

## 164th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 24-28 June 2019

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*Provisional Agenda Item 3.5*

CE164/8  
8 April 2019  
Original: English

### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ETHICS OFFICE FOR 2018

#### Introduction

1. Established in 2006, the Ethics Office of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works to promote the Organization's values and commitment to ethical behavior, transparency, accountability, and equity.
2. The Ethics Office is an independent entity within the organizational structure of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) and has a direct reporting relationship to the Governing Bodies of PAHO through the Executive Committee. Within PASB, the Ethics Office reports to the Deputy Director for performance evaluation and routine administrative matters, including biennial work plans, budget, staffing needs, and the approval of duty travel and leave.
3. The Ethics Office is guided by the principles of integrity, independence, and impartiality in pursuing its mandate of ensuring ethical conduct and compliance with the rules and policies that have been instituted in PAHO to promote the highest standards of ethical behavior. The Ethics Office performs its functions without any external influence from staff, management, or third parties outside the Organization.
4. Since its establishment 13 years ago, the Ethics Office has had a dual mandate: *a)* to provide guidance and advice to PASB personnel on ethical issues to help guide them in the right direction, and *b)* to conduct administrative fact-finding investigations into allegations of misconduct. However, effective 1 January 2018, the investigative function was transferred to a newly established Investigations Office. As a result, this is the first year that the Ethics Office will only report on its ethics-related activities. Nonetheless, pending recruitment of a Chief of the Investigations Office, the Ethics Program Manager acted in that position during all of 2018 and, accordingly, dedicated a significant amount of time to the duties of that office last year.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The new Chief Investigator was appointed on 11 March 2019.

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5. The Ethics Office strives to cultivate an internal work environment in which respect for others, integrity, trust, open communication, and tolerance for different cultures and perspectives are both encouraged and shared by all personnel. While every person who works for PASB is expected to apply the principles of PAHO's *Code of Ethical Principles and Conduct* ("the Code") in their day-to-day activities, both inside and outside the workplace, the Ethics Office is tasked with promoting high ethical standards and responding to any doubts, questions, or uncertainties about these principles that may arise.

6. Access to the Ethics Office is open to all personnel in PASB, irrespective of their contractual status. Personnel are encouraged to seek advice on how to comply with the principles of ethical behavior set out in the Code and other policies that regulate the conduct of international civil servants. The Ethics Office plays a primary role in promoting and shaping a culture of ethics and integrity in PASB, providing guidance and training to help personnel make the right ethical decisions, and integrating the principles set forth in the Code into the daily professional practice of all personnel. The role of the Ethics Office is vital to helping PAHO convey transparency, trust, and integrity, both within the Organization and in its relationships with external partners as it carries out its mission of championing health throughout the Americas.

7. The Ethics Office utilizes a variety of tools and resources to promote high ethical standards and awareness, including printed materials and face-to-face training sessions both at Headquarters and in the PAHO/WHO Representative (PWR) Offices and PAHO Centers. By staying abreast of emerging trends and shifting priorities in the areas of ethics and compliance, the Ethics Office can develop new policies and initiatives, which are then incorporated into learning activities.

8. The Ethics Office is the coordinator of PAHO's Integrity and Conflict Management System (ICMS),<sup>2</sup> which brings together all the offices in the Organization responsible for addressing matters of organizational integrity and conflict resolution. The ICMS members meet regularly to ensure consistent application and interpretation of PAHO rules and regulations, to discuss matters of mutual interest, and to suggest policy changes and improvements to the Organization's conflict resolution system.

9. In this report, the Ethics Office outlines its activities, achievements, and challenges in 2018. Areas covered include: *a)* advice and guidance provided to PASB personnel in response to consultations; *b)* briefing and training activities to continue to foster an improved ethical culture; *c)* new initiatives that were implemented in 2018 to improve awareness and reduce the risk of potential conflicts of interest; and *d)* future actions that will be taken to further enhance the ethical culture in PASB.

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<sup>2</sup> The ICMS members include the Ethics Office, Office of the Ombudsman, Office of the Legal Counsel, Human Resources Management, Information Security Officer, Internal Oversight and Evaluation Services, Investigations Office, Board of Appeal, and PAHO/WHO Staff Association.

10. Highlighted below are the principal activities undertaken and the results achieved by the Ethics Office in 2018 in each of the key areas described above.

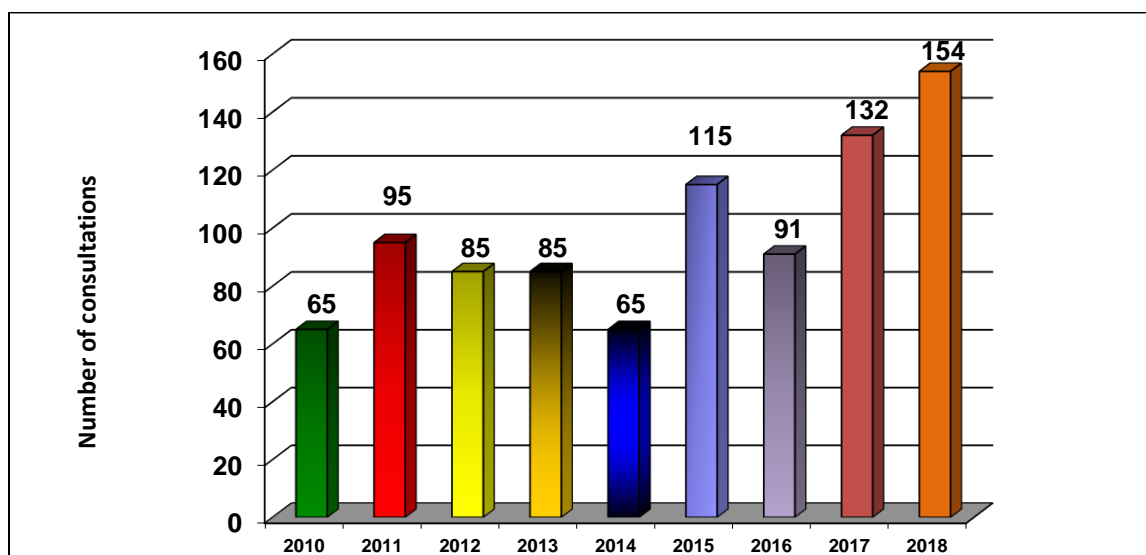
### Advice and Guidance

11. At its core, the Ethics Office's role is to help PASB personnel meet their responsibilities and obligations under the Code. All personnel are encouraged to seek advice from the Ethics Office whenever they have questions or are unsure of the potential implications of their actions. By providing authoritative guidance, the Office helps personnel avoid potential conflicts of interest between their professional responsibilities and personal interests, thereby safeguarding the reputations of both the Organization and the individuals themselves.

12. When PASB personnel have an ethical dilemma, question, or concern, they may opt for any of several different avenues to obtain guidance on the issue: *a*) consult the various written policies of the Organization, including the Code and the International Civil Service Commission's Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service; *b*) ask a question through PAHO's Helpline (remaining anonymous if they wish); and/or *c*) approach the Ethics Office directly (in person or by email) for guidance and advice on how to address a given situation.

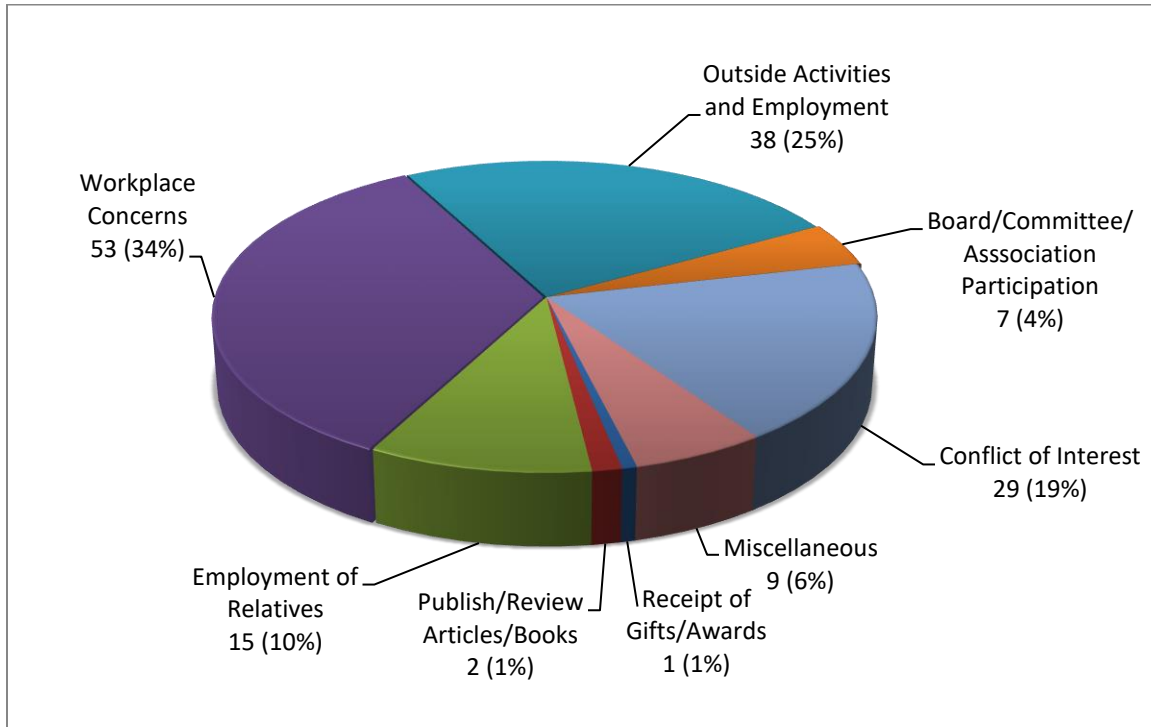
13. As shown in Figure 1, the Ethics Office responded to 154 consultations in 2018 from personnel on a wide range of topics. This 17% increase in consultations relative to 2017 indicates a growing willingness on the part of PAHO personnel to seek guidance when faced with ethical considerations, as well as trust in the quality of the advice that is provided. The record 154 consultations received in 2018 corresponds to about 7% of the PASB workforce of over 2,100 individuals employed under all types of contracts.

**Figure 1. Consultations by Year, 2010–2018**



14. The types of consultations received in 2018 are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Consultations by Type, 2018**



15. In 2018, 53 queries were received about general workplace concerns, such as whether private sales are permitted on PASB premises, how to address colleagues whose behavior does not reflect the standards reflected in the Code, and how to respond when supervisors ask staff to perform personal services on their behalf.

16. The Ethics Office received 38 queries in 2018 regarding outside activities and external employment of PASB personnel. This represents a 65% increase from the prior year. This may be the result of greater sensitization at Headquarters following the Ethics Office's increased outreach efforts. When reviewing these queries, the Ethics Office determines whether the proposed outside activity or employment would pose a conflict of interest with the work of the Organization, create a reputational risk or interfere with the person's ability to carry out their work in PAHO. In addition, the Ethics Office must ensure that any outside employment conforms with the individual's immigration status at their duty station.

17. In 2018, 29 queries referred to potential conflicts of interest. In one case, the Ethics Office received a query from an administrator who disclosed that an ex-spouse was employed by a vendor participating in a procurement action. The Ethics Office reviewed the information provided and confirmed that recusal by the administrator from the procurement action was necessary to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.

18. As was the case in 2017, 15 queries related to the employment of family members or relatives of serving PASB personnel. Given the negative connotations of nepotism, the Organization does not normally allow the employment of family members or relatives in PASB unless the person undergoes a competitive selection process, the position requires specialized skills, and no other equally qualified candidate is available.

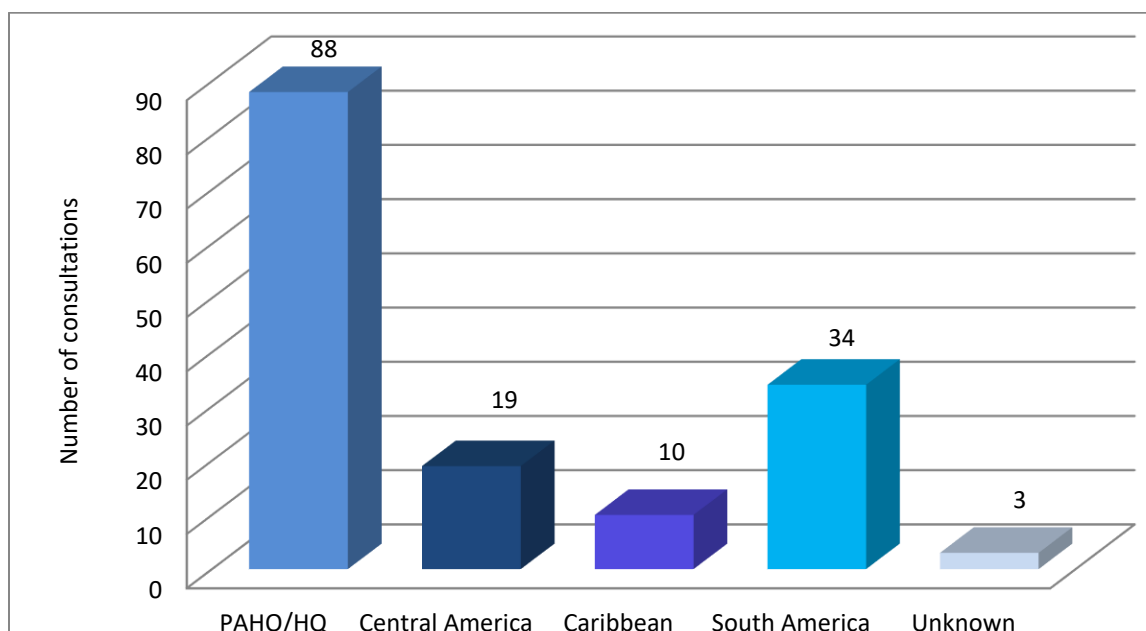
19. In addition, seven queries related to serving as a board member of an outside organization or association. As part of the review process, the Ethics Office seeks to ensure that the person's participation would not create a conflict of interest with the mandate or work of the Organization. In one instance, a staff member contacted the Ethics Office to ask whether it would be permissible to serve on a committee to select recipients for a prestigious award. The Ethics Office determined that such activity was compatible with the work and reputation of the Organization and allowed the staff member to accept the invitation on condition that it did not interfere with their duties in PAHO and that no PAHO resources were used to pursue the activity. The Ethics Office also noted that the staff member's professional allegiance must always be with PAHO and that all day-to-day activities must be guided by that commitment.

20. Only one consultation was received in 2018 about gifts from suppliers or vendors. The Code stipulates that a gift from an outside source may only be accepted if it is "infrequent and of minimal value." Accordingly, PASB personnel are required to decline substantial gifts to avoid any perception of preferential treatment and any expectation of reciprocity from the vendor in the future. Two queries related to the publication of books, and nine other queries were received on miscellaneous issues.

21. Figure 3 shows that 57% (88) of all consultations were received from personnel at PAHO Headquarters, while 41% (63) were from personnel in the PWR offices and PAHO Centers, disaggregated as follows: 22% (34) from South America, 12% (19) from Central America, and 6% (10) from the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> Three consultations did not include information on the duty station.

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<sup>3</sup> Another 2% of consultations in 2018 were received through the PAHO Helpline from unknown locations.

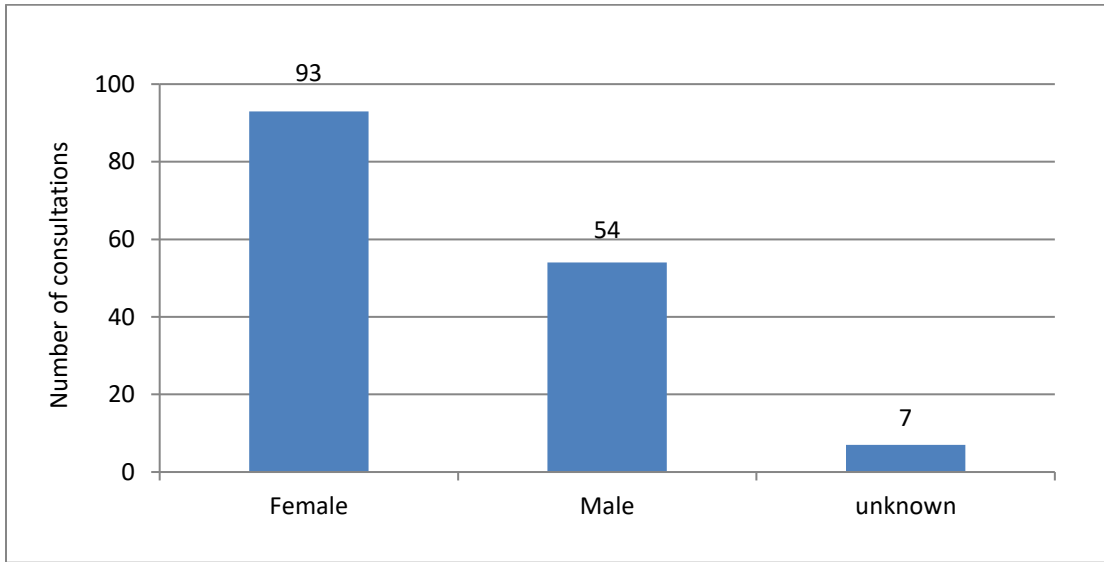
**Figure 3. Consultations by Subregion, 2018**

22. Figure 4 shows that female personnel accounted for 60% of the total number of consultations received. This is consistent with their representation in the PAHO workforce, which is made up of 60.3% women.<sup>4</sup> Of the 93 consultations received from women, 87% (81) were from holders of United Nations (UN) contracts, while 13% (12) originated from women who are non-UN staff. Figure 4 also shows that men accounted for 35% of all consultations in 2018 while representing 39.7% of the PAHO workforce. Of the 54 consultations received from men, 93% were from holders of UN contracts, while only 7% were from non-UN staff. Seven consultations did not include any disclosure on gender.

23. For the most part, the breakdown of consultations by gender approximates the demographic situation in the Organization. However, the relatively low number of consultations from non-UN staff indicates that additional outreach efforts must be made to sensitize them about the Organizational resources available to them, as well as about their rights and obligations under the Code.

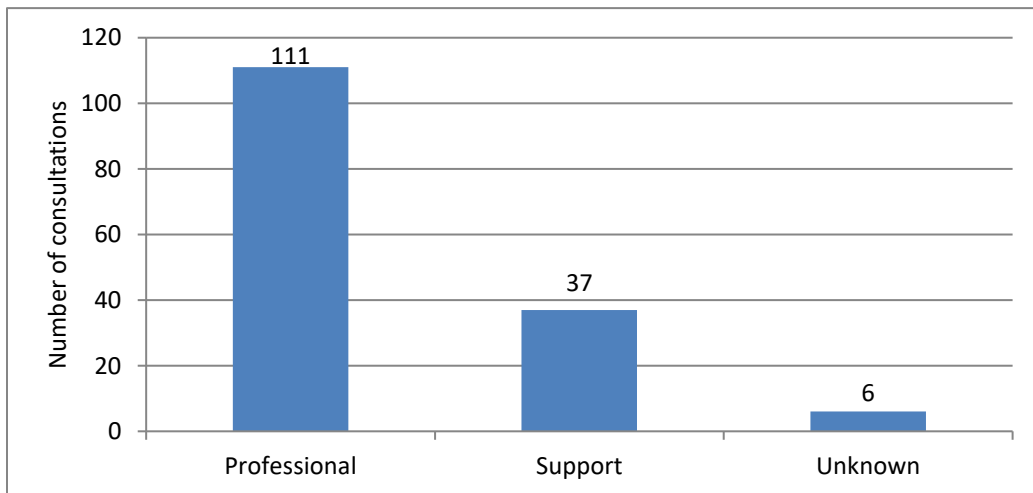
<sup>4</sup> Based on a total personnel count of 2,116 on 31 December 2018 as provided by the Department of Human Resources Management (HRM).

**Figure 4. Consultations by Gender, 2018**



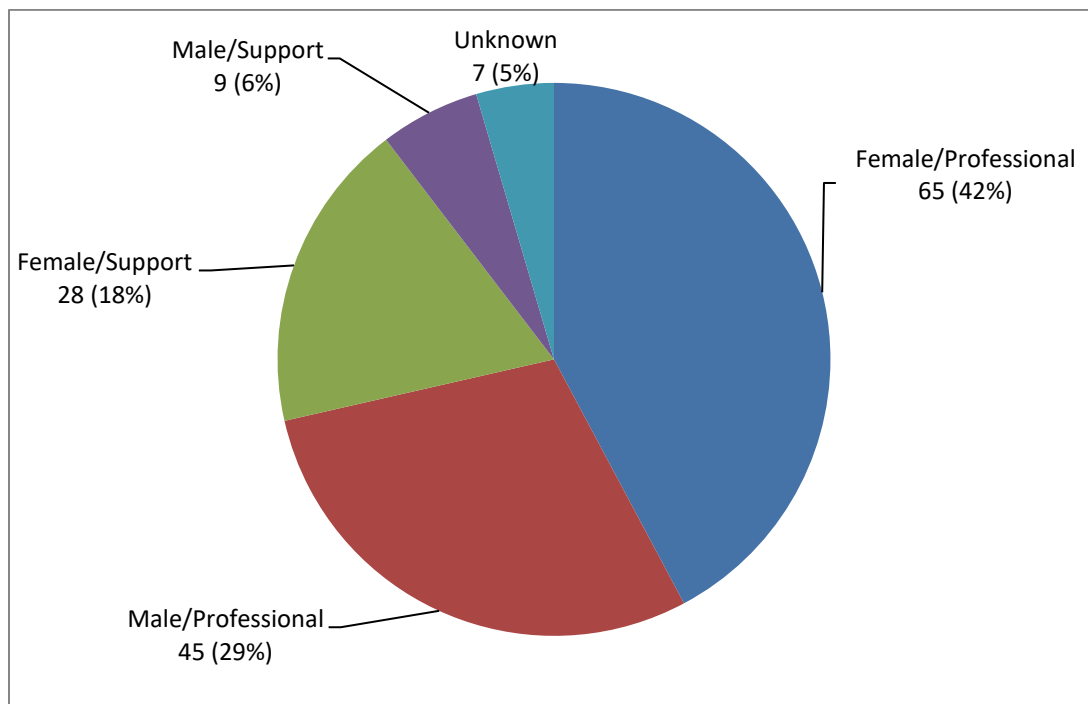
24. Figure 5 shows the number of consultations by employment category. While personnel in the professional category make up 59% of the total PAHO workforce, they were responsible for 72% (111) of the consultations in 2018. In contrast, support personnel make up 41% of the PAHO workforce and accounted for 24% (37) of the consultations. While it is reasonable to expect that a higher number of questions would come from staff in the professional category due to their participation on professional committees, boards, and/or associations, the discrepancy between the two categories of personnel signifies that additional efforts are necessary to encourage support personnel to approach the Ethics Office for advice and guidance.

**Figure 5. Consultations by Employment Category, 2018**



25. Figure 6 shows the disaggregation of 2018 data by both gender and employment category. As can be seen, the highest number of consultations received in 2018 came from female professional personnel, who accounted for 42% of all consultations but made up 33.3% of the total workforce. The next highest group was male professionals, with 29% of all consultations while accounting for 26% of total personnel. In contrast, male support personnel had the lowest rate of contact with the Ethics Office in 2018, accounting for only 6% of the total number of consultations while representing 13.7% of the overall workforce.

**Figure 6. Consultations  
by Gender & Employment Category, 2018**



### **Briefing and Learning Opportunities**

26. The Ethics Office's objectives in providing briefing and learning opportunities to PAHO personnel are to: *a)* impart a sound knowledge of the Code and the Organization's expectations in terms of acceptable behavior; *b)* provide tools and resources for PASB personnel to address ethical concerns and to know when and how to seek assistance; and *c)* lay the groundwork for establishing a strong ethical foundation and respectful workplace.

27. In 2018, the Ethics Office conducted training sessions on proper ethical behavior, conflicts of interest, fraud prevention and detection, use of social media, personal and sexual harassment, and whistleblower protection in five PWR Offices and six Headquarters departments. In total, over 500 people received training, and the number of personnel trained at Headquarters was the most in a single year. This outreach demonstrates the Ethics Office's renewed efforts to ensure that all PAHO personnel benefit from ethics training and outreach.



<b>Countries</b>	<b>Headquarters Departments</b>
Argentina	Communications (CMU)
Belize	Country and Sub-regional Coordination (CSC)
Ecuador	Evidence and Intelligence for Action in Health (EIH)
Haiti	Health Systems and Services (HSS)
Honduras	Human Resources Management (HRM) Information Technology Services (ITS)

28. In 2018, the Ethics Office also gave briefings to a new group of PAHO administrators and a group of interns at PAHO Headquarters.

29. In addition, the Ethics Office and the Office of the Ombudsman co-hosted a session of the Learning Fair held during the 2018 Managers' Meeting in Panama City, Panama. Dr. Christine Porath, a renowned expert on the topic of civility in the workplace, was invited to the meeting and provided valuable insights to senior managers and PAHO/WHO Representatives on the cost of incivility in the workplace in terms of lower productivity and morale and greater absenteeism and turnover.

30. The Ethics Office is also a regular presenter at the newly launched orientation program for new personnel entitled PLUS@PAHO. By participating in a program specifically designed for new hires, the Ethics Office hopes that a new generation of PASB personnel will appreciate the importance of ethics in their day-to-day work and know that PAHO is an organization with high ethical standards that does not tolerate unethical behavior.

31. Finally, the Ethics Office also launched its first curriculum on PAHO's iLearn platform. The 2.5-hour curriculum comprises three activities: *a*) a United Nations course on Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority in the Workplace; *b*) a UN video entitled To Serve with Pride: Zero Tolerance for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; and *c*) a user survey. The curriculum is mandatory for all PAHO personnel, regardless of position or type of contract.

### **Other Actions and Initiatives**

32. In 2018, the Ethics Office automated its annual Declaration of Interests form and issued it to designated personnel to enable them to disclose any activity that could give rise to a conflict of interest with the work or mandate of the Organization. The Ethics Office reviewed 178 responses and ensured that any potential or actual conflicts of interest were resolved in favor of the Organization.

33. In conjunction with Knowledge Management, Publications and Translations (KMP) and Health Systems and Services (HSS), the Ethics Office co-hosted a session entitled Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-plagiarism and Other Questionable Writing and

Authorship Practices. This session was in response to the World Health Organization's new Code of Conduct for Responsible Research and its Policy on Misconduct in Research. The session was led by Professor Miguel Roig from St. John's University and was intended to strengthen personnel awareness and understanding of key research integrity topics.

34. The Ethics Office also teamed up with the Office of the Ombudsman to develop a dedicated training session on sexual harassment. This training program aims to provide a better understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment, how to avoid behavior that might give rise to an allegation of sexual harassment, and better awareness of the available resources in PASB to prevent and address sexual harassment.

35. Finally, the Ethics Office issued a Public Information Bulletin (PIB) in October 2018 about the presidential election in Brazil. This bulletin reminded PASB personnel of their obligation to refrain from any actions or activities that could be viewed as being critical of a Member State government or political party, including opposition parties.

### **Future Actions**

36. In 2018, the Ethics Office dealt with an increasing number of concerns from professional staff about what they perceived to be dismissive and demeaning behavior from their supervisors. On some occasions, staff have expressed concern that their input on technical matters is summarily dismissed by their supervisors. In turn, some supervisors have indicated that staff become defensive when their suggestions and opinions are not implemented. This has led to friction between some supervisors and their staff.

37. It is important for staff at all levels to feel free to voice their opinions and engage in professional discourse without fearing retaliation or marginalization. Supervisors must be able to accept feedback and opinions from subordinates without becoming defensive and presuming that their authority is being challenged. Likewise, it is important for staff to understand that supervisors are accountable for decisions and actions taken by their entity, that supervisors have the authority to make the final decision, and that staff need to accept the decision and move on even when they do not agree with the decision.

38. With a view to encouraging supervisors and their subordinates to engage in full and open debate without worrying about professional pride, the Ethics Office is fostering the concept of "respectful dissent" by encouraging all parties to avoid jumping to conclusions, to value the experiences and viewpoints of others, and to understand the decision-making process at PAHO.

39. In late 2018, the United Nations launched a "Safe Spaces" survey across the UN System on sexual harassment in the workplace. PAHO personnel participated in the anonymous survey and the results were disseminated to all participating agencies in early 2019. The results provided a greater awareness of the prevalence of sexual harassment in the UN, including in PAHO, and showed that additional efforts must be made to: *a*) set the tone at the top and send an unequivocal message that sexual harassment is not tolerated in the international civil service; *b*) improve the level of awareness of the available

institutional resources to prevent, report, and address sexual harassment; and *c*) hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. The Ethics Office is preparing a plan of action to spearhead these initiatives in PAHO.

40. PAHO personnel come from about 55 different countries, and everyone who works in PAHO, irrespective of country of origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation, deserves to be treated with respect. To this end, the Ethics Office is developing a campaign with a two-pronged approach. One part of the campaign is to direct staff to “Cut It Out,” meaning to stop any inappropriate or disrespectful behavior, while the other part is to “Call It Out,” to encourage personnel to report any concerns they may have without fear of retaliation.

41. A new anti-fraud and corruption policy will be issued in 2019. The Ethics Office led a working group that was tasked with establishing a more robust policy to address the various types of fraud and risk factors and to highlight the proactive measures that can be taken to reduce the incidence of fraudulent activity. This new policy takes into account the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System in its report on Fraud Prevention, Detection and Response in United Nations System Organizations.

42. In addition, the Ethics Office will undertake in 2019 a comprehensive review of PAHO’s Policy to Protect Against Retaliation for Reporting Wrongdoing or Cooperating in an Investigation or Audit, which was issued in 2009. This review will consider best practices, as well as the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit following its review of whistle-blower policies and practices in UN System organizations.

43. The Ethics Office also led efforts in 2018 to develop a new policy addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. The intent of this policy is to ensure that no one in PAHO misuses or attempts to misuse their position to sexually exploit or abuse another person who is in a vulnerable position due to their age, socioeconomic status, or security situation. This policy is also being finalized and will be issued in 2019.

44. In 2019, the Ethics Office will work with the Department of Human Resources Management to ensure that individuals who are being recruited for positions or assignments in the Organization meet PAHO’s high standards of integrity and do not have any past behavior or conflicts of interest that could pose a reputational risk for the Organization after they are appointed.

45. Finally, the Ethics Office will develop a new code of ethical principles and conduct in 2019 that will incorporate the latest best practices and developments in the ethics field, and offer a more appealing visual presentation.

**Action by the Executive Committee**

46. The Executive Committee is invited to take note of this report, solicit additional information or clarification on the work and activities of the Ethics Office in 2018, and provide additional guidance to the Organization as it sees fit.

Annex

### Analytical Form to Link Agenda Item with Organizational Mandates

<b>1. Agenda item:</b> 3.5 - Annual Report of the Ethics Office for 2018
<b>2. Responsible unit:</b> Ethics Office (ETH)
<b>3. Preparing officer:</b> Mr. Philip MacMillan
<b>4. Link between Agenda item and <a href="#">Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018-2030</a>:</b> Not applicable.
<b>5. Link between Agenda item and the <a href="#">Strategic Plan of the Pan American Health Organization 2014-2019 (Amended)</a>:</b> Category 6: Corporate Services/Enabling Functions Program Area 6.2: Transparency, Accountability, and Risk Management Outcome 6.2: PAHO operates in an accountable and transparent manner and has well-functioning risk management and evaluation frameworks
<b>6. Link between Agenda item and the <a href="#">PAHO Program and Budget 2018-2019</a>:</b> Output 6.2.3: Improved ethical behavior, respect within the workplace, and due process across the Organization
<b>7. List of collaborating centers and national institutions linked to this Agenda item:</b> Not applicable.
<b>8. Best practices in this area and examples from countries within the Region of the Americas:</b> Not applicable.
<b>9. Financial implications of this Agenda item:</b> This Agenda item has no specific financial implications, but the Ethics Office continues to rely on the requisite level of funding to enable it to fulfill its mandate.