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## **Management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2022**

### **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2022 (WFP/EB.A/2023/4-C/Add.1).

1. Management welcomes the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) for 2022. 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, providing an informal and confidential mechanism for addressing employee conflicts, disputes and complaints and actively promoting a respectful working environment through its interventions.
2. Management also highly values OBD's contributions to the work of the interdisciplinary committee on internal justice, which supports the implementation of the Executive Director's circular (OED2022/004) on the prevention of and response to abusive conduct (harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination).

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\* 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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3. Management notes that the number of individual visits to OBD increased significantly from 2021 to 2022, from 433 to 692. This increase suggests a good level of awareness of the office's services among employees across WFP, fostered through internal communication efforts and the well-established global network of respectful workplace advisors overseen by OBD. The two new positions established and the numerous field missions undertaken in 2022 may also have contributed to the increased accessibility of OBD's services.
4. Management notes the significant decrease, for the second consecutive year, in the number of reports of harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination (abusive conduct) brought to OBD, with such cases dropping from 44 percent of the total caseload in 2018 to 21 percent in 2022. This may partly be a result of the measures implemented by WFP to increase awareness of behavioural expectations as well as the numerous initiatives in recent years aimed at improving workplace culture and preventing and responding to abusive conduct.
5. Management welcomes OBD's contribution to the identification of potential systemic issues and its recommendations for addressing them.

### **“Informal resolution first” to create an effective internal system of justice and improved work culture**

6. Management recognizes OBD's positive contribution in providing an efficient and effective option for employees seeking to redress grievances. In addition, management recognizes mediation as a cost-effective method of dispute resolution, in line with [resolution A/RES/77/260](#) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 30 December 2022.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>1. <i>WFP leadership should actively promote, support and encourage employees including managers to engage in informal resolution as an important avenue for improving WFP workplace culture with the aim of finding quicker, more satisfying and sustainable solutions before taking formal steps, which are generally lengthy and costly and can lead to controversial outcomes.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Management has promoted, supported and encouraged employees, including managers, to play an active role in improving WFP's workplace culture.</p> <p>Specifically, in 2022, the Executive Director issued the revised abusive conduct policy (OED2022/004), which clarifies the main avenues through which WFP employees can report any inappropriate or abusive conduct that they face or witness. Those avenues include informal resolution facilitated by OBD.</p> <p>To accompany the revised policy, the Human Resources Division (HRM) has updated the mandatory training for all employees on “preventing and responding to abusive conduct at WFP” and continues to deliver awareness raising sessions that remind employees of how they can speak up when they are affected by inappropriate or abusive behaviour.</p> <p>The policy itself reflects the role of managers in addressing issues early on including through the performance management framework and introduces management intervention as a sustainable and cost-effective solution for employees that lies between informal resolution</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
	<p>and the formal process implemented through the Office of Inspections and Investigations.</p> <p>In addition, awareness raising materials have been developed for managers, emphasizing their roles and responsibilities in preventing inappropriate and abusive conduct and creating psychological safety.</p>
<p>2. <i>WFP should integrate an “informal resolution first” approach into existing policies and processes and provide employees with a broad understanding of the workings of the internal justice system, and in particular of the effectiveness of the informal resolution services provided by OBD.</i></p>	<p><b>Under consideration.</b></p> <p>Management is participating in the ongoing review of WFP’s internal justice system. As part of that process, the possibility of requiring employees to seek informal resolution of contested administrative decisions as a mandatory first step before they engage in a formal appeal process is being discussed.</p>
<p>3. <i>The members of the Internal Justice Interdisciplinary Committee should enhance their collaboration with the aim of providing avenues for robust responses to behaviour that does not meet WFP standards of conduct.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Management acknowledges the importance of effective collaboration through the interdisciplinary Committee in promoting respectful, diverse and inclusive workplaces for all WFP employees. Management will continue to ensure a robust response to any failure to meet WFP standards of conduct, either through the disciplinary process that follows an investigation by the Office of Inspections and Investigations (with 16 such cases completed in 2022) or through the performance management route, with HRM supporting managers in responding to abusive conduct. (In 2022, HRM assisted management interventions in more than 100 cases and in eight separations for underperformance.)</p>

## Performance management and WFP feedback culture

7. Throughout 2022, as part of its efforts to create an inclusive and respectful workplace, management continued to invest significant resources in supporting the cultural shift in WFP’s workforce. The revised leadership framework establishes common standards of behaviour and embeds them in revised competencies and indicators. It aims to foster an inclusive and collaborative working environment and introduces the concept of “leading through others”.
8. Additional initiatives include the mentoring programme, through which senior and junior employees can share their perspectives and transfer knowledge across generations, creating a culture of mutual feedback and exchange.
9. Performance and competency enhancement (PACE) webinars are offered to employees to strengthen their performance review skills including giving and receiving feedback.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>4. <i>Efforts should be made to change WFP's performance management culture, with greater emphasis given to professional and personal development in the interest of both employees and the organization, in which support for improving performance is actively sought and given, leading to a more respectful and productive work climate.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>An extensive range of tools, information products and other resources have been made available to all WFP employees with the aim of fostering positive change in WFP's performance management culture. HRM will continue to ensure that WFP is as well positioned as possible in this area. The efforts referred to in the recommendation will be driven by managers in the first instance, while recognizing that all employees have a role in creating a more respectful and productive work climate.</p>
<p>5. <i>The organization should engage in a broad and honest dialogue on how to improve WFP's performance management climate and culture so that it is perceived and acted upon as something positive and beneficial.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>As indicated in the previous response, continuous improvements are being made to WFP's approach to managing performance tools, processes, policies and guidance, as necessary. At the same time, perceptions about WFP's approach to performance management and the extent to which it is beneficial depend on managers and on how effectively they engage in the process and encourage others to do the same.</p>
<p>6. <i>Providing and receiving constructive feedback and guidance require courage and need to be role modelled by WFP leadership and integrated into a culture in which ongoing dialogue between supervisor and supervisee about performance is the norm and is perceived as positive.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Managers are encouraged to recognize good work in yearly performance assessments and on informal occasions. The PACE tool used to assess staff performance includes a function that facilitates feedback between employees.</p> <p>Every year, all staff members are offered PACE webinars covering the topics of goal setting, performance reviews, giving and receiving feedback and development planning. So far in 2023, six global webinars have covered the final review phase of the PACE process, with 887 attendees globally, and four have covered the planning phase, with 540 attendees globally. These webinars are in addition to in-country efforts to educate employees on performance management, including through two e-learning programmes on performance management for employees and one for supervisors, which were developed as part of efforts to educate, guide and build capability in performance management. In 2023, the focus shifted to supporting supervisors in managing the performance of others.</p>

## Health and well-being

10. Management prioritizes the health and well-being of WFP employees. Within the Workplace Culture Department, HRM, the People and Culture Coordination Unit and the Staff Wellness Division are focused on creating a workplace where all people are valued and able to meet their full potential, enabling WFP to deliver on its mission. The Staff Wellness Division includes a counselling service staffed by licensed mental health professionals who provide support for staff and dependants.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>7. <i>There is a need to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to returning to the office. Flexibility to meet the individual needs of employees and fairness and consistency in the implementation of required office presence while adhering to set working days and hours are important to sustaining team spirit and productivity.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Management recognizes that lessons learned from the hybrid working pilot should inform decision making on future working arrangements, balancing the needs of a high-performing organization with the duty of care for its employees and the importance of a positive team spirit.</p> <p>It is agreed that no one-size-fits-all approach can meet the needs of such a diverse organization. The principles of fairness, consistency and simplicity will inform the development of future working arrangements. Broad consultation with all stakeholders will be undertaken to enable effective decision making.</p>
<p>8. <i>Managers need more support to be able to meet the many diverse expectations that the organization places on them. Organizational structures and staffing need to be adequately resourced, while managers need to be enabled to recognize and respond to the mental health needs of team members and tackle factors in the organization of work that can lead to excessive occupational stress and affect mental health negatively. The development of leaders at all levels could also include more substantial action aimed at ensuring their own well-being, including through the development of emotional intelligence to help them meet both others' emotional needs and their own.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Leadership development programmes are offered to people managers at various levels in the organization, equipping them with tools that help them to create psychological safety and uncover and address the underlying factors that affect a team member's behaviour and performance.</p> <p>The programmes cover a range of topics related to emotional intelligence and neuroscience that help managers to understand a person's state of mind, underlying needs and feelings and what they, as managers, can do to create a safe space for themselves and their team members where emotions can be expressed and managed in a constructive way. There is also an important emphasis on enhancing managers' self-awareness, including with regard to their own emotional triggers and stressors. The programmes aim to build managers' ability to understand through empathy. Leaders need these skills in order to be resilient and to be able to create safe, respectful working environments that are conducive to physical, emotional and mental well-being.</p> <p>The staff counselling service works regularly with managers on their individual well-being and supports healthy team dynamics through consultations and workshops.</p>

## Diversity, equity and inclusion

11. Management recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workforce and understands the need to further expand the dimensions of diversity as part of efforts to foster an enabling working environment. WFP has adopted a more integrated approach that focuses on other aspects of diversity, including, but not limited to, disability status and race.
12. The diversity, equity and inclusion team has been raising awareness among senior and country office leadership through initiatives such as the Global Executive Inclusive Leadership Programme, which focuses on inclusive behaviour and competencies for leaders.
13. The team is using consultative processes, engaging with employees globally through affinity groups such as the disability inclusion network.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>9. <i>While advancing gender parity there is a need to create a work environment in which female employees and female leaders can thrive and be respected by the leadership and their supervisors, peers and supervisees.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Management understands the need to expand the dimensions of diversity beyond gender parity in order to further foster an enabling working environment. A more integrated approach has been adopted that focuses on other aspects of diversity, including, but not limited to, disability status and race. Information sessions on conscious inclusion are being rolled out to raise awareness of individual biases and cultural intelligence so that all employees can thrive in the workplace. Moreover, to create an enabling environment for all leaders, the Workplace Culture Department has invested in the Global Executive Inclusive Leadership Programme for all country directors and leaders at D2 level and above. The programme's focus is on embedding inclusive behaviour and developing the competencies that leaders need to serve role models in the effort to foster a working environment in which both women and men thrive as leaders.</p>
<p>10. <i>Since 2020 racism has emerged as a concern within WFP, including a lack of awareness about existing forms of racism in behaviour and institutionally, i.e., within WFP systems and policies. There is a need for WFP offices at headquarters and in the field to commit themselves to having open and possibly facilitated conversations within their teams to explore what being anti-racist could mean in their offices, and in their activities and programmes, and to identify what adaptations would be necessary to achieve this.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b></p> <p>Management recognizes the need to address manifestations of racism where they occur. Building on the 2021 awareness session on anti-racism with the WFP Leadership Group, the Deputy Executive Director for Workplace Culture has continued to facilitate racism awareness sessions with leaders at regional meetings. In addition, the diversity, equity and inclusion team is facilitating discussions on racism with individuals and focus groups, including via digital channels.</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>11. <i>Enhanced and more wide-reaching efforts to communicate the reasons for cultural change processes, such as the new leadership framework and the new diversity and inclusion strategy, would help to create alignment between headquarters and the field and prevent the risk of having a “two-speed” organization in which the field is called to implement changes without having ownership or a broad understanding of the issues behind them.</i></p>	<p><b>Agreed.</b>  Management understands the need to bring everyone along in this cultural shift. To this end, management has collected the views of an array of diverse employees. Future discussions on diversity and inclusion will feature a greater focus on the field. In addition, the diversity and inclusion team has established affinity groups that encourage employees to share their experiences. In 2022, the disability inclusion network and LGBTIQ affinity groups were established. Another affinity group, on women at WFP, has also been set up to seek input on issues that affect women at the organization.</p>

## Conclusion

14. WFP is committed to ensuring a respectful and inclusive workplace. Significant efforts have been made to update and develop policies, guidance and awareness raising materials in order to ensure that all employees, especially managers, clearly understand what is expected of them.
15. The annual report of OBD is a helpful source of information, guidance and encouragement for management as it continues to improve WFP's workplace culture.