETH) for 2024 is presented pursuant to paragraph 26(e) of [EB 2023/140/R.19/Rev.1](#) (IFAD Ethics Charter), according to which "The Chief, ETH, submits annual reports to the President, which are subsequently transmitted to the Audit Committee and then shared with the Executive Board for information."
2. This report highlights ETH's achievements and milestones during 2024 and our ongoing commitment to fostering a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability across IFAD, and includes an update on IFAD's approach to preventing and responding to sexual misconduct.

## I. Ethics Office profile

3. **Mission.** ETH is dedicated to promoting and upholding IFAD's highest standards of ethics and conduct, together with its Code of Conduct and core values. It does this by cultivating and nurturing a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability in all IFAD activities and operations, thereby increasing trust in the organization and strengthening and protecting its reputation and credibility, both internally and externally.
4. **2024 Milestone.** This was the first year in which the IFAD Ethics Charter was implemented, marking a transformative milestone for ETH. In line with international best practice, the Charter reinforces the Office's independence. It gives ETH full discretion over its programme of work, protects the ethics function from undue influence and thus strengthens IFAD's organizational integrity, which is critical to meeting goals and minimizing risks. The Charter enables the Office to report on challenges that need to be addressed and gives it the authority to initiate, conduct and report on any action considered necessary. The Audit Committee's general oversight role over ETH further strengthens the Office's independence.

## II. Key achievements in 2024

5. ETH's accomplishments in 2024 reflect its strengthened independence, expanded outreach and proactive approach to ethical leadership. Key achievements included:
  - (i) **The first-ever Ethics Townhall.** Held in compliance with a recommendation by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the United Nations System and hosted by IFAD's President, the Ethics Townhall engaged over 500 IFAD personnel. Held at the beginning of the year, the event demonstrated IFAD Senior Management's firm commitment to a culture of ethics across the organization. The meeting raised awareness about ethical issues, fostered collaborative dialogue with personnel and encouraged compliance.
  - (ii) **Expanded outreach.** ETH increased the breadth and diversity of its outreach activities, using tailored messaging and innovative approaches to boost engagement and build a coherent ethical culture across every role and region. For the first time, and with the full support of the Department for Country Operations (DCO), ETH visited all IFAD regional offices, participating in regional retreats and business planning meetings to foster dialogue with about 350 personnel.
  - (iii) **Record engagement.** Personnel's trust in ETH was reinforced and the accessibility of the Office was strengthened. As a result, ETH was

consulted on a record number of 383 matters in 2024, showing a strong increase in staff engagement of 24 per cent over 2023.

- (iv) **Informal resolution.** In 2024, ETH emphasized and prioritized informal resolution mechanisms as the foremost approach to addressing workplace concerns, underscoring its effectiveness in fostering trust and collaboration. Of the 383 consultations conducted throughout the year, only nine matters required escalation to the Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO) for formal investigation.
- (v) **Prevention of sexual misconduct.** ETH sharpened the focus on preventing and responding to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse (SH/SEA). A new position for an Ethics Officer specifically responsible for SH/SEA was created, and 26 events on SH/SEA with 1,255 participants were held during project start-up workshops.
- (vi) **The Financial Disclosure Programme (FDP).** ETH continued to support personnel in effectively addressing matters related to conflicts of interest and outside activities and managed the FDP. Over 800 staff completed the programme in 2024, with 100 per cent compliance.
- (vii) **Policy advocacy.** ETH finalized the Revised Whistleblower Protection Procedures, enhancing safeguards for whistleblowers and reinforcing IFAD's zero-tolerance policy for misconduct.

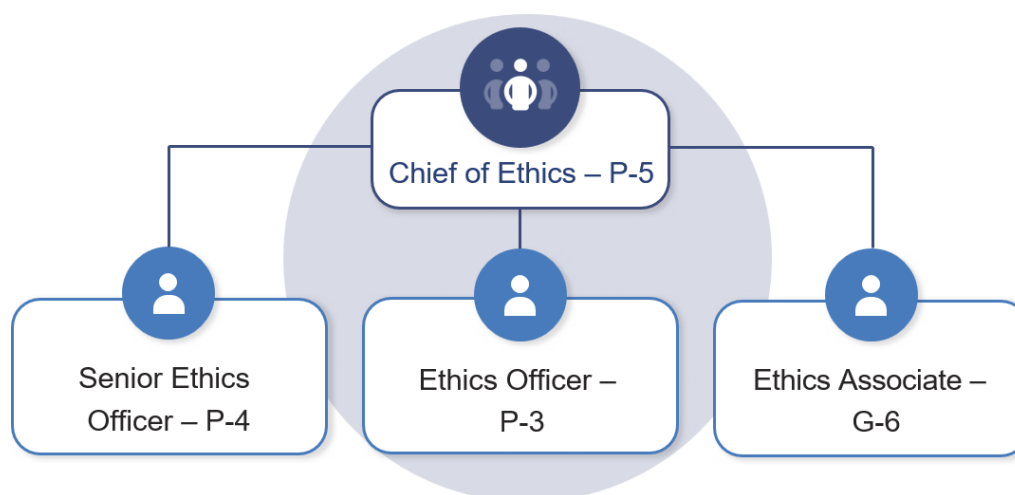
Chart 1  
Ethics Office 2024 at a glance



### III. ETH's resources

6. In response to ETH's reinforced independence and greater responsibilities, Management recognized the need to increase the resources allocated to the Office to ensure that its goals are met. The ETH team was thus expanded to four full-time members during 2024. As of the end of the year, the Office was staffed by the Chief of Ethics (P-5), a Senior Ethics Officer (P-4), an Ethics Officer (P-3) and the Ethics Associate (G-6), servicing a workforce of approximately 1,800 staff and non-staff across 5 regions and 92 countries of investment.
7. The Office's non-staff budget allocation for 2024 was US\$93,650, which was just adequate to fund the annual workplan. In light of ETH's greater responsibilities, an increased budget was approved for 2025.
8. ETH also used the services of consultants, interns and service providers on an ad hoc basis. This was primarily to assist with the assessment of requests for authorization of outside activities under the Code of Conduct, the editing and design of visual elements in communication materials and the administration of FDP.

Chart 2  
Ethics Office organigram, 2024



### IV. Key areas of focus

#### Strengthening outreach in a decentralized IFAD

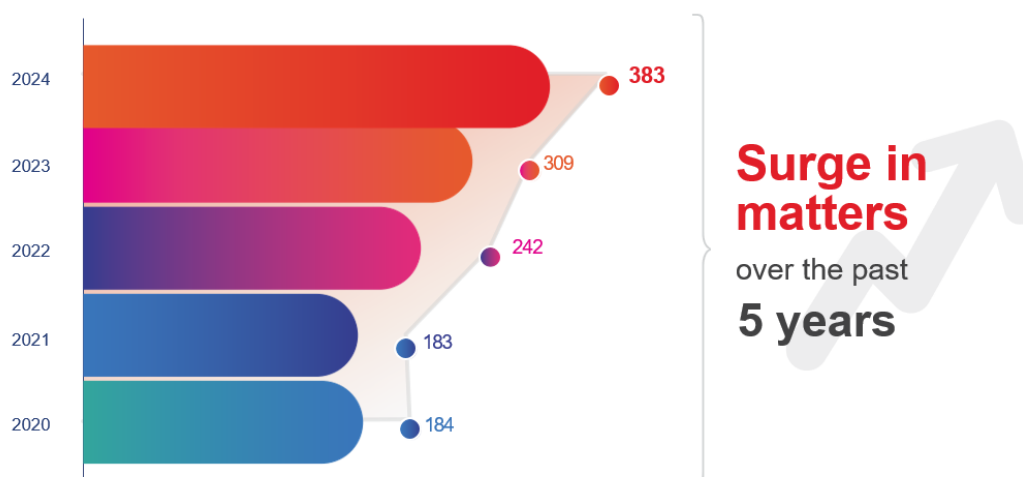
9. As IFAD continued the drive to decentralize its operations, ETH intensified its efforts to deliver ethics training programmes across multiple contexts and duty stations to engage with diverse audiences and cohorts of the IFAD community. This involved tailoring messages to different environments – including more informal settings – and adopting flexible, innovative approaches to foster meaningful dialogue and ensure that ETH's outreach creates a lasting impact. ETH visited all IFAD regional offices for the first time during the year. Training sessions were timed to dovetail with IFAD's corporate agenda and the different teams' business schedules. Building a consistent and coherent ethical culture across every role and region was a prime focus in 2024.

### Enhancing informal resolution of workplace concerns

10. Building on successful work to reinforce trust in the Office, ETH experienced a significant rise in staff engagement in 2024. In the critical area of confidential advice and guidance, it saw a 24 per cent increase over the previous year, continuing the upward trend observed over the past five years. This growth underscores the strong confidence personnel place in ETH's ability to support workplace concerns through timely advice, prevention and informal resolution.
11. ETH continues to manage informal resolution processes under IFAD's Anti-Harassment Procedures, ensuring that workplace disputes are addressed swiftly. Notably, out of 35 issues related to the workplace environment (17 of which were initially formal complaints), only 5 were subsequently referred to AUO for formal investigation. Thus, most cases were effectively managed without the need for escalation. Workplace environment concerns include harassment, abuse of authority and retaliation.

Chart 3

Increase in the number of matters addressed by ETH, 2020 to 2024



12. The rising demand underscores ETH's role as a trusted resource and highlights the importance of proactive conflict resolution. In response, ETH remains committed to prioritizing informal resolution wherever possible, addressing concerns early and constructively. Building on insights from 2024, ETH will continue to refine informal resolution processes to better target workplace conflicts. This includes providing tailored recommendations for administrative measures, ensuring that workplace concerns are directed to the most appropriate channels and proactively cautioning staff members before inappropriate behaviour escalates into misconduct.

## V. 2024 in review

### Standard setting and policy advocacy with internal and external partners

13. In 2024 ETH intensified its efforts to uphold IFAD's ethical standards across the organization's increasingly decentralized environment. The Office uses a wide range of platforms, channels and events to engage with staff and Management, raising awareness, providing training, fostering compliance and offering confidential guidance and support.
14. In close collaboration with the Office of the General Counsel (LEG), AUO and the People and Culture Division (PCD) (previously titled the Human Resources Division), ETH finalized IFAD's Revised Whistleblower Protection Procedures, reinforcing the organization's zero-tolerance policy for fraud, corruption and other forms of

misconduct, including sexual misconduct. IFAD recognizes the critical role of whistleblowers in exposing such behaviour and is committed to safeguarding them from retaliation, an act that directly undermines IFAD's core values, the duty of accountability and the organization's best interests.

15. The revised Procedures enhance protection for both internal and, where possible, external whistleblowers. By aligning with best practice and donor expectations, these updates further strengthen trust in IFAD's commitment to accountability and integrity. The revisions were well-received by Management, the Audit Committee and the Executive Board, reflecting strong institutional support for robust whistleblower protections. The document is scheduled for publication in early 2025.
16. In 2024, the [IFAD Ethics webpage](#) was comprehensively revamped with the support of the Communications Division (COM). Streamlined navigation and content enable visitors to easily find guidance on ethics-related topics, with quick links to ETH core documents, including the [Code of Conduct](#), to help users understand IFAD's ethical standards and support ethical decision-making.
17. ETH's strong collaboration with key IFAD stakeholders, as well as partners in the United Nations system and the broader development community, is essential for sharing best practices and advocating for policy enhancements that reflect these standards.
18. IFAD is an active and recognized participant in the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (ENMO), contributing to discussions on ethical best practice and strengthening collaboration within the community – for instance, by giving a presentation on crisis management at the annual conference. ETH plays a key role in the network, sharing knowledge and supporting the work of the ENMO Executive Committee. It also provides substantive contributions, assisting in the development and monitoring of ENMO's workplan. IFAD is a valued voice in discussions on ethical recommendations, reinforcing its commitment to high standards of integrity across the international community.
19. During the year, ETH met regularly with the ethics offices of the sister Rome-based Agencies (RBA) and participated in the RBA, World Bank and IFI Security Network, making presentations on racism and discrimination, work-life balance and reputational risks. Outreach sessions were also held with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and PwC.
20. Across IFAD, ETH stepped up its engagement with a wide range of divisions that were intent on fostering ethical behaviour in their teams. For the first time, the Office participated in person in major retreats, workshops and business planning meetings organized by all five regions, engaging with 350 personnel overall.
21. In another form of divisional engagement, the Office provided ethics-related training to the Agricultural Transformation Office of the African Agricultural Transformation Initiative in Dodoma, United Republic of Tanzania, an initiative led by DCO.
22. To unpack the results of the 2024 IFAD Global Staff Pulse Survey (the Survey), ETH fielded missions to Panama in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and to Cairo in the Near East, North Africa and Europe (NEN). The Office also conducted dialogues on the Survey results with six other IFAD divisions. It ensured that the Survey results were taken fully into account to create an ethical work environment, particularly the responses to question number 10: "People in IFAD are treated with dignity and respect irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, language, sexual orientation, abilities and disabilities, culture, religion, profession, education, marital status, workplace experience, role, staff position (national/international) and contract modality."

23. ETH played an active role in twice-monthly meetings with PCD and meetings of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) working group. Two ETH team members were trained as DEI advocates at the Workplace Culture (WPC)-DEI training for advocates and culture carriers. ETH conducted a briefing session for the Audit Committee and a dedicated outreach session for IFAD consultants.

**Training and outreach**

24. ETH's regular and ad hoc programme of preventive activities and strategies aims to support personnel at all levels and in all locations in recognizing and successfully navigating ethical challenges and making ethical decisions that uphold IFAD's Code of Conduct and boost its reputation, while fulfilling their contractual ethical obligations.
25. In 2024, a total of 4,057 participants received ethics training, an increase of 20 per cent over 2023. Mandatory online training on the Code of Conduct, anti-harassment and SH/SEA was taken by 1,448 personnel, with a global completion rate of 98 per cent. ETH also provided training for 1,354 personnel at 20 corporate events, including divisional meetings, regional retreats and corporate inductions. Some 26 classroom-based training and awareness-raising events on SH/SEA reached 1,255 personnel and implementing partners.



Chart 4  
2024 Ethics Office training and awareness-raising sessions



Chart 5  
2024 SH/SEA training events per region during start-up workshops



### Protection from SH/SEA

26. In 2024, ETH strongly reinforced IFAD's commitment to preventing and addressing SH and SEA. Its 2024 workplan on SH and SEA was in line with international best practice and responded to recommendations made by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) through the IFAD performance assessment exercise finalized in February 2024.
27. As agreed through the [Management response to the MOPAN Assessment of IFAD](#), in 2024 IFAD intensified its SH and SEA outreach efforts through targeted training. Through in-person missions to all IFAD regions in 2024, along with regular virtual training, ETH increased awareness of SH and SEA among the implementation teams and IFAD partners who directly interact with the rural communities where IFAD works. ETH also provided information about victims' rights and SH and SEA responsibilities when engaged in IFAD-supported activities and created an open dialogue through Q&A sessions.
28. ETH maintained strict adherence to best practice when handling sexual misconduct allegations. The Office prioritized victim protection, applying a survivor-centred approach to all cases and ensured that prima facie reviews were conducted rigorously and confidentially. To strengthen IFAD's victim-centred approach to addressing SEA, in 2024 IFAD received the visit of Ms [Najla Nassif Palma](#), the UN Victims' Rights Advocate, representing the [United Nations Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate \(OVRA\)](#). During her visit, Ms Palma met with IFAD President Alvaro Lario, ETH and AUO to exchange insights on best practice, challenges in ensuring

accountability and strategies to enhance victim support mechanisms. The discussions underscored IFAD's commitment to preventing and responding to SEA, reinforcing accountability and aligning with United Nations-wide efforts to protect and support victims.

29. IFAD experienced a significant increase in SH/SEA allegations, with seven cases reported in 2024, up from three in 2023. This rise reflects heightened awareness and growing confidence in IFAD's reporting mechanisms, including the use of [anonymous reporting forms](#), and our victim-centred approach. Of the seven cases, five have been closed, of which: one case was resolved through ETH's intervention, two resulted in the dismissal of the offenders, one was found to be unsubstantiated, and one was closed due to lack of jurisdiction to review. Two cases remain ongoing and are being investigated. As communicated routinely, all SH/SEA data is promptly and securely reported on the Member States Interactive Platform, which is accessible to Executive Board members.
30. In 2024, ETH delivered 26 SH and SEA training sessions during project start-up workshops, and nearly 1,000 members of IFAD personnel completed mandatory training on harassment, including SH and SEA prevention.
31. To strengthen the organizational culture and attitudes towards all forms of sexual misconduct, ETH, in collaboration with the Innovation Unit and LAC, finalized a comprehensive "behavioural audit." This initiative employed a combination of desk research, behavioural science methodologies and qualitative and quantitative data collection to identify behavioural factors influencing the effectiveness of IFAD's reporting mechanisms. IFAD leveraged the results of this exercise to bolster its current reporting processes and improve the overall reporting experience for victims/survivors and bystanders reporting sexual misconduct incidents.
32. In 2024, IFAD increased the resources allocated to SH and SEA prevention and response. In October, an Ethics Officer was appointed in a dedicated role focused on developing and implementing SH and SEA initiatives, strengthening regulatory frameworks and responding to reported cases promptly and effectively.
33. Furthermore, in 2024, IFAD launched a dedicated public webpage on [Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct](#). This restates IFAD's zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct and provides IFAD stakeholders with all the relevant information regarding their rights and obligations and the mechanisms available to enforce IFAD's standards.
34. In 2024, ETH actively participated and provided SH/SEA with specific inputs in support of:
  - (i) The 2024 [Special Measures Report \(SMR\) for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse](#), led by the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA).
  - (ii) The 2024 Survey for Members of the United Nations Executive Group on Challenges and Good Practices in Policy Implementation and on Capacity Development to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment.
  - (iii) The 2024 annual Survey of UN Personnel on Standards of Conduct and Behaviour, which collected facts and perceptions of United Nations personnel related to the prohibition of SEA.
  - (iv) The consultation process on the [UN-SWAP 3.0](#) reporting framework, which included a new performance indicator on SH and SEA and progress achieved in the promotion of a lasting change in organizational culture, behaviour and attitudes towards all forms of sexual misconduct.

- (v) The initiatives identified and implemented in the context of the working group on [Strengthening Multilateral Financial Institutions' Approaches to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in Development Operations](#).
  - (vi) Negotiation of IFAD contracts with donors, recipients, vendors and implementing partners, ensuring adherence to the commitments and obligations contained in the SH/SEA policy.
  - (vii) Monthly meetings organized by the [OSCSEA](#) on best practices.
  - (viii) Regular meetings of the [Chief Executives Board for Coordination \(CEB\) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment](#) within the organizations of the United Nations system.
  - (ix) Ad hoc meetings planned by the multi-stakeholder steering committee of individual experts, governments and organizations that contributed to the [Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(CAPSEAH\)](#).
  - (x) Ad hoc meetings led by the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(IASC PSEA\)](#) Technical Expert Group.
  - (xi) [The Pandemic Fund](#) – a multilateral mechanism dedicated to financing critical investments to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response capacities at the national, regional and global levels, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries.
  - (xii) IFAD reaccreditation requirements with the [Green Climate Fund](#).
  - (xiii) IFAD reaccreditation requirements with the [Adaptation Fund](#).
35. ETH reaffirms its unwavering commitment to addressing SH and SEA by continuously strengthening, evaluating and refining its mechanisms in alignment with international best practice. By upholding the highest standards of accountability, ETH ensures that IFAD personnel and all individuals engaged in IFAD-supported projects operate in full adherence to the Fund's mandate and SH/SEA policy. Looking ahead, ETH remains dedicated to fostering a culture of integrity, respect and zero tolerance for sexual misconduct, reinforcing IFAD's mission to create safe and inclusive environments for all.

#### **Guidance and advice**

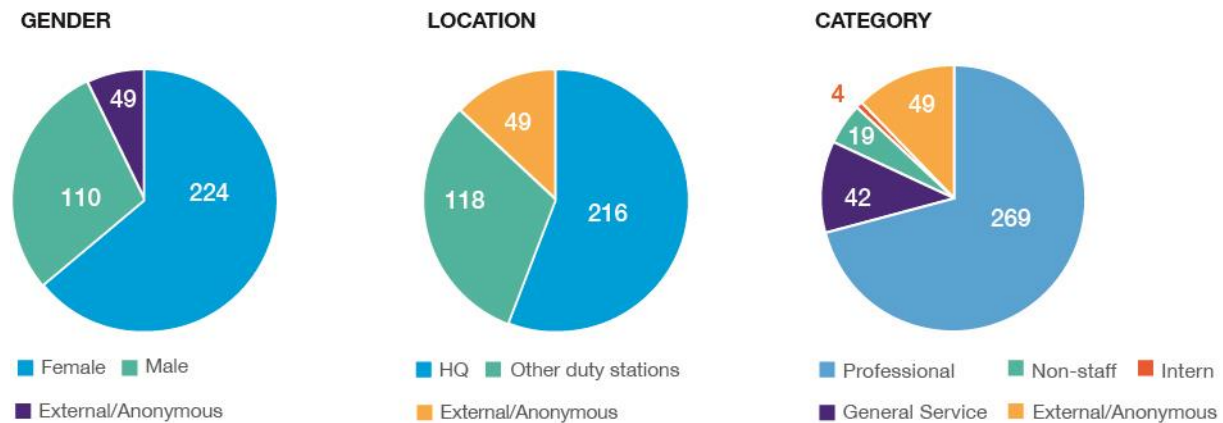
36. The provision of confidential guidance and advice on the Code of Conduct and ethical issues is a major element of ETH's workload, and this continued to be the case in 2024. The Office provided support to the IFAD community, including staff, non-staff and external third parties.
37. Continuing a marked trend over past years, the vast majority of staff seeking ETH's advice in 2024 were in the Professional category (269 Professional, compared to 42 General Service and 19 non-staff). It is also noteworthy that an increasing number of matters were raised by external partners or anonymously (49 matters, compared to 37 matters raised this way in 2023). Those seeking advice from ETH were predominantly female (224 women compared to 110 men).<sup>1</sup> Although the majority of requests for support were made by personnel at headquarters (216 out of 383 matters), there was also a surge in requests from elsewhere (118 compared to 63 in 2023). This was likely a consequence of ETH's in-person participation in regional retreats.

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<sup>1</sup> References to any gender in this report are for convenience only and shall not form part of or affect the interpretation of this report. Unless the context clearly indicates otherwise, each pronoun herein shall be deemed to include the masculine, feminine, neuter, singular and plural forms thereof. Where specific references are made to masculine and feminine gender in this report, those are for convenience of reference only and shall not be construed as an opinion on gender limitation.

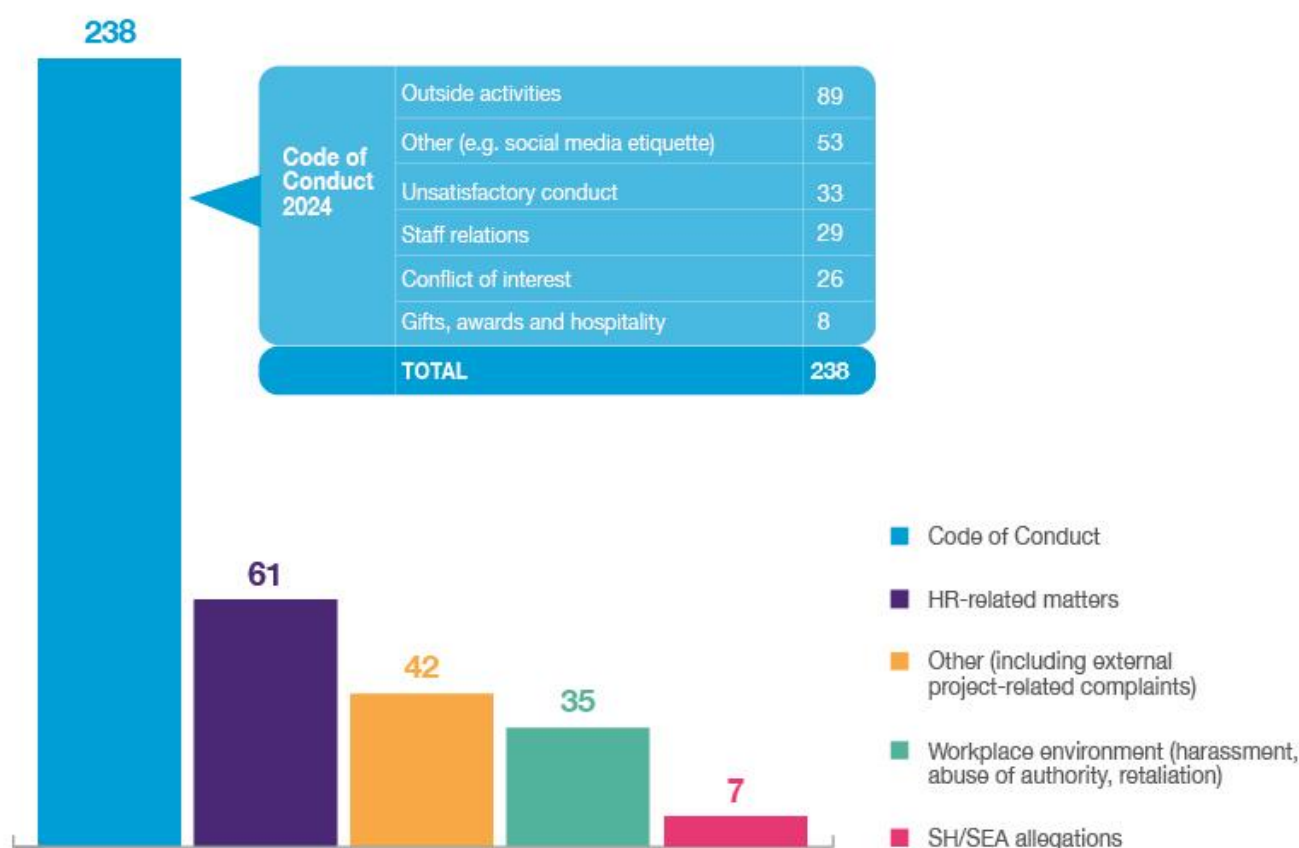
Chart 6

**Ethical matters addressed in 2024 by gender, location and personnel category**



38. Of the 383 matters raised with ETH during 2024, a majority of 238 (62 per cent) were related to the Code of Conduct. Again, this was a trend continued from previous years and marked an increase over the 202 matters raised in this category in 2023. Code of Conduct concerns were related to outside activities; unsatisfactory conduct; staff relations; conflicts of interest; gifts, awards and hospitality; and other, including social media etiquette. Outside activities accounted for the majority of requests for guidance in the Code of Conduct category, with 89 matters raised. A total of 53 matters were raised in the category of "other issues" related to the Code of Conduct, such as compliance with personal legal obligations, confidentiality requirements and social media etiquette.
39. Issues related to human resources accounted for 16 per cent of the total matters raised – a total of 61. This continued the steady increase seen in previous years (19 in 2021, 37 in 2022, 47 in 2023). Other matters (unrelated to the Code of Conduct and including external project-related complaints) accounted for 42 matters raised, a slight increase over 38 in 2023. Issues related to the workplace environment (including harassment, abuse of authority and retaliation) showed a marked increase from 19 in 2023 to 35 in 2024.

Chart 7  
Breakdown of matters received and guidance provided in 2024



## Conflict of interest management

40. The IFAD Ethics Charter entrusts ETH with the authority to provide confidential advice and guidance on conflicts of interest and to administer the FDP for all staff. Through the FDP, IFAD demonstrates to Member States, partners and the general public that conflicts of interest are proactively and consistently addressed.
41. The FDP has two main elements: (i) the annual statement of compliance with the Code of Conduct, which is required of all staff, and the declaration of non-IFAD income, goods, services or assets (declaration); (ii) for eligible staff members, the financial disclosure statement (financial statement). Staff are required to submit a financial statement if they meet any of the following criteria:
  - (i) All staff at the P-3 grade and above.
  - (ii) All staff members involved in the investment of IFAD's assets, procurement activities or the operations and/or administration of any IFAD accounts.
  - (iii) All Professional staff members working in IFAD Country Offices.
42. In 2024, 804 staff participated in the FDP for the 2023 reporting period. At the end of the process, a total of 245 had completed the declaration and 559 had completed the financial statement. The completion rate was 100 per cent at year end.



Chart 8  
FDP staff numbers in 2024



43. ETH reviewed all cases of possible or actual conflicts of interest flagged during the FDP process. All cases were resolved either by requesting that the staff member cease the conflictual activity, or by instructing them to obtain the necessary authorization in accordance with the Code of Conduct and to adopt the appropriate measures to mitigate the conflict of interest.

#### **Intake and preliminary assessment of formal complaints**

44. ETH is responsible for the preliminary review of formal allegations of Code of Conduct violations by IFAD personnel, including harassment, discrimination, abuse of authority, retaliation and sexual misconduct under IFAD's SH/SEA policy.
45. When complaints are made, ETH receives and conducts an initial review of the available evidence to determine whether the matter should be referred to AUO for investigation. Before, during and after the preliminary review, ETH may recommend interim protective measures to safeguard the affected person(s). If a case is not referred for investigation, ETH closes the complaint, informs the complainant and may recommend intervention measures by Management as appropriate.
46. In 2024, the Office received 25 formal complaints – 17 related to harassment and/or abuse of authority, 3 concerning sexual misconduct, 1 regarding retaliation, and 4 involving other Code of Conduct violations (failure to comply with private obligations and discrimination). A total of 9 complaints were referred to AUO for investigation, including 1 received in 2023. The remaining complaints did not meet the prima facie threshold for referral for investigation and were closed, in some instances with steps towards informal resolution or referral to the administration for Management intervention. ETH recommended protective measures for affected persons in relation to 5 of these complaints.

## **VI. Conclusion and final remarks**

47. 2024 was a landmark year for ETH, marked by significant achievements, expanded outreach and strengthened policies. These successes reflect the importance of ETH's independence and its vital role in upholding IFAD's core values of respect, integrity, focus on results and professionalism.
48. ETH's achievements would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment and support of IFAD's President, Management, Audit Committee and Executive Board. Their belief in ETH's mission and their dedication to our independence have been the foundation of our progress. Equally, ETH is grateful to every member of the IFAD community for their trust and engagement. The record number of consultations and growing confidence in ETH's services are a testament to the strong partnership that has been created. ETH remains committed to being a steadfast, reliable and accessible resource for all.
49. Moving forward, ETH's primary focus will be on prevention – promoting awareness, fostering ethical leadership and embedding integrity in daily decision-making. In this way, IFAD can mitigate risks before they escalate, ensuring a positive and inclusive work environment that upholds the highest standards of conduct. With the continued support of IFAD leadership and the trust of its personnel, ETH will build on its achievements to further strengthen IFAD's ethical culture and advance the organization's mission.