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Programa Mundial de Alimentos  
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

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## **Annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2022**

### **Draft decision\***

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

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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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## Introduction

1. The demands on WFP and its employees continued to intensify throughout 2022. Emergencies are affecting growing numbers of employees and their families, and in their interactions with the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) employees have underscored the increasing importance of having realistic workloads, job security and supportive and inclusive work environments.
2. Fortunately, OBD managed to expand its team with two positions and to conduct 23 in-person visits to the field in 2022. As a result, accessibility to its services improved and 60 percent more employees reached out for informal conflict resolution services compared to 2021.
3. The mandate of OBD is to promote a respectful work environment and thus a more impactful organization. Finding resolutions that are acceptable to all parties and restoring relationships at work are crucial ways of creating a work environment in which employees thrive and feel able to give their best. Moreover, when employees and their managers are capable of resolving conflicts, concerns and other issues effectively, they can achieve more for WFP beneficiaries and they will feel safe engaging in innovation and improving their work.
4. The informal resolution services provided by OBD help create a safe space for self-expression and dialogue where employees are heard and their perspectives understood. OBD offers opportunities to clarify issues, crystallize thoughts and self-reflect. Informal resolution processes help employees to broaden or adapt their viewpoints and subsequently their approach to the situations they face. This often enables them to find innovative ways to achieve positive outcomes for themselves and others, including their teams.
5. OBD plays an integral role in WFP's readiness to deliver on its dual mandate: OBD aims to change workplace lives so that employees can focus on saving and changing the lives of WFP beneficiaries.

## 2022 at a glance

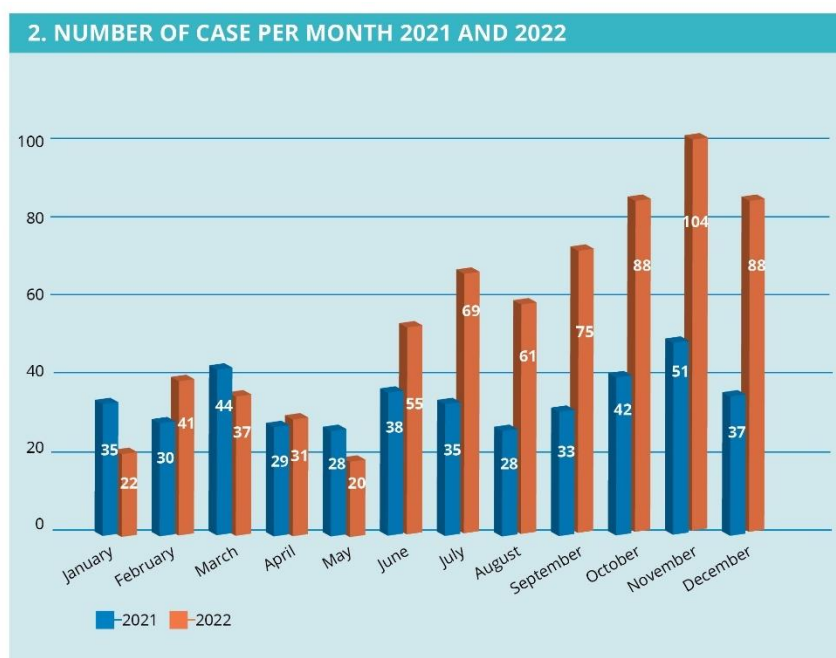
### Overview

6. During 2022, OBD registered 692 visitors (figure 1). This was a 60 percent increase over the previous three years and more than three times the number of cases in 2016, when the term of the current Ombudsman began.
7. In June 2022, OBD recommenced field missions. Access to the informal justice system is built on trust and in-person contact is therefore essential. As figure 1 shows, the number of cases reported to OBD increased in 2017, 2019 and 2022, when an increase in the number of OBD employees allowed the office to conduct more field visits. This is in contrast to 2020 and 2021, when field visits were suspended due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, although OBD managed to stabilize case numbers by conducting virtual missions.

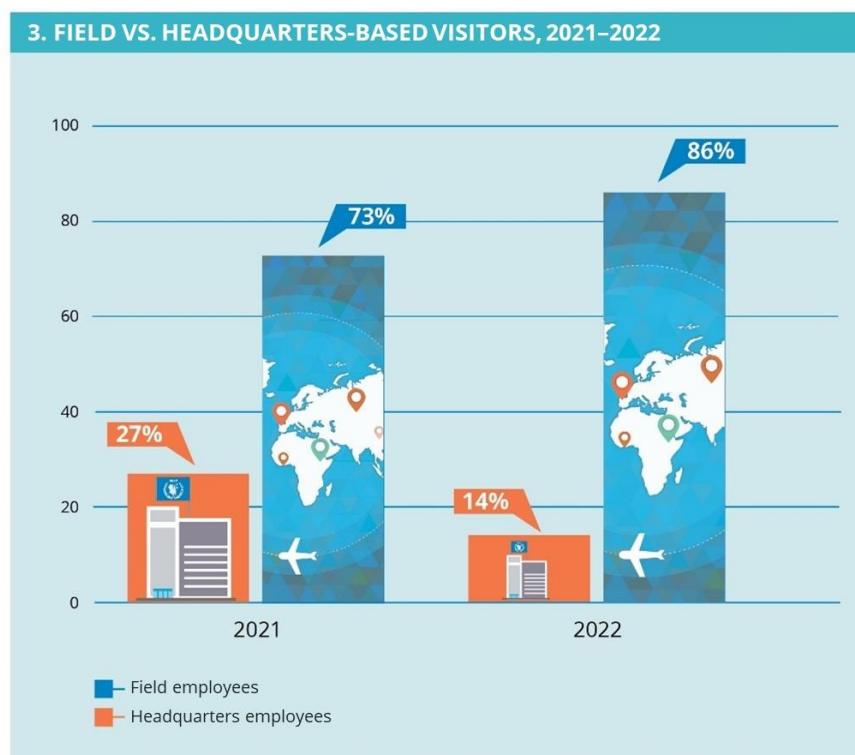
**Figure 1: Number of cases reported, 2016–2022**



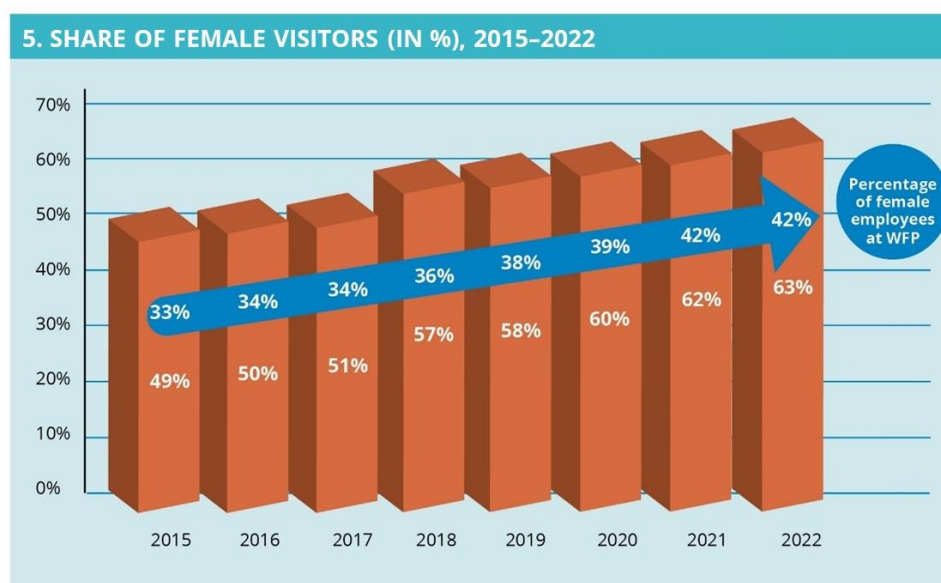
reported to OBD increased in 2017, 2019 and 2022, when an increase in the number of OBD employees allowed the office to conduct more field visits. This is in contrast to 2020 and 2021, when field visits were suspended due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, although OBD managed to stabilize case numbers by conducting virtual missions.

**Figure 2: Number of cases per month, 2021 and 2022**

8. The share of visitors to OBD who work in the field increased from 73 percent in 2021 to 86 percent in 2022, confirming that the presence of OBD in the field encourages WFP employees to come forward with their concerns.

**Figure 3: Share of visitors from headquarters and field offices, 2021 and 2022**

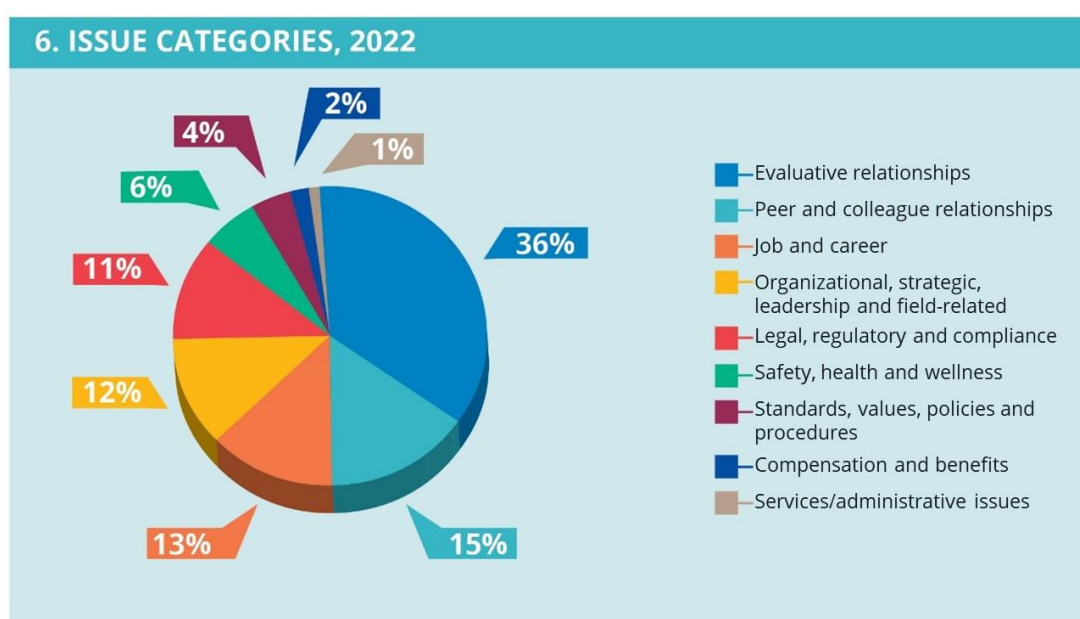
9. Figure 4 presents a breakdown of visitors in 2022 by gender. As in previous years, more visitors were female (63 percent) than male (37 percent).

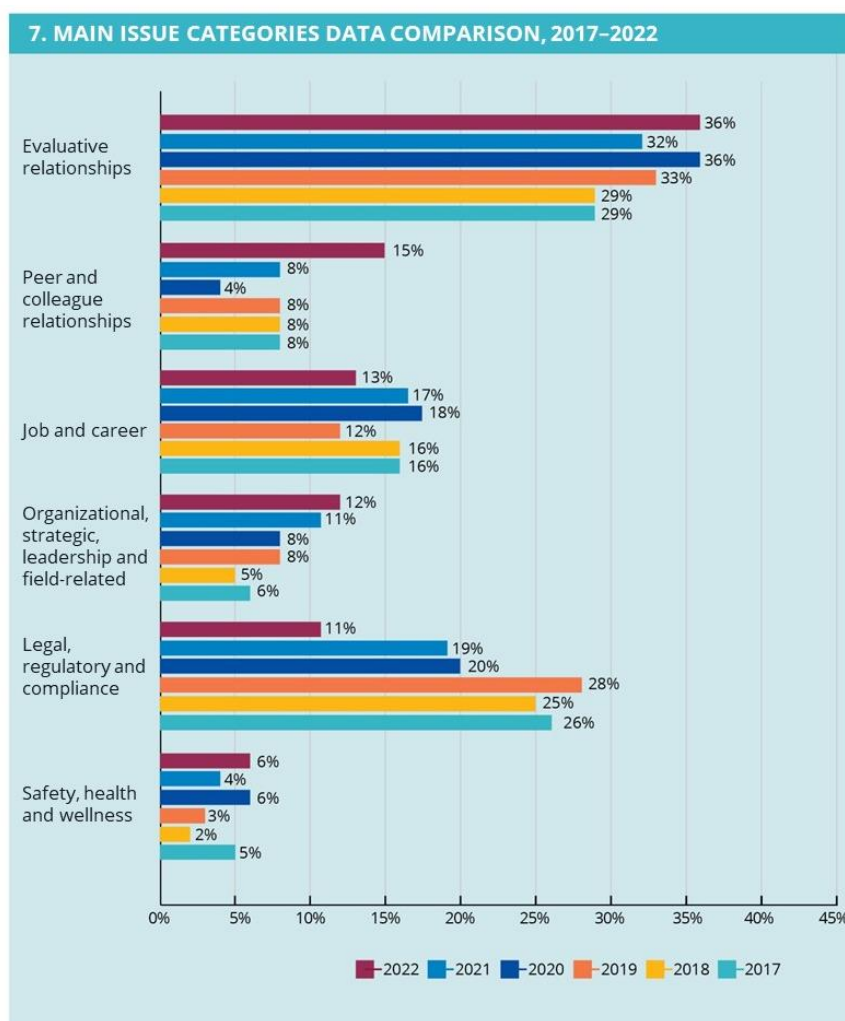
**Figure 4: Share of visitors by gender, 2022****Figure 5: Share of female visitors, 2015–2022****Main issues in 2022**

10. Once an employee has shared his or her concerns with the Ombudsman, the office considers this a case. Each case comprises one or more issues that are classified using a version of the reporting categories of the International Ombuds Association adapted for use in the United Nations. By categorizing issues, the Ombudsman identifies dynamics and trends within the organization, informing the understanding of current systemic issues and creating a more comprehensive picture of the organizational climate.
11. The top three issue categories in 2022 were *evaluative relationships* (36 percent), *peer and colleague relationships* (15 percent) and *job and career* (13 percent). The share of *peer and colleague relationships* issues doubled from 4 percent in 2020 to 8 percent in 2021 and rose again to 15 percent in 2022. This trend can be linked to the increased return of employees to physical offices. In many instances employees had to re-negotiate relationships because while they were working from home issues related to collaboration and conflict were often not sufficiently addressed; furthermore, many team members were no longer used to working physically together.

12. At the same time, *legal, regulatory and compliance* issues fell from 19 percent in 2021 to 11 percent in 2022. This category includes abusive conduct and is reflected in detail in figures 6 and 7.
13. *Organizational, strategic, leadership and field-related* issues were again the fourth largest category, increasing from 8 percent in 2020 to 11 percent in 2021 and to 12 percent in 2022. This category includes issues relating to organizational climate, morale, communication and culture, which WFP is striving to improve. The increased attention to workplace culture can create more awareness and higher expectations on the part of employees, which they may want to explore with OBD.
14. The *safety, health and wellness* category encompasses 6 percent of all issues, a level last seen at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

**Figure 6: Issues brought to OBD, by category, 2022**

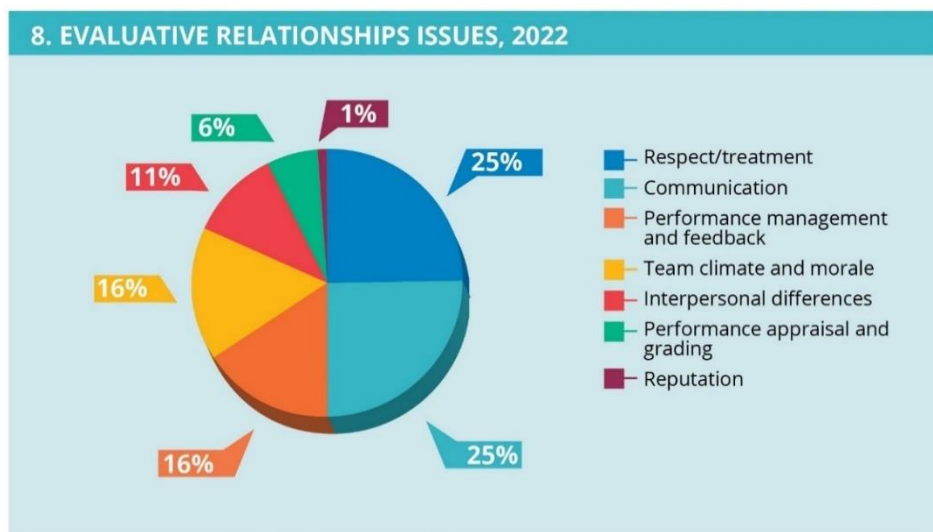


**Figure 7: Trends in major categories of issues, 2017–2022**

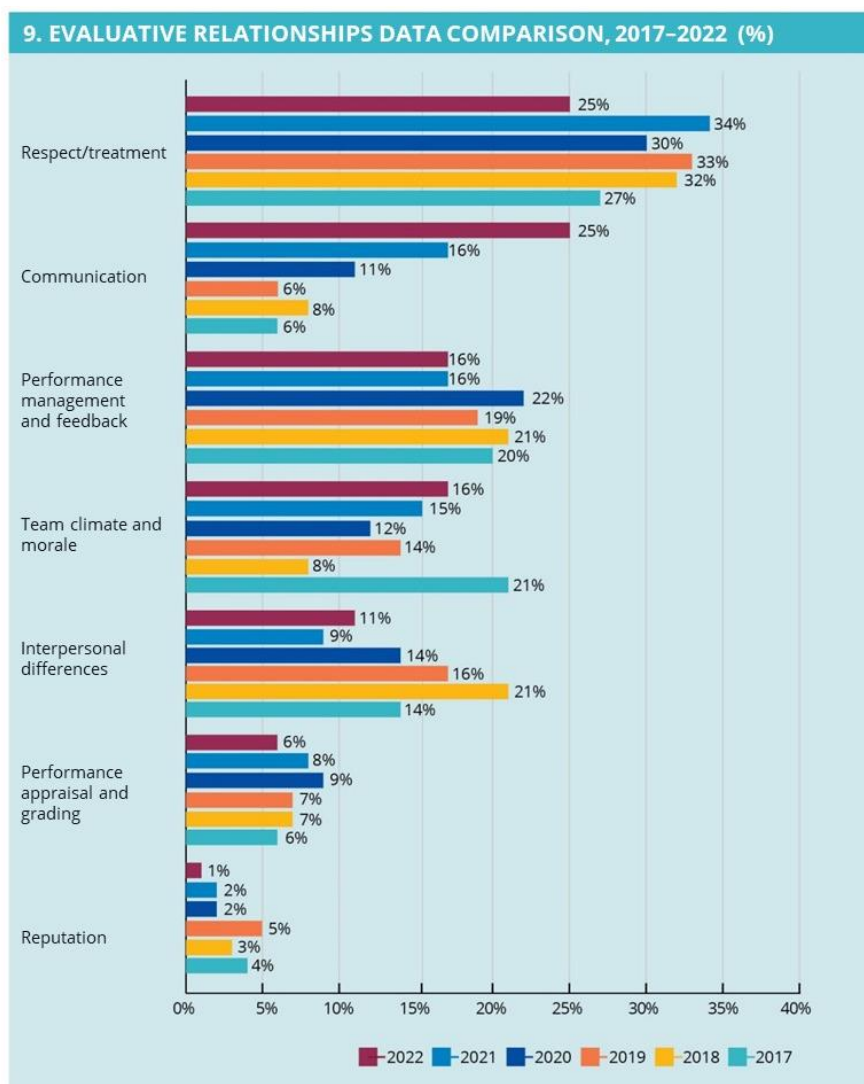
### Evaluative relationships

15. The biggest issue category in 2022 continued to be *evaluative relationships*, consistent with the data of other Ombudsman offices worldwide. Within this category the share of issues connected to *communication* increased to 25 percent in 2022, continuing an upward trend from 11 percent in 2020 and 16 percent in 2021. At the same time the share of issues related to *respect and treatment* dropped to 25 percent in 2022 from 34 percent in 2021. This could signal a positive change, with greater awareness among WFP employees of the need to prevent and resolve conflict through dialogue. This approach is being promoted by the Workplace Culture Department to create a more respectful and inclusive work climate and is supported by OBD training in conflict resolution skills, which has been provided to over 6,500 employees worldwide.
16. Figure 8 provides insight into the types of issues reported under the category *evaluative relationships* in 2022 and figure 9 shows comparative data from previous years. More details on systemic issues identified by OBD are presented in the “Performance management and WFP feedback culture” section.

**Figure 8: Evaluative relationship issues reported in 2022**



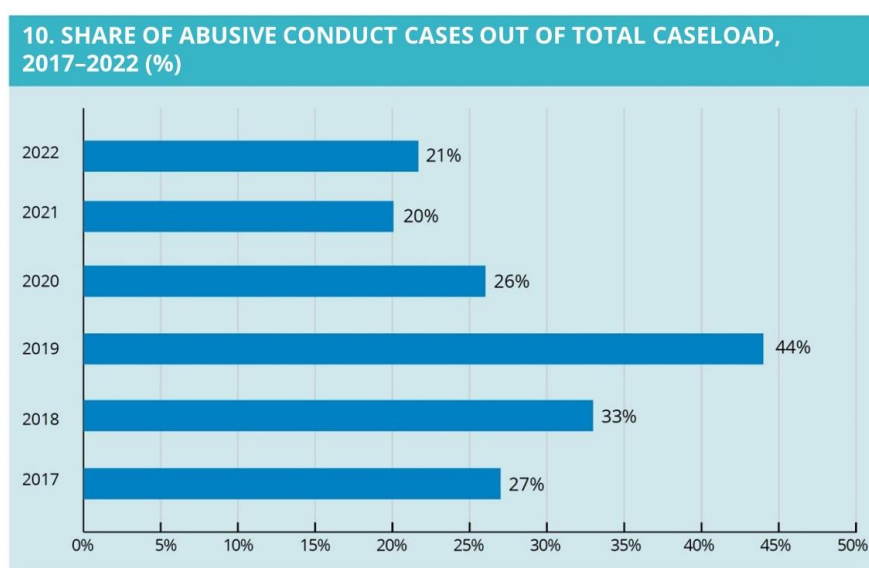
**Figure 9: Trends in issues related to evaluative relationships, 2017–2022**



## Abusive conduct

17. Out of the total cases OBD received in 2022, 21 percent were related to abusive conduct, which encompasses harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination. WFP issued a new policy on protection from abusive conduct in 2018, which was reinforced by repeated communications from the Executive Director. This triggered a steep increase in cases of abusive conduct brought to OBD in 2018 and especially in 2019, after which the number decreased sharply when most employees had to work from home in 2020 and beyond. The Workplace Culture Department has made progress in facilitating cultural change since 2020 and in 2022 the abusive conduct policy was updated and re-issued. These efforts contributed to a decrease in OBD cases alleging abusive conduct and a cultural change at WFP that OBD hopes to see continue.

**Figure 10: Share of cases related to abusive conduct, 2017–2022**

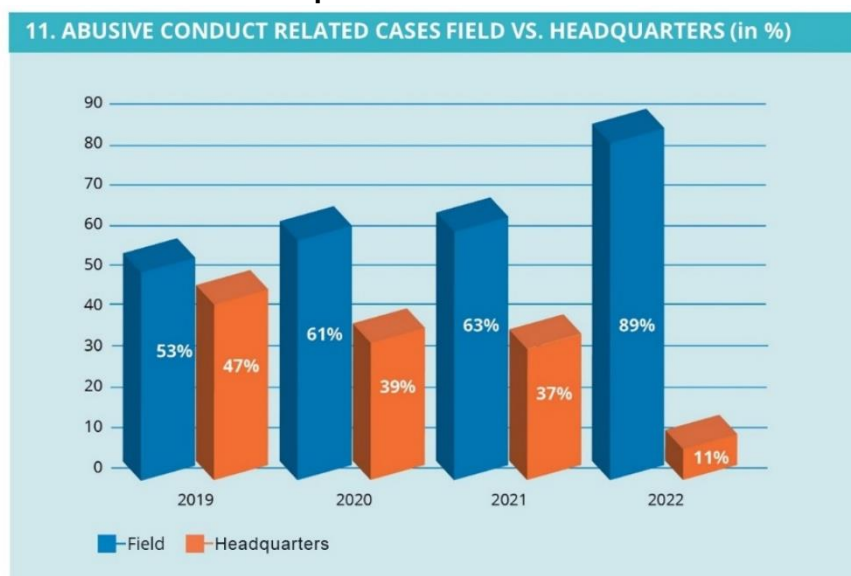


18. Around 89 percent of cases related to abusive conduct were brought to OBD by employees in field duty stations, an increase of 26 percentage points compared to 2021, when 63 percent of such cases came from the field.<sup>1</sup> These figures mark a significant change from 2019, when reports of abusive conduct were almost evenly split between headquarters and the field. This could indicate that efforts to create a more respectful workplace are not reaching some field duty stations as they should; on the other hand, it could be that the Human Resources Division Speak Up! campaign is encouraging more staff located in the field to come forward.

<sup>1</sup> The share of all cases that came from the field in 2022 was 86 percent.

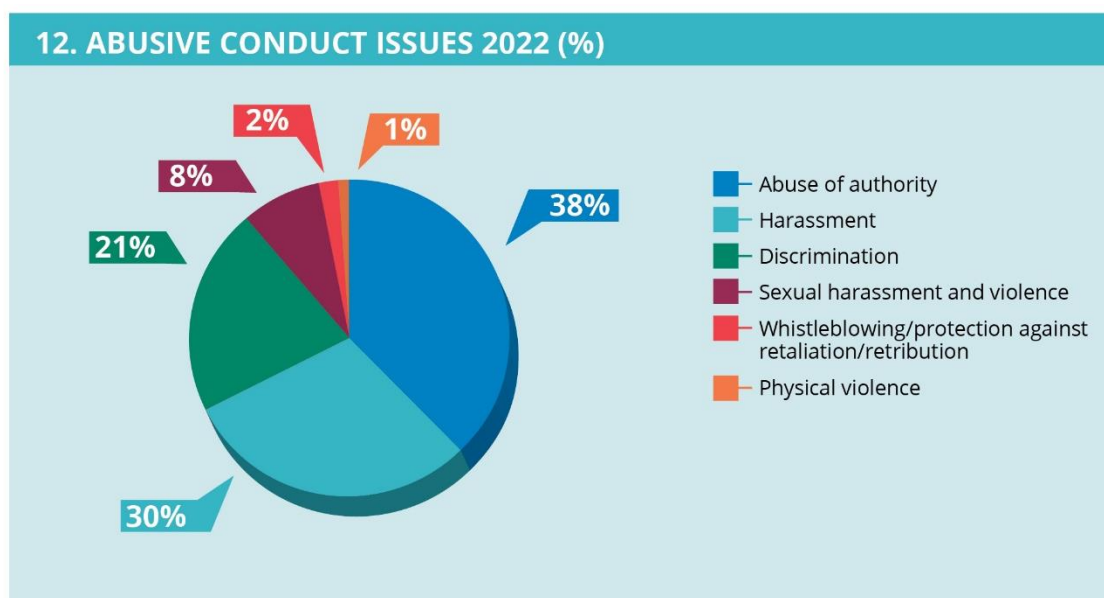


**Figure 11: Share of cases related to abusive conduct reported by headquarters and field staff**



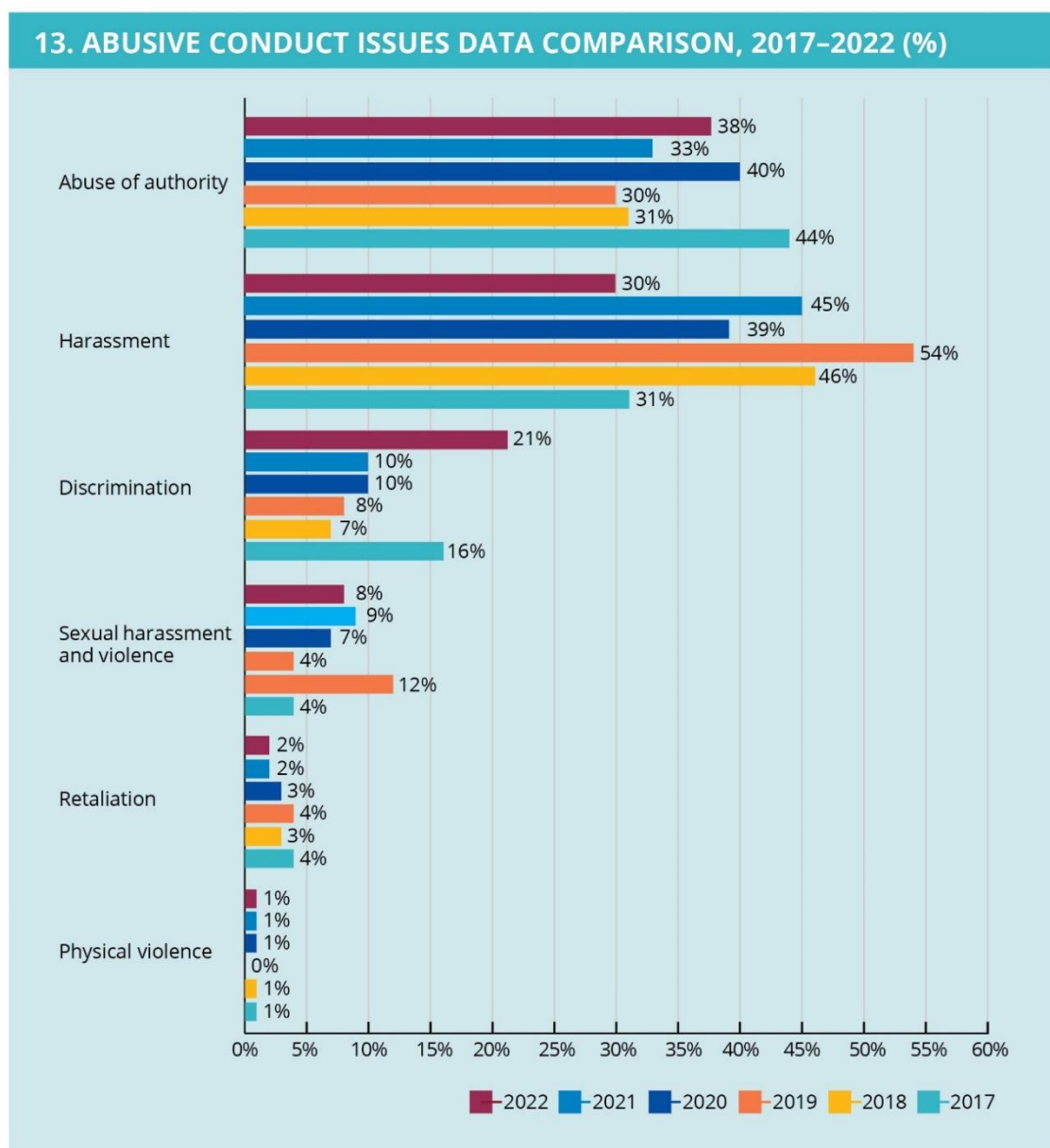
19. Among all issues related to abusive conduct, *abuse of authority* (38 percent), *harassment* (30 percent) and *discrimination* (21 percent) were most frequently raised. *Sexual harassment and violence* constituted 8 percent of these issues. The numerical increase in issues related to *discrimination*, which mainly involved gender and racial discrimination, is striking.

**Figure 12: Abusive conduct issues reported in 2022**



**Table 1: Trends in reports of discrimination, 2018–2022**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Discrimination (no of cases)	12	21	15	13	37
Discrimination (% of caseload)	3	5	4	3	5

**Figure 13: Trends in issues related to abusive conduct, 2017–2022**

### Capacity building

20. In 2022 OBD undertook 70 training sessions for 4,000 employees across all WFP regions in English, Spanish, French and Arabic. Since OBD launched its capacity building programme in 2020 as its contribution to the workplace culture change initiative, a total of 6,550 employees have been trained in 158 sessions. The OBD training programme aims to enhance the essential conflict management and resolution skills of WFP employees and managers by providing practical knowledge, skills and insights that they can immediately apply in diverse and challenging work situations. The courses include “Conflict resolution through effective communication”, “Respectful leadership: Leading teams effectively and mindfully”, “Giving and receiving feedback”, “Active listening skills”, “Abusive behaviour: What it is and how to respond” and “Teambuilding for a respectful work climate”.
21. OBD continued its Ombuds Webinar series in 2022, presenting three sessions: “Giving feedback”, “Receiving feedback” and “Listening skills”; each session was attended by an average of 250 employees.

22. OBD training continues to receive very positive feedback from participants. On average, 95 percent of the participants “strongly agree” or “agree” that “the course was well organized and informative” and would “recommend the course”.

*I loved the content! With its group exercises, the training was very engaging, gave us the tools and encouraged us to resolve conflicts constructively in the future.*

*(A participant of the OBD training course:  
Conflict resolution through effective communication)*

### **Facilitation and mediation**

23. Facilitation and mediation are confidential processes by which employees who have strained work relationships or disputes seek improvement or resolution with the assistance of a neutral third party. Facilitation and mediation can greatly benefit all categories of WFP employees, including managers and supervisors. They can facilitate the identification of underlying issues that need attention but have gone undiscovered or unexpressed; they also facilitate the restoration of work relationships and improve team cohesion and productivity as a result. In 2022, OBD conducted 12 mediations involving 31 employees, several of which were conducted as immediate interventions during field missions.

### **Team climate assessments**

24. In 2022, OBD conducted five team climate assessments involving 74 employees across various WFP regions. Launched in 2020, this initiative supports managers in gaining a better understanding of the atmospheres of their teams and the perception of their leadership styles by their supervisees. Team climate assessments consist of feedback from team members on leadership, cohesion and morale within their teams, and they help managers to find realistic and workable solutions.

### **Team climate coaching**

25. Team climate coaching helps supervisors to address issues identified within their teams for a possible follow-up after climate assessments. In 2022, OBD provided three coaching trajectories.

### **Visitor survey**

26. OBD visitors are invited to complete a confidential and anonymous user satisfaction survey that encourages them to reflect on their choice for tackling the workplace issues they face. In 2022, with a response rate of 30 percent:
- 84 percent said that they would “recommend OBD to others following their visits”; and
  - 74 percent agreed or strongly agreed that through their interactions with OBD they had gained more insight into relevant policies and available resources and could more easily identify options for addressing their concerns.
27. OBD employs a coaching approach designed to enable visitors to deal effectively not only with their current issues but also with future challenges:
- 64 percent of respondents said that through their interactions with OBD they felt more comfortable about addressing workplace issues in the future;
  - 52 percent of the respondents said that their mental health would have continued to suffer had they not approached OBD; this demonstrates that OBD services contribute to the well-being of WFP employees;

- 46 percent of the respondents concluded that their situations would not have changed without the involvement of OBD; 37 percent believed that their situations would have escalated without OBD involvement; and
- 24 percent would have used formal channels to address their concerns, demonstrating the impact of OBD in avoiding unnecessary, lengthy and often costly escalation.

Visitor quote:

*"It would be great to have Ombuds services closer to the field, say in regional bureaux. This will make staff feel they can address their issues faster."*

## Systemic issues

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

28. A culture of dialogue, feedback and addressing issues and conflict in the workplace early on in an informal, off-the-record way strengthens WFP's internal system of justice. Such a culture encourages and allows employees to seek justice to resolve issues and conflicts effectively and in a timely way without having to overcome formal barriers. It also allows them to take personal responsibility in the situations they face and for the outcomes they desire, with the opportunity to obtain important skills that improve workplace culture. By the same token, the informal channel of WFP's internal justice system complements its formal channels, especially considering the limitations that the latter might have due to their rules-based nature.
29. Mediation is an essential element in informal justice as it opens the door to amicable dispute resolution where, with the structured support of a neutral third party, parties explore their interests, engage in constructive dialogue and generate mutually acceptable solutions. Unlike rules-based formal processes where the outcomes are imposed and relationships often negatively affected, in mediation the parties come to an agreement themselves, which results in greater acceptance and improves work relationships.
30. In the context of the "informal resolution first" approach, OBD welcomes the draft revision of the appeals mechanism in the Human Resources Manual and the staff rules, which stresses the possibility of informal resolution at any stage of the formal appeals process and includes an extension of 90 days once mediation is agreed by the parties. OBD awaits the final outcome of this revision and has expressed its readiness to play a pivotal role in ensuring that efficient services are in place for employees to avail themselves of informal resolution, and in particular mediation, during the appeals process.
31. Other important advantages of engaging in informal resolution practices are the opportunities they provide for reflection, for personal and professional growth and for the acknowledgment of responsibility for one's viewpoints and actions. These are critical elements that lead to behavioural change and improve WFP's workplace culture, achievements that cannot be made through the application of current policies and rules-based processes alone. Informal resolution is therefore an enabler of the WFP people policy, which is "aimed at providing a coherent framework for excellence in people management and establishing mutual accountability for the organization, its managers and

- its employees".<sup>2</sup> Encouraging informal resolution as a first step in resolving any workplace concern will facilitate a shift away from a culture of compliance to a culture of prevention.
32. The formal system of justice at WFP, in which the Office of the Inspector General, the Human Resources Division and managers play prominent roles, is essential; like any formal system, however, it has limitations. OBD visitors have expressed frustration concerning the threshold for and the length of investigations. Just five disciplinary decisions related to abusive conduct were adopted in 2022; between two and eight such decisions have been adopted annually in the last five years. Perceptions that justice has been delayed or denied damage the trust in the internal justice system that employees must have. Visitors involved in an investigation seek the support of OBD in coping with the personal, professional and psychological toll that this process has on them and their colleagues and teams, which often affects their morale and productivity. The Office of Inspections and Investigations receives complaints about inappropriate behaviour that does not meet the threshold for formal investigation as misconduct; complainants are advised to contact the Human Resources Division, management or OBD. OBD asserts that inappropriate behaviour that does not reflect WFP's values or code of conduct must be addressed by the organization to prevent festering or escalation and should be addressed through informal resolution or management interventions, including those administered by the Human Resources Division.
  33. OBD welcomes the management interventions offered by the Human Resources Division, which provide swift action to formally address inappropriate behaviour and demonstrate the commitment of senior leadership to improving workplace culture, as set out in the people policy. These interventions are based on existing rules and aim to provide an avenue of accountability in addition to the disciplinary action that is taken in cases where abusive conduct is substantiated through investigation.
  34. Observing these formal and rule-based interventions, however, OBD is concerned that they do not appear always to lead to the desired changes in behaviour. Working relationships might not be repaired and could even worsen due to the formal and often adversarial nature of these interventions. Informal processes would empower those engaged in them to address whatever problems have arisen themselves, creating a positive impact on them and their immediate work environment.
  35. In its [resolution 77/260](#) of 30 December 2022, the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed the use of informal dispute resolution as an essential step in the administration of justice and an effective method compared to formal processes. This resolution is in line with the [review of the organizational ombudsman services](#) conducted in 2015 by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), which stressed the importance of having a robust and well-established informal dispute resolution mechanism in United Nations organizations. Following up on the resolution, the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet in February 2023 sent a memorandum to all heads of entities in the United Nations Secretariat encouraging the use of informal resolution as a first step in conflict resolution. The United Nations Ombudsman Network, co-chaired by the United Nations Ombudsman and the WFP Ombudsman, has initiated inter-agency advocacy to promote the use of informal resolution as the first step in dispute resolution.
    - **Recommendation 1:** 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.

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<sup>2</sup> "WFP people policy" (EB.A/2021/5-A), para 3.

- **Recommendation 2:** 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.
- **Recommendation 3:** 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.

### Performance management and WFP feedback culture

36. In the last three years WFP has invested in advancing its leadership culture. The organization’s new leadership framework issued in March 2022 sets out the behaviours expected of employees at their current level of responsibilities and as they progress in their careers. The framework is a helpful tool for managing people skills because it presents points of reference for assessing *how* employees are delivering results, in addition to *what* they deliver.
37. The performance and competency enhancement (PACE) 2.0 platform, launched in 2020, provides effective tools for improving performance management in WFP. It allows for upward, downward and sideways feedback and facilitates the inclusion of behaviour and teamwork related to WFP core values in performance reviews in addition to technical output. For supervisors, PACE generates specific work goals and indicators.
38. Despite these significant steps, OBD has some concerns related to WFP’s culture of performance management and feedback. *Evaluative relationships* has been the largest case category in OBD since its inception; over the last seven years an average of one out of every three cases (36 percent) involved supervisor–supervisee relationships (see figure 7). A key concern for OBD is that although feedback is increasingly provided, the content of feedback can lack honesty and clarity and does not always have the desired effect as a tool for managing performance. Here follow some of the causes observed by and shared with OBD.
39. A vulnerable contract status or a desire for career advancement can make employees hesitate to provide frank feedback. Many supervisors seem to struggle to give constructive and frequent feedback to their employees due to a lack of skills, overwhelming workloads, competing priorities or a fear of it being considered harassment. Visitors to OBD said that they receive feedback only during their yearly PACE conversations or at the end of their consultancy contracts and that supervisors shy away from performance discussion and instead resort to written PACE comments, which can lead to supervisees feeling blindsided and surprised, especially when the feedback does not correspond with their self-perception. OBD observed instances in which supervisors, despite expressing concerns about the performance of their supervisees, gave positive PACE evaluations or where supervisees could not digest or accept feedback, with some even reporting their supervisors for harassment and abuse of power or retaliating against their supervisors in some other fashion.
40. OBD acknowledges that it takes courage and requires specific skills to address the (under-) performance of employees effectively. It also notes that while the support of second-level managers is crucial, it is not always forthcoming. Fear of being formally accused of abusive behaviour by supervisees (which may lead to investigation), the prospect of an imminent move to another duty station and sympathy for a supervisee’s personal hardship were among the most common reasons cited by supervisors for not addressing underperformance. The cost of this can be high: mediocre output, low productivity, employees occupying roles that do not fit their skillsets and other employees suffering stress because they must make up for the gaps in the work of their colleagues who underperform.

41. OBD concludes that WFP has a work culture in which honest and constructive feedback is not always given or accepted; when it is given it may damage the career chances of the employee being evaluated and may lead to resentment or hostile behaviour by that employee. In addition to a sophisticated system such as PACE 2.0, a change in culture is required to ensure that seeking and providing feedback and guidance are accepted as positive and integral parts of professional and career development. This requires supervisors to act as coaches and guides and to encourage individual growth and to review and document performance in a frank way, not in order to limit an employee's career progression but to support the development of their potential to the benefit of the employee, the organization and ultimately WFP's beneficiaries.
- **Recommendation 4:** 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.
  - **Recommendation 5:** 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.
42. How feedback is received can differ greatly: Gallup research shows that when a manager's feedback is perceived in a negative way as criticism or demotivates or disappoints supervisees, the supervisees will remain significantly less engaged in their work and most will look for other employment.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, when feedback is received in a positive way, leading supervisees to feel inspired to self-improvement or confident about knowing how to do their work better, they are far more likely to remain engaged in their work, with hardly anyone looking for another job.
- **Recommendation 6:** 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.

### Health and well-being

43. In 2022 the World Health Organization<sup>4</sup> issued recommendations on organizational and individual interventions and training to tackle mental health issues in the workplace, followed by a policy brief<sup>5</sup> published jointly by the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization describing the close links between mental health and work and outlining the related duties of employers and the rights and responsibilities of workers.
44. Visitors have told OBD that since the pandemic they continue to be expected to remain available after working hours and on weekends, which affects their well-being and their ability to balance work and family priorities. OBD has also heard concerns about the arbitrary application or a lack of adherence to the policy on remote work on the part of country offices.

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<sup>3</sup> Gallup. 2019. [Why Employees Are Fed Up With Feedback](#).

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. 2022. [WHO guidelines on mental health at work](#).

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization and International Labour Organization. 2022. [Mental health at work: Policy brief](#).

- **Recommendation 7:** 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.
45. Leaders are expected to manage their emotions, remain calm under pressure, be attentive to their employees' mental health needs and build psychological safety while achieving their work objectives, often in challenging circumstances and without sufficient means. Leaders are also required to take responsibility for the stress and health of their employees and themselves. This emotional labour is reflected in the WFP leadership framework as essential to the workplace because it increases organizational trust and staff well-being. However, it can lead to burnout and turnover of talented managers if adequate support is not provided by the organization; several leaders have said that current support for managers at WFP is insufficient and leads to work overload.
- **Recommendation 8:** 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.

### **Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging**

46. In the past years WFP has made a concerted effort to advance diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization, as outlined in the WFP diversity and inclusion framework and its four pillars: gender, race and ethnicity, disability and LGBTQI+.<sup>6</sup> OBD welcomes the Global Executive Inclusive Leadership Programme for senior management, part of the implementation of the anti-racism action plan (in its final stages of development), as well as the focus on educating and raising awareness of disability inclusion among employees and leaders.
47. While these efforts are in general acknowledged and welcomed by employees, they have also created a feeling among categories of employees who traditionally held more power that they are now being disadvantaged. In this regard, visitors expressed concern to OBD that some hiring managers felt mounting pressure when they could not both select the most qualified candidate and meet gender parity key performance indicators. Other visitors, in particular from north America and European countries, shared their perception that they were being disadvantaged in hiring processes due to efforts by offices to become more diverse.
48. On the other hand, OBD noticed that several headquarters offices providing services to employees around the world have not proactively engaged in anti-racism or awareness raising activities. The recipients of their services stand to benefit from such initiatives, and OBD has received related expressions of concern. Furthermore, female visitors, in particular those in supervisory roles, continue to face challenges from male colleagues, including in relation to ensuring that the guidance of female supervisors is being followed. These examples could indicate that in recent years WFP policies have changed faster than its organizational culture.

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<sup>6</sup> More information is available on [WFPGo](#).



- **Recommendation 9:** 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.
- **Recommendation 10:** 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.
- **Recommendation 11:** 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.

## Implementing the OBD action plan

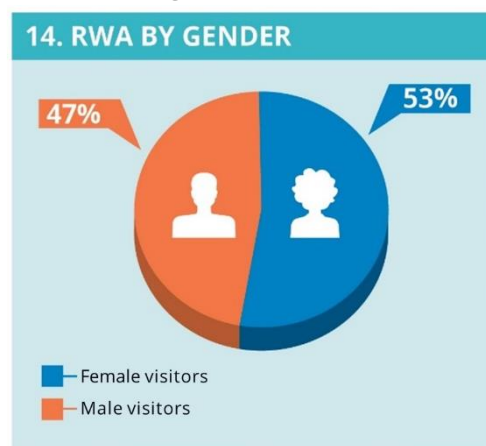
49. In line with the recommendations of the 2015 JIU report on organizational ombudsman services, OBD commissioned an impact assessment in 2021. The assessment, the first since the establishment of OBD in 2005, was carried out by an independent external consultant, who submitted a report in 2022.
50. The recommendations included improving the understanding of the role of OBD within WFP; introducing a more diverse and decentralized office structure and, most importantly, reviewing OBD’s terms of reference to clarify the guiding principles of the Ombudsman service and OBD’s reporting line and to reflect how OBD has adapted and broadened its services in response to changes at WFP.
51. OBD has developed a comprehensive action plan consisting of concrete steps to implement the recommendations. As of 15 May 2023, 70 percent of these actions are nearing completion and 30 percent have been fully completed. Once the consultation process with stakeholders and the Executive Board has been finalized, OBD intends to present the revised terms of reference at an informal briefing in July 2023.

## The respectful workplace advisor programme

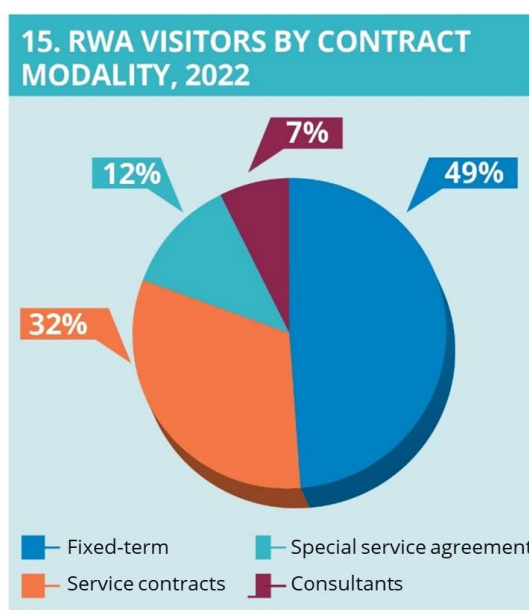
52. The respectful workplace advisor (RWA) programme continues to provide on-site support to address workplace concerns and conflicts. RWAs act as an early warning system for management and OBD on matters affecting employees and their workplaces and on systemic issues. RWAs are local WFP employees who are nominated by their peers based on trust and confidence and are present in country offices, large sub-offices and headquarters departments.
53. In 2022 the two RWA network coordinators regularly conducted one-on-one consultations to support RWAs and held 54 teleconference sessions for RWAs to enhance their capacity and increase their impact. The RWAs themselves conducted sessions for their peers, covering the topics “*Building a positive workplace*”, “*Employee attitudes and their impact*”, “*Helping people feel heard*”, “*Effective apologies*” and “*Promoting psychological safety*” using training material issued by OBD and the Ethics Office. These initiatives are typically well supported by country directors.

54. As the RWAs become more skilled and competent in their roles, they support the implementation of the Respect+ and Speak Up! campaigns and other workplace culture initiatives. RWAs are frequently called upon by the leadership of their offices to provide input and suggestions on matters affecting employees, and regional and country directors have acknowledged the important role that RWAs play in the field.
55. The following key issues were flagged by RWAs to OBD in 2022:
- Fear of losing jobs and retaliation remain the biggest concerns of employees when reporting misconduct or wrongdoing.
  - There is a widespread perception among employees that abusive supervisors are not held responsible and that lack of action on the part of second and third line supervisors allows abusive conduct to continue.
  - Many employees wish to see more consistency and transparency in recruitment and selection processes in the field; the conversion of service contracts to fixed-term contracts has led to rumours and perceptions of unfair treatment.
  - Job insecurity among holders of short-term contracts remains a key concern and leads employees to apply for jobs outside WFP.
  - While the working from home modalities introduced at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic were generally perceived as well organized by WFP management, many RWAs flagged concerns that the return to the office was unorganized, poorly guided and perceived as lacking consideration for personal circumstances, thereby creating confusion and stress among staff.
56. Every time an RWA is approached by a colleague it is noted as a consultation. As the RWAs form a large network across all WFP regions and every RWA categorizes his or her consultations independently, a certain margin of error in the statistics must be taken into account. In 2022, the RWAs handled 287 consultations, a 10 percent decrease from 2021. This drop can be attributed to the visits conducted by OBD and the launch of the Respect+ and Speak-Up! campaigns, which increased awareness among employees and addressed many queries and issues that otherwise would have been clarified by RWAs.
57. In 2022, 53 percent of visitors to RWAs were female, compared to 51 percent in 2021.

**Figure 14: Visitors to RWAs, by gender, 2022**

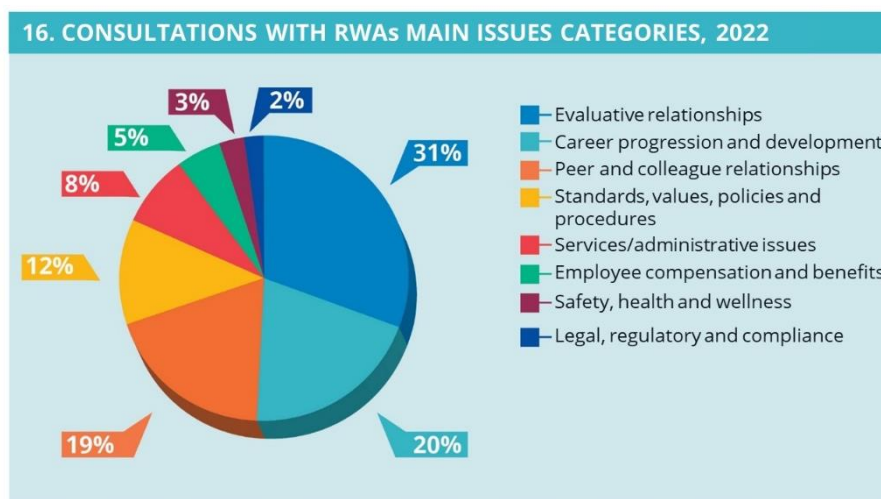


**Figure 15: Visitors to RWAs, by contract modality, 2022**

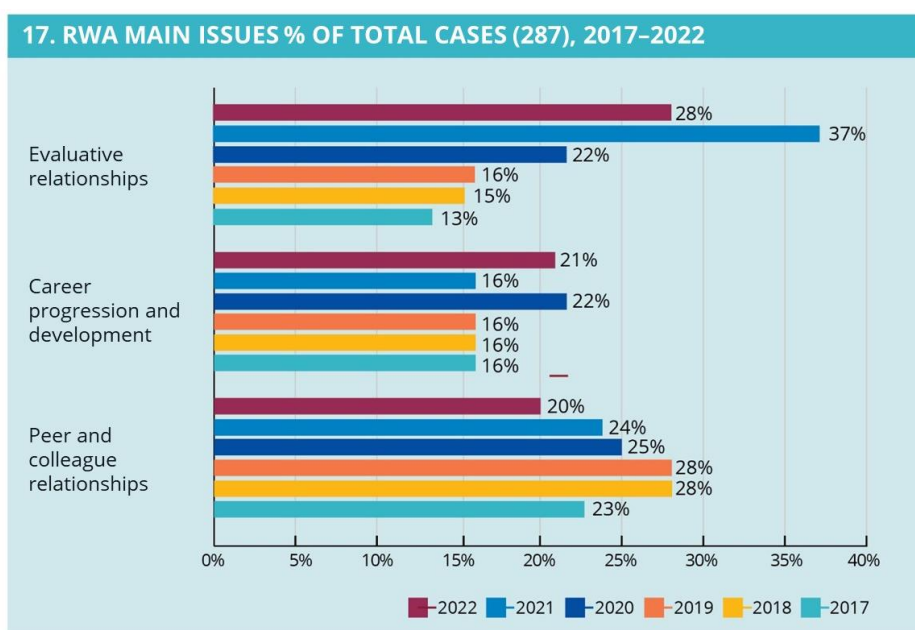


58. While in 2021, 58 percent of all RWA visitors were on short-term contracts, this figure dropped to 51 percent in 2022, reflecting the drive to convert such contracts to fixed-term contracts (see figure 15).
59. The RWAs identified 362 issues brought to them. As in previous years, most employees consulted them regarding *evaluative relationships*, which constituted 31 percent of all issues, followed by issues of *career progression and development* (20 percent) and *peer and colleague relationships* (19 percent).

**Figure 16: Main issues raised with RWAs, 2022**

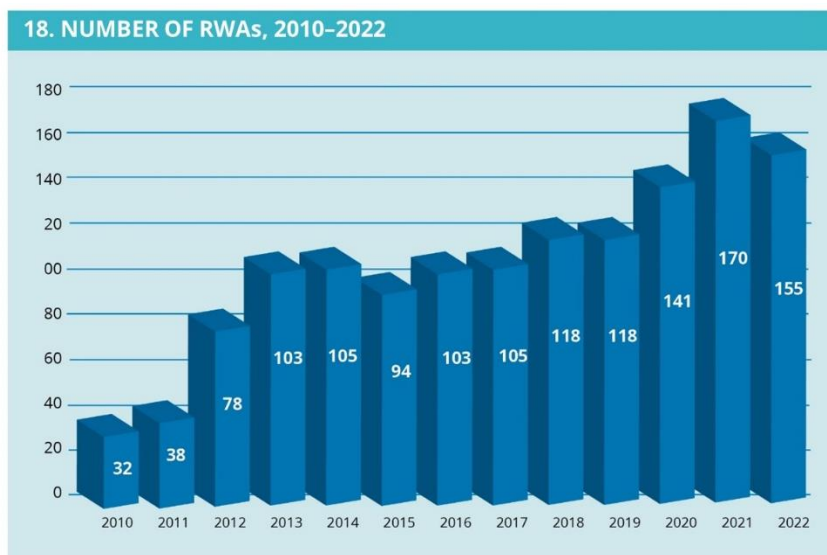


**Figure 17: Trends in main issues raised with RWAs, 2017 to 2022**



60. While there were 170 RWAs in 2021, their number declined to 155 in 2022 (see figure 18) due to the high turnover of national staff in many country offices. In 2023, OBD aims to bring the total number of RWAs close to 200.

**Figure 18: Number of RWAs, 2010-2022**



## Looking forward

### New WFP leadership – a new chapter

61. OBD welcomes the intention of the new Executive Director, Ms Cindy McCain, and her team to be actively involved in the internal workings of WFP and to support and prioritize workplace culture initiatives and the implementation of the people policy. OBD is ready to support the new leadership, including the new Deputy Executive Director of the Workplace Culture Department and the new Director of the Human Resources Division by continuing to contribute to a better workplace culture through its services, especially mediation, team climate assessments, team climate coaching and the capacity building programme, as well as sharing upward feedback as appropriate.

### Addressing racism

62. The JIU recently issued a [review of measures and mechanisms for addressing racism and racial discrimination in United Nations system organizations](#). The report calls for a United Nations-wide effort to address racism in United Nations organizations. As the world's largest humanitarian organization, WFP's actions in this regard will be especially important. OBD is ready to provide support and feedback aimed at preventing racism and racial discrimination, especially in the context of efforts to change workplace culture and the implementation of WFP's anti-racism action plan.

### Increase access to OBD services in the field

63. In 2023 and beyond, OBD will continue to bring its services closer to WFP regional, country and sub-offices. Following the successful pilot posting of an ombuds consultant in Amman and an ombuds officer in Nairobi, OBD is in the process of recruiting an additional ombuds officer to be based in Dakar. The incumbent will serve the francophone countries, enhancing access to ombuds and mediation services and strengthening cooperation with regional stakeholders. OBD aims to recruit other ombuds officers to increase its field presence elsewhere.

### Advancing ombuds services – updating OBD's terms of reference

64. The current OBD terms of reference date back to 2012. Since then, OBD and the ombudsman profession have undergone significant change. OBD has broadened the range of the services it offers to employees, while adapting them to the changing circumstances and demands of WFP and its employees. To reflect these changes and the latest best practices of the ombudsman profession, OBD will revise its terms of reference in 2023 with the input of WFP leadership and stakeholders such as the Human Resources Division, the Legal Office, the Office of the Inspector General, the Ethics Office and the Executive Board.

## Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
OBD	Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services
PACE	performance and competency enhancement
RWA	respectful workplace advisor
WHO	World Health Organization