

Zürich, May 31, 2022

**Ombudsoffice at ETH Zurich**  
**Annual Report 2021****Personal**

On March 1, 2021, Margrit Leuthold resumed her mandate as ombudsperson after a one-year break.

**Statistics 2021**

	<b>Number 2021</b>	<b>Percent 2021</b>	Percent 2020
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>		
Doctoral Students	<b>36</b>	<b>34</b>	24
Postdocs	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	16
Senior Scientists	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	15
Admin/Technical Staff	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	17
BSc/MSc Students	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	16
Professors	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	3
Other	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	9
Men	<b>67</b>	<b>63</b>	65
Women	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	35
Others	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	-
German speaking	<b>70</b>	<b>66</b>	64
Non-German speaking	<b>36</b>	<b>34</b>	36
Low effort consultations	<b>66</b>	<b>62</b>	73
Considerable effort consultations	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	23
High effort consultations	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	5

Table 1: Number of inquiries in 2021 (cut-off date 15.12.2021) at the ombudsperson's office, broken down by status, gender, language and amount of advice provided.

In 2021, the ombudspersons handled a total of 106 inquiries. In 2020, there were 88 inquiries, and in 2019, 116 people used the services of the ombudsman office.

When the inquiries are broken down by status, gender or language (Table 1), there were no unexpected findings or changes compared to 2020. A good 60% of the inquiries could be handled with little

effort (< 1 day), while a quarter of the situations required various discussions and clarifications that took 2 to 3 days. In 15% of the cases, the time required was high and extended over a longer period. In 2 cases, conflict mediation reached its limits.

The inquirers usually choose an ombudsperson. Preferences by gender or status were not apparent in 2021. Compared to the other ombudspersons, the ombudsperson (lawyer) with no connection to ETH received a higher proportion of inquiries, many of which were in a legal context.

### Persons suspected of causing conflicts

In 2021, the ombudspersons analyzed the persons suspected of causing conflicts according to gender and academic status (professor/non-professor) (Table 2).

Persons suspected of causing conflicts		Number	Percent
Male	Professor	33	31
	non Professor	16	15
Female	Professor	9	8
	non Professor	7	7
No allocation possible		41	39

Table 2: Individuals suspected of causing conflict, broken down by gender and academic status in 2021 (N = 106).

In 39% of the situations, the person suspected of causing the conflict was a professor (male&female). In 22% of the cases, the person did not have the status of a professor.

Male professors are almost four times more likely to be the suspected conflict-causing person than female professors. According to the ETH annual report 2021, 80% of professors are men and 20% are women. Thus, the ratio of suspected conflict-causing male professors and female professors corresponds exactly to the ratio of male and female professors at ETH overall.

It is noteworthy that in 39% of the cases, it was not possible to meaningfully assign a suspected conflict-causing person. There are various reasons for this:

- The inquiry is about a legal assessment of a situation, without direct reference to an existing conflict.
- An office is suspected of causing the conflict and not a person.
- There are several suspected conflict-causing persons.
- The hierarchical situation of the suspected conflict-causing persons is unclear.

### Assessment of the ombudsperson activity over the period 2018 - 2022

Over the past four years, there has been no perceptible change in ombudsman activity in terms of the number and origin of inquiries and the nature of the problems. This includes the two Corona years. Virtual consultations take place regularly and do not cause any difficulties.

The handling of inappropriate behavior has changed significantly for the better with the release of corresponding new regulations. Structures and procedures have been optimized; in particular, by dividing the process into an informal and a formal phase, the process has been given a clear structure at a decisive point. Inquirers can thus be advised more precisely and transparently. For the formal phase, it is also helpful to have a clearly designated reporting office and precise information on the form of report and deadlines.

A second milestone was the new doctoral ordinance. Together with the directive for doctoral students employed at ETH, several frequent causes of conflicts between doctoral students and supervisors could be eliminated.

Even with good regulations, conflicts will not disappear. However, in the event of a conflict, adapting structures such that conflicts are less likely to arise is more effective than trying to change people. A great deal has changed in a short time regarding the available regulations. In the next few years, the existing instruments should be tested to gain experiences about usability, including implementation before adjustments are considered.

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