Management response to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019

1. Management welcomes the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) for 2019 and continues to value the contribution made by OBD in providing an informal and confidential process for addressing conflict, disputes and complaints among employees, as well as the Ombudsman’s contributions to the inter-divisional standing committee established to support implementation of the policy on protection from harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination.

2. Management acknowledges the reported increases in the number of visits to OBD, particularly on matters related to harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination, and the number of managers and supervisors requesting guidance and support regarding implementation of the harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination policy. Other entities within WFP dealing with these issues have also witnessed sharp increases in reports, which is seen as evidence of the success of ongoing corporate efforts to promote a safe and harmonious workplace, including through continued messaging from the Executive Director, as acknowledged in the annual report.

Focal points:

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3. In January 2020, Ms Gina Casar was appointed Senior Advisor to the Executive Director on Workplace Culture to move forward the WFP workplace culture agenda and to drive development of a comprehensive action plan (CAP) for addressing harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination in the workplace following the report of the joint Board/management working group.\(^1\)

**Values and principles**

4. WFP concurs with the report regarding the importance of organizational values. As part of the CAP, a WFP values consultation was conducted with all WFP employees by the office of the Senior Advisor on Workplace Culture in May 2020 to reaffirm values and behaviours that will be fully endorsed, communicated and actively applied throughout the organization.

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<td>1. 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.</td>
<td>Agreed. As part of ongoing efforts aimed at improving workplace culture, management conducted a consultation on WFP values to reaffirm values and behaviours through a bespoke global consultation exercise involving all employees, which closed on 27 May 2020. Employees were asked to assess WFP’s current values, what should be valued going forward, and what they personally valued. Once inputs have been gathered and reviewed, the WFP values will be refined. Following further consultation with leaders, main stakeholders and key networks (the two official staff representative bodies, the youth network and respectful workplace advisors) using a combination of consultations, one-to-one interviews and workshops, the revised WFP values will be launched in October 2020. This will be accompanied by a people activation plan identifying the symbols and systems that need to be improved in order to live WFP values and behaviours at all levels of the organization. In addition, a revision of WFP’s code of conduct is being carried out.</td>
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**Promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion**

5. WFP acknowledges and has identified gaps in various elements of diversity in the workforce and, more specifically, in gender parity and inclusion. A number of initiatives are ongoing to address these gaps.

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\(^1\) WFP/EB.2/2019/9-A.
3. To enhance team cohesion and output, onboarding 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.

Agreed.

WFP is reviewing online and virtual onboarding processes to ensure that they encompass diversity and inclusion elements. In addition, initiatives are being considered for adopting informal discussions with employees, “blind” lunch meetings\(^2\) and other social activities that reinforce team culture.

The Human Resources Division (HRM) is leading the development of leadership skill programmes for WFP managers at all levels and the enhancement of people management skills and manager accountability to equip managers to become role models for the promotion of an inclusive and respectful working environment by developing a leadership framework that guides leaders at different levels in their leadership journeys and a systematic approach to the assessment and development of management skills; rolling out a corporate programme for middle managers; and training incoming country directors and deputy country directors on effective employee management to foster an inclusive and respectful working environment.

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.

Partially agreed.

In the context of the CAP, WFP will continue to implement the recommendations in the WFP gender parity action plan (2018), which will incorporate gender parity in the revision and updating of human resources processes – recruitment, reassignment, career development and retention. Specifically, two new gender-related initiatives were incorporated aimed at increasing gender awareness within WFP through document sharing and dissemination and events and the promulgation of gender equitable norms to enhance inclusion in WFP programmes, humanitarian operations, workplaces and the workforce. Increased gender awareness builds on the personal commitment of the Executive Director to improving gender parity.

\(^2\) This would involve lunch meetings between colleagues randomly selected from different divisions/sections/departments etc., the main aim being to provide the space for intentional informal sessions for colleagues to get to know each other, build relationships and thus strengthen organizational culture.
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<td>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, female employees, in addition to the staff representative bodies (Professional Staff Association and the Union of General Service Staff), and those in the field.</td>
<td>Agreed. As part of the development of the CAP, for example, consultations are ongoing with staff representative bodies, key networks including respectful workplace advisors and the Youth Network, and women working at remote duty stations. A specific initiative on developing an identity for young WFP employees is currently included in the CAP, in the core area of employee engagement.</td>
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<td>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.</td>
<td>Agreed. Well-being committees will be created and strengthened and support missions, outreach and guidance will be provided to country offices on the enhancement of safe and healthy work environments. Support for country offices will be provided to address workplace conflicts and the inclusion of physical and mental health-related activities in country office plans, and staff cohesion will be promoted.</td>
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<td>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 (<a href="https://www.equalsalary.org">https://www.equalsalary.org</a>). 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.</td>
<td>Partially agreed. WFP will continue to implement the WFP gender parity action plan, which will incorporate gender parity in the revision and update of human resources processes. HRM will conduct an audit of policies and processes with agreed external vendors to strengthen WFP’s employee value proposition as an employer of choice.</td>
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**Addressing abusive behaviour: using the combined strength of formal and informal internal justice processes**

6. The 2018 revised policy on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination acknowledges and reinforces both formal and informal processes as a means of recourse for affected persons. Management acknowledges that not all reports are addressed most effectively through investigation and disciplinary processes, but a managerial or administrative intervention can help to address issues adequately and swiftly. Investments are being made to ensure that the formal processes, which involve investigations and possible disciplinary processes, are adequately staffed. A number of new positions, including in HRM, have been established specifically for this purpose.
### Recommendation of Ombudsman vs Management response

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<td><strong>8.</strong> 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 juxtaposed 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.</td>
<td>Agreed. A number of initiatives aimed at the improvement of effective responses to abusive and disrespectful behaviour are being considered. These include undertaking continuous policy development related to abusive conduct; continuing global rollout of the “Speak Up” initiative using face-to-face awareness raising sessions on behavioural standards and protection against abusive conduct for all employees; issuing annual reports on disciplinary practices; developing tools and procedures that support HRM in addressing workplace behavioural issues; implementing revised procedures for administrative and disciplinary processes; and developing internal communications on disciplinary policies.</td>
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<td><strong>9.</strong> 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.</td>
<td>In confronting abusive behaviour, whether formally or informally, management is mindful of ensuring that due process is safeguarded. HRM is considering the development of tools and procedures for more effectively addressing workplace behavioural issues that may not constitute misconduct or that would be more effectively handled through an administrative rather than a disciplinary approach.</td>
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<td><strong>10.</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Partially agreed. Management considers that there are situations where mediation may not be an appropriate approach (e.g., in cases of physical sexual harassment) and notes that mandatory mediation may affect reporting where there are confidentiality and retaliation concerns.</td>
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### Conclusion

7. WFP is committed to ensuring a respectful, safe and inclusive workplace. Work under the CAP is ongoing despite the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While some delays and reprioritizations have taken place, significant progress has been made in the areas of reaffirming values and disciplinary processes.