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Annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019 (WFP/EB.A/2020/4-C).

Introduction

1. The WFP Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (hereafter, the "Office") promotes a harmonious work environment and thus a more impactful organization. It does so by providing informal conflict resolution services to WFP's employees and by identifying systemic issues within the organization. Hereby, the Office of the Ombudsman is an integral part of WFP's organizational readiness towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Office of the Ombudsman works along the principles of confidentiality, informality, independence, neutrality and impartiality.
2. This report provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the matters brought to the attention of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services and provides an overview of the work undertaken in 2019.

* 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.

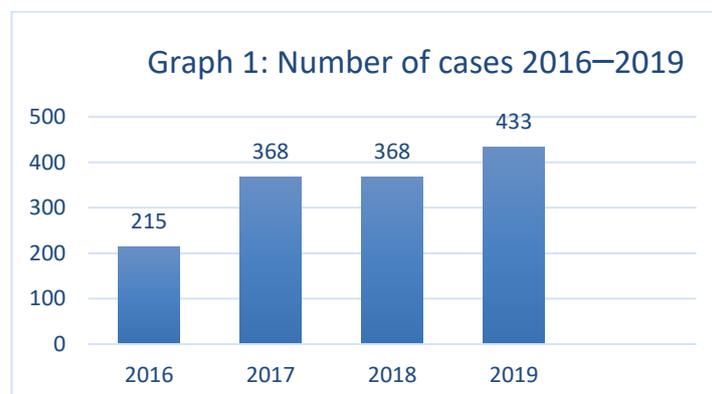
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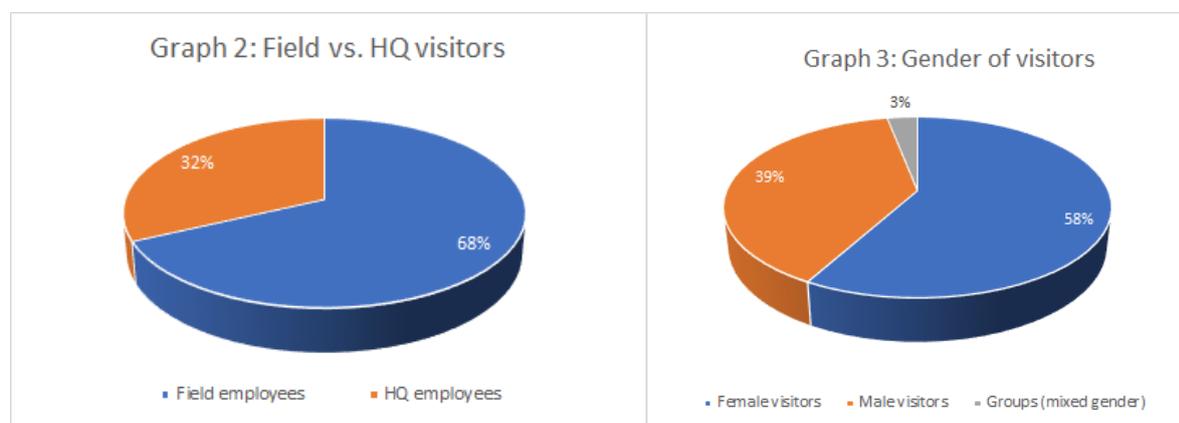
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2019 at a glance

3. The Ombudsman registered a total of **433 visitors (cases)**,¹ corresponding to an **increase of 18 percent** over 2018 and 2017 (both years had 368 cases).



4. In the cases brought to the Ombudsman, **1180 issues** were identified, which is an increase of 39 percent compared to 2018 (852 issues).
5. **Sixty-eight percent** of the Office’s visitors were **field employees**, compared to 75 percent in 2018, and **32 percent** were **headquarters employees**, compared to 25 percent in 2018.
6. **Nineteen percent more female visitors than male visitors** contacted the Ombudsman Office: 58 percent compared to 39 percent, which is practically equal to the 2018 gender breakdown (respectively 57 and 40 percent).²



7. In 2019 the Office of the Ombudsman visited a total of **15 offices**, equal to the number of offices visited in 2018: two regional bureaux, one liaison office, eight country offices, and four field offices.

¹ A “case” is when a visitor (any WFP employee) contacts the Ombudsman in relation to a specific situation, conflict or concern. A case comprises one or more “issues”.

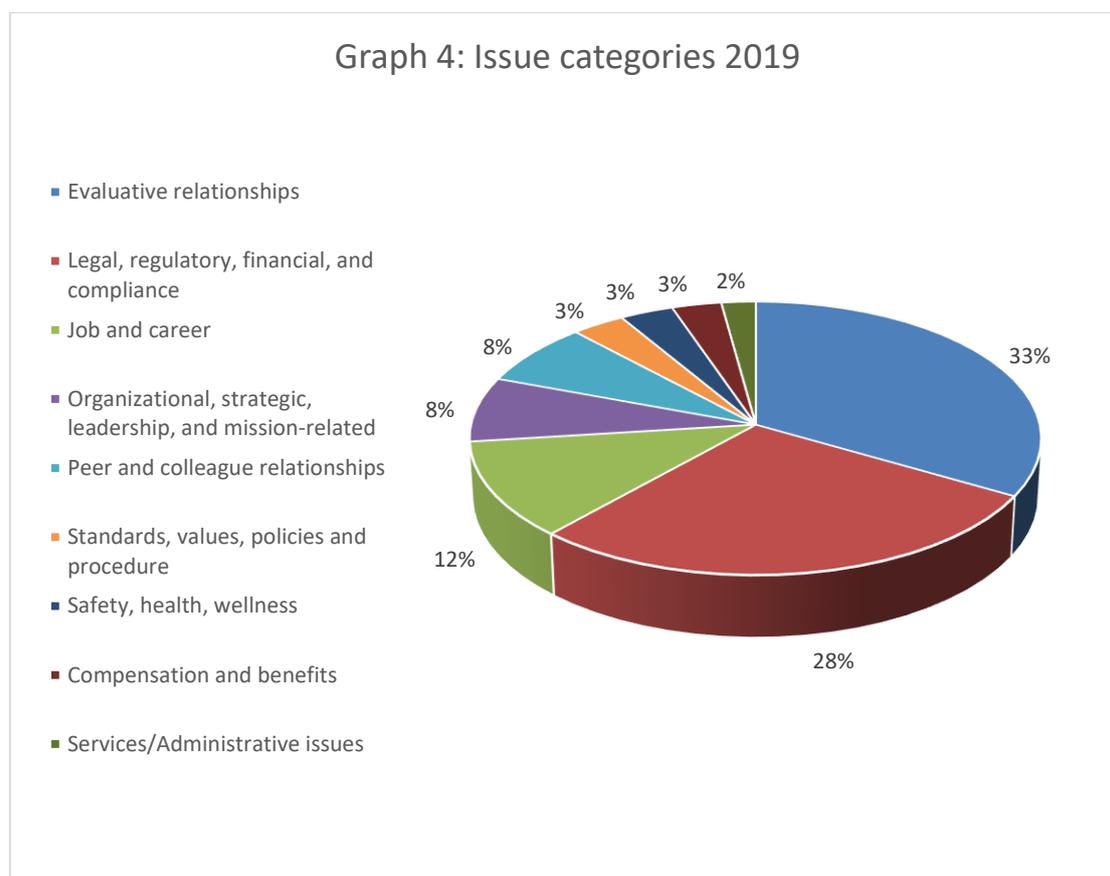
² Three percent of cases was brought by multiple visitors.

8. In 2019 the Office of the Ombudsman **increased its capacity**: two additional professional and one additional support staff joined the team, bringing the total number of employees to three professional staff, two support staff, and three part-time consultants offering expertise in ombuds, mediation, facilitation, coaching and training services.³
9. In May 2019 the WFP Ombudsman was invited to take up the role of Co-Chair of the newly created **United Nations Ombudsman Network**, together with the Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Ombudsman Shireen Dodson. This network feeds directly into the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) with recommendations pertaining to systemic and organizational change.

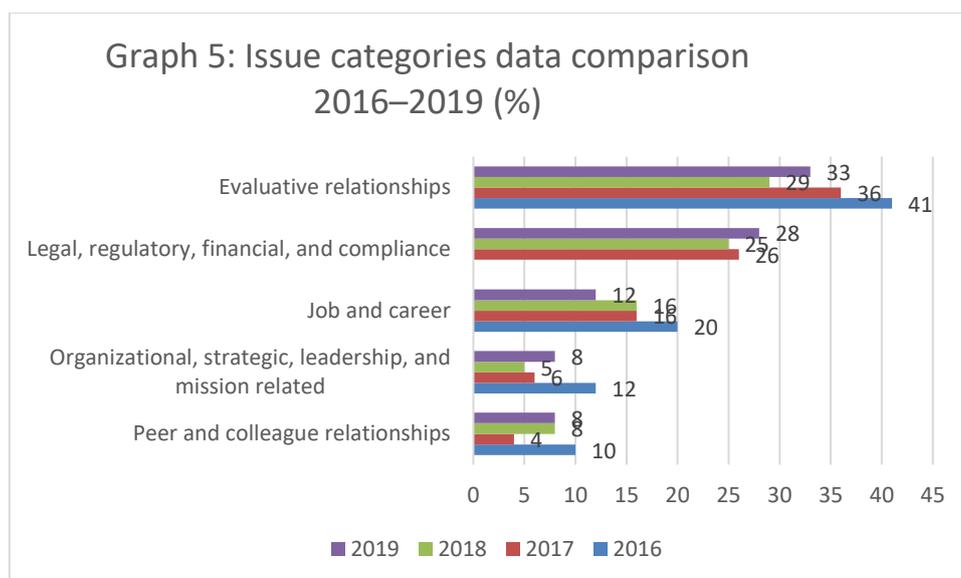
Main issues

Overview of issue categories in 2019

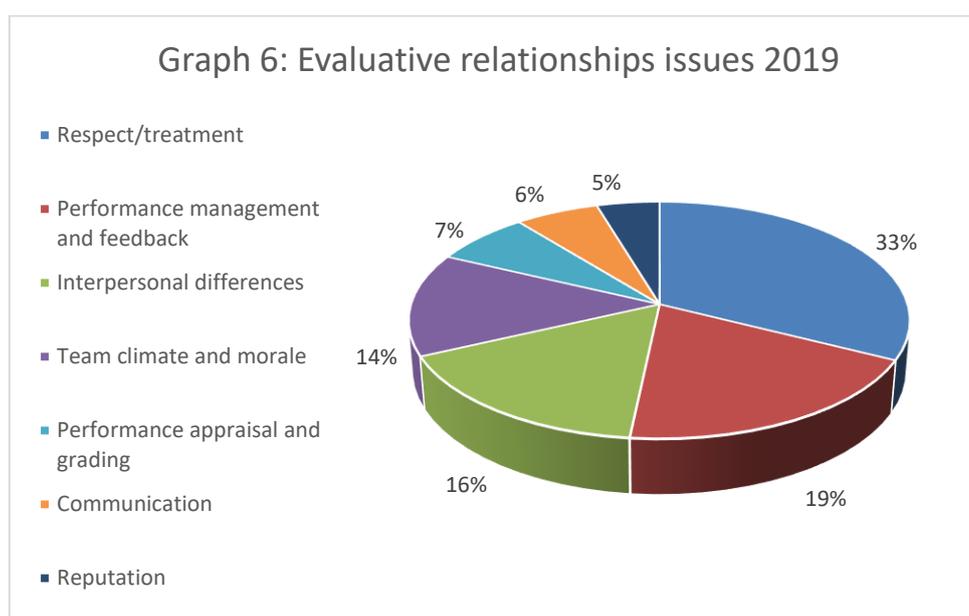
10. When an employee gets in touch with the Office of the Ombudsman for a one-on-one meeting, this “visitor” brings a case to the Ombudsman. That case can comprise one or more issues. Classification of the issues is undertaken by the Ombudsman using the International Ombudsman Association Uniform Reporting Categories. Each of these are broken down into further sub-categories that allow the matter to be better identified. A breakdown of the Office’s 2019 issue categories is provided in graph 4.
11. The three categories reflecting the highest numbers of issues, like in 2018 and 2017, were **evaluative relationships** (33 percent), **legal, regulatory, financial and compliance** (28 percent), and **job and career** (12 percent). Please find an overview of the most prevalent issue categories from 2016 to 2019 in graph 5.



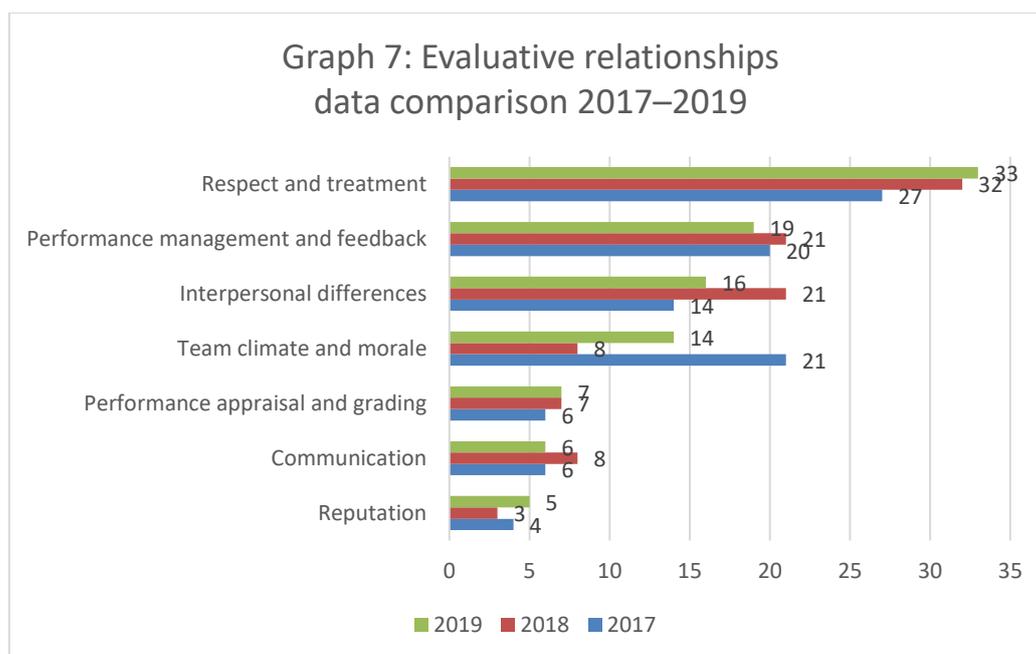
³ At its inception in 2005, the Office of the Ombudsman started out with two employees: the Ombudsman and a support staff. At that time, WFP’s staffing numbered 12,800, which was already a high number of employees to be served by one Ombudsman. Since, the number of WFP employees has increased by almost half, totalling 18,600 at the end of 2019.



12. **Evaluative relationships** as the number one issue category raised is consistent with other ombudsman offices worldwide. This category reflects issues brought by supervisors as well as supervisees and encompasses, among others, interpersonal differences, issues of respect and treatment, performance management issues, and concerns related to team climate and morale. Within the category, respect and treatment has been the number one issue raised for the last three years.⁴ Details pertaining to evaluative relationships are provided in graphs 6 and 7.
13. **Legal, regulatory, financial and compliance** was the second most prevalent category in 2019. Within this category 81 percent of employee issues were harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination (HSHAAD) related. This is the same percentage as in 2018. Ethics and integrity issues made up 14 percent. An analysis of HSHAAD issues will be provided in the next section of this report.
14. Within the **job and career** category, the three most prevalent issues are related to career progression and promotion (33 percent), terms and conditions of contract and contract type (26 percent), and job application and selection processes (22 percent).

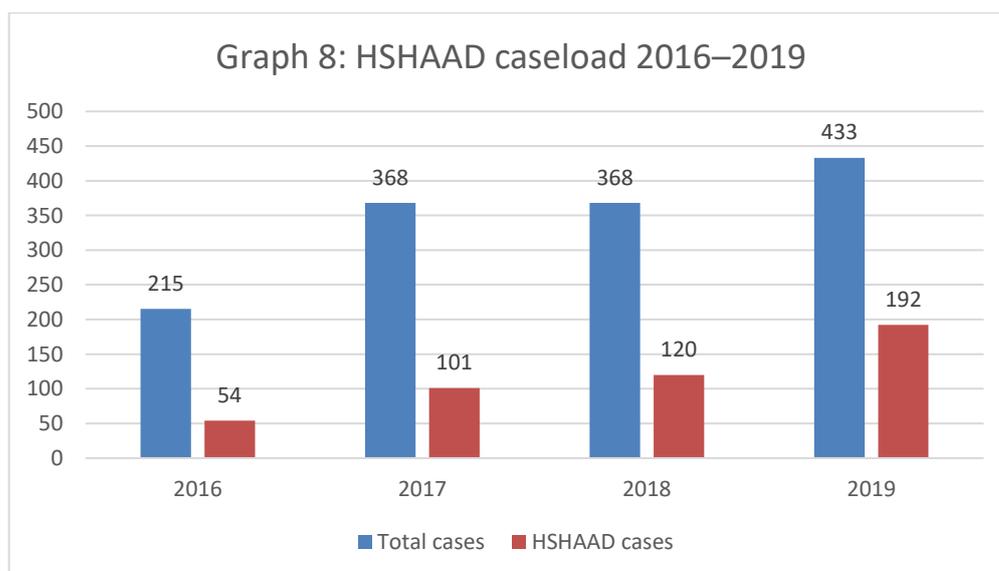


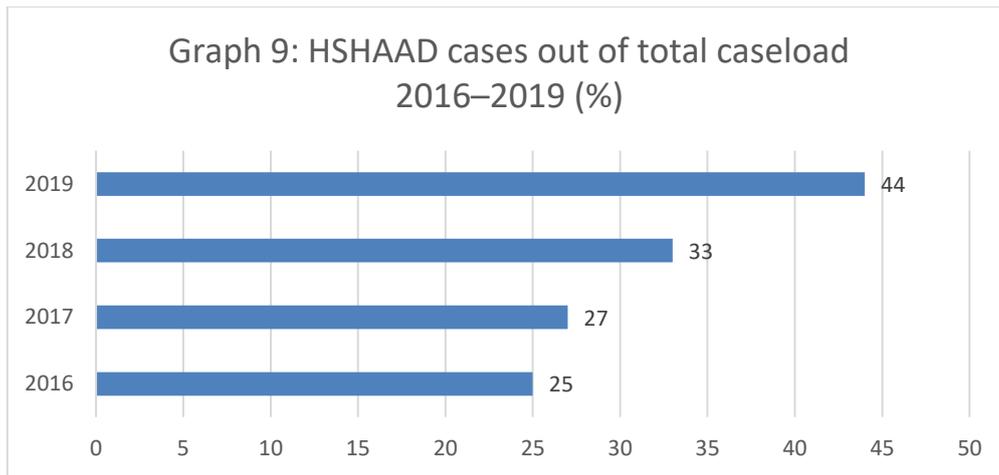
⁴ No detailed data available for the years prior to 2017.



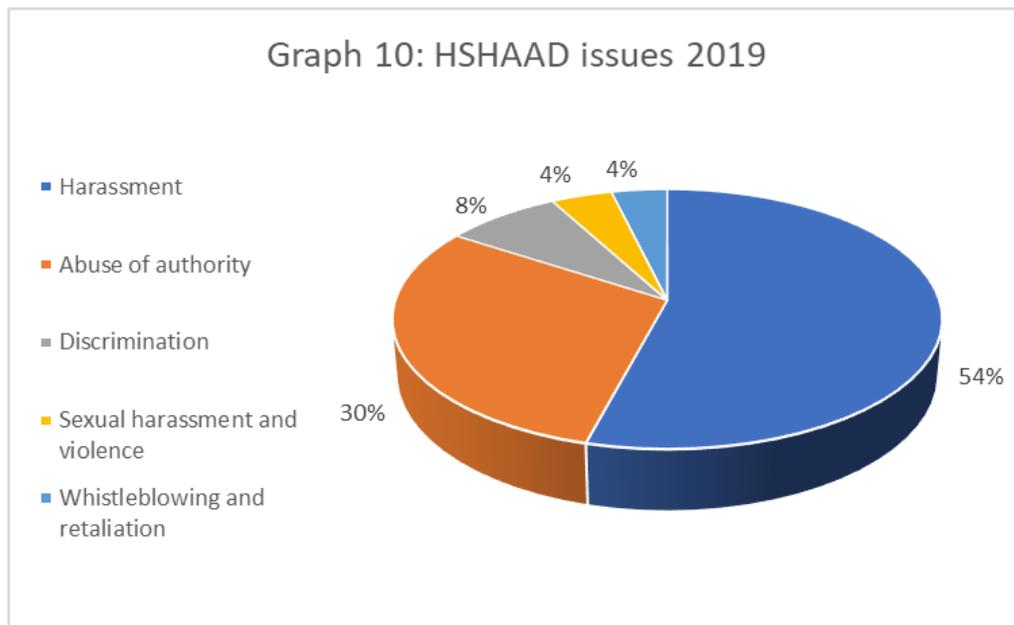
Harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination

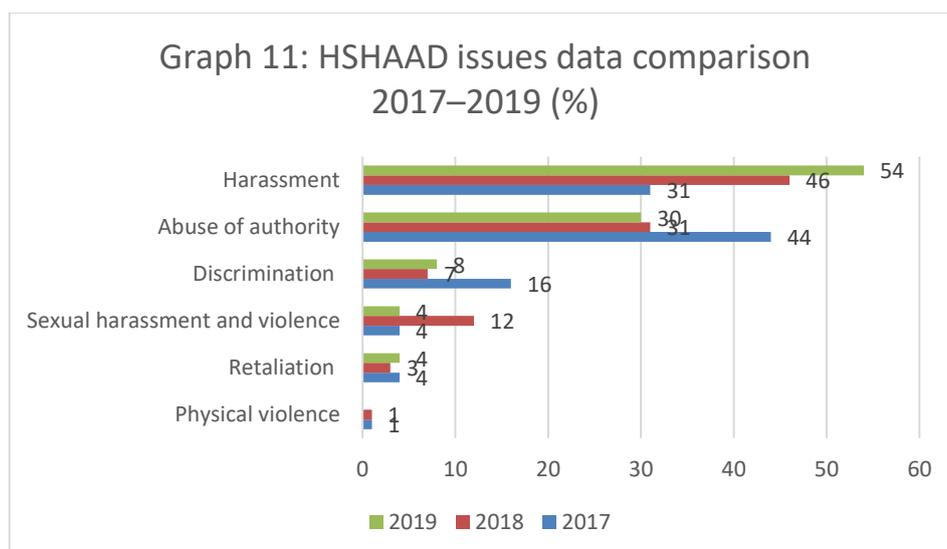
15. In 2019, HSHAAD cases counted for 44 percent of the Office's total caseload. This is a significant increase as compared to previous years, although the Office received fewer sexual harassment-related cases in 2019. The overall increase in the HSHAAD related caseload over the past four years is pictured in graphs 8 and 9.
16. It is important to note that an increase in HSHAAD cases brought to the Office does not necessarily indicate an increase in HSHAAD related incidents within WFP. The Office believes that the increase is to a large extent the result of ongoing corporate efforts to promote a safe and harmonious workplace, including continued messaging by the Executive Director, and thus an increased awareness on the topic among WFP's employees. It also shows that employees realize that the Ombudsman Office is a safe and trusted place to receive neutral, confidential and independent support for their HSHAAD concerns.



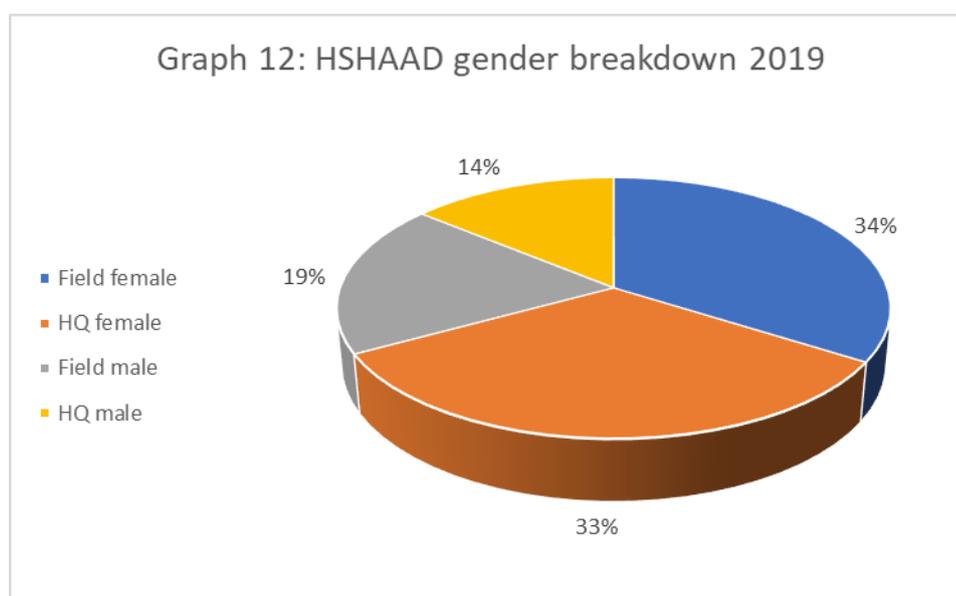


17. The Office continues to see a surge in managers and supervisors requesting guidance and support regarding the HSHAAD policy implementation. This also indicates a growing acknowledgment of this group that harassment has a negative impact on their teams, and an increased motivation to take responsible action to prevent and address harassment effectively.
18. In 2019, consistent with previous years, **harassment and abuse of authority** are the most prevalent HSHAAD issues. For details, see graphs 10 and 11.





19. In 2019, 67 percent of HSHAAD cases were brought forward by female employees compared to 33 percent by male employees. A significant number of HSHAAD cases (47 percent) came from employees in headquarters. For both headquarters and the field, female employees more frequently raised HSHAAD related issues with the Ombudsman than their male colleagues (see graph 12). The Ombudsman's numbers are reflected in the findings of the External Review of Workplace Culture and Ethical Climate⁵ (hereafter: External Review) that suggest that women are more often on the receiving end and that abusive conduct is most prevalent in headquarters: "One of the key findings of this review is that women experience or witness abusive behaviour significantly more than men and this holds true across all types of abusive behaviour explored especially harassment and sexual harassment. This is a worrying finding and suggests that gender inequality exists at WFP."⁶



⁵ Willis Towers Watson. *External Review of Workplace Culture and Ethical Climate at World Food Programme, Final Submission for Joint Executive Board/WFP Management Working Group on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Abuse of Power and Discrimination*. September 2019.

⁶ Ibid. page 26–27.

Services of the Office of the Ombudsman

20. The Office of the Ombudsman assists employees through informal resolution of work-related concerns and conflicts, so they are better equipped to operate successfully in their roles. Carving out workable options, helping employees gain insights, and providing upward feedback are core methods of the Ombudsman's work. In 2019, the Office of the Ombudsman expanded its services and added a preventative component with its new capacity building strategy. Services comprise:
- **One-on-ones:** confidential and informal conversations, in which ombuds staff work with employees to better understand their situation and support them in developing effective resolution strategies. A **coaching approach** is used to help them gain insights and skills that will enable them to deal with the issues at hand as well as future issues.
 - **Facilitation and mediation:** The facilitation and mediation services of the Office of the Ombudsman are confidential and informal processes, where parties work together with assistance of a neutral third party. Facilitation is more generally applied where two or more parties want to engage in a constructive discussion towards achieving better mutual understanding and avoiding future disputes; while mediation is used to support parties to reach a voluntary resolution of a dispute, often in writing.
 - **Capacity building:** In 2019, the Office of the Ombudsman launched a new capacity building strategy to strengthen the conflict resolution abilities of WFP's employees. Training and workshops are offered during field visits, and on request to headquarters divisions. Content can be tailored to the needs and circumstances of the respective offices.
 - **Coach roster:** The Office of the Ombudsman has a roster of coaches for employees who like to engage in a personal coaching trajectory. The coaches are all well established in their field, have a solid reputation and a broad set of skills. In 2019, 5 percent of the visitors to the Ombudsman, junior as well as senior WFP employees, decided to engage with one of these coaches.
 - **Shuttle diplomacy:** Shuttle diplomacy is a form of mediation where the Ombudsman will contact one party on behalf of the other and vice versa to solve the conflict or disagreement. Depending on the nature of the issue, this form of mediation is either suitable to solve the issue without direct confrontation or can be used to prepare the employees involved to work out the issue themselves.
 - **Feedback to leadership, management, country directors and other stakeholders:** Through its large number of conversations, the far majority held with employees in the field, the Office of the Ombudsman has a distinct window on the organization's functioning and obtains insights that otherwise may not surface. Based on these insights, the Office:
 - offers feedback to the leadership and management on systemic issues within WFP, and flags potential risks to the organization;
 - offers feedback, observations and ideas to directors of country offices and regional bureaux as part of the debrief after field visits;
 - provides insights and ideas to its stakeholder offices in WFP.

High overall satisfaction – results of the visitor survey 2019

21. Visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman receive a survey on their experience with the Office. This feedback provides valuable input to help serve employees better in the future. The survey is confidential and anonymous.
22. In 2019, a total of 118 visitors responded to the survey. The outcomes confirm the benefits that the Office brings to WFP's employees and the organization:
 - **High overall satisfaction:** 79 percent of the respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the services received from the Office of the Ombudsman as satisfied. Eighty-one percent agree that the Ombudsman and her staff helped them to feel comfortable discussing their concerns. Sixty-two percent agreed that working with the Office of the Ombudsman helped them to respond to their situation, issue or concern, while 20 percent were neutral.
 - **Avoiding formal processes, leading to cost savings:** 69 percent agreed that working with the Office of the Ombudsman helped them to avoid a formal process, which means that potentially 299 cases were not brought to the Human Resources Division (HRM), the Office of the Inspector General or other formal channels. This figure, up from 50 percent in 2018, underlines the strong cost-saving benefits of the Office of the Ombudsman for WFP.
 - **Obtaining new perspectives and empowering for the future:** 59 percent agreed that through their interactions with the Office of the Ombudsman, they obtained insights that will help them to address workplace issues in the future. This figure validates the coaching approach of the Office: visitors become equipped with perspectives that enable them to deal effectively with issues they are confronted with.
23. Quotes from the visitor survey 2019:

"The Ombudsman listened and clarified the issues I raised without taking sides. This helped me see things from a factual unbiased perspective. I gained practical skills in handling difficult conversations."

"For an employee faced with "little to no voice", I appreciated most having someone listen to me... Psychologically it would have been impossible to navigate my difficult circumstances without this professional service."

"I have benefitted from huge support over a very – long – difficult period dealing with harassment and abuse of power from a senior manager. I liked the fact that I have also received feedback on my own behaviour and how to improve my response to certain behaviours from the senior manager...."

The systemic approach of the Ombudsman

Strengthening the pillar on systemic issues since 2016

24. When starting her four-year term in 2016, WFP Ombudsman Gabrielle Kluck, using her change management experience, put a greater emphasis on identifying systemic issues.
25. When supporting individuals, the Ombudsman takes a bird's eye view and becomes aware of the overarching issues that need to be addressed to affect positive change within the organization. She does so by providing recommendations on how to improve systems, practices and policies, which in their turn shape the culture. For example, in her annual report for 2016 the Ombudsman highlighted abuse of power as one of the main systemic concerns for WFP. In its annual report for 2017, the Office of the Ombudsman called attention to the extensive use and the vulnerability of short-term contracts as another

key concern for WFP. In 2019 these findings were echoed by the external review and are subsequently being addressed in 2020.

26. Please find two examples of the Ombudsman providing early warning in the table below.

Ombudsman as Early Warning: From 2016 to 2019 on Abuse of Power and Leadership			
Ombudsman Annual Report 2016 “Determine the necessary competencies for WFP leaders” “Implement a 360 performance assessment system for supervisors and their managers...”	WTW Report Sept 2019 “Introduce rigorous selection process to identify management and leadership talent” “Design, develop and implement leadership competencies and behavioral KPIs for leaders including an associated 360 assessment tool...”	JWG Report Nov 2019 “Leadership qualities need to be identified, cultivated and measured” “...Training and manager support to improve two-way communication within teams, for example by using 360° or 180° assessment tools.”	Executive Director in Staff Meeting Nov 2019 “If I hear about cases of abusive conduct, I have two problems: with the person, and with the supervisor of this person.” “We are going to implement a 360-degree evaluation”

Ombudsman as Early Warning: From 2017 to 2019 on Short-Term Contracts				
Ombudsman Annual Report 2017 “Establish clear criteria for issuing short-term contracts: who should get which contract, under which circumstances, and for how long? And ensure better compliance with these criteria.”	WFP Management Response to Ombudsman AR 2017 “Short-term contracts are one of several critical contractual modalities allowing WFP to employ human resources in line with its operating model, business requirements and financial capacity.”	WTW Report Sept 2019 “Consultants and those of short-term contracts are perceived as being most at risk of experiencing abuse due to the lack of job security”	JWG Report Nov 2019 “It is ...important that short-term contracting modalities be applied properly and restrictions on their use for ongoing staff functions be introduced.”	Executive Director in Staff Meeting Nov 2019 “First and foremost, I have little doubt that the biggest and most significant issue we face is short-term contracts.” ... Number of consultants is “completely unacceptable”

Working with other offices to find resolution and achieve change

27. The Ombudsman Office brings weight to the systemic approach through ongoing dialogue with leadership, senior management and Member States.
28. Gabrielle Kluck is the first WFP Ombudsman to present the Office’s annual report to the Executive Board. With this important step, the annual reports of the Ombudsman became an additional governance resource. In addition, starting in 2019, the Ombudsman was invited to provide regular informal briefings to the Executive Board and to WFP’s Audit Committee, and is a non-voting member of the Executive Management Group since 2017.
29. The Office of the Ombudsman collaborates with relevant stakeholders while guarding confidentiality, in particular with the Human Resources Division, the Office of the Inspector General, the Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division, the Enterprise Risk Management Division, the Staff Wellness Division, the Security Division, the Ethics Office and the Gender Office. In 2020 there will be close collaboration with the Senior Advisor to the Executive Director on workplace culture, Gina Casar.
30. With its insights gained through field visits the Office of the Ombudsman provides input to the HR induction and training programme for country directors and deputies. Another example is the collaboration with CAM to train the respectful workplace advisors in their role as facilitators of the Respect Campaign.
31. The Ombudsman is one of the five members of the Inter-Divisional Standing Committee (IDSC) established to support the implementation of the policy on protection from harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination. During 2018 and 2019,

the Ombudsman also participated in the ad hoc joint working group (JWG)⁷ on this topic and in one of its sub-working groups.

2019 key systemic issues

32. Being the inside outsider and the outside insider, the Ombudsman provides alternative perspectives and brings issues into the consciousness of the organization. Systemic issues are identified through conversations with employees, management and stakeholders and through observations. This annual report reflects on themes that are pertinent to the commitment the organization has made in 2019 to create cultural change.

Values and principles

33. WFP's external output-driven outlook has been a dominant and shaping force of its organizational culture, emphasizing the "what" rather than the "how". The Ombudsman made this observation in her annual report for 2017, which the External Review has echoed in 2019.

34. Following developments pertaining to #MeToo, #AidToo and reviews of other humanitarian and international organizations, and as a result of the outcomes of WFP's global staff survey in 2018, the external report and the JWG report in 2019, the organization's outlook has become more people-centred. Subsequently, values and principles that underpin internal interactions and processes require more attention. The JWG and the evaluation of the WFP People Strategy (2014–2017) indicated a need for WFP to:

*"explicitly define the overarching values and principles that (should) underlie people management within the organization in a high-level (policy) document"*⁸, and

*"continue and expand its efforts to ensure a common understanding of values...including by continuing its global awareness-raising efforts while also identifying ways to reinforce them in daily practice"*⁹

35. Values – conscious or unconscious, positive or negative – are the motivation for every decision made or action taken. When corporate values are not clear, negative values could take over. Such negative values generally include individual ambition, competitiveness, and a drive to acquire power; whereas cynicism, fear, and frustration are examples of negative values guiding those who subsequently feel left out. Negative values lead to negative behaviours and are detrimental to organizational performance. Visitors frequently mention the lack of collaboration, either within teams or between units, fuelled by unhealthy competition.
36. **Recommendation 1:** A "silo" and competitive mentality is often mentioned to the Ombudsman as an obstacle to inclusion and to better performance. The cultural change process should promote the benefits of collaboration and ingrain it in the consciousness of the organization and its employees.
37. Results from the external review suggest that in WFP certain negative behaviours have been allowed to emerge given the large number of survey respondents who indicated to have experienced or witnessed abusive behaviour: one third of respondents said they have

⁷ Joint Executive Board/WFP management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination.

⁸ Evaluation of the WFP People Strategy (2014–2017), Evaluation Report: Volume 1, January 2020.

⁹ Report of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination, 9 November 2019.

experienced or witnessed abuse of authority during their time with WFP and nearly 50 percent said they have experienced shouting and aggressive behaviour.¹⁰

38. The Ombudsman sees a clear correlation between the dissemination of organizational values, and the prevalence of abusive behaviour. As such, the Ombudsman supports the envisaged efforts to strengthen WFP's value framework and seconds the recommendation in the evaluation of the WFP People Strategy to define the WFP core values in a high-level policy document.
39. **Recommendation 2:** Once the WFP values are redefined, to have a lasting impact they need to be embedded in organizational policies and processes and anchored into everyday practices, such as team meetings, workload distribution and performance management, and applied in decision-making processes. To keep values alive, they need to be continuously communicated and reinforced as harvesting cannot take place without an ongoing process of sowing and weeding.

Promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion

40. Respecting and supporting diversity are core to humanitarian values. As a global humanitarian and United Nations organization, diversity matters to WFP as demonstrated in the online course "Diversity & Inclusion and the World Food Programme". The course, launched in 2019, gives the following interpretations of inclusion: "to be considered, respected, welcomed, supported, listened to and to be able to be oneself".
41. As WFP is growing, and is growing more diverse, it is important to broaden and promote the conversation about diversity and inclusion. Comfortably dealing with differences can only be achieved through sincere dialogue, the will to understand the other, his or her otherness, and to arrive at mutual understanding. Without that, differences stay in the realm of difficulties, in which case WFP will miss out as both diversity and inclusion are needed to generate organizational success.
42. The Ombudsman has observed that certain diversity challenges exist within WFP. These relate to gender, seniority, age, sexual orientation, nationality, race, contract status and even to lacking previous WFP or United Nations experience. In this report four employee groups who brought their concerns to the Ombudsman are highlighted: interns and junior consultants and others with no previous WFP or United Nations experience; female employees, especially younger ones; coloured and LGBTI¹¹ employees. The recent workplace surveys might have encouraged these employees to bring their concerns forward, more so than in previous years.
43. Concerns brought to the Ombudsman varied from: feeling unequally treated or discriminated, particularly in terms of pay levels; contract duration or extensions; being ridiculed in front of colleagues; feeling excluded from meetings; information and socializing; being silenced through indirect or implied threats; and their questions, contributions or points of view being under-valued or dismissed. Several spoke of a cumulation of so-called micro-aggressions that grind away the employees' self-esteem, affect their health, and reduce productivity and innovation which lead to sub-optimal performance.
44. A specific challenge shared with the Ombudsman relates to the on boarding process and inclusion of new and existing employees belonging to minority groups. Aspirations to enhance diversity within teams do not always seem to be coupled with the same dedication to make newcomers feel valued or to let them contribute their talents. They do not always

¹⁰ Willis Towers Watson. *External Review of Workplace Culture and Ethical Climate at World Food Programme, Final Submission for Joint Executive Board/WFP Management Working Group on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Abuse of Power and Discrimination*, pp. 26 and 34. September 2019.

¹¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex, as per the United Nations Globe abbreviation (unglobe.org).

- feel “respected, welcomed, supported and listened to”, as per the language of WFP’s Diversity & Inclusion course mentioned above. Some newcomers have been told to take it or leave it: “there are a hundred others waiting to take your place” or instead of being empowered and guided in their (first) job were told “do as you are told or I won’t extend your contract” which feels patronizing, disempowering and diminishes someone’s value.
45. Feelings of exclusion, as shared with the Ombudsman, may result in resignation or in separation because of unsuccessful performance which could have been prevented had there been a more inclusive approach.
 46. **Recommendation 3:** To enhance team cohesion and output, on boarding practices should become more inclusive. Those who start their first job after graduation, who have no prior United Nations or WFP experience, or who come for the first time to headquarters or the field need guidance and training on the job. Supervisors and colleagues need to value newcomers for their experiences and qualifications. Offering a sense of belonging rather than making one “fit in” are different approaches that create either an experience of inclusion or one of exclusion.
 47. Inclusion presents an opportunity if it transcends the mere assimilation of diverse voices and perspectives into the existing culture, and when it opens the possibility of transformation of culture by embracing and leveraging diversity.
 48. **Recommendation 4:** Conscious efforts are required to make teams diverse and to keep them diverse. Making sure equal opportunities are provided to both women and men as well as people from all backgrounds and regions is an important step in diversifying the workforce. This would necessitate obtaining insights on personal and policy biases and working to overcome them.
 49. Visitors shared experiences that when respect for diversity is lacking in their workplace, citing one’s socio-cultural background is often resorted to as justification for not being diversity sensitive. This requires diversity and inclusion to be included as a corporate value and calls for adequate training. Furthermore, experiences of differential treatment based on sexual orientation are a growing concern to the Ombudsman.
 50. **Recommendation 5:** To help achieve diversity and inclusion various existing employee groups could be consulted more often, such as the United Nations Globe LGBTI representative, the Youth Network, the respectful workplace advisors (RWAs), female employees, in addition to the staff representative bodies (Professional Staff Association and the Union of General Service Staff), and those in the field.
 51. During field visits the Ombudsman has observed that the mandate of “wellness” and “welfare” committees varies by country from organizing social events to advocating for local employees’ working conditions. There appears to be confusion about the roles and the accompanying responsibilities of the employees elected for such committees, while these might change when new country office management arrives. This decreases the effectiveness of these committees.
 52. **Recommendation 6:** To provide consistency and clarity in expectations and approaches, align the mandates of field “wellness” and “welfare” committees and provide a template for a terms of reference and for management-staff relations in the field.
 53. Gender bias and gender discrimination is a concern that has surfaced through a significant number of conversations with the Ombudsman. As referred to earlier in this report, the external review found that women experience or witness abusive behaviour, including

discrimination, significantly more than men and that perceptions of those who participated in the review indicate that women are not always treated equally to men.¹²

54. Like in 2017, the Ombudsman highlights this year the sometimes arbitrary assessment of remuneration levels, which appears to affect women more negatively than men. Although few in number, the fact that these concerns continue to exist, and given that pay discrimination is a global phenomenon, it needs to be given due attention.
55. While the HRM Manual stipulates that the terms of reference should primarily determine one's pay level, female consultants continue to report to the Ombudsman that previous payslips play a key part in this process. As a result, they may find themselves scaled lower than male colleagues performing the same kind of work. Often, they are either too afraid of retaliation to take this up with their supervisors or their concerns are dismissed. Furthermore, the Ombudsman has noted some consultants might receive their monthly subsistence living sum as part of their remuneration whereas it should be paid on top of it. An example of an arbitrary salary decision is when a (male) supervisor told a junior (female) consultant that an increase was out of the question "because you are already earning more than I did at your age".
56. **Recommendation 7:** To demonstrate its commitment to gender equality and eliminate any pay discrimination, WFP should conduct an equal pay certification process like the one Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, and The Global Fund have completed in 2018 and 2019 respectively (<https://www.equalsalary.org>). With this certification the organization would distinguish itself as an employer within the United Nations system where principles of fairness and inclusion are part of its good governance.

Addressing abusive behaviour: using the combined strength of formal and informal processes of internal justice

57. A large number of employees who contact the Office of the Ombudsman experience situations of abusive behaviour (in 2019 this was 192 employees or 44 percent of all cases). The Office of the Ombudsman supports them by exploring options on how to address the situation, including through informal and formal processes. Affected persons often wish behaviour to change and working environment to improve. Some employees prefer to express themselves to the alleged perpetrator, either through a facilitated process like mediation, or through shuttle diplomacy, to make him or her understand that the behaviour is harmful. Other employees prefer to resort to formal means to achieve that, while not always fully comprehending the ramifications of the process. But the largest portion of our visitors, fearing retaliation, prefer no action at all and rather seek a way out by looking for another position or leaving the organization.
58. The Ombudsman notes that the existing processes are not always considered an effective solution to address abusive behaviour: there are cases and situations that call for an alternative approach. In the annual report for 2017, the Ombudsman recommended to "(e)stablish a standard process to address instances of abusive managerial behaviour in an effective way, especially when the manager in question is unaware of the impact of their behaviour". Indeed, abusive supervisors and managers are often blind to their own misuse of power and to the effects of their behaviour.
59. Emphasis on "greater investigative capacity" creates an expectation that the formal process is the best answer to deal with abusive behaviour, while investigative thresholds are not always met, and evidence may be hard to collect. Moreover, formal processes are stressful

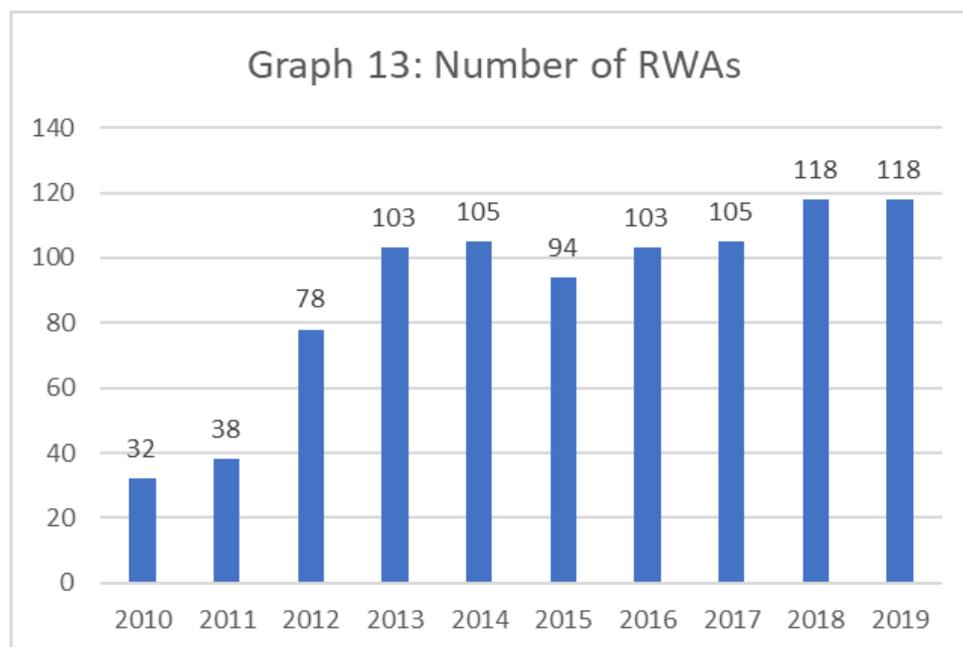
¹² Willis Towers Watson. *External Review of Workplace Culture and Ethical Climate at World Food Programme: Final Submission for Joint Executive Board/WFP Management Working Group on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Abuse of Power and Discrimination*, p. 26-27. September 2019.

- and lengthy, tend to disrupt teams and often have an uncertain outcome: less than 50 percent of investigations on abusive conduct is substantiated.
60. Tackling abusive behaviour will further remain difficult if the burden of initiating the process is primarily borne by affected persons who are often afraid of retaliation. The formal process is also costly due to its labour-intensive nature. This asks for alternative approaches that include prevention, early action, quicker outcomes and result in learning, transformation and restoration, to which informal processes can contribute.
 61. **Recommendation 8:** The option to submit a formal report plays an important role in addressing abusive conduct. However, the informal process that includes dialogue, facilitation, mediation and restorative processes needs to be juxtapositioned with the formal process, as both are valid options. Corporate communication, investments, and the upcoming cultural change process that aims to create an “improved, inclusive and respectful culture at WFP” would need to focus on both.
 62. **Recommendation 9:** To confront abusive behaviour especially from “open secrets”, that cannot or does not need to be addressed through a disciplinary process but continues to cause harm, the organization should give priority to the establishment of an alternative process, complementary to existing mechanisms. Reference is made to the recommendation in the Ombudsman’s annual report for 2017.
 63. **Recommendation 10:** Creating a respectful, dignified and diverse work culture will be supported by more listening through dialogue and by taking efforts to solve issues together. When the affected person to a conflict prefers mediation, and mediation is deemed a viable option by the Ombudsman, WFP should consider making the first session compulsory for the other party, after which the parties decide whether they want to continue. Such programmes are successfully implemented by the United Nations Secretariat and the World Bank.

The respectful workplace advisor programme

Overview

64. Since its creation in 2007, the RWA programme has developed into a professional programme consisting of a network of approximately 120 RWAs worldwide. As extended arm of the Office of the Ombudsman in the field, RWAs provide confidential and impartial support to colleagues facing workplace issues. RWAs help employees explore options for addressing issues in a solution-oriented manner, focusing on self-help approaches and empowerment. Since 2011, RWAs are also serving as ‘Ethics Ambassadors’, raising awareness of the Code of Conduct and related policies.



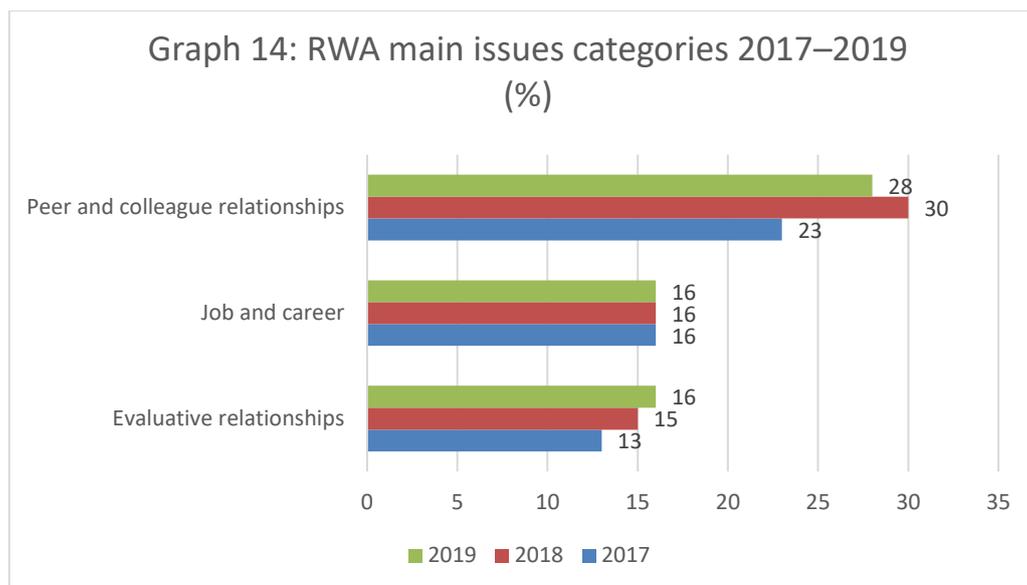
65. Respectful workplace advisors are nominated by their peers as part of an anonymous process organized by the Ombuds Office. Serving as RWA is a voluntary commitment, complementing an employee's regular function. To prepare for the role, RWAs are required to participate in the foundation training where they acquire basic coaching skills and learn about the, for them, relevant organizational policies and mechanisms. At the end of 2019, the network comprised 118 RWAs worldwide.
66. Respectful workplace advisors are supported by the RWA network manager, an Ombudsman Office employee, via monthly teleconferences that allow for discussion, exchange on best practices, and learning sessions on relevant subjects. In 2019, 40 teleconferences were organized for the five different regional groups. In addition, RWAs have access to individual online case-specific guidance.

Facilitators of the Respect Campaign

67. During 2019, the Ombudsman Office partnered closely with the Internal Communications and Engagement Unit in the roll-out of WFP's global "Respect Each Other" campaign, which at year end had reached approximately 50 country offices at different stages of implementation. In most of these countries, RWAs were instrumental in launching the campaign and co-facilitated sessions with while being supported by their network manager. Many RWAs reported back that the positive experience with the Respect Campaign increased the visibility and recognition of their work.

Caseload of the respectful workplace advisors

68. Respectful workplace advisors handled a total of 218 cases, a drop of 15 percent over the previous year, which can be explained by the departure of several experienced RWAs, while new RWAs usually need some time to get settled in their roles. The distribution of cases by issue categories mirrors that of previous years: 28 percent of all cases fall into the category of 'peer and colleague relationships', followed by 16 percent of cases concerning 'job and career', and another 16 percent concerning 'evaluative relationships'.
69. The most common issues shared with RWA's are harassment and abuse of power – captured under peer and colleague relationships and evaluative relationships – which accounted for 34 percent of all cases. This high level, equalling that of 2018, could be attributed to heightened awareness of the revised HSHAAD policy due to the outreach conducted by HRM and the Ombudsman Office. Graph 14 gives an overview of the RWA caseload of the past three years.



Looking ahead in the light of WFP's culture change process

70. The Ombudsman welcomed the external review, which reaffirmed the observations and echoed most of the recommendations the Ombudsman made in her reports over 2016, 2017 and 2018. The outcomes of the external review demonstrate the strength and the value of the Ombudsman Office, which is a unique safe space for in-depth conversations, and provides unparalleled insights about what matters in the organization.
71. It goes without saying that these insights are not always welcome. Leadership and managers might possibly have a hesitation to acknowledge or address certain issues. Courageous and inclusive leadership requires an open mind, a willingness to look at what is uncomfortable, and taking responsible action. The role of the Ombudsman for the organization and its leadership is to render visible what remains invisible or unaddressed.
72. WFP's leadership has shown courage in voluntarily undertaking the External Review and in their commitment to the change process, by appointing the senior advisor to the ED, setting up the project management office (PMO) and providing the related funding. Against this backdrop, the Ombudsman welcomes WFP's cultural change process and is eager to contribute towards its realization.

Contributing to the comprehensive action plan

73. Acknowledging their importance, the Office of the Ombudsman offers its expertise to contribute to the six work streams of WFP's comprehensive action plan for an "improved, inclusive and respectful workplace culture". The six work streams are: **reaffirming values, leadership, employee engagement, policy and system revisions, and discipline and communications.**

Capacity building

74. In 2020 the Office of the Ombudsman will roll out a capacity building programme to support employees in managing differences and difficult relationships at work. The aim is to strengthen conflict resolution skills that enable employees to prevent and solve conflicts themselves.

Enhancing the informal and formal processes to address abusive behaviour (HSHAAD)

75. In 2019, the Ombudsman Office received a greater number of requests for mediation and facilitation. As this trend is expected to continue, the Office will provide more capacity to meet this increase.

76. Referring to our recommendation nine in this report, the Ombudsman Office will provide a proposal to the IDSC for an additional process, aimed at complementing existing processes to address abusive behaviour. The Office of the Ombudsman will work together with the members of the IDSC to bring it to fruition.

Introducing respectful workplace advisors in headquarters

77. Originally conceived as a field-based programme, the Office of the Ombudsman will extend its RWA network to WFP's headquarters in Rome in 2020. This decision is a response to the high number of headquarters employees who have come to the Office with HSHAAD concerns.

In closure

78. While writing this report in 2020, the Ombudsman cannot reflect on the previous year and address current and future issues without considering the implications of living at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the perspective of conflict prevention and resolution, the Ombudsman emphasizes how notions such as respect, cooperation, and inclusion are vital in the global quest to define the "new normal". While serving our beneficiaries and saving more lives than ever, it is important for WFP to remain focussed on these concepts which are key for a healthy and enriching work environment.

Acronyms

HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Division
HSHAAD	harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination
IDSC	Inter-Divisional Standing Committee
JWG	joint Executive Board/WFP management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination