



World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board
Annual session
Rome, 21–25 June 2021

Distribution: General

Agenda item 4

Date: 28 May 2021

WFP/EB.A/2021/4-C/Add.1*

Original: English

Annual reports

* Reissued for technical reasons on
16 June 2021

For consideration

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 2020

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2020 (WFP/EB.A/2021/4-C/Add.1).

1. Management welcomes the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services ("the Office") for 2020. The Office makes a vital contribution to 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. Moreover, management highly values the Ombudsman's contributions to the work of the Inter-divisional Standing Committee, which supports the implementation of the Executive Director's circular (OED2018/007) on protection from harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination, with a particular focus on protecting affected individuals.
2. Management notes that the number of individual visits to the Office has remained stable, even though many consultations took place virtually in 2020 and Office staff were not able regularly to conduct field missions due to travel restrictions. The unwavering demand for Office services points to a good level of awareness of and satisfaction with those services among employees across WFP, fostered over the years through pre-pandemic field

* 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.

Focal point:

Ms J. Luma
Director
Human Resources Division
email: joyce.luma@wfp.org

missions, internal communication efforts and the well-established global network of respectful workplace advisors (RWAs) overseen by the Office.

3. WFP has embarked on major improvements to its workplace culture. While the remote working arrangements in place for a large portion of the workforce may partly explain the significant decrease in the number of reports of harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination (HSHAAD) brought to the Office in 2020, this may also be a first tangible result of the measures implemented by WFP to increase awareness of behavioural expectations and tackle the areas of focus identified by the joint Board/management working group on addressing HSHAAD, in addition to WFP's significant investment of human and financial resources to enhance reporting and protection mechanisms (for example, through the Office of Inspections and Investigations (OIGI), the Staff Relations Branch of the Human Resources Division (HRM) and staff counsellors).
4. Management is mindful that further efforts are needed to improve WFP's workplace culture. As emphasized in the Office's annual report and in several consultations with Board members on the topic of HSHAAD, many staff continue to report instances of disrespectful behaviour, harassment and abuse of authority, and addressing them remains a priority. The Office's annual report and related discussions with management endorse the targeting of relevant Workplace Culture Department initiatives and help identify areas where the scope of work could be expanded and complemented by the expertise and services offered by the Office, such as its innovative "team climate assessments".
5. WFP employees have been significantly affected both personally and professionally by COVID-19. The impact on individuals and their families must not be underestimated. Management has worked hard to acknowledge the challenges and support employees during the pandemic, and employees have sought to adapt to these challenges and have demonstrated a remarkable level of resilience and engagement throughout. Personal health concerns, social distancing and restrictions on movement have not distracted employees from their service nor deflected WFP from the pursuit of its workplace culture improvement objectives. In order to reflect the new modalities of work and global changes, WFP has adapted its policies and initiatives, including through guidelines on the management of staff and non-staff personnel issued during the pandemic and consistent messaging to managers worldwide encouraging them to exercise flexibility. The demands of the pandemic have prompted unprecedented levels of collaboration among employees and teams across functions and regions, including between the Staff Wellness Division and HRM teams. Management has engaged extensively with employees, directly and through the staff representative bodies, in order to analyse emerging problems and define WFP's response. Significant efforts have also been made in the framework 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) and related initiatives and activities.

A. Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging

6. In 2018 WFP intensified its pursuit of gender parity by developing a WFP gender parity action plan with four focus areas: talent acquisition; career and capability development; engagement; and well-being and accountability. This was consistent with the United Nations Secretary-General's call to action for gender parity set out in the United Nations system-wide gender parity strategy. Significant progress has been made, especially in increasing the representation of women at WFP. In 2017, 34 percent of the WFP global workforce was female; the share is currently 40 percent. Among locally recruited employees, women made up 30.3 percent in 2017 and now represent 37 percent. Among international staff,

45 percent are women, up from 42 percent in 2017. WFP is becoming a more gender-balanced organization thanks to a concerted and continued focus on this area in recent years. Challenges remain, such as ensuring better representation of women in geographical terms and at senior levels. However, the progress has been remarkable.

7. In 2020, WFP partnered with an external vendor to develop a diversity and inclusion framework, which will help further define what inclusion and diversity mean for WFP. It should also drive the alignment and integration of ongoing diversity and inclusion initiatives, including the United Nations system-wide action plan, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and WFP's gender policy, gender parity action plan, disability inclusion road map and anti-racism action plan.
8. The Workplace Culture Department is gathering data on employee perceptions and confirmed instances of workplace discrimination based on race or ethnicity, which will inform the development of the anti-racism action plan. In 2020, WFP engaged with broad groups of employees on diversity, inclusion and perceptions of racism; met repeatedly with staff representative bodies; collected information on the nature of allegations of discrimination reported to OIGI; and sought advice from diversity and inclusion experts. Faced with a complex and multi-faceted problem that had not been sufficiently considered before by WFP, nor within the United Nations system, the organization has focused on conducting a thorough diagnosis of the issues. On the basis of that diagnosis WFP will seek to identify any corrective and preventive actions required. A similar approach may be needed with respect to the mental health and neurodiversity concerns expressed by the Office. The WFP staff counselling service of the Staff Wellness Division has grown over the past few years and currently comprises 22 staff counsellors in headquarters and the field who provide support to individuals in addition to facilitating general well-being and awareness-raising events.

i) Gender and racial biases; equality and equity

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>1. <i>The Ombudsman acknowledges that the envisioned organizational change process requires time to be fully implemented, especially with regard to changes in mindset or behaviour. Nevertheless, more effort could be made to raise awareness particularly of gender and racial biases both in individual behaviour and in policies; in addition, measures could be taken to prevent such biases from influencing decisions.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>In 2020 major progress was made in reaffirming WFP's values of integrity, collaboration, commitment, humanity and inclusion. Ways of raising awareness of the values and embedding them in everyday work and behaviours are being defined, and there will be further developments in 2021.</p> <p>Several "jam sessions" were conducted by the Workplace Culture Department with large groups of employees in 2020 to collect input for future anti-racism initiatives. Meanwhile, various training sessions have been conducted at headquarters (for example, "brown-bag lunches" on gender issues conducted by the Management Services Division) and in the field with RWAs and human resources business partners. Other recently launched training modules that will be expanded in the coming months include "Training on unconscious bias for Staffing Coordinators", "Introduction to unconscious bias", "Introduction to diversity and inclusion", "Dealing with micro-aggressions", "Neurodiversity,</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
	<p>psychological safety and allyship” and “Diversity and inclusion in recruitment, performance and management”. A podcast on the experiences of WFP employees living with disabilities is being recorded.</p> <p>A request for proposals has been published in order to identify vendors specialized in capacity building and consulting services related to anti-racism, diversity and inclusion, gender and disability inclusion. Long-term agreements with the selected vendors should be in place by the end of May 2021.</p> <p>WFP is committed to addressing all forms of racial and gender discrimination and related intolerance. To reaffirm this commitment, in 2018, “discrimination” was regulated as a standalone form of misconduct by the Executive Director’s circular on protection from HSHAAD. This 2018 circular is currently under review, and updated provisions should strengthen WFP’s mechanisms for preventing and responding to inappropriate and abusive conduct and reinforce WFP’s commitment to a victim-centred approach and zero tolerance of inappropriate and abusive conduct – explicitly including racial and ethnic discrimination.</p> <p>Diversity, inclusion and gender parity are core priorities under the WFP people policy, which is being submitted to the Board for approval at its 2021 annual session. The people policy places strong emphasis and provides further direction on workplace culture, diversity and inclusion, particularly as they apply to issues of gender, race and disability.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the capacity of the Diversity and Inclusion team within HRM is being strengthened through the hiring of a consultant head of diversity and inclusion, who will soon be working with the rest of the team to lead a review of WFP policies and any racial biases.</p> <p>WFP has also been focusing on global outreach and prevention with the continued rollout of HRM “Speak Up!” awareness-raising sessions on behavioural standards and protection from abusive conduct. Since 2020, these sessions have been delivered via videoconferencing given the ongoing office closures and travel restrictions.</p> <p>As part of the CAP initiatives, HRM is developing animated videos and e-modules on addressing problems in the workplace, which will be available to all WFP employees online in 2021. These tools aim at raising awareness, changing behaviour and empowering employees to speak up when they witness inappropriate or abusive conduct including discrimination.</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>2. <i>Gender parity is in itself a good starting point, especially if it is achieved at every level of the organization, because throughout the United Nations system women are underrepresented at the higher levels and overrepresented at lower levels.</i></p> <p><i>That said, the unequal treatment of women at work is not addressed by gender parity, and there is an underlying assumption that bringing more women on board will change the culture. This puts the onus for change on women, whereas it is the leadership, culture and systems that need to change. Gender equity is a more ambitious and even-handed goal, and it is more likely to bring about the desired equality and ultimately change the culture.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>WFP sees gender parity and gender equity as closely interlinked. Significant cultural change in this area requires progress on these two dimensions, which mutually reinforce each other, as research in this area shows. As well as focusing on ensuring equal representation of women and men across the organization and at various levels, WFP has been reviewing its policies and practices to ensure that they promote gender equity. The global staff survey (GSS) conducted in February 2021 was designed to capture how effectively the organization engages with women and men across diversity dimensions such as age, sexual identity and orientation, ethnic background and specific needs and abilities. The GSS results should provide evidence that can be used to address specific needs and ensure the organization is more inclusive in all dimensions.</p>

ii) Anti-racism

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>3. <i>In anticipation of the anti-racism action plan, recognizing that it takes time to determine appropriate action, leaders and managers need to educate themselves and their teams. This includes engaging in non-judgmental listening. Creating a safe space where BIPOC colleagues and all other colleagues who experience racial discrimination can speak out and share their experiences is essential for healing and awareness. Leaders and international professionals must become anti-racist role models and work to become aware of their own racial biases and privileges and how they affect their behaviour, decisions and the way they interact with BIPOC colleagues, other vulnerable groups or beneficiaries.</i></p> <p><i>Racial bias does not just exist in behaviour; it can also exist in systems such as recruitment, promotion, staff assessment and reassignment processes. To better understand how this bias can influence staffing decisions and how to make impactful changes, the collection and sharing of related data (as mentioned in recommendation 6 below) are necessary in the context of an anti-racism action plan.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>In addition to the work outlined in paragraph 8 and management's response to recommendation 1, WFP is investing time and resources in carrying out a thorough review of any issues of racism in the workplace. A key element of this exercise, identified in consultation with the staff representative bodies, is extensive information gathering through several means such as the latest GSS, which for the first time included specific questions on race and ethnicity.</p> <p>WFP will develop an anti-racism action plan, factoring in the information gathered through focus group discussions, digital conversations, individual interviews and HRM data. WFP will also keep track of United Nations system-wide discussions on the topic.</p>

iii) Mental health and neurodiversity

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>4. <i>The organization is encouraged to further promote openness about mental health challenges and to increase positive messaging on the topic in order to both demystify it and lift the associated taboo. It is particularly important to further increase awareness of prevalence and risk factors for employees in managerial positions.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The Well-being Platform gives all employees access to a broad spectrum of information about well-being, including videos of staff members talking about how they manage the challenges (and rewards) of working for WFP. Using a “lived experience” approach with current staff members talking openly about mental health is an effective way of reducing stigma. The Well-being Platform allows employees to assess their own mental health via a self-assessment section, with the option of sharing the results with a staff counsellor. To date, over 8,500 employees have accessed the platform. There was a 40 percent increase in the number of contacts employees made with staff counsellors between 2019 and 2020, reflecting a growing willingness to seek support. Another indicator and the increase in the number of seminars requested and offered in 2020; many of these requests came from senior managers asking for team sessions on managing stress related to COVID-19, suggesting that managers are increasingly aware of the challenges faced by employees and are seeking to mitigate them.</p>
<p>5. <i>The organization is encouraged to incorporate neurodiversity in its diversity and inclusion efforts; to create awareness of its existence and prevalence through learning and development initiatives; and to explore how to build skills and tools for supporting and accommodating employees with neurodivergent needs. Supervisors, managers and human resources officers should be given the tools and skills needed to better identify, support and accommodate employees with different, often invisible, needs.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The Wellness and Diversity and Inclusion teams have been consulting on the topic of neurodiversity and are committed to working in partnership to raise awareness of this issue (and other issues related to diversity). The Family Liaison Officer (in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) has started compiling a reference list for families of schools that accept and have programming for children with neurodivergent needs.</p>

B. Transparency

9. Management concurs with the Ombudsman’s observation that transparency is a crucial factor in nurturing trust and engagement. Within the framework of the proposed people policy, leaders would be expected to honour a core commitment to integrity and transparency in their decision making. The Workplace Culture Department would coordinate and provide oversight on cross-cutting activities implemented at the organizational level aimed at clarifying roles and responsibilities, empowering teams to be more actively involved in how their workplaces operate, fostering trust through greater transparency of decision making and increasing monitoring in order to promote clearer accountability on people-related matters. The Communications, Advocacy and Marketing

Division would facilitate employee engagement and effective communication through WFP's internal communications strategy.

10. Consistent with the above, "assessments and decision making based on fairness, transparency and objective criteria, and the highest ethical standards of efficiency, competence and integrity" would be a key enabler in achieving the people policy strategic goal of "Performing and improving".

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>6. <i>To better understand and raise awareness of the current imbalance in gender and racial equality at WFP, and to facilitate informed decisions about effective measures, more data needs to be collected and shared. Examples of valuable data in this respect are the gender and racial balance of all applicants for a vacancy compared to those shortlisted; their turnover rate once on board; performance assessment ratings by gender, race and role, in order to identify bias (for example, another organization found that women were systematically receiving lower performance reviews in male-dominated roles); and average number of years before promotion, disaggregated by gender and race.</i></p>	<p>Agreed. On gender equality, please refer to paragraphs 6 and 7 above. As explained in paragraph 8 above, the scope of racial discrimination issues at WFP is still under review. Relevant data is being collected and will be shared in a transparent manner in due course. Gender data are tracked consistently and shared with managers. Additional analysis will be undertaken to clarify decisions that may have implications for gender and racial balance.</p>
<p>7. <i>Cultural change towards an improved, inclusive and respectful workplace would benefit from looking at what does not work in that regard and from identifying patterns that exclude certain people, discriminate against their achievements and ignore their needs. Being transparent and sharing data and information about such patterns bring an essential humane element into change processes and make them more likely to succeed.</i></p>	<p>Agreed. Management refers to its response to recommendation no. 6 above, as well as the CAP initiatives and activities that are being implemented – and communicated – in all core areas identified by the joint Board/management working group.</p>

C. Internal system of justice

11. As part of its efforts to create an inclusive and respectful workplace, WFP will mainstream the implementation of the CAP. A wealth of CAP initiatives and activities are ongoing. For instance, the proposed people policy enablers include zero tolerance of abusive conduct, decisive and timely action in response to any breaches of WFP standards of conduct, and the strengthening of conflict resolution capacity and internal justice mechanisms including mediation, coaching and team assessments.
12. Following extensive consultations between HRM, the Legal Office and OIGI, as well as with other WFP stakeholders and staff representative bodies, WFP took an important step towards improving its internal system of justice in February 2021, when the Executive Director approved revisions to the disciplinary process and other measures to enable WFP to better ensure individual accountability and protection in the workplace. With those revisions, WFP's regulatory framework now expressly provides for the potential suspension of a staff member or consultant pending an investigation or disciplinary process

in cases, among others, where their continued presence at the office could have a negative impact on the preservation of a harmonious work environment or when there is a risk of repetition or continuation of the unsatisfactory conduct. In part to offset the negative consequences of delayed justice, the disciplinary process revision also formalizes the practice of continuing disciplinary reviews against individuals who are subject to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse or abusive conduct and separate from service with WFP prior to the completion of any investigation or disciplinary processes. This enables WFP to provide feedback to affected persons, decide on administrative measures such as bans on future employment and include confirmed perpetrators of sexual harassment or sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations ClearCheck database.

8. *The Ombudsman has noticed among managers and supervisors more willingness and motivation to address abusive conduct. However, this is at times paired with a lack of insights, skills or tools needed to effectively deal with such situations. Managers and supervisors need to obtain insights and skills to be able to identify strenuous work relationships early on and to intervene effectively when there are signs of abusive conduct; they also need to know where to turn to for support and be given tools with which to take action.*

Agreed.

A number of initiatives aimed at raising awareness and empowering managers and supervisors with specific skills have been implemented under the CAP. These include revamping the WFP Leadership Programme, which gives managers the necessary knowledge to assume their roles, including how to become behavioural role models and promote respectful working environments; rolling out a corporate programme aimed at giving middle managers the tools for establishing positive team interactions; providing training for incoming country directors, deputy country directors and heads of field offices on effective staff management and the creation of respectful working environments; and launching PACE 2.0 and a review of the underperformance policy in order to better equip managers to address workplace behavioural issues. Further tools that managers and supervisors can use to address workplace issues and behavioural change continue to be developed including online modules on creating psychological safety for teams and on individual behavioural change; and a practical toolkit for employees and managers to help them navigate inappropriate or abusive conduct.

Once implemented, the WFP people policy would also place a strong emphasis on people management and, including through specific commitments for managers and supervisors.

Conclusion

13. WFP is committed to ensuring a respectful, safe and inclusive workplace. Work under the CAP is ongoing despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While some delays and reprioritizations have taken place, significant progress has been made in the areas of reaffirming values and disciplinary processes.
14. The people policy, which is being presented to the Board for approval at its 2021 annual session, represents WFP's vision for its future workforce, one in which individuals are selected on merit and diverse, committed, skilled and high-performing teams operate in a healthy and inclusive work environment and live WFP's values. Management's approach will encompass progressive diversity and inclusion initiatives and will pay particular attention to how people are recruited, engaged, supported, assigned, managed, developed and retained.
15. The annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services is a precious source of information, guidance and encouragement in improving WFP's workplace culture.

Acronyms

BIPOC	black, indigenous and people of colour
CAP	comprehensive action plan
GSS	global staff survey
HRM	Human Resources Division
HSHAAD	harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination
OIGI	Office of Inspections and Investigations
RWA	respectful workplace advisor