



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

Executive Board
Annual session
Rome, 24–28 June 2024

Distribution: General

Agenda item 4

Date: 20 May 2024

WFP/EB.A/2024/4-C/Add.1

Original: English

Annual reports

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 2023

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2023 (WFP/EB.A/2024/4-C/Add.1).

* 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:

Mr S. Samkange
Assistant Executive Director a.i.
Workplace and Management Department
email: stanlake.samkange@wfp.org

Ms N. Vareil
Chief a.i.
Staff Relations Branch
email: nicole.vareil@wfp.org

Ms R. Gbinoba
Director
Human Resources Division
email: robosa.gbinoba@wfp.org

1. Management welcomes the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) for 2023 and values OBD's contributions to the strengthening of WFP's workplace culture and internal justice system. In particular, management appreciates the office's provision of an informal and confidential mechanism for resolving conflicts and grievances among employees and its active promotion of a respectful and inclusive working environment through interventions and engagement with other stakeholders on enhancing WFP's prevention of and response to abusive conduct.
2. Management also appreciates the support that OBD is providing to employees during the transformative journey of organizational realignment and is committed to enhancing communication on, and ensuring adequate support mechanisms for that transformation.
3. Management notes that the number of employees contacting OBD continued to rise in 2023, with OBD attributing the increase to factors that include the large size of WFP's workforce and the expansion and increased in-person outreach activities of the office itself. Management welcomes in particular OBD's recognition of a positive shift in workplace culture as an additional contributing factor to the increase. Significant efforts have been made in recent years to improve the overall experience of employees and the workplace culture of WFP, which remains a core priority.
4. Management also notes the continued decrease, for a second consecutive year, in the number of allegations of harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination (abusive conduct) reported to OBD, with such cases dropping from 44 percent of the office's total caseload in 2018 to 21 percent in 2022. This may be a result of the measures implemented by WFP to increase employees' awareness of expected behaviours, and the numerous initiatives of recent years aimed at improving workplace culture and preventing and responding to abusive conduct, including the introduction of management interventions as an additional avenue for reporting and acting on allegations of misconduct.
5. Management welcomes OBD's contribution to the identification of potential systemic issues and its recommendations on how to address them. Management looks forward to maintaining regular dialogue with OBD throughout 2024 with a view to ensuring timely awareness of and appropriate action on any systemic issues identified.

Change management

6. Management recognizes the importance of supporting employees through enhanced communication and adequate support mechanisms, especially in times of change.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>1. <i>WFP's leadership and management should enhance communication channels so as to provide clear and timely updates regarding organizational changes, especially those related to restructuring and downsizing. This will help to ensure that employees understand the reasons behind such changes and the impact that the changes will have on their roles and responsibilities. Ensuring openness, transparency and clear step-by-step procedures would help to manage the change process and reduce the stress on WFP's workforce.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>In December 2023, a senior management-level task force on change and employee engagement was established to pursue improved and coherent engagement and communication with employees in order to reduce "silos" and strengthen the mutually reinforcing links between change management processes, including the revision of the organizational structure and the budget reprioritization exercise. One concrete result of the task force's actions has been the creation of a webpage on WFP's internal website describing the transformational journey and providing all key information such as the reasons for and key aspects of the transformation, its implications for employees and the resources available to support those employees.</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
	<p>Following on from this, in April 2024, the Communications and Media Division established an internal communications working group on change. In addition, the Assistant Executive Director for workplace culture organized calls with directors at WFP headquarters with a view to ensuring that they were kept informed and were able to provide timely and consolidated information to their teams, thereby fostering conversations regarding the management of programmes, budgets and people. The aim has been to ensure that managers are equipped with the tools to help them navigate the change, and to communicate to staff and partners in a clear and informed manner.</p>
<p>2. <i>Enhancing the support provided to employees by WFP's leadership: A culture of stability and resilience within the organization can be fostered by emphasizing the importance of empathy, value-driven decision-making and solidarity among colleagues. WFP ought to encourage its leaders to prioritize the well-being of both employees and beneficiaries.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The employee support programme was launched in March 2023 to support all employees as members of WFP's global community during these times of organizational change and uncertainty. Offices for various functions organize webinars and other events on topics such as navigating organizational change and coping with stress in times of uncertainty. These events provide employees with an opportunity to ask questions and to understand that they are not alone, nurturing solidarity among employees. All webinars are offered in various languages and time zones for greater inclusivity.</p> <p>Efforts are also being made to sensitize all employees to the standards of behaviour reflected in WFP's leadership framework, with a focus on developing leaders who understand the importance of building skills in emotional intelligence, including empathy, active listening, understanding and connecting with others, and creating an atmosphere of psychological safety in which individuals and teams can thrive.</p> <p>An inclusive leadership programme for global executives, from which 100 senior leaders have already successfully graduated, is aimed at further equipping leaders with the ability to leverage inclusion initiatives in order to achieve greater results with fewer resources, create a safe and welcoming environment for everyone, bring out the best in each team member, promote adaptability and flexibility, and create the willingness to explore and support new and innovative methods of achieving results in the face of growing demands and limited resources.</p>

Flexible working arrangements

7. Management prioritizes the health and well-being of WFP employees by, among other initiatives, providing the flexible working arrangements that employees need, while ensuring that business needs are covered. Within the Workplace and Management Department, the Human Resources Division, the People and Culture Coordination Unit and the Wellness Service focus on creating a workplace where all people are valued and able to meet their full potential, enabling WFP to deliver on its mission.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>3. <i>To recognize the diverse needs and situations of employees in different locations and roles, management could consider exploring more flexible working arrangements, including options for hybrid working models that combine remote and in-office work. The recommendations in the Joint Inspection Unit's report provide a basis for developing a coherent approach to the mainstreaming of flexible working arrangements and new ways of working.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Office attendance is critical to meet operational needs and maximize team cohesion and communication. In some circumstances, hybrid and other flexible working arrangements may also fulfil these objectives and can be considered on a case-by-case basis. In this regard, management recognizes that flexible, hybrid and remote work policies can contribute to a more inclusive workplace and enhance employee experience by accommodating the diverse needs of employees across various locations and roles, abilities and life circumstances.</p> <p>WFP's human resources policy framework identifies and makes available various modalities of flexible working arrangements that employees can avail themselves of in agreement with their managers, who are encouraged to support their requests. WFP also took note of the recommendations from the Joint Inspection Unit report, ensuring that the arrangements in place take into account the diverse needs and realities of personnel while keeping in mind the best interests of the organization. This includes, for example, the commitment to establishing a clear definition of flexible working arrangements that sets out the scope of the policy.</p>
<p>4. <i>WFP employees would benefit from more open and transparent communications about remote working policies and decisions.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Following the pilot project on hybrid working, which ended in July 2023, all employees were informed of the reasons for a gradual return to the office for employees in those offices where the pilot had been implemented. Subsequent communications, including those issued during an all-staff event in December 2023, have clarified the value of following a consistent approach in all locations and the benefits of in-office presence, but flexible arrangements are available to take into account the diverse needs of WFP's employees.</p> <p>To address the needs of individual employees, WFP's arrangements for flexible working, including telecommuting, continue to be available on request and with the approval of the relevant authority.</p>

Accountability of managers and employees

8. Management prioritizes the fostering of a culture of accountability at all levels of the organization, as set out in WFP's leadership framework. The accountability of managers and employees is defined through various initiatives focusing on respect, psychological safety and performance management.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>5. <i>WFP would benefit from investing further in a culture of accountability in which leaders are held accountable for leading their teams in a respectful and effective way, and employees are held accountable for delivering on agreed results. While WFP's leadership framework provides good guidance on what this means in practice, OBD observes that the framework is underused in many duty stations. WFP could thus increase its efforts to make the leadership framework a common point of reference and ensure that employees know about the framework and how to adapt and use it in their offices. Giving more weight to supervisory skills in the PACE assessment, and ensuring a consistent tone at all levels that emphasizes accountability could drive further improvement in this area.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>WFP has invested in various initiatives focusing on managers' accountability and their ability to lead teams in a respectful and effective way, including the "Speak Up" awareness-raising initiative dedicated to leaders, induction sessions for country directors and deputy country directors, and the head of field office programme, which focuses on managers' role in ensuring psychological safety and preventing and addressing inappropriate and abusive conduct in their teams. In addition, the majority of training programmes for country office leaders include modules on providing duty of care.</p> <p>WFP also invests in strengthening managerial capacity and accountability through the management intervention method in which managers address any inappropriate or abusive behaviour, on the part of themselves or their team members, through awareness raising activities, active performance management and corrective tools that include coaching.</p> <p>Regarding PACE evaluations, a mandatory goal for supervisors was revised in 2023 to emphasize the importance of completing the PACE assessments of their teams. There are plans to issue additional guidance throughout 2024, and managers will be held responsible for operationalizing that guidance.</p> <p>The behaviours expected of all employees, including leaders, as defined in the leadership framework, have been integrated into WFP's performance management platforms. This integration is essential to the implementation of the leadership framework and helps to promote a culture of accountability. In addition, a toolkit that promotes peer-to-peer recognition of colleagues manifesting the behaviours in the framework has been developed to foster a culture in which good behaviours are recognized.</p>

Living WFP's values

9. As part of its commitment to ensuring that all employees adhere to WFP's core values, management is using enhanced communication and implementing various training programmes that promote cultural intelligence; awareness of biases and strategies for addressing them; and the embedding of diversity, equity and inclusion principles into different cultural settings. The impact of these initiatives is being monitored.

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>6. <i>Continuous monitoring and evaluation: Establishing mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of cultural dynamics, diversity and inclusion initiatives within WFP would assist the organization in assessing the effectiveness of its cultural integration efforts and identifying areas for improvement.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>WFP's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Unit is dedicated to promoting cultural intelligence, awareness and strategies that address biases and "blind spots", and conducts regular training sessions for WFP's multicultural teams and offices in order to embed DEI principles into different cultural settings. Recognizing the importance of providing education and advocacy interventions throughout an employee's career at WFP, the organization has invested resources in those areas to improve its outcomes. The work of regional DEI experts is particularly important and has enabled many awareness-raising events to be organized in different local cultural settings.</p> <p>Another opportunity for improving the measurement of activities related to workplace culture is presented in the pilot country office support programme, which was implemented in the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and which comprises a psychosocial risk assessment using the Copenhagen Psychological Questionnaire methodology. The assessment provides a granular overview at the team level, identifying areas where teams are doing well and areas where they require support.</p> <p>A corporately endorsed pulse survey tool is also now available in multiple languages for all WFP teams. The tool offers the opportunity to measure employees' sentiments and perceptions in a number of areas, and facilitates benchmarking and the gathering of insights based on the results received.</p> <p>The issues related to the workplace and conduct identified through the management review of significant risk and control issues in 2022 and 2023 are being addressed through a costed workplan in the management plan for 2024–2026.</p>

Recommendation of the Ombudsman	Management response
<p>7. <i>Enhanced cultural awareness at all levels: Cultural differences often play an underlying role in conflicts between supervisors and supervisees. WFP's leaders would benefit greatly from additional support in developing further cultural awareness, which would enable them to manage cultural differences more effectively. At the same time, WFP could build more understanding among national employees of what working for a United Nations organization entails. These steps would help to bridge existing gaps, in particular between supervisors in the international professional staff categories and national staff, strengthening the overall organizational culture and identity.</i></p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Throughout the organization, as part of efforts to embed WFP's values, including the Respect+ programme, cultural awareness and inclusion are being fostered through various activities. Pillar 2 of the Respect+ programme focuses on building capacity for cross-cultural inclusivity and embracing cultural differences. Respect+ tools are available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish to ensure maximum reach.</p> <p>WFP's global executive inclusive leadership programme further ensures that leaders are equipped to effectively manage all forms of diversity in their teams, with a focus on cultural diversity.</p> <p>The DEI Unit continually promotes awareness of DEI issues through frequent global dialogues. The unit's "Inclusive Insights" webinar series features panels of experts who explore various topics and perspectives, helping to deepen employees' understanding of inclusion issues. The unit also dedicates significant efforts to ensuring that all employees are aware of practical ways to embed inclusion into their daily activities. By supporting employees in identifying and understanding the barriers to inclusion and how they are manifested in the workplace, the unit aims to foster an environment in which cultural differences are not only respected but also valued.</p>

Conclusion

10. WFP remains committed to pursuing its efforts to improve its workplace culture, embracing diversity and inclusion and promoting emotional and cultural intelligence while fostering accountability at all levels. It will also focus on enhancing communication on ongoing changes and further supporting managers and employees in navigating the related uncertainty.
11. The annual report of OBD is a valuable source of information, guidance and encouragement for management as it continues on this journey.