

2024 Annual Activity Report and Case Statistics of the **Respect Compliance Office**

Source: Respect Compliance Office (RCO)

Version: October 2025

Introduction

This report presents an overview of the activities carried out by the Respect Compliance Office (RCO) during the year 2024. It marks the first full year of implementation of LEX 1.8.3, the directive governing the handling of integrity-related concerns, and 1.5 year of operational presence of the RCO Officer.

Throughout the year, the RCO's work has been grounded in the principles of trust, transparent communication, and collaborative engagement across the institution.

It offers a comprehensive perspective on the RCO's contribution to promoting a healthy, safe, and fair study, professional and research environment at EPFL.

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RESPECT COMPLIANCE OFFICE – 2024 ANNUAL REPORT**Executive Summary of the Respect Compliance Officer**

Established in 2023, the Respect Compliance Office (RCO) is a relatively new entity at EPFL, dedicated to promoting a respectful, inclusive, and safe academic and professional environment. In 2024, the RCO completed its first full year of operation under Directive LEX 1.8.3, which formalizes EPFL's framework for managing psychosocial risks and integrity-related issues. Throughout the year, the RCO has solidified its role as a key institutional actor in fostering a culture of respect within the EPFL community.

The RCO is composed of two complementary bodies:

- **The Respect Compliance Committee, which provides collegial strategic oversight on cases brought through the respect@epfl.ch email address, and**
- **The Respect Compliance Unit, which serves as the operational branch, manages formal actions and supports the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.**

The legal framework provided by LEX 1.8.3 has enhanced the RCO's legitimacy and structural clarity. However, it has also highlighted limitations in addressing complex real-life situations. In response, EPFL's leadership initiated an external evaluation to support improvements, and the community has called for greater clarity in complaint procedures.

In 2024, the RCO received 84 new cases and managed 19 ongoing from 2023, representing a **25.4% increase** compared to the previous year. Cases were categorized as formal complaints (45.2%), alerts (48.8%), or information requests (6%). This categorization reflects the need for diverse pathways for individuals seeking support or reporting concerns.

The RCO enhanced its presence through 17 training and awareness sessions and ongoing collaboration with the Trust and Support Network (TSN).

In conclusion, the RCO contributed to institutional learning, collective learning process and proposed several recommendations: preserving its independence, addressing recurring informal concerns, clarifying academic hierarchies, and supporting professors in leadership training. These efforts aim to consolidate a culture of respect and psychological safety at EPFL.

The importance of a solid legal foundation

In 2024, the Respect Compliance Office (RCO) completed its first full year of operation under Directive LEX 1.8.3, which formalizes EPFL's framework for preventing and managing psychosocial risks, including harassment, discrimination, and other behaviors detrimental to personal integrity. This directive delineates a structured, multi-tiered approach to handling such issues, emphasizing early intervention through the Trust and Support Network (TSN) and, when necessary, formal proceedings via the RCO. The RCO operates with full independence and confidentiality, comprising a Respect Compliance Officer and a committee of members representative of the EPFL community.

Governance : RCO Unit and RCO Committee

The Respect Compliance Committee, as defined in LEX 1.8.3, provides strategic oversight and guidance. Its operational body is the Respect Compliance Unit, which manages the handling of complaints and supports implementation.

The Committee, comprising representatives from various EPFL departments, convened regularly to assess cases and issue recommendations. All cases are presented by the RCO Officer to the Committee, which holds collective responsibility for:

- **Assessing the admissibility of complaints and alerts:** Determining whether a case falls within the scope of psychosocial risks as defined in Article 4 of the LEX 1.8.3 directive.
- **Defining appropriate actions:** Proposing suitable measures such as mediation, HR involvement, or other support mechanisms tailored to the case.
- **Evaluating the need for interim measures:** Deciding whether temporary protective measures should be implemented to safeguard the parties involved, including individuals in management roles.
- **Ensuring case confidentiality:** Upholding confidentiality, except in serious cases where notification of competent authorities is required.
- **Recommending actions to management or external investigation:** Advising the managerial line on appropriate responses or recommending the launch of an external investigation when necessary.
- **Collaborating with institutional structures:** Working closely with internal entities and the Support and Trust Network to ensure the effective implementation of decisions.

The RCO expanded its collaborative efforts with internal and other institutions partners, reinforcing its role in supporting leadership and fostering a respectful campus culture. Ongoing evaluations aim to refine governance structures and clarify roles within the complaint management framework.

Guiding principles:



TRUST



CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION



HUMAN APPROACH

Efforts were also directed towards refining internal processes, improving communication strategies, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities within the complaint management framework.

This comprehensive approach underscored EPFL's dedication to addressing psychosocial risks effectively and fostering a safe and supportive academic environment for all its community members.

Composition of the RCO in 2024



RESPECT COMPLIANCE OFFICER	Emmanuel Noyer
PRESIDENT	Kathryn Hess, former member and president Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs and Outreach
MEMBER	Françoise Chardonnes, former Director of Legal Affairs
MEMBER	Marianne Wannier, Director of HR Department, a.i.
MEMBER	Eric du Pasquier, Director of Security, Safety and Facilities Operations
MEMBER	Annalisa Buffa, Associate Vice-President for Post-Graduate Education
COORDINATOR RCO	Ofelia Tursi, from May 2022

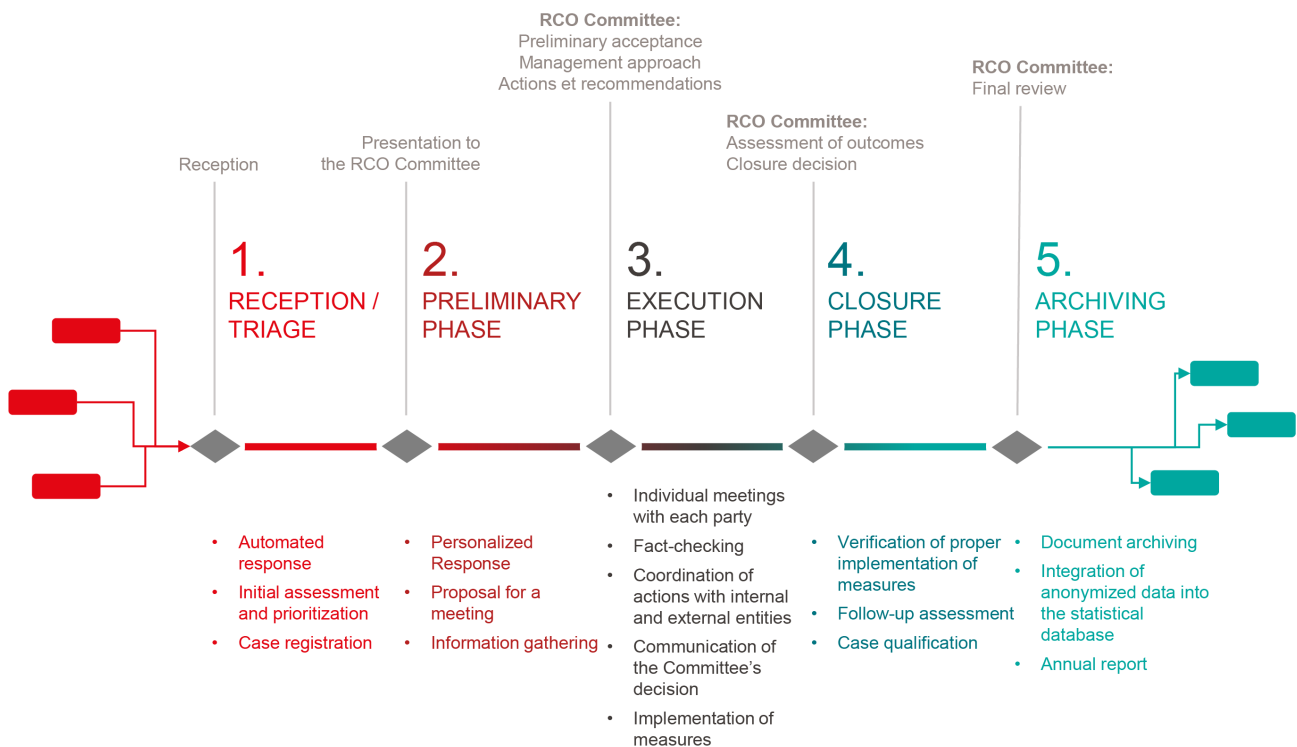
The names of the committee members are publicly available on the [EPFL website](#), ensuring transparency and accessibility for the community.

RCO Case handling

The Respect Compliance Office (RCO) is responsible for receiving, assessing, and supporting the management of cases related to potential violations of personal integrity at EPFL. Its approach aims at supporting the principles of confidentiality, independence, fairness, and institutional coordination.

Each case is handled with attention to its specific context and level of sensitivity. Depending on the situation, the RCO may:

- Provide information and support to the individuals involved
- Facilitate the initial assessment and classification of the case
- Coordinate with other internal actors (e.g. Human Resources, EDOC, Faculty Deans) when appropriate
- Implement or recommend protective or safeguarding measures
- Conduct or support a structured case management process, including final qualification when applicable.



Creating a secure space for dialogue

One of the most significant developments introduced by this framework is the possibility for members of the EPFL community to engage in confidential and informal discussions with the RCO.

This secure space for open expression offers a trusted environment where individuals can share concerns, clarify their options, and receive guidance without the pressure of initiating formal proceedings.

In practice, almost all RCO formal complaints in 2024 were preceded by a request for an initial meeting with the RCO Office, either with the Respect Compliance Officer or the Coordinator.

2024 CASES STATISTICS

2024 Cases overview

In 2024, the RCO initiated 84 new cases, in addition to 19 cases that remained open from 2023. As of December 31, 2024, a total of 14 cases were still ongoing.

The categorization of cases was revised and formalized to better reflect the variety of situations brought to the RCO's attention, resulting in the introduction of a third category.

The current classification includes three distinct types of cases:

1. **COMPLAINTS:** a complaint is a formal procedure initiated by an individual who considers themselves directly affected by a situation that may constitute a violation of their personal integrity (such as harassment, discrimination, violence, etc.).
The filing of a complaint triggers a structured process, which includes a factual analysis, confidential interviews, and the formulation of recommendations. These recommendations may lead to internal, disciplinary, or administrative measures, in accordance with the applicable regulations (LEX 1.8.3).

Complaint process

The complaint process managed by the Respect Compliance Officer (RCO) follows a structured and confidential procedure. A report is treated as a formal complaint only if the following criteria are met:

- **Identification of the Parties Involved**
The person submitting the complaint (the complainant) and the person concerned (the respondent) must both be clearly identified. Anonymous or vague reports may not be processed as formal complaints.

- **Clear Expectations**

The complainant must express clear expectations regarding the situation: what outcome they seek, what form of resolution they consider appropriate, and whether they are requesting specific measures.

- **Informed Consent to Proceed**

The complainant must give explicit and informed consent to allow the facts of the case to be confronted with the respondent. This means the respondent will be informed that a complaint has been made against them and will be given an opportunity to respond. This step is essential for the case to move forward to the next level of review by the RCO or the Committee.

-
2. **ALERTS** (previously referred to as Discussions/Red Flags): information brought to the attention of the RCO without the submission of a formal complaint. An alert may, in some instances, lead to the filing of a formal complaint; however, it does not automatically trigger a formal review or handling process by the RCO.
 3. **REQUESTS** (introduced in 2024): A request refers to an inquiry or a call for information or guidance addressed to the RCO, without the intention of reporting a specific incident or filing a formal complaint. However, the content of such a request may involve sensitive topics that engage the School's responsibility, requiring careful consideration and an appropriate institutional response.

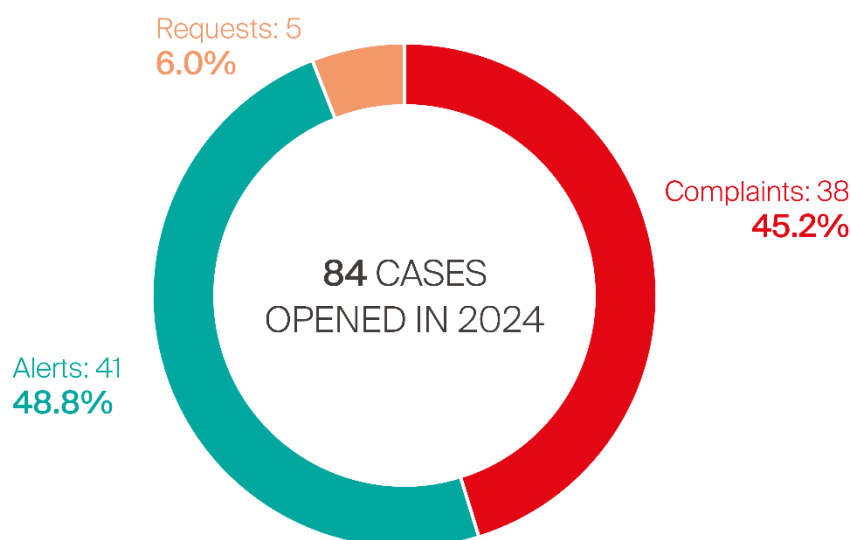


Fig. 1
Distribution of cases opened in 2024 by category (in %)

The data indicates that **Alerts** accounted for the largest share of cases in 2024 (**48.8%**, or **41 cases**), suggesting that a significant number of individuals chose to share concerns or report potentially problematic situations without initiating formal proceedings. This may reflect a preference for informal resolution mechanisms or a continued need for a **safe and low-threshold channel** to express concerns.

Complaints represented **45.2%** of cases (**38 in total**), showing that nearly half of the reported issues led to formal procedures.

Requests, a category introduced in 2024, accounted for **6%** of cases (**5 in total**). This new reporting channel is intended for individuals seeking information or support without the intention of triggering formal action or reporting a specific incident, and will continue to be monitored as it evolves.

Evolution of cases (2018–2024)

Overall, the total number of cases recorded by the RCO has steadily increased, rising from **6 cases in 2018** to **84 cases in 2024**. This upward trend reflects a growing use of reporting mechanisms made available to the EPFL community.

Since 2022, the number of **alerts** has consistently exceeded the number of **formal complaints**.

Evolution of cases

2018..2024

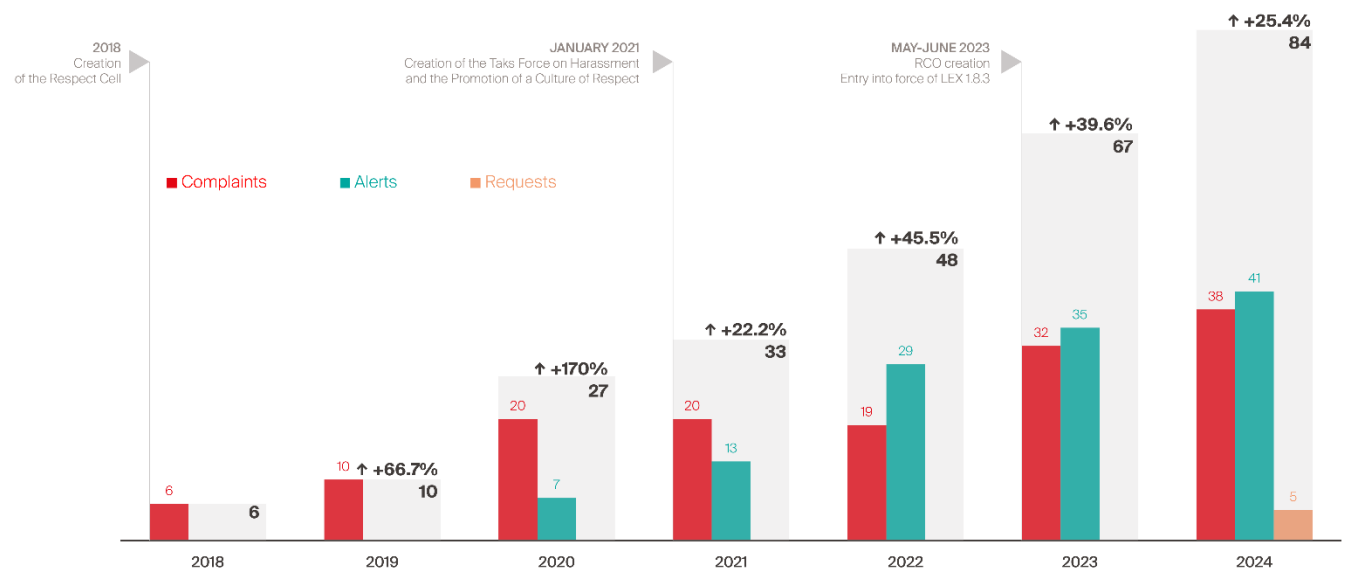


Fig. 2
Evolution of cases reported to the RCO from 2018 to 2024, by category

While complaints remained relatively stable at around **20 cases per year** until 2022, they increased significantly over the past two years, reaching **38 cases in 2024**. In parallel, alerts have grown more rapidly, from **7 cases in 2020** to **41 cases in 2024**.

Although this rise in reported cases **does not necessarily indicate an increase in psychosocial risk**, it coincides with a significant **communication and outreach effort** launched following the introduction of **Directive LEX 1.8.3** in 2023.

Initiatives such as **TrustPoint** have contributed to enhancing the **visibility and accessibility** of the RCO across campus, potentially encouraging more individuals to come forward.

Contact entry point

87.1%

of the persons contacted
respect@epfl.ch

4.8%

contacted the RCO Officer directly

8.2 %

were referred from:
the Person of Trust (2), the Ombudsperson (1), the Equal Opportunity Office (1), Mediacom (1), the president of the RCO Committee (1) and section deputies (1).

The official institutional channel, via the RCO's dedicated email address (respect@epfl.ch), remains the **main entry point** for individuals wishing to report concerns. This reflects the accessibility and confidentiality of the RCO's centralized contact point.

At the same time, the data highlights the key role played by internal stakeholders—such as Persons of Trust, HR, and academic leaders—in referring cases to the RCO when necessary, and in guiding members of the EPFL community towards appropriate and trusted reporting channels.

The RCO also maintains a **flexible and open-door approach** to how individuals choose to reach out.

The fact that several individuals directly contacted the Respect Compliance Officer is a meaningful outcome of the Officer's proactive communication and internal networking efforts, aimed at strengthening trust and visibility across the institution.

Urgency and impact

As part of a continuous improvement approach to case management, it became clear in 2024 that additional structuring tools were needed to better guide the RCO's response to reported situations. In this context, the RCO introduced two new criteria: **urgency** and **impact**.

These criteria aim to assess both the **extent** of a situation and its **time sensitivity**, to ensure a response that is timely, proportionate, and aligned with the needs of the individuals involved.

- **Urgency Level:** the urgency criterion indicates the required response time and level of priority assigned to each case:

Level 1 – Non-priority: Standard follow-up; no immediate action required.

Level 2 – Important: Requires a rapid intervention, within 36 hours.

Level 3 – Critical: Requires immediate action, to be addressed within 24 hours.

- The **Impact** criterion refers to the scope of the situation reported, categorized as follows:

Individual: The situation affects a single person.

Group: The situation impacts a group of individuals (e.g., a team, a research unit).

Institution: The situation has broader implications that may affect the institution as a whole.

In such cases, **Mediacom is systematically involved** to support institutional communication and alignment.

The data shows that the majority of cases (25 cases) were classified as Urgency Level 1 and were assessed as having an individual impact (23 cases). 12 cases were categorized as Urgency Level 2, of which 6 had an individual impact and 6 a group impact. Only 1 case was classified as Urgency Level 3. This case was assessed as having an institutional impact.

This distribution reflects that most complaints involve situations affecting individuals and do not require urgent intervention. However, a smaller proportion of cases were identified as having broader consequences or

requiring immediate attention, illustrating the relevance of these new classification criteria to guide the RCO's operational response.

Temporary measures in response to complaints

During case management, a set of coordinated actions may be implemented depending on the situation. These include:

- **Protective measures** during the handling of the case (e.g. support for the complainant, temporary adjustments to avoid contact between parties).
- **Conservatory measures**, such as the preservation of evidence or documentation.
- **None**, when no specific action is identified as necessary.

Classification versus qualification of complaints

In the spirit of continuous improvement, and in response to strong demand from the community for clearer and more consistent practices in complaint case handling, the RCO introduced in 2024 a new methodological approach to the categorization of formal complaints.

This approach clearly distinguishes between two key stages in the case assessment process: **the classification** of the complaint **and the qualification** of the facts (to evaluate the severity and nature of the alleged misconduct based on institutional rules).

- **Classification:** Refers to the alleged nature of the issue as described by the complainant at the time of reporting. This reflects the initial perception of the situation by the person affected.
- **Qualification:** Refers to the final assessment made by the RCO upon closure of the case, based on a thorough analysis of the facts, context, and evidence collected. The qualification provides a formal determination of the issue according to applicable institutional frameworks and internal procedures.

This two-tiered approach allows for a more accurate understanding of both the subjective experience of the complainant and the objective findings of the RCO.

To support this new two-step approach, the **list of terms used for both classification and qualification was expanded in 2024**. This revision was designed to better reflect the nuance and complexity of the situations reported, allowing for greater precision in documenting and analyzing cases.

A new initiative was introduced in 2024 to allow for **multi-criteria classification and qualification** of cases. Rather than assigning a single label, cases can now be categorized under multiple relevant criteria, reflecting the complexity and intersectionality often present in integrity-related issues.

In addition to the reports of psychological harassment, verbal abuse, and violence, the data also reveal the presence of **managerial issues and interpersonal conflicts** throughout the period from 2018 to 2024.

The number of confirmed cases of sexual harassment remained low (2 cases). Ongoing awareness and training efforts at the institutional level are being prosecuted. In three cases, the RCO was unable to proceed due to insufficient information: the absence of a named respondent, unclear affiliation with EPFL, or a lack of follow-up from the reporting person.

These elements point to the importance of continued clarity in definitions, reinforcement of communication channels, and the building of trust to ensure that individuals feel both safe and capable of fully engaging in the case-handling process.

UniSAFE Survey¹

Data from the UniSAFE survey show that **of those who had experienced any form of genderbased violence only 13% reported it.**

Among the reasons for not reporting events of genderbased violence, almost half of the victims (47%) said they felt uncertain whether the behaviour was serious enough to report it.

Another frequent reason for not reporting was that victims do not always recognise the behaviour as violence at the time of the incident, indicated by 31% of the victims.

Complainants and concerned individuals

Among the **38 formal complaints** submitted in 2024, the profiles of complainants come from a wide range of institutional roles, **with students (14 cases) and staff members (11 cases)** representing the largest groups. The presence of **PhD candidates (7 cases)** also highlights the vulnerability of early-career researchers in academic environments.

This distribution highlights that concerns related to misconduct or inappropriate behavior may arise across all levels of the institution, regardless of role or position.

At EPFL, all complaints are presented to the Committee, which determines the most appropriate management approach, considering confidentiality and with the complainant's consent, to achieve the most effective outcome.

Most cases are handled directly by the Respect Compliance Office (RCO) due to confidentiality concerns. However, approximately 16% of cases are managed jointly (HR, Doctoral school, managerial line) with the complainant's agreement to benefit from additional expertise.

This approach implies a shared responsibility: the RCO ensures confidentiality and case coordination, while other involved units contribute specific expertise when necessary. The complainants remain at the center of the process, and their agreement is essential in shaping the way the cases are handled.

¹ [→ see UniSAFE 2022 survey \(pdf\)](#)

Complaint follow-up: types of actions or recommendations

The Committee issues formal recommendations and ensures they are effectively implemented. These recommendations are systematically followed by the relevant leadership and management, particularly in collaboration with TSN and HR.

Recommendations may range from a reminder of institutional rules to formal reframing discussions, written warnings, awareness-raising sessions, or communication about the roles of TSN and RCO. In some cases, targeted actions such as individual training or coaching are put in place to address issues identified during the case.

It is important to note that in certain cases – involving both students and staff – the RCO recommended disciplinary measures. However, no external or administrative investigations were recommended to the EPFL Presidency in 2024.

Complaint closure

The closure of a case is formally decided during a Respect Compliance Committee meeting, based on a set of criteria reflecting the nature, evolution, and outcome of the case.

In 2024, the reasons for case closure were distributed as follows:

Reason for complaint closure
2024

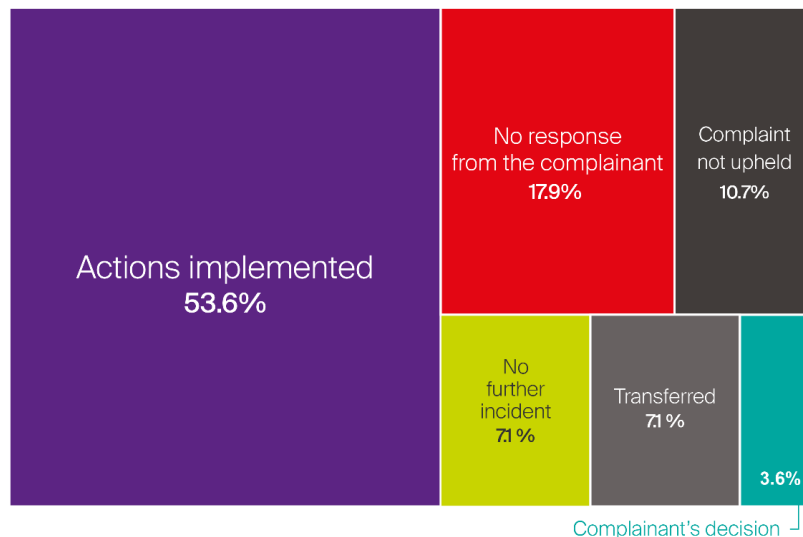


Fig. 3
complaints - reason for closure - 2024

It is worth noting that in **17.9% of complaints**, the complainant did **not respond** or **discontinued communication** after the initial report.

“Complaints not upheld”

At EPFL, a complaint is considered **not upheld** when, after thorough complaint management, the reported facts do not constitute a violation of the institution's rules or directives (LEX 1.8.3). However, this does not imply the absence of a problem. In many cases, genuine distress is identified, necessitating appropriate attention, support, and case management to address the individual's support.

Duration

The duration of a case is calculated in calendar days, from the date the written message is received through the official reporting channel to the date the case is formally closed by the Respect Compliance Office Committee.

87% of the cases were handled in less than 3 months in 2024

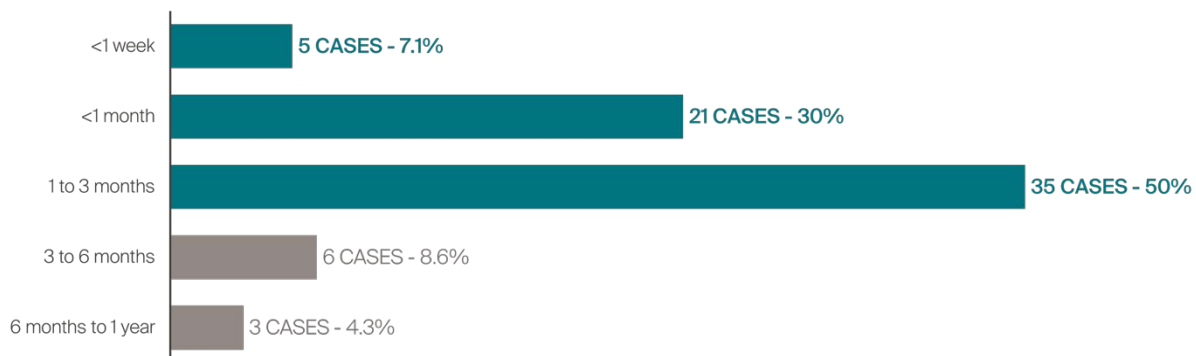


Fig. 4
Duration of cases - 2024

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF RESPECT

Sensibilization and visibility

17

Live presentations, coaching events or training sessions

In 2024, the Respect Compliance Office (RCO) continued the work initiated in 2023 in close collaboration with the TSN Office, developing shared strategies to raise awareness and promote a culture of respect.

As part of this effort, the RCO participated in various institutional events to present its mission and respond to questions from the EPFL community.

4

Participations at EPFL information, thematic or festive events

Communication

As part of its ongoing efforts to professionalize its operations, the Respect Compliance Office (RCO) is finalizing its 2024 activity report, accompanied by the publication of key statistics on the EPFL website.

This transparent approach reflects the RCO's commitment to building trust and reinforcing the credibility of its mandate. It also supports accountability by clearly documenting the actions taken, objectives achieved, and resources mobilized.

The annual report is not only a tool for institutional transparency, but also an instrument for progress monitoring. It enables the RCO to assess its impact in light of community expectations, identify persistent challenges, and define areas for improvement to guide future developments.

- **Useful Tools:** A key aspect of enhancing understanding of the TSN and RCO systems was the collaborative effort in creating a graphic representation of LEX 1.8.3, accompanied by another illustrative image detailing the various support and reporting tools available at EPFL.

These posters were displayed in offices, classrooms, and hallways, and distributed to the entire community through the administrative bodies of all units and faculties.



- Throughout 2024, the RCO continued to raise awareness within the community about using the Trust Point as a support tool for various situations, particularly highlighting the usefulness of the Glossary section. This section aims to help users better understand the key components of issues related to psychosocial risks, enabling them to discern the nature of the need and adjust their responses accordingly.

LESSONS LEARNED IN 2024: EVOLUTION OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

Integrated Within the System: The RCO's Role in the Psychosocial Risk Framework

The Respect Compliance Office (RCO) was initially created to handle formal complaints but has since evolved into a key actor within EPFL's broader system for preventing and managing psychosocial risks, contributing to the improvement of working and learning environments for the entire community.



A fundamental element of the RCO's contribution lies in its coordination with other stakeholders involved in case management. Ensuring a coherent and supportive approach requires close collaboration across various institutional actors.

In this regard, regular dialogue with the Ombudsperson is particularly important to ensure proper case orientation, especially when both services are in copy or contacted as witnesses. Close collaboration with professionals in the Trust & Support Network (TSN) also supports consistent and coordinated institutional responses.

Permanent exchanges

The RCO engages in ongoing discussions with members of both institutional and academic bodies on topics related to awareness, understanding, and prevention of psychosocial risks. These exchanges are essential to fostering a respectful and inclusive environment and contribute to aligning efforts across the institution and ensuring that concerns are addressed at multiple levels—from individual situations to cultural and structural change.

In addition, the RCO maintains regular exchanges and peer learning opportunities with counterparts at other universities facing similar challenges, such as UNIL, ETH Zurich, and others. These interactions offer valuable insights, benchmarking opportunities, and contribute to a broader reflection on institutional practices in conflict prevention and integrity management.

RCO prevention in the management of problematic situations

While remaining within the boundaries of its legal mandate, the RCO has increasingly been consulted by unit heads, professors, and managers seeking guidance in the early handling of situations that could become harmful, especially those involving complex interpersonal dynamics or risks to individual well-being.

This evolving role highlights the RCO's contribution as a neutral, professional and trusted advisory resource in the prevention of psychosocial risks.

Psychological support- Lex 1.8.3 art. 11

Since its introduction in June 2023, the service offering has consistently gained more success in terms of demand throughout 2024.

A very important point not to be underestimated, which emerged from our analysis of the dossiers, is that in almost all cases, individuals were found to be moderately or severely impacted by the situations they brought to our attention, resulting in a subsequent risk to their academic and professional performance.

In some cases, individuals offered support by the RCO were already being followed by external professionals, confirming the intensity of the psychological strain involved.

Conclusion and perspectives

A significant increase in new cases has been recorded, particularly regarding requests for contact related to the reporting of inappropriate behaviors, which can be divided into two main categories:

- **Horizontal behaviors** between collaborators, such as:
 - Discrimination
 - Sexism
- **Vertical behaviors** between collaborators and supervisors often stem from poor managerial skills. These situations are frequently overlooked by leadership, which may prioritize results over interpersonal dynamics. In some cases, the behaviors resemble mobbing, but do not fully meet the legal definition, as they may lack one or more of the required criteria.
Within these dynamics, several subcategories of problematic conduct can be identified, such as:
 - Verbal abuse
 - Psychological degradation
 - Sexism
 - Micromanagement
 - Lack of supervision

In many cases, there are determining factors that exacerbate the situation, such as:

- Excessive stress and workload.
- The significant psychological impact of the situations experienced.
- The psychological condition of the person involved, creating fertile ground for actual or perceived conflicts, ongoing or potential.
- Miscommunication, understood as misunderstandings, lack of clarity, or inconsistent messaging.

With the introduction of the new Directive on psychosocial risks, which came into effect in 2023, the role of the RCO as the contact point for reporting inappropriate behaviors has been formalized.

In this context, the work of the RCO has mainly focused on informing the community about its existence, mandate, contact methods, and the procedure for filing a report, specifying the possible consequences and measures that can be adopted.

Thanks to a year and a half of communication efforts, the RCO has gained visibility and continues to build trust within the EPFL community. An increasing number of individuals now reach out not only to report concerns, but also to seek advice on how to prevent situations that could affect individual or team integrity. These requests come from people in a wide range of roles, including those directly involved in a situation, as well as witnesses or supervisors seeking guidance.

Acknowledgements

The Respect Compliance Office would like to extend its sincere thanks to the two former Chairs of the Respect Committee: **Françoise Chardonnes** and **Kathryn Hess Bellwald** for their dedication to fostering a respectful environment for study, work, and research at EPFL.

Their voluntary commitment, thoughtful involvement, and benevolence in managing complex cases have significantly contributed to the well-being of the entire community.

In addition, the RCO warmly thanks the many partner units, associations, and collaborators—with whom it has worked throughout the year. These collaborations, always grounded in a spirit of neutrality, empathy, and solution-oriented dialogue, have been essential to promoting a culture of respect across campus.

RCO Unit, June 2025