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Joint Inspection Unit

Review of the Ombudsman and Mediation function in the United Nations system organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Review of the Ombudsman and Mediation function in the United Nations system organizations” ([JIU/REP/2025/5](#)).

* [A/81/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2025/5)¹ covers the work undertaken by the Unit with the following objectives: (a) to provide a system-wide, comparative and independent assessment of the current state of the ombudsman and mediation function; (b) to assess progress since 2015; (c) to examine the policy framework, mandate, organizational set-up and resourcing; (d) to analyse inter-agency cooperation and coherence; and (e) to highlight good practices and areas for improvement.

II. General comments

2. Organizations welcome the report, consider it relevant to their respective contexts and recognize its contribution to advancing coherence and reinforcing professional standards. Several note that it provides useful benchmarks and demonstrates the added value of informal dispute resolution mechanisms in promoting efficiency, productivity, staff well-being and adherence to organizational principles. A limited number of entities observe that, while the report may not be directly applicable to their current institutional arrangements, it nonetheless serves as a helpful reference for good practices, with organizational size, existing structures and resource considerations remaining important factors in assessing the feasibility of any adjustments.

3. Organizations express overall support for the findings and appreciation for the system-wide perspective, including the identification of progress and areas for further strengthening. In light of financial and capacity constraints, several entities encourage a stronger focus on enhancing inter-agency cooperation, synergies and efficiencies. They suggest that proposals for deeper integration into existing arrangements would benefit from clearer articulation of their expected operational impact, including potential applicability across the wider system. Entities also highlight the value of strengthening performance measurement approaches, including comparable indicators and benchmarking tools, and of presenting additional evidence on the cost-effectiveness and tangible benefits of mediation and informal dispute resolution services.

4. The Secretariat underscores that the report is particularly pertinent to its context, as it consolidates standards and recommendations aimed at harmonizing and strengthening the ombudsman and mediation function across the system, highlights its contribution to efficiency, staff satisfaction and organizational values and reaffirms the mandate established by the General Assembly.

5. Organizations are generally supportive of the proposed recommendations, while drawing attention to the annex of the review, which outlines the actions to be taken by participating organizations and identifies those for which no action is required.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations with an internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function who have not yet done so should, by the end of 2027, develop and adopt formal terms of reference in

¹ Circulated to the General Assembly under the symbol [A/81/86](#).

consultation with the function and other relevant stakeholders, including staff representatives.

6. Organizations support this recommendation, noting it is either already implemented or not addressed to them.

Recommendation 2

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should, by the end of 2027, include the active participation of staff representatives in the selection and appointment process of the heads of their ombudsman and mediation functions, as well as in decisions concerning their dismissal or removal.

7. Organizations to which the recommendation is addressed partially support it. Organizations' views vary, with one expressing support in principle, while noting that existing terms of reference within current inter-agency arrangements already provide for staff representative involvement in selection processes. Another organization indicates partial support, while clarifying that it does not currently maintain a formal ombuds structure. Another organization does not support the proposed recommendation, emphasizing that recruitment and dismissal processes are governed by established legal and administrative frameworks designed to safeguard merit, independence and institutional integrity. It cautions that extending staff representative participation in such processes could compromise the neutrality of independent oversight functions.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should, by the end of 2027, establish term limits of a minimal duration of four years for renewable terms and a maximum duration of seven years for non-renewable terms for the heads of their ombudsman and mediation functions, with a post-employment restriction within the same organization.

8. Organizations generally support the substance of the recommendation, while suggesting clarification of certain elements, including with regard to the duration and scope of term limits and the application of post-employment restrictions. Some indicate that relevant provisions are already in place under existing agreements, while others note that current interim arrangements already operate on a time-limited basis.

Recommendation 4

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should, with immediate effect, ensure that the contracts of newly appointed heads of ombudsman and mediation functions are issued for a full term.

9. Organizations support this recommendation. Several entities confirm that heads of independent functions, including ombuds roles, are appointed for full fixed terms, in line with established practice, whether under internal frameworks or shared inter-agency arrangements. One organization expresses support in principle but notes that it does not currently have an ombudsman function in place.

Recommendation 5

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should ensure that, by the end of 2027, the annual reports of their ombudsman and mediation functions are submitted to their respective governing bodies or legislative organs, to enhance transparency and accountability.

10. Organizations express general support for the recommendation, or indicate that they agree in principle, with some noting that relevant reports are already publicly available. At the same time, certain conditions are raised, including the need to safeguard personal data, confidentiality and the independence of the ombudsman function. It was further noted that, in some cases, agenda-setting for governing or legislative bodies rests with Member States and not the secretariats.

Recommendation 6

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should, by the end of 2027, make the annual reports of their ombudsman and mediation functions publicly available to enhance transparency and accountability and promote broader awareness of the function.

11. Organizations concerned by this recommendation generally support it, while, in one case, noting the absence of an existing ombudsman function.

Recommendation 7

The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should review the human and financial resources of their respective ombudsman and mediation functions regularly to ensure that the functions are adequately equipped to fulfil their mandate. This review should take into account geographical dispersion of the workforce, linguistic diversity and the full range of responsibilities.

12. Organizations broadly support this recommendation, with most entities indicating that regular reviews of the human and financial resources allocated to the ombudsman and mediation functions are already in place, reflecting a shared recognition of the importance of aligning resources with mandate requirements, while approaches vary according to organizational size and institutional arrangements.

13. Several organizations note that such reviews occur periodically or as part of established budget cycles and that resource levels are assessed against operational needs, workforce distribution and service delivery requirements. In shared service arrangements, cost-sharing frameworks are referenced as a basis for determining and adjusting budgetary allocations.

14. Entities operating without a dedicated ombudsman and mediation function express support in principle and observe that a structured review of resources could help strengthen capacity and responsiveness over time.

15. In the Secretariat, the budget of the ombudsman and mediation function is reviewed on an annual basis and submitted to the relevant governing bodies for consideration and approval. Furthermore, the review of resources considers key human resources performance indicators, including gender and geographical diversity, as well as the need for the services to be provided in all six official languages of the United Nations.

Recommendation 8

The Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) should ensure that the office of their ombudsman is provided with the required resources in line with the provisions of the memorandum of understanding.

16. Organizations note that the recommendation is addressed to the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women.

17. Some of the entities concerned note that their governing boards have already directed the provision of adequate resources to the ombudsman function, including under existing cost-sharing arrangements formalized through a memorandum of understanding among participating organizations and, on that basis, the recommendation is considered implemented.
