



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

**Executive Board**  
Annual session  
Rome, 20–24 June 2022

---

Distribution: General

Agenda item 4

Date: 19 May 2022

WFP/EB.A/2022/4-C

Original: English

Annual reports

For consideration

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

---

## **Annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2021**

### **Draft decision\***

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

### **Introduction**

1. The year 2021 was a demanding one for WFP. Global emergencies increased in number and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic forced most offices to continue remote working modalities, placing additional pressure on WFP employees. The organization became increasingly aware of the importance of people skills in meeting these challenges, leading to a noticeable rise in requests for the services of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) in 2021. Furthermore, the results of the 2021 global staff survey prompted several directors to seek OBD support in understanding the causes of their results and to engage in team climate assessments and capacity building sessions. More coaching was requested than in previous years, and country directors asked for additional respectful workplace advisors (RWAs).
2. Incorporating the new WFP core values of integrity, collaboration, commitment, humanity and inclusion in the everyday work of the organization is an important focus of OBD. With its mandate and its insights into systemic issues at WFP, OBD is in a key position to promote

---

\* 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 points:**

Ms G. Kluck  
Director  
Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services  
email: [gabrielle.kluck@wfp.org](mailto:gabrielle.kluck@wfp.org)

Ms D. Gómez-Morán  
Senior Ombuds Officer and Mediator  
Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services  
email: [dolores.gomezmoran@wfp.org](mailto:dolores.gomezmoran@wfp.org)

---

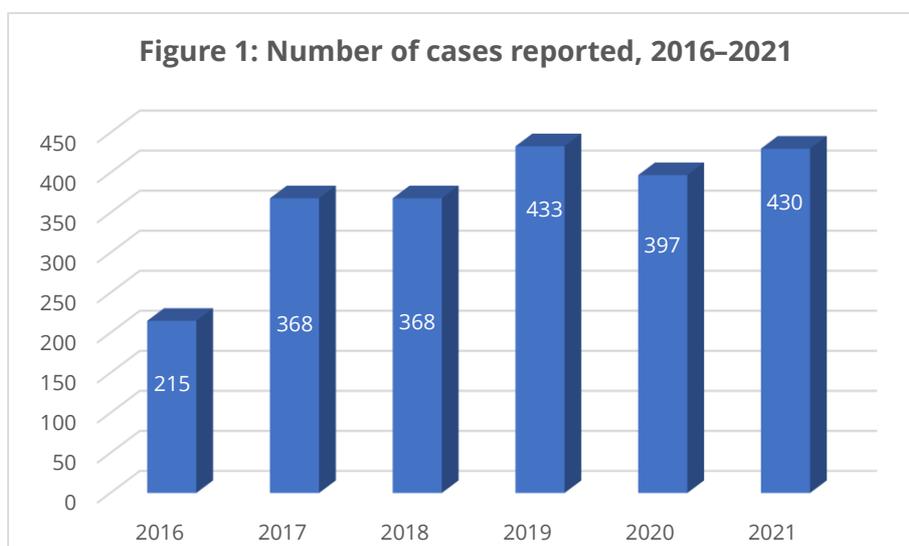
these values. Incorporating the new values across WFP requires more than their proclamation; the WFP internal justice system plays a pivotal role in motivating employees to honour and live them. Its key players – the Human Resources Division, the Ethics Office, the Inspector General, the Legal Office and OBD – have a special responsibility to “walk the talk” along with WFP leadership and managers.

3. The main systemic issues and trends observed by OBD in 2021 affect workplace culture and employee engagement. While OBD acknowledges that WFP has made significant progress in addressing *how* things are done rather than simply *what* is done, serious challenges remain. Among them are stress and exhaustion, possible precursors to what some economists describe as “the Great Resignation” – the trend, mainly seen in the United States of America, of workers no longer being willing to tolerate toxic work environments, abusive leadership, lack of diversity and closed inner circles of power that affect individual career prospects, as well as for reasons of dissatisfaction about salary levels and career and life choices prompted by COVID-19.
4. Another issue of concern raised in this report is the perceived need to reform recruitment systems and processes, including talent acquisition, where biases and lengthy processes hamper efforts to find candidates with the best potential. The report also draws attention to the increasing focus on compliance at WFP, which risks taking the spirit and joy out of work, neglecting the human factor and harming the crucial engagement of employees.
5. WFP has the advantage of offering a meaningful mission that attracts very capable and talented individuals who are more than motivated to give their best. The challenge is to create an open-minded and inclusive work community – a work environment where talented people belong and thrive and where creativity and initiative are supported and prioritized over the need to protect egos or procedures. OBD is committed to supporting this change process and functions as an integral part of WFP’s organizational readiness to achieve its mandate.

## Cases and issues brought to the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services in 2021

### Overview

6. During 2021 OBD registered 430 cases, an increase of 8 percent compared to 2020 but comparable to the 433 cases registered in 2019, before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

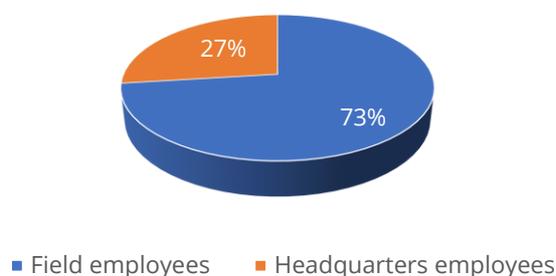


7. Access to informal justice is built on trust. In-person contact with OBD is essential in empowering employees to come forward with work-related concerns. OBD figures show that virtual missions carried out by video quadruple the threshold for employees to come forward compared to in-person missions. Unfortunately, COVID-19-related restrictions on travel and meetings prevented OBD from making in-person visits in 2020 and for much of 2021; OBD conducted 11 virtual missions in 2021 and just 2 in-person missions.
8. The share of employees contacting OBD (referred to as “visitors”) who were based at headquarters rose from 23 percent in 2020 to 27 percent of in 2021; 73 percent of OBD visitors in 2021 worked in the field. The increase in headquarters visitors might be a result of outreach by the newly appointed RWAs at headquarters.
9. Since 2017 the ratio of female employees contacting OBD has been increasing, from 50 percent in 2016 to 62 percent in 2021. This might partly reflect the increased recruitment of female staff (who represented 42 percent in 2021 of staff, up from 34 percent in 2017); it might also indicate a need for more effort to create gender equality.

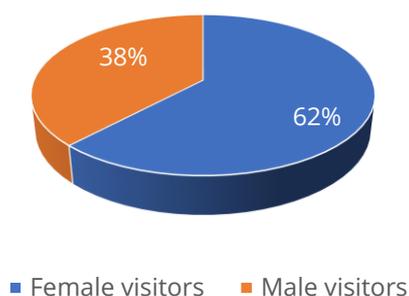
*“I liked the fact that I solved the problem that I could not solve on my own in a year and a half of trying. Thanks to the service I was able to direct my efforts constructively and I regained enthusiasm in my work. I appreciated the guidance of those who deeply know the internal dynamics and the experience provided in the right direction.”*

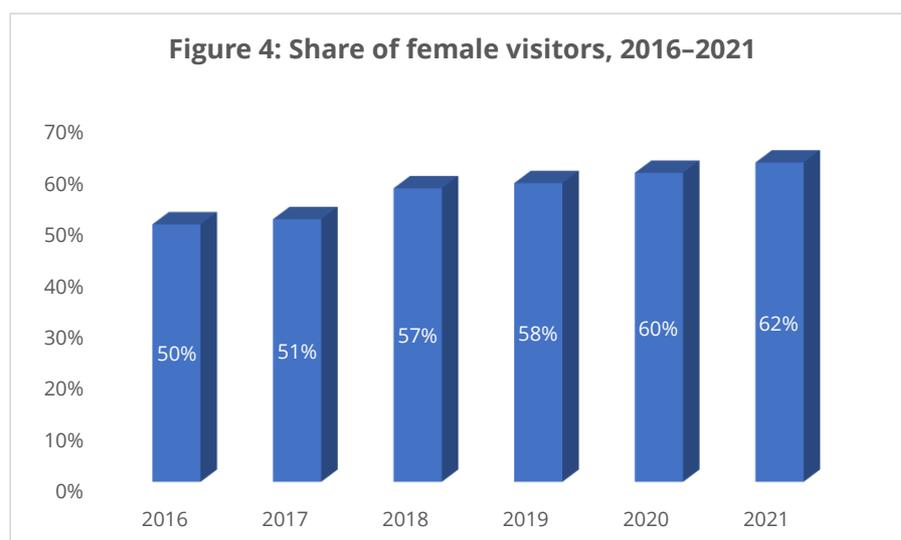
Feedback from a visitor to OBD

**Figure 2: Field vs. headquarters-based visitors, 2021**



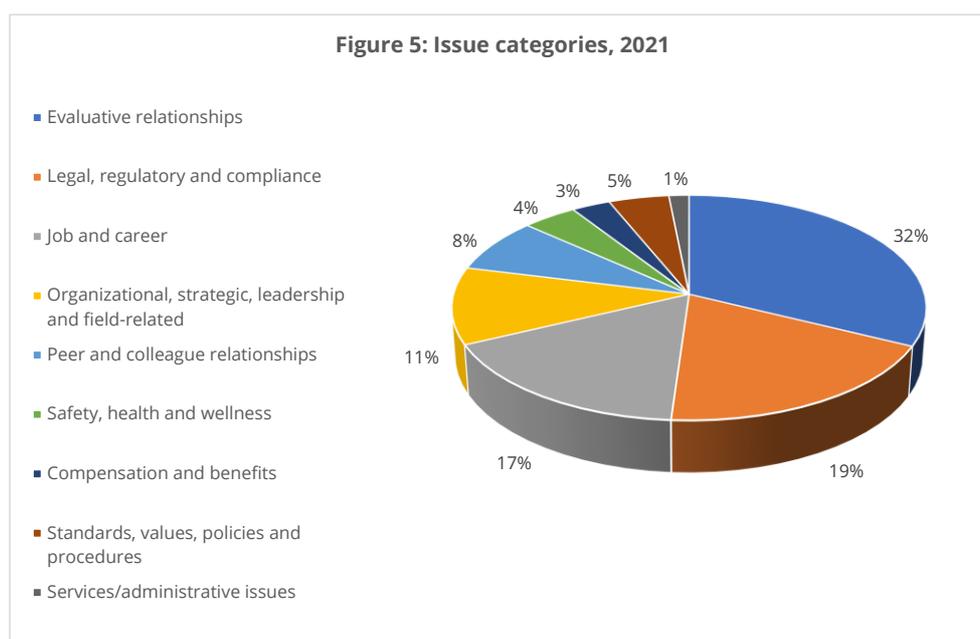
**Figure 3: Gender of visitors, 2021**

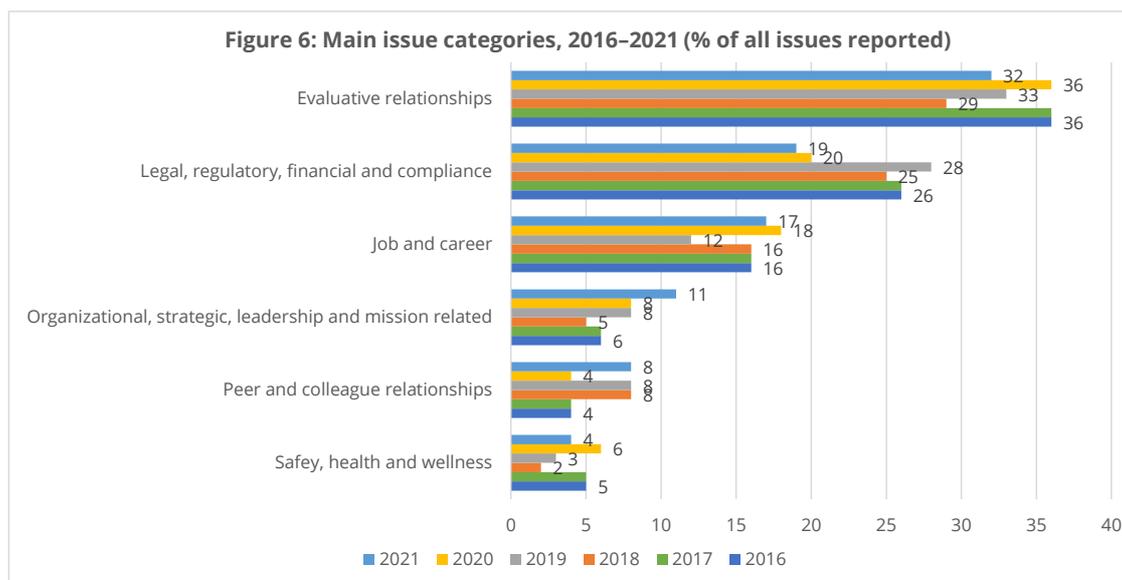




### Main issues in 2021

10. Every case in which a visitor contacts OBD involves one or more issues. OBD classifies these issues using the reporting categories of the International Ombuds Association, each of which has subcategories that allow for better understanding of the matters presented and the identification of trends in the issues reported to OBD.
11. In 2021 OBD identified 1,098 issues raised by its 430 visitors. Consistent with the previous four years, the top three issue categories were *evaluative relationships* (32 percent); *legal, regulatory and compliance* (19 percent); and *job and career* (17 percent).
12. OBD saw a remarkable increase in issues related to *peer and colleague relationships*, which rose from 4 percent in 2020 to 8 percent in 2021, resuming levels seen in 2018 and 2019 before the widespread adoption of telecommuting. Issues related to *safety, health and wellness* also returned to pre-pandemic levels, down from a peak of 6 percent in 2020. *Organizational, strategic, leadership and field-related* issues were the fourth largest category, rising from 8 percent in 2020 to 11 percent in 2021.



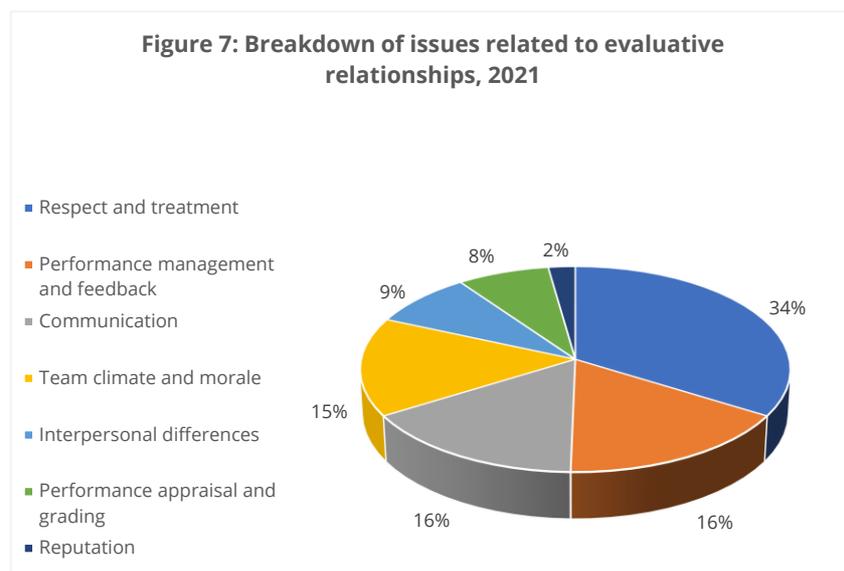


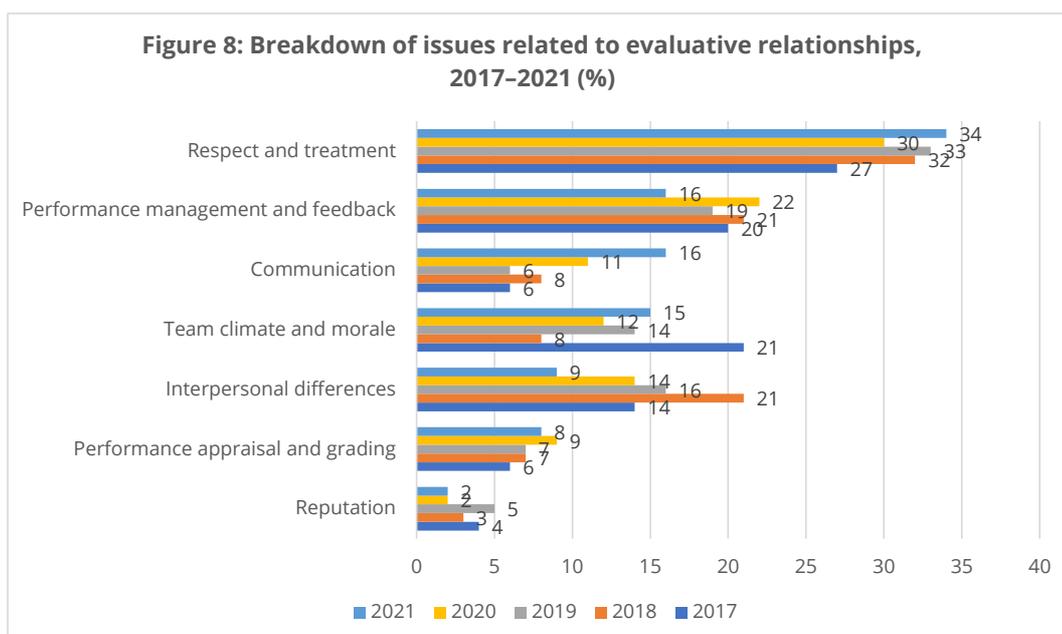
**Evaluative relationships**

- The most prevalent issue category in 2021 was *evaluative relationships*, consistent with data from other ombudsman offices worldwide. Within this category, there were increases in issues related to *respect and treatment*, *team climate and morale*, and in particular *communication*; these trends could be linked to the attention WFP has given to its new organizational values and related campaigns aimed at embedding them in daily work. There was a decline in cases related to *performance management and feedback* and *interpersonal differences*, which may be explained in part by the fact that many employees continue to work from home.

*“I initially thought that the interaction of the Ombudsman service was going to escalate the issue. However, the way the OBD staff dealt with it was really very objective and required genuine self-reflection from all parties”*

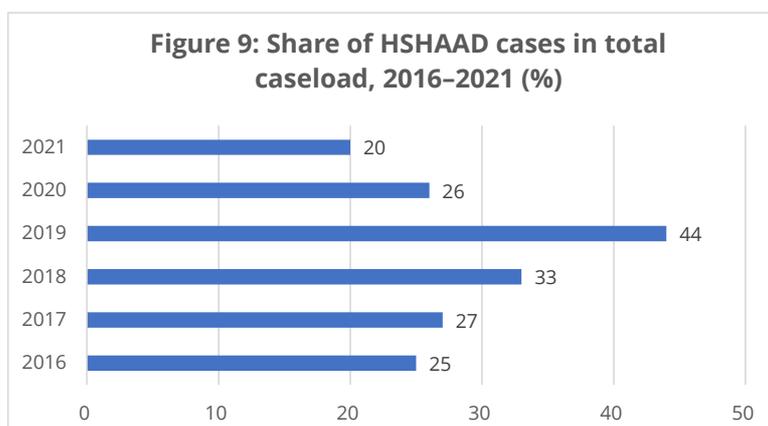
Feedback from a visitor to OBD

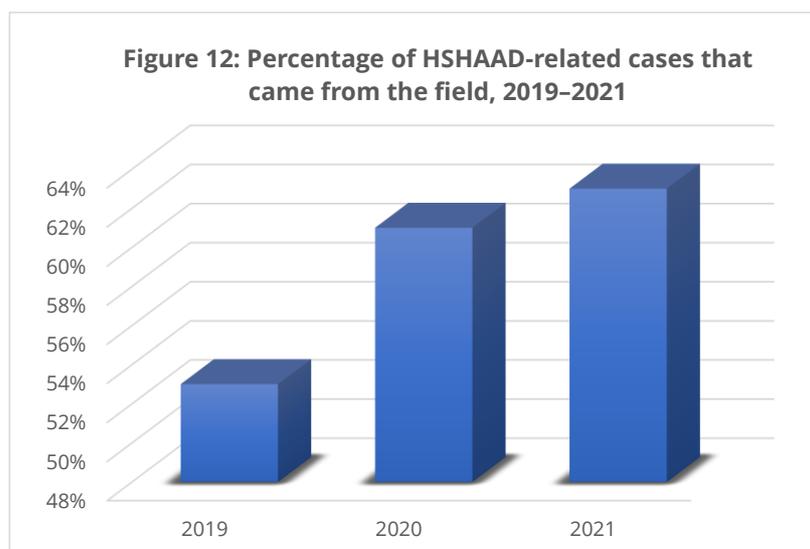
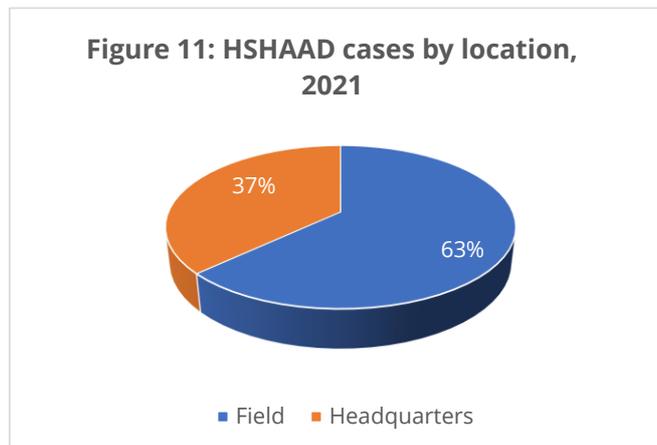
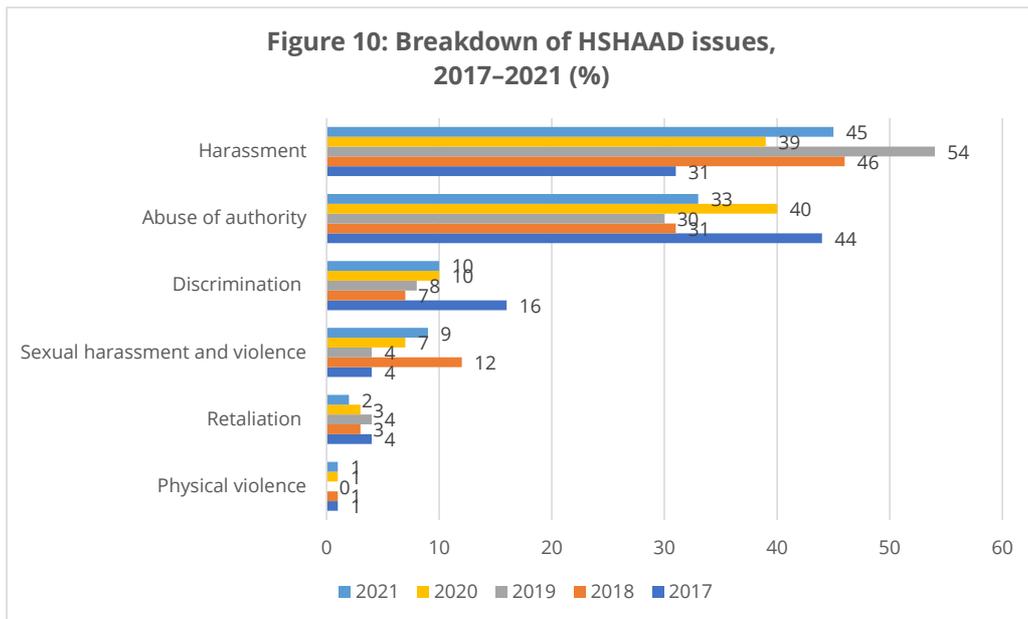




### **Abusive conduct**

14. For a second consecutive year, OBD recorded a decline in cases related to abusive conduct: *harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination (HSHAAD)*. As a share of the total caseload, they reached a peak of 44 percent in 2019, falling to 26 percent in 2020 and 20 percent in 2021. The prevalence of remote working could partially explain the trend of the past two years, as many employees might not have experienced interpersonal issues during this time or they may not have taken the opportunity to informally address them. Throughout 2018 and 2019 there was a strong corporate message that abusive conduct should be reported, which encouraged employees to come forward.
15. The share of HSHAAD cases from the field continues to grow, increasing from 53 percent in 2019 to 61 percent in 2020 and 63 percent in 2021. This trend could reflect greater awareness of what constitutes HSHAAD and where to bring concerns. These topics have been addressed through the “Speak Up!” campaign run by the Human Resources Division and OBD webinars and capacity building sessions; the increased presence of RWAs in the field may also encourage staff affected by HSHAAD to come forward.
16. Consistent with previous years, *harassment* (45 percent of all HSHAAD issues) and *abuse of authority* (33 percent) were the most frequently raised HSHAAD issues. Sexual harassment and violence made up 9 percent of reported HSHAAD issues.





### Team climate assessments

17. In 2021, OBD conducted 10 team climate assessments involving 83 employees in various WFP regions. First launched in 2020, team climate assessments help managers understand the atmosphere in their teams and how their supervisees perceive their leadership. They consist of feedback from team members on leadership, cohesion and morale within teams, and they support managers in finding realistic and workable solutions to any issues raised.

*I had no idea that I was creating this toxic environment for my team.... now I know what I specifically need do to get better and create a better team culture"*

A supervisor after a team climate assessment

### Coaching

18. Through coaching, OBD assists employees who seek help in handling challenging work-related situations, thereby contributing to positive cultural change at WFP. This approach incorporates personal reflection and skills enhancement, going beyond simply providing information on the application of legal frameworks such as relevant WFP rules, guidelines or the human resources manual. It involves helping employees to look at situations from various angles, allowing them to recognize their own role and how previous behaviour and decisions might have contributed to a situation; to understand how WFP rules and policies inform managerial and employee responsibility; and to take steps towards resolving issues.
19. In 2021 OBD provided comprehensive coaching sessions to 18 employees, mainly on how to deal constructively with interpersonal tension and conflict.

*Through coaching interventions OBD contributes to the enhancement of emotional intelligence among WFP leadership to the benefit of employees and ultimately WFP beneficiaries, and it thus supports WFP's vision of transforming its workplace culture.*

20. As a voluntary follow-up from team climate assessments, team climate coaching helps supervisors to address issues within their teams; improve their communication styles; and build more cohesive teams. In 2021, OBD provided team climate coaching for two supervisors.

### Capacity building

21. In 2021, OBD undertook 60 training sessions attended by 1,700 employees located in all WFP regions; training was conducted in English, Spanish, French and Arabic. Since the launch of the OBD capacity building initiative in 2020, the office has trained 2,650 employees through 92 sessions. The training programme aims to enhance the essential conflict management and resolution skills of WFP employees and managers, providing them with practical knowledge, skills and insights to apply immediately in various challenging work situations.

*"The self-reflection sessions helped me identify areas of improvement in my leadership style and how to ensure that as a leader I maintain a harmonious work environment."*

Feedback from a participant in the respectful leadership training course

22. In response to increased demand for training and guidance on how to manage difficult conversations, address HSHAAD matters and contribute to a respectful workplace culture, OBD launched a series of monthly ombuds webinars in October 2021. The webinars held to date have been attended by an average of 250 employees and have generated excellent feedback, indicating their value for WFP employees worldwide.

*“Thank you so much for organizing this series of webinars which are much welcome and appreciated by the field! You developed effective techniques to embed the concepts in a wide audience, I will definitely use the knowledge gained on dealing with conflict situations in the future”*

Feedback from a WFP employee

### Visitor survey

23. OBD visitors are invited to complete a confidential and anonymous survey that provides input on how OBD can improve its services. The survey also helps many employees to reflect on the way they have chosen to tackle the workplace issues they face.
24. In 2021 the survey results showed a very high level of satisfaction with OBD services: 92 percent of respondents stated that they would recommend the OBD to others following their visits, and 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the ombuds officer they talked to helped them to identify and review options for addressing their concerns.
25. In their interactions with visitors, OBD staff use a coaching approach designed to help employees gain insights and skills that will enable them to deal effectively not only with their current issues but also future challenges. This approach empowers OBD visitors: 55 percent of respondents said that through their interaction with OBD they felt more comfortable about addressing workplace issues in the future.

*By providing informal conflict resolution services, OBD serves as a crucial pillar of the WFP internal justice system. Around 36 percent of respondents said that following their interactions with OBD they had decided not to submit formal reports to the Office of Inspections and Investigations (OIGI). This figure demonstrates that the work of OBD creates significant cost savings for WFP not only within OIGI but also in relation to staff turnover, morale and productivity, to name a few of the costs of conflict that OBD mentioned in its 2017 annual report.*

#### Visitor quotes:

*“I liked your sincere interest in resolving issues and your ability to navigate within the organization and bring ... difficult issues to the attention of WFP's senior leadership”*

*“I liked the commitment of the ombuds officer, who showed sincerity both in understanding of the situation but also in addressing the whole process. Also, the office helped me to feel supported in a situation where I was absolutely powerless.”*

## 2021 systemic issues and recommendations

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

26. Few WFP employees have brought the impact of COVID-19 measures taken by WFP to the attention of OBD compared with those of other United Nations organizations. OBD believes that this is due to WFP's swift reaction to the changing situations worldwide and its regularly updated guidance and instructions addressing employee needs related to these changing situations such as guidance on telecommuting, travel and health and safety.
27. The mental health and well-being of employees globally have become increasingly affected by the continuing measures and by general, persistent uncertainty regarding the future. Distress, exhaustion, anxiety and fear accumulated throughout 2021 have affected workplace culture and morale, albeit to varying degrees depending on factors such as personality, family constellation, duty station and other factors. This pressure on mental health and well-being is exacerbated by ever-expanding emergencies, the influx of new colleagues, travel complications, uncertainty about the health of family and friends and the possibility to connect with them, and isolation induced by quarantines, lockdowns and limited office access. Resilience is essential, and while WFP provides several valuable resources for strengthening employee resilience they need to be accompanied by realistic workloads, job security and supportive and inclusive work environments, all of which are the responsibility of management.
28. **Recommendation 1:** *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.*
29. **Recommendation 2:** *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.*
30. Managers and supervisors themselves are also under continuous pressure because of the constraints imposed by the pandemic, the increased number and scope of emergencies and the permanent uncertainty facing everyone. At times this can result in noticeable strain and affect their behaviour. How managers handle stress and pressure affects their teams and sometimes their ability to embody the WFP values of inclusion, integrity, collaboration, commitment and humanity. In 2020 and 2021 OBD noted an increase in perceptions of managers being controlling, less patient or less considerate.
31. **Recommendation 3:** *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.*
32. Several employees told OBD that at work, as in the media and the outside world, certain opinions and questions about national or WFP measures related to COVID-19 appeared to be increasingly unwelcome. Some employees said that they did not feel free to talk about the restriction of their human rights caused by the measures or about what they considered to be discriminatory decisions and behaviour.

33. Other employees shared experiences of divergent opinions or views on topics not related to the pandemic being increasingly unwelcome, and some said that WFP seemed to be becoming a more controlling organization that makes employees more cautious about contributing or more hesitant to speak out.
34. As a general observation, in the mainstream media and in daily life, measures related to COVID-19 have sadly become a controversial topic where in general only one narrative is accepted and those who think differently, ask questions or request more transparency are often dismissed, ridiculed, verbally attacked or excluded. This behaviour does not reflect the values of WFP and the United Nations. It is noteworthy in this regard that within the family of United Nations organizations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has issued official statements about the ethical use of COVID-19 passes and warned about potential misuse, discrimination and infringement of freedom of choice.
35. **Recommendation 4:** *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.*
36. **Recommendation 5:** *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.*

### Psychological safety in teams

37. COVID-19 measures have forged a new working reality in which “psychological safety” within teams has become more relevant than ever. Harvard professor Amy Edmondson<sup>1</sup> coined this term to describe a working environment in which the members of a team feel safe to take interpersonal risks, which may include speaking up with an idea in a meeting, challenging the status quo, suggesting a change or admitting to mistakes.
38. Enabling teams to be effective and resilient, psychological safety allows each team member to feel that they can contribute freely without fear of being judged for thinking differently and to believe that their work makes a difference to the team and contributes to the success of the organization.
39. Creating psychological safety within and among teams is not easy, certainly not when working virtually or in hybrid format. During the last two years managers and employees have approached OBD to share related difficulties.
40. Working virtually offers fewer opportunities for interaction among employees and removes the opportunity for spontaneous in-person conversations that naturally build trust among colleagues. A nurturing and positive environment produces teams where each member can feel valued and appreciated and where they can feel comfortable enough to disclose information about their personal well-being and the support they might need from their team.
41. **Recommendation 6:** *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.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Edmondson, A. C. 2018. *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth.*

42. Working virtually makes it more difficult to read non-verbal cues in others; these cues are absent when colleagues turn their cameras off during meetings. Effective communication and collaboration have also become more of a challenge within teams. Keeping teams inter- and intra-connected requires consistent effort from all team members, in particular managers and supervisors.
43. **Recommendation 7:** *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.*
44. When employees are comfortable and able to express themselves freely, motivation and collaboration increase and engagement and loyalty are bolstered. The result is a healthy working environment of learning and growth, where employees feel safe and comfortable about taking risks. This is a necessary component in fostering innovation in the workplace and of crucial value to WFP as it seeks to maximize productivity during these demanding times.
45. **Recommendation 8:** *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.*
46. **Recommendation 9:** *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.*
47. **Recommendation 10:** *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.*
48. Research indicates that teams that operate in an environment of psychological safety are happier, take smarter risks, feel comfortable raising concerns at an early stage and are more resilient in the face of change and external pressures. Psychological safety also has a positive impact on the quality of work and increases creativity and innovation, which will enhance productivity at WFP.

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

49. Managers and employees have approached OBD to share concerns regarding recruitment processes, highlighting, among other issues, a need for a more equitable process and better matches that will be valuable to WFP in the long term. Visitors have also expressed a need for transparency, streamlined and faster processes, and bias-resistant approaches.
50. Currently, the recruitment process at WFP puts a lot of weight on the outcome of interviews; other factors such as test results, previous experience, human potential and personal motivation do not appear to be included in the final ranking of candidates after the interviews. Panel members have biases, as all humans do, and for example tend to value confidence over competence or find it hard to distinguish between the two. As a result, the recruitment process can constitute a hurdle to entry for candidates who are not skilled or experienced in competency-based interviews and for otherwise suitable candidates who do not "tick all the boxes", for example candidates who are capable of performing at a very high level in an advertised position but do not have the exact experience called for by the vacancy

announcement or who have had career breaks or other atypical experiences. This limitation adversely affects WFP field operations in particular.

51. Volumes have been written about effective recruitment and vast amounts of research undertaken. All of this has not necessarily made recruitment easier or more successful. OBD therefore welcomes WFP efforts through its new staffing framework to define and measure the targets of its recruitment and reassignment exercises, particularly with regard to how the organization can enhance diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, identity, sexual orientation, disability and nationality.
52. OBD also appreciates WFP's plans to train recruitment panel members on unconscious bias and its efforts to ensure better representation of employees from the Global South on those panels. The 2021 diversity and inclusion framework will provide necessary guidance in this regard.
53. **Recommendation 11:** *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.*
54. **Recommendation 12:** *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.*

## Compliance

55. In recent years WFP has fostered a culture of compliance. There is wide appreciation for the organization's efforts to manage risks and ensure that its operations are conducted in accordance with established guidelines, procedures and rules and that its employees do what they are required or expected to do. At the same time, some managers have raised concerns that once compliance exercises and forms are completed and submitted to the relevant compliance unit, the subject of that compliance can disappear off the radar of the manager and the team concerned. Compliance activities are also found to be time-consuming, and their value is not always understood.
56. These concerns indicate that a compliance culture can push managerial and individual responsibility to the background and diminish engagement, active involvement and interaction among employees. This can impede effective daily management and adequate responses to unexpected situations. A focus on compliance risks overlooking the creativity, intuition and insight, honed by experience, that enable people to respond effectively to challenging situations. Being compliant is one thing; using compliance to prevent mishaps is another.
57. By contrast, good governance – which refers to good practices – allows organizations to remain resilient in the face of changing circumstances. Good governance supports a culture that focuses on making an organization better, one in which employees collaborate and ethical behaviour is a goal, together with the integration of the organization's values into every aspect of its operations.
58. By way of analogy, pilots need to know how to fly no matter the weather. Flying purely by checklist and computer has been shown to be potentially disastrous. The addition of experience and an intuitive feel for flying developed over the years enables a fuller interpretation of the information available beyond that provided by technology. A

combination of technology human understanding, intuition and experience is necessary to weather any storm.

59. Likewise, WFP must not lose sight of the importance of this “human factor” as a way to use the full potential of its staff. By nurturing the human factor the organization will foster creativity, engagement and innovation.
60. **Recommendation 13:** *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.*

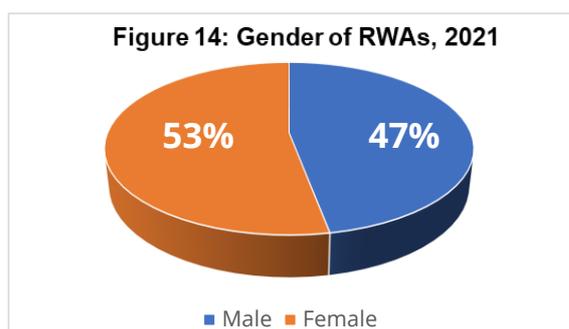
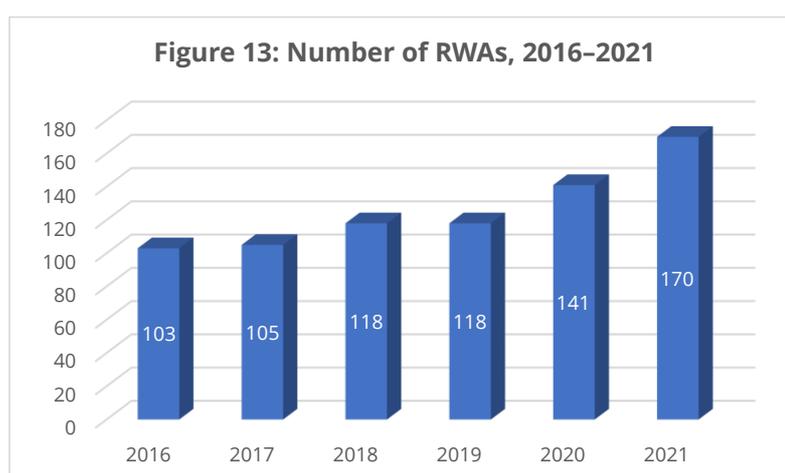
## The respectful workplace advisor programme

### Overview

61. The RWA network has grown tremendously since the RWA programme was created in 2007, from 32 RWAs in 2010 to 170 in 2021. RWAs are now active worldwide, covering all regional bureaux, 71 country offices, 88 sub-offices and headquarters in Rome. Around 98 percent are national employees.
62. Country directors are increasingly requesting more RWAs for their country offices, which speaks of their recognition of the impact of the programme.
63. In 2021, 53 new RWAs were ready to assume their roles after successfully completing the five-day comprehensive training offered by OBD, while 15 existing RWAs with more than four years’ experience received advanced training.

*“In our country office, the role of the RWAs is crucial as they are the first point of contact for employees when they do not know what to do in certain situations.”*

WFP country director



64. As an extension of OBD, RWAs are a valuable resource on the ground, providing confidential and impartial support to colleagues facing workplace issues or concerns. RWAs are trained to listen empathetically and in confidence to colleagues' concerns, help them identify options, provide information on policies and procedures and refer them to other resources for additional help. They serve as an initial point of contact and source of information on the WFP internal justice system.

*"The respectful workplace advisors are like an early warning system on systemic issues within WFP."*

Amir Abdulla, WFP Deputy Executive Director

### **Advancing the RWA Network**

65. The RWA programme is managed by two part-time RWA network coordinators who report to the Ombudsman. In 2021, they conducted 54 teleconference training sessions for RWAs across all WFP regions and at headquarters, thus increasing the impact of RWAs. The topics covered in the training included "dealing with difficult bosses"; "dealing with difficult people"; "addressing micro-aggressions"; and "workplace bullying". The coordinators also provide the RWAs with guidance on how to conduct one-to-one consultations with peers.
66. To increase the visibility of RWAs and their services, OBD has developed a new RWA logo and communication products including flyers, posters and standardized presentations. The OBD outreach officer has trained RWAs on how to publicize their roles in their country offices and headquarters departments.

**Figure 15: The newly created RWA logo**



### **Support for the workplace culture initiative, the RESPECT+ campaign and the 2021 global staff survey**

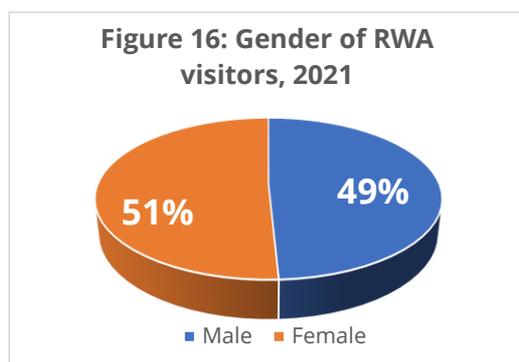
67. The RWAs and RWA coordinators contributed to the design and launch of the RESPECT+ digital campaign. Many RWAs played an active role in the "JAM sessions" organized as part of the collaborative process through which WFP defined its new organizational values. To encourage employee participation, RWAs promoted participation in the global staff survey in their offices.

## RWA consultations

68. Every time an RWA is approached by a colleague, it is recorded as a consultation.<sup>2</sup> In 2021 the RWAs handled 319 consultations, a 60 percent increase from 2020. The increase reflects the 21 percent rise in the number of RWAs in 2021; RWAs also performed considerably more outreach and training in 2021. Anxiety and stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have also contributed to the rise in the number of consultations.
69. The gender ratio of employees consulting RWAs was almost balanced: 51 percent of RWA visitors were female and 49 percent male. Around 58 percent of all RWA visitors were on short-term contracts.<sup>3</sup>
70. The RWAs identified 378 issues brought to them. As in previous years, most employees consulted them regarding *evaluative relationships* (31 percent of issues), *peer and colleague relationships* (20 percent) and *career progression and development* (15 percent).
71. The share of reported issues related to *evaluative relationships* increased from 22 percent in 2020 to 31 percent in 2021. According to the RWAs, working from home makes it more difficult for some employees to engage with their supervisors; communication has been less effective, with meetings repeatedly cancelled and emails used as the principal means of communication, even to convey difficult news on matters such as a negative performance evaluation. Certain supervisors have shown a lack of trust when working remotely and have required employees to document work activities to demonstrate that they are performing their duties when not in the office.
72. Harassment and abuse of power remain a significant concern, as observed by several RWAs. The attitudes and behaviours of some supervisors have been inconsistent with WFP values: colleagues have recounted instances of yelling and threats not to renew contracts. Fear of retaliation and possible negative consequences prevent employees from speaking out – a situation that underlines the important role of RWAs.

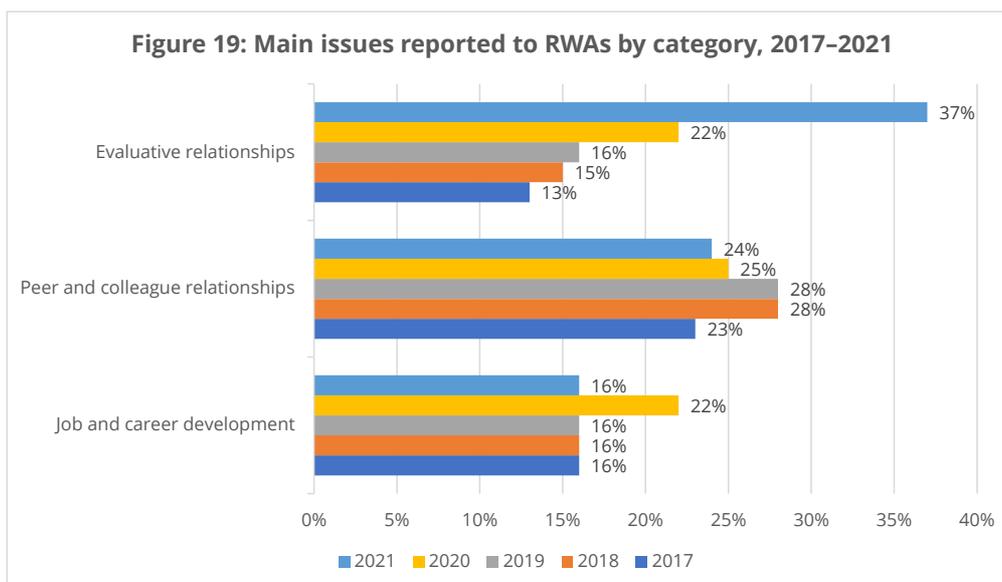
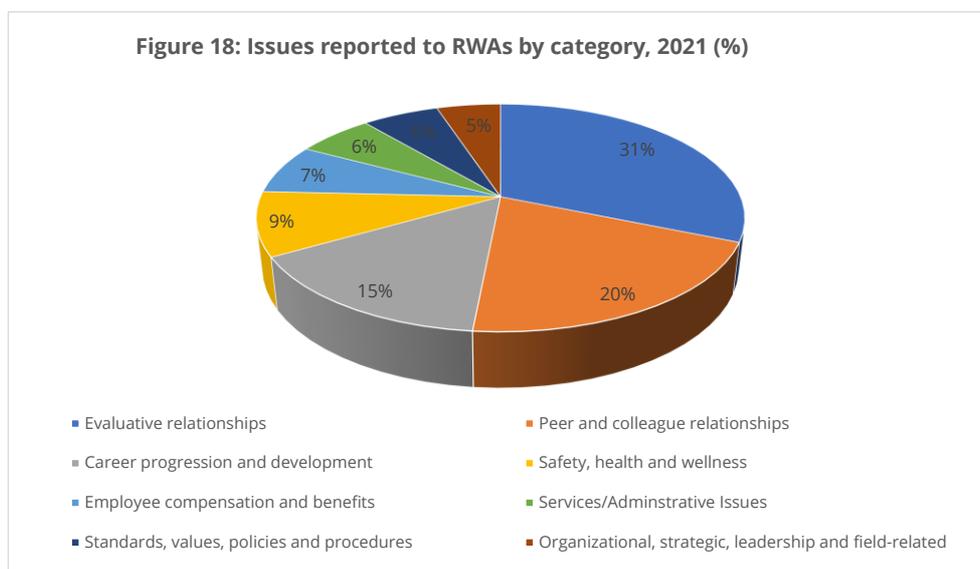
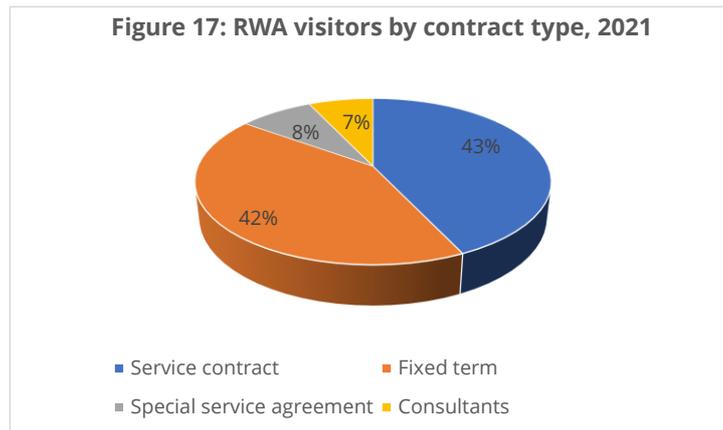
*"People at the office want someone to listen to them and help them manage their situation. By talking to a respectful workplace advisor, they get ideas in how to approach the situation."*

An RWA



<sup>2</sup> When an employee gets in touch with an RWA, this is recorded as a consultation, while when an employee reaches out to the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services directly it is recorded as a "case". While RWAs function as an initial point of contact and source of information, they do not provide the full range of ombuds services.

<sup>3</sup> These short-term contracts include special service agreements, service contracts and consultant contracts.



## Looking ahead

73. Important steps lie ahead for OBD in 2022.

### Impact assessment

74. Since its establishment in 2005 there has been no outside independent assessment or evaluation of OBD. OBD initiated an impact assessment in 2021. The outcomes of the assessment, expected in the second quarter of 2022, will inform the development of an OBD action plan.

### Mediation assessment

75. To support WFP's internal justice system and strengthen the transformation of its workplace culture, OBD initiated in 2021 an assessment of WFP's mediation needs and potential, along with an exercise to benchmark WFP against the mediation programmes of other United Nations and international organizations. The results of this work, together with relevant recommendations from the impact assessment referred to in the preceding paragraph, will provide the guidance needed to establish mediation as a conflict resolution tool at WFP in a way that reflects the values of the organization and contributes to an inclusive and respectful workplace culture.

### FAO and JIU reviews of appeals mechanisms

76. A review of the appeals mechanism of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will be completed in 2022. OBD is collaborating with its FAO counterpart to define the scope of the roles of the two offices in implementing the outcome of this review, which will include a more prominent role for mediation. Meanwhile, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the United Nations<sup>4</sup> has initiated a review of the internal pre-tribunal stage appeal mechanisms available to staff members in the United Nations system organizations, a report on which is expected to be issued in 2023.

### OBD budget

77. While it is committed to contributing to WFP's organizational change process and readiness, OBD faces cuts in its budget submission for 2022. These cuts affect OBD's ability to serve WFP employees worldwide, forcing the office to cut back on consultant contracts, seek reimbursement for the cost of tailor-made ombuds interventions such as coaching, training and specific team interventions and forego staff travel for at least the first quarter of 2022.
78. This is unfortunate, especially as in 2022 more employees will be returning to their offices and OBD has developed a comprehensive field mission plan. In-person visits are crucial to providing access to informal justice: on average, the number of employees who seek ombuds services during virtual missions is just 25 percent of those who come forward during in-person visits.

---

<sup>4</sup> The JIU is the independent external oversight body of the United Nations system mandated to conduct system-wide evaluations, inspections and investigations.

**Conclusion**

79. As a trusted navigator of the WFP internal justice system, OBD seeks to work with employees, regardless of where they are located in the organization, to find constructive and positive solutions to their concerns and thus strengthen the organization's core values and contribute to its mission.
80. OBD advocates dialogue, respect and inclusion, no matter the topic, issue or event. In these times of polarization and "cancel culture", it has never been more important to engage in dialogue and ask questions in order to understand differences of opinion and perspective, create connections and build bridges.

**Acronyms**

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HSHAAD	harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations
OBD	Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services
OIGI	Office of Inspections and Investigations
RWA	respectful workplace advisor