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Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2021

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2021 (WFP/EB.A/2022/4-C/Add.1).

1. Management welcomes the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) for 2021. OBD continues to play a key role in the pursuit of WFP's workplace culture and internal justice goals, including by flagging systemic issues in its annual report and providing an informal and confidential process for addressing employee conflict, disputes and complaints.
2. Moreover, management highly values the Ombudsman's contributions to the work of the Interdisciplinary Committee, which supports the implementation of the recently updated Executive Director's circular (OED2022/004) on the prevention of and response to abusive conduct (harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination).
3. Management notes that the number of individual visits to OBD has increased by 8 percent, from 397 in 2020 to 433 in 2021. The demand for OBD services points to a good level of awareness of the services among employees across WFP, fostered through internal communication efforts and the well-established global network of respectful workplace advisors overseen by OBD, which continues to grow.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

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4. Management also notes the higher proportion of female colleagues using OBD services, from 50 percent in 2016 to 62 percent in 2021. This is consistent with the results of the latest global staff survey, which suggest that female colleagues are more likely to speak out about potential issues in the workplace.
5. WFP is finalizing various initiatives aimed at improving its workplace culture. The number of reports of harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination (or “abusive conduct”) brought to OBD over the last two years has continued to fall, from 44 percent of OBD’s total caseload in 2018 to 20 percent in 2021. This decrease may also be a result of the measures implemented by WFP to increase awareness of behavioural expectations and prevent abusive conduct.
6. Management welcomes OBD’s contribution to identifying potential systemic issues and its recommendations on how to address them. However, it is noted that some of its observations regarding systemic issues appear to refer to global trends and external information rather than being based on data gathered from visits to OBD.

Impact of COVID-19 on mental health and well-being in the workplace

7. As indicated in the management note to the OBD annual report for 2020, management acknowledges that WFP employees have been significantly affected both personally and professionally by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>1. <i>WFP would benefit from strategically planning measures related to its duty of care to support its workforce, which faces multiple emergencies in an increasingly precarious funding environment and as a result is overstretched. The pressure caused by this situation is not only physically stressful and exhausting; it is also emotionally difficult for WFP employees to find that they cannot provide services to beneficiaries when help is so clearly needed.</i></p>	<p>Agreed. Management has worked hard to acknowledge challenges and support employees during the pandemic. Management has continuously and extensively engaged with employees, directly and through the staff representative bodies, in order to analyse emerging problems and define WFP’s response.</p>
<p>2. <i>People-centred management is vital to ensuring a resilient workforce. Managers and supervisors should commit to fostering a healthy, balanced and supportive working environment. This should start with adherence to set working days and hours – working from home does not imply being constantly available; the even distribution of workloads; recognition of, and where possible, fulfilment of the individual needs of employees; and attention to ensuring that employees take breaks and time off.</i></p>	<p>The demands of the pandemic have prompted unprecedented levels of collaboration among employees and teams across functions and duty stations. The Staff Wellness Division has conducted over 400 seminars at the local and global levels addressing a wide range of issues related to the impact of the pandemic, including homeschooling, remote working and isolation. The Family Liaison Officer has coordinated several global seminars aimed at supporting employees and their dependents on topics such as raising third-culture children and neurodiversity. All this work recognizes the complexity faced by employees in the humanitarian sector and their families, not only during the pandemic.</p>
<p>3. <i>It is essential for managers and supervisors to reflect on personal needs related to mental health and to act on them. Managers and supervisors should model self-care by regular taking breaks and stepping back. Without the energy to listen to and engage with others, it is hard for managers and supervisors to be effective and responsive and to embody WFP values and support their teams.</i></p>	<p>Training programmes for managers that include comprehensive coverage of self care and the duty of care towards other employees are also being rolled out.</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>4. <i>WFP employees have an obligation to live up to the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service and to WFP's values of integrity, inclusion, collaboration, commitment and humanity and to role model these values at work and outside work, including under extraordinary circumstances.</i></p>	<p>Management has continued its work on prevention through the "Speak Up!" campaign led by the Human Resources Division (HRM), which aims to raise awareness of behavioural standards and protection from abusive conduct. As part of the Speak Up! series, management also rolled out awareness raising materials for managers designed to ensure effective role modelling and a consistent tone at the top (see response below under the heading "Psychological safety in teams").</p> <p>Management has recently updated its approach to the prevention of and response to abusive conduct and has created tools to help employees understand how to speak up and what happens when they do. The materials comprise a toolkit, infographics, animated videos and e-modules on addressing problems in the workplace and are available on a dedicated website in all official languages of WFP.</p> <p>These tools aim to raise awareness, change behaviour and empower employees to speak up when they witness inappropriate or abusive conduct, including discrimination.</p> <p>Finally, HRM has also invested in WFP's response capacity with increased support for managers who need to address concerns of abusive conduct or other inappropriate behaviour in their teams.</p>
<p>5. <i>In navigating the new working reality, it is more important than ever to promote a culture of inclusion and understanding through consistent and proactive messaging from the top about the importance of respecting individual differences and choices without judgment.</i></p>	<p>Management continues to make comprehensive efforts to provide respectful and inclusive workplaces for employees. Employees have expressed appreciation for efforts to facilitate vaccination, especially for those posted outside their home countries. WFP is required to act in accordance with government health authority decisions on issues such as face masks, office spaces and vaccination passports. In their guidance, the WFP Medical Service has always followed the best empirical evidence regarding public health measures.</p>

Psychological safety in teams

8. As part of its efforts to create an inclusive and respectful workplace, WFP has mainstreamed the implementation of the comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination (CAP). A wealth of CAP initiatives and activities have been completed. For instance, the recently updated Executive Director's circular on the prevention of and response to abusive conduct includes references to psychological safety, as does the leadership framework. Work to increase understanding of the concept of psychological safety at WFP is ongoing.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>6. <i>Managers should actively seek connection with team members, both virtually and in the office now that there are fewer moments for impromptu walk-ins with supervisees and consequently the threshold for contacting a manager has often increased.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Initiatives to raise awareness of psychological safety have been developed with support from an external organizational psychologist and take two forms: an e-module available for all colleagues and mandatory for staff at the P-5 level and above; and face-to-face sessions that build on the e-module and seek to create self awareness. The latter has already been piloted in three country offices and for country directors in one region. Psychometric testing of “dark-side” personality traits will accompany this awareness raising.</p> <p>In addition, training programmes for country directors, deputy country directors and heads of field offices include guidance on psychological safety, as does the executive management training programme.</p>
<p>7. <i>Managers should seek to foster inter- and intra-team collaboration and learning by creating physical and virtual spaces and methods for employees to engage and exchange information and ideas.</i></p>	
<p>8. <i>Managers should create a climate of appreciation and recognition within their teams, acknowledging the achievements and contributions of all members and showing that their opinions matter, leading by example and encouraging employees to share positive feedback with each other.</i></p>	<p>Managers are encouraged to recognize good work in yearly performance assessments as well as informally. There is a feature in the Performance and Capability Enhancement tool used to assess the performance of staff that allows for ongoing feedback to and from all colleagues.</p>
<p>9. <i>In a virtual or hybrid working world, employees need opportunities to connect socially in order to relax and have fun together. This could take the form of storytelling, quizzes, physical and virtual coffees, lunches, get-togethers and if possible outdoor outings. Managers should be sensitive to virtual and in-person limitations on attendance and schedule such activities with due consideration of time zones.</i></p>	<p>WFP is conducting a hybrid working pilot project. The project takes into account the importance of connecting socially and is tracking several indicators that probe issues related to flexibility and collaboration (among other data points) that will help to guide the future of the WFP workplace.</p>
<p>10. <i>Employees have varying expectations about what a return to the office should look like. Flexibility and collaboration to cater to a hybrid workplace model that combines remote and on-site work will be essential. Managers will need to be cognizant of this transition and learn how to manage expectations while displaying extra patience and tolerance; and everyone will need to exert extra empathy and alertness to one another’s needs.</i></p>	

Workforce planning: from a culture of recruitment to a culture of talent acquisition

9. Management would welcome further discussion regarding the data that underpin the recommendation on recruitment so that the context and possible extent of the issue is fully elucidated.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>11. <i>To further develop a culture of talent acquisition, WFP should conduct an in-depth review and redesign of recruitment processes to ensure that they reflect the purpose of the people policy, the WFP values and the criteria of the leadership framework so that WFP can better meet its present and future needs.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Sponsored by senior leadership, a talent acquisition working group was created in April 2022 to review current staff recruitment processes. The focus group consists of HRM talent specialists, country directors, staffing coordinators and human resources officers based in the field. The areas of focus of the working group include the time it takes to fill posts, the quality of selections, assessments, diversity and candidate experience. The review is expected to be completed in June 2022.</p>
<p>12. <i>WFP should train hiring managers and panel members in effective assessment methods and tools such as aptitude tests for assessing potential and actual skill levels and WFP leadership competencies. The results of these assessments and tests should be compared with job descriptions and well thought out job profiles, particularly when selecting candidates for supervisory and leadership positions.</i></p>	<p>Standard candidate assessment tools are already incorporated into the WFP selection processes used in country offices, for international professionals and the Future International Talent Pool. These assessments allow technical tests with various question formats and are conducted in a proctored environment and reviewed anonymously by subject matter experts to ensure a fair process.</p> <p>Work on psychometric testing has commenced, and a long-term agreement is being finalized with a psychometric company. WFP will seek to introduce these tools into its recruitment process.</p> <p>Funding allocated to providing global training for hiring managers and panel members is being considered.</p>

Compliance

10. Management recognizes the importance of governance as demonstrated by the values exercise conducted at the start of the CAP implementation. With an organization as large as WFP, it is also important to maintain clear rules, regulations and policies so that employees understand what is expected of them and to ensure consistency throughout the organization.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>13. <i>Compliance is an important part of what makes an organization efficient and resilient. However, compliance should not be a goal in itself. WFP should therefore start a dialogue about how to stimulate employee engagement, encourage the human aspects of independent and innovative thinking and foster personal responsibility.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>In the recently updated Executive Director's circular on the prevention of and response to abusive conduct, WFP has acknowledged the need to "manage by values" rather than "manage by investigation". WFP has introduced "management interventions" as an alternative to the investigations function as a means for colleagues to speak up about behavioural issues in the workplace. Management interventions are led by managers and human resources staff in HRM and the field and seek to ensure accountability through the active management of the performance of employees who engage in potentially inappropriate or abusive behaviour.</p> <p>HRM has updated the mandatory training for all employees on preventing and responding to abusive conduct at WFP and continues to hold awareness raising sessions to remind employees of their personal responsibilities at WFP and how they can speak up when they are affected by inappropriate or abusive behaviour.</p>

Conclusion

11. WFP is committed to ensuring a respectful and inclusive workplace. Through the CAP, significant efforts have been made to implement the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination and related initiatives and activities.
12. The WFP people policy approved by the Executive Board in 2021 guides WFP management in administering its workforce. As expressed in the policy WFP's vision of its workforce is one in which diverse, committed, skilled and high-performing teams are selected on merit, operate in a healthy and inclusive work environment and live WFP's values. The people policy places a strong emphasis on people management, including through specific commitments for managers and supervisors; management ensures that this focus is maintained.
13. The OBD annual report is a helpful source of information, guidance and encouragement from which management can draw in continuing on the path that it has taken to improve WFP's workplace culture.