



United Nations

Review of the Ombudsman and Mediation function in the United Nations system organizations (expanded report)

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit

Prepared by Gönke Roscher



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Abbreviations and acronyms

CEB	United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOA	International Ombuds Association
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
NOMMO	Network of Ombuds and Mediators of Multilateral Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNARIO	Ombudsmen and Mediators of the United Nations and Related International Organizations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN Tourism	World Tourism Organization
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

I. Introduction

A. Context and background

1. The present review was included in the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) programme of work for 2024 and is part of the JIU cluster of reports addressing oversight, integrity and accountability.
2. The review expands on the previous work of JIU, in particular two reports, the 2015 JIU review of the organizational ombudsman services across the United Nations system ([JIU/REP/2015/6](#)) and the 2023 JIU review of the internal pre-tribunal-stage appeal mechanisms available to staff of the United Nations system organizations ([JIU/REP/2023/2](#)).

B. Objectives

3. The objectives of the review are: (a) to provide a system-wide, comparative and independent assessment of the current state of the ombudsman and mediation function; (b) to assess progress made 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. The report covers ombudsman and mediation functions of United Nations system organizations.
4. The intended impact of the present review is to foster a better understanding among organizations and Member States of the relevance and value of the function to the informal resolution of work-related conflicts and to strengthen coherence and harmonization between the participating organizations.
5. The review is subject to the following limitation: five JIU participating organizations (International Trade Centre (ITC), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)) which are serviced by the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman (UNOMS) are not covered in detail in the present review.
6. Consideration is given to the different mandates, sizes and organizational structures of the United Nations system organizations. In cases in which the recommendations do not apply equally to all the organizations that participated in the review, this has been pointed out clearly.

C. Approach and methodology

7. The review was conducted from July 2024 to February 2025. The scope of the review is system-wide and includes all JIU participating organizations, namely the United Nations Secretariat, its departments and offices, the United Nations funds and programmes, other United Nations bodies and entities and the United Nations specialized agencies, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
8. The methodology for the review was designed and implemented in accordance with the statute of JIU and its internal standards and working procedures. Due consideration was given to protecting the confidentiality of stakeholders who responded to questionnaires, queries and surveys, as well as of those who participated in interviews.

9. The review has applied a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The methods employed include a desk review of relevant documents, a corporate questionnaire sent to the 28 JIU participating organizations and interviews (in-person or remotely, owing to financial and time constraints), including of the ombudspersons and mediators.

10. The data for the review originated from, inter alia, the responses to the corporate questionnaire, interview notes, relevant reports and decisions, and additional information provided by JIU participating organizations. The data were subjected to a quantitative and qualitative analysis, and the information obtained was triangulated and validated.

11. Twenty-four participating organizations responded to the corporate questionnaire and other requests for information.¹ A total of 177 individuals from 22 participating organizations were interviewed, including the ombudspersons and mediators. For comparative purposes, the ombudsman and mediation functions and mechanisms for informal conflict resolution at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank were examined.

12. In accordance with article 11.2 of the JIU statute and for quality assurance purposes, a draft of the present report underwent an internal peer review for quality assurance and was subsequently shared with JIU participating organizations before the report was finalized. The Inspector affirms that independence, impartiality and professional integrity were maintained throughout the entire review process.

13. The present report contains eight formal recommendations: seven addressed to the executive heads of JIU participating organizations and one to 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). Timely and effective implementation of these recommendations requires the explicit support of the legislative organs and governing bodies. The formal recommendations are complemented by 18 informal recommendations, which are indicated in bold in the report, as suggestions for effecting further improvements.

14. The Inspector wishes to express her sincere appreciation to all the representatives of United Nations system organizations and of other bodies and entities who assisted in the preparation of the present report, in particular those who participated in the interviews or responded to the questionnaires and other information requests, and so willingly shared their knowledge and expertise.

D. Key terms and definitions

15. The following terminology is used in the context of the present report:

(a) **Ombudsman in United Nations system organizations.** The ombudsman is the only designated neutral resource that provides confidential, impartial and independent services within each organization to informally address workplace-related concerns. The mandate of the ombudsman is to assist visitors through informal conflict resolution services to address workplace-related concerns. This includes but is not limited to voluntary consultation, guidance and assistance in developing

¹ The responses of UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat and UNODC are contained in the response of the United Nations Secretariat to the JIU corporate questionnaire. ITC provided an individual response.

options, conflict coaching, capacity-building and mediation. In addition, the ombudsman identifies systemic issues, policy gaps, procedural irregularities and problematic behaviour patterns. The ombudsman facilitates outcomes that build trust, enhance relationships and improve communication within the organization, as well as between the organization and its workforce;²

(b) **Mediation.** Mediation is a confidential dispute resolution process in which a neutral third-party professional – a mediator – helps the parties in dispute to engage in a constructive conversation, discuss issues, express interests, brainstorm options, find common ground and, where applicable, reach consensus with a view to resolving the dispute;³

(c) **Ombuds case.** An ombuds case is one or more workplace issues or questions brought to the ombudsman and mediation function by a visitor who requests information, resolution options or assistance that requires specific ombuds skills or knowledge. A visitor who returns with the same issue(s) shall be regarded as a returning visitor and does not require a new case to be recorded.⁴ A case may involve various parties;

(d) **Ombuds group case:** If there is more than one visitor, it is an ombuds group case, which is defined by the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators as “an issue(s) brought by a group of visitors who request information, resolution options, or assistance for the same issue(s)”. A group is considered more than one visitor;³

(e) **Mediation case:** A workplace conflict brought to the ombudsman and mediation function by one or more visitors who request, agree, and/or are referred to participate in mediation;³

(f) **Visitor:** Any individual or entity that contacts the office for assistance;³

(g) **Issue:** An issue is a workplace concern or concerns raised by the visitor seeking consultation, information or action. There are nine main issue categories and several sub-issues [*N.B.*: one case can encompass more than one issue category];³

(h) **Systemic observation/systemic issue:** The identification of potential systemic issues generally flows from case work. Additional observations can be made through direct observation and through contact with stakeholders and others in the Organization. Systemic issues can be rooted in the organizational culture or may be the result of structural problems, poor leadership, gaps, inconsistencies or a lack of alignment in the Organization’s policies, processes, practices and behaviours. Early detection and flagging of potential systemic issues allow the Organization to respond in an adaptive and holistic way as appropriate;³

(i) **United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services:** Although the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services comprises (a) the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman; (b) the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes; and (c) the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the present

² Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators (February 2024), sects. 1.1 and 1.2.

³ As defined in the Standard Operating Procedures of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services.

⁴ In response to recommendation 4 of the 2015 JIU review and with the purpose of harmonizing common, key terminology used by ombudsman and mediator practitioners within the member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the members of the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators developed definitions that make a clear distinction between individual cases, group cases and mediation cases. In the context of the present review, these are the definitions used.

review uses “UNOMS” in lieu of “the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman” due to the lack of an appropriate acronym.

E. About the report

16. There are two outputs resulting from the review: (a) the present report, which is the expanded version of the review and available in English only; and (b) a concise report, issued under the symbol [JIU/REP/2025/5](#), available in the six official languages of the United Nations, which contains the formal recommendations addressed to JIU participating organizations.

II. Main findings

A. Progress made since the 2015 Joint Inspection Unit review

17. In its 2015 report, JIU stated that 19 out of 28 JIU participating organizations provided organizational ombudsman services in different modalities. Of these 19, however, only 11 had a stand-alone internal ombudsman and mediation function, namely the United Nations Secretariat (including ITC, UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat and UNODC), the separately administered funds and programmes (International Labour Organization (ILO), UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

18. In contrast, in the remaining eight organizations (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism)), the services were provided through either combined functions or other means. A few organizations (IAEA, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Universal Postal Union (UPU)), at the time, had nothing in place.

19. Based on the findings of the present review and compared with the 2015 situation, some progress has been made, as the number of internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation functions has increased since then by three, with FAO, ICAO and UNRWA adding the function.

20. Four organizations choose to provide their workforce with the services of an ombudsman and/or mediator through an arrangement with the ombudsman office of another United Nations system organization. Since January 2020, WMO has been serviced by the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services. Starting in 2026, ITU and WIPO will share a position of Ombudsman (P-5) under the authority of UNOMS while UNAIDS will be serviced by the WHO ombudsman.

21. Since 2015, UPU has chosen to use an external service provider from the private sector to serve as the ombudsman and mediation office for the organization.

22. No changes have been made in IMO (mediation services provided through external mediators and a few staff members trained as mediators and through certified mediators from the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution), UNESCO (mediation services provided through the college of mediators, composed of retired staff members, and ombudsman services provided through the Ethics Office) and UN Tourism (through a combined function with its human resources entity).

23. IAEA and UNIDO are the remaining organizations that do not provide professional ombudsman and mediations services to their workforce at all.

24. Further improvements since 2015 include the continuing professionalization of the personnel of the ombudsman and mediation function; the establishment of the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators of CEB member organizations⁵ aimed at, among other things, harmonizing practices across the United Nations system; and the increased relevance attributed to the function, such as the

⁵ See www.un.org/ombudsman/network.

recognition of its contribution to a respectful and harmonious workplace culture and informal conflict resolution, if not the prevention of conflict.

25. However, despite the measurable progress made, the present review identified a number of shortcomings in the current ombudsman and mediation arrangements of the United Nations system organizations. The Inspector considers it essential for the sake of the informal resolution of conflicts and the overall culture of organizations to further strengthen the ombudsman and mediation function. This will considerably contribute to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal justice system.

B. Shortcomings in the implementation of the formal recommendations contained in the 2015 Joint Inspection Unit report

26. The 2015 report included eight formal recommendations: one addressed to the governing bodies and legislative organs and seven to the executive heads.

27. Ten years later, by the end of May 2025, formal recommendation 1⁶ regarding an update to the terms of reference, had been accepted by 18 organizations. (It had been addressed to 19 for action.) One organization (UNCTAD) considered it as not relevant (not applicable), as the action had to be taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Two organizations (FAO and UN-Habitat) reported that implementation was in progress, while the others reported it as implemented.

28. The present review found, however, that the terms of reference of the ombudsman and mediation function had been updated in only two organizations, namely the United Nations Secretariat (updated in 2016) and WIPO (updated in 2019), but not in the other organizations concerned.

29. Formal recommendation 2⁷ regarding staff awareness, had been accepted by 18 organizations (addressed to 19 for action). One organization (UNCTAD) considered it as not relevant (not applicable), while the others reported it as implemented, except UN-Habitat (implementation in progress). The findings of the present review confirm the implementation, although more could be done to increase awareness among all personnel of the mechanisms available for informal conflict resolution and the services of the ombudsman and mediation function.

30. Formal recommendation 3⁸ regarding access had been accepted by 13 organizations (addressed to 19 for action), while 3 organizations (ILO, UNFPA and UN-Women) had not accepted it and three (FAO, UNCTAD and WIPO) considered it as not relevant (not applicable). Although 12 of the 13 organizations that had accepted the recommendation reported it as implemented, the present review found that the option for field staff to have an in-person consultation with the ombudsman of another United Nations system organization in the same location, or at least in the same time zone, was possible only for personnel working for the United Nations and its

⁶ The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations, in consultation with staff representatives and the existing Ombudsmen, should review, update and disseminate across their respective organizations the terms of reference of the ombudsman, giving due consideration to the direction provided by the present report and using a staff-management consultation mechanism.

⁷ The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations, in cooperation with the ombudsman offices, should include questions relating to the ombudsman service in staff surveys and responses should be used by management, staff associations and the ombudsman office to increase staff awareness and promote a better understanding of the ombudsman function in the organization.

⁸ The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should request their respective ombudsmen to ensure that their field staff have the option of an in-person consultation with the ombudsman of another United Nations system organization in the same location (for example, the regional ombudsman of UNOMS or the visiting ombudsman of another United Nations system organization).

separately administered funds and programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women) and for UNHCR. As for the personnel of other United Nations system organizations located in the field, it was still not possible to use the services of the ombudsman and mediation function present in the same location, either of a visiting ombudsman or of an ombudsman located there. **The Inspector considers this a serious lacuna and urges the organizations concerned to implement recommendation 3 of the JIU 2015 report at the earliest.**

31. Recommendation 4⁹ regarding a case management manual had been accepted by 16 organizations (addressed to 19 for action), while 1 organization (UNFPA) had not accepted it and 2 (ILO and UNCTAD) considered it as not relevant (not applicable). A total of 15 organizations of the 16 that had accepted the recommendation reported it as implemented. In verifying the status of implementation, the present review found that there was still work to be done by some organizations (UNESCO, UNRWA and WHO) to develop a case management manual and to achieve the required level of harmonization across the system.

32. With a view to enhancing the implementation of recommendation 4 of the 2015 JIU review, the members of the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators developed definitions for the following terms: ombuds case, ombuds group case, mediation case, visitor and issue. In February 2025, they recommended that Network members adopt the suggested definitions. The Inspector considers this an important step for achieving consistency and coherence across the system and making the data provided in the annual reports comparable.

33. Recommendation 5¹⁰ regarding reporting to governing bodies was addressed to 17 legislative organs and governing bodies of organizations for action and accepted by 11. At the time of the present review, one organization (FAO) was still considering whether to accept it, while four (UNCTAD, UNHCR, UNODC and UN-Women) considered it as not relevant (not applicable).

34. The present review found, however, that, except for the United Nations Secretariat, WFP and WHO, there was no regular reporting of the ombudsman to the governing bodies or legislative organs of the other organizations on systemic issues. The Inspector considers this a serious lacuna. Consideration of the annual reports of the ombudsman and mediation function by governing bodies or legislative organs provides them with information on matters related to informal conflict resolution and the status of the workplace culture of an organization.

35. Recommendation 6¹¹ had been accepted by 16 of the 19 organizations to which it was addressed for action. Two organizations (UNFPA and UN-Women) had not accepted, it while one (UNCTAD) considered it as not relevant (not applicable). A total of 15 of the 16 organizations that had accepted the recommendation reported implementation. The present review found that only the United Nations Secretariat for UNOMS, UNDP for the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, and WHO provided substantive information on the implementation in the JIU web-based tracking system, whereas for the others no information was available. During the conduct of the present review, confirmation was obtained that, in most cases,

⁹ The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should request their ombudsman offices to include in their work programme the development of a case management manual and to seek the cooperation of other United Nations system ombudsmen with a view to achieving a certain level of harmonization across the system.

¹⁰ The legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations should make it possible for the ombudsman to report to them on systemic issues identified on a regular basis.

¹¹ The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should request the ombudsman to include continuous training and certification of ombudsman practitioners in the strategic workplans of their ombudsman offices.

especially for those organizations with a stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function, continuous training takes place.

36. Recommendation 7¹² had been accepted by 13 of the 19 organizations to which it was addressed for action. At the time of the present review, one organization (FAO) was still considering whether to accept it. Four organizations (ICAO, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN-Women) had not accepted it, while one (UNCTAD) considered it as not relevant (not applicable). Twelve organizations reported implementation of the recommendation. The present review found that, as of 2025, only eight functions¹³ reported conducting some form of performance assessment of the ombudsman and mediation function, although the methodologies, frequency and benchmarks used varied across entities.

37. Recommendation 8¹⁴ had been accepted by 14 of the 19 organizations to which it was addressed for action. Three organizations (ICAO, UNFPA and UN-Women) had not accepted it, while two organizations (FAO and UNCTAD) considered it as not relevant. Thirteen organizations reported implementation of the recommendation. The Inspector considers the recommendation implemented through the creation of the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators.

C. Persisting lacunae and deficiencies

38. There are other deficiencies and shortcomings already identified in 2015 that persist, as identified in the present review. These deficiencies and shortcomings relate, inter alia, to:

- (a) The role of the ombudsman and mediation function in the internal justice system of organizations;
- (b) Organizational set-up;
- (c) Terms of reference;
- (d) Professional standards;
- (e) Independence;
- (f) Resourcing;
- (g) Outreach.

¹² The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should establish an accountability and appraisal system for the ombudsman services and include the relevant provisions in the ombudsman's terms of reference. The system and the provisions should reflect the specific requirements of the ombudsman function by making accountability and the appraisal process inclusive and participatory for all stakeholders.

¹³ UNOMS, the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, FAO, ICAO, ILO, ITC, UNHCR and UNRWA.

¹⁴ The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should request their ombudsmen to discuss the findings and recommendations of the present review at the UNARIO meeting to be held in 2016 and to decide on the course of actions they intend to reflect in their programmes of work, either individually or collectively.

III. Role of the ombudsman and mediation function in the systems of administration of justice

A. Role of the function in the system of administration of justice applicable to the United Nations

39. In 2007, a new system of administration of justice was established for the United Nations. In its resolution [61/261](#) of 4 April 2007, the General Assembly recognized that informal resolution of conflict was a crucial element of the new system of administration of justice, emphasizing that all possible use should be made of the informal system to avoid unnecessary litigation.¹⁵ Later, in its resolution [62/228](#) of 22 December 2007, the Assembly further recognized that the strengthening of the informal system might reduce recourse to the formal system.¹⁶

40. To that end, in 2007, the General Assembly, also in resolution [62/228](#), decided to create a single integrated and decentralized Office of the Ombudsman for the United Nations Secretariat, funds and programmes, and to establish the Office as from 1 January 2008. Furthermore, it decided to establish the Mediation Division as from 1 January 2008.¹⁷ In response to the annual report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Ombudsman, the Assembly emphasized in the same resolution that the role of the Ombudsman was to report on broad systemic issues to promote greater harmony in the workplace.¹⁸

41. Since then, the General Assembly has expressed itself each year in its resolutions on the administration of justice on the crucial role of the ombudsman and mediation function as the informal part of the system of administration of justice. In paragraph 17 of its resolution [77/260](#) of 30 December 2022, the Assembly recognized mediation as a core part of the work of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services and as a cost-effective method of informal conflict resolution. The important role of the Office in the informal resolution of conflicts in the system of administration of justice, and in a broader sense for the promotion of greater harmony in the workplace, is thus clearly established.

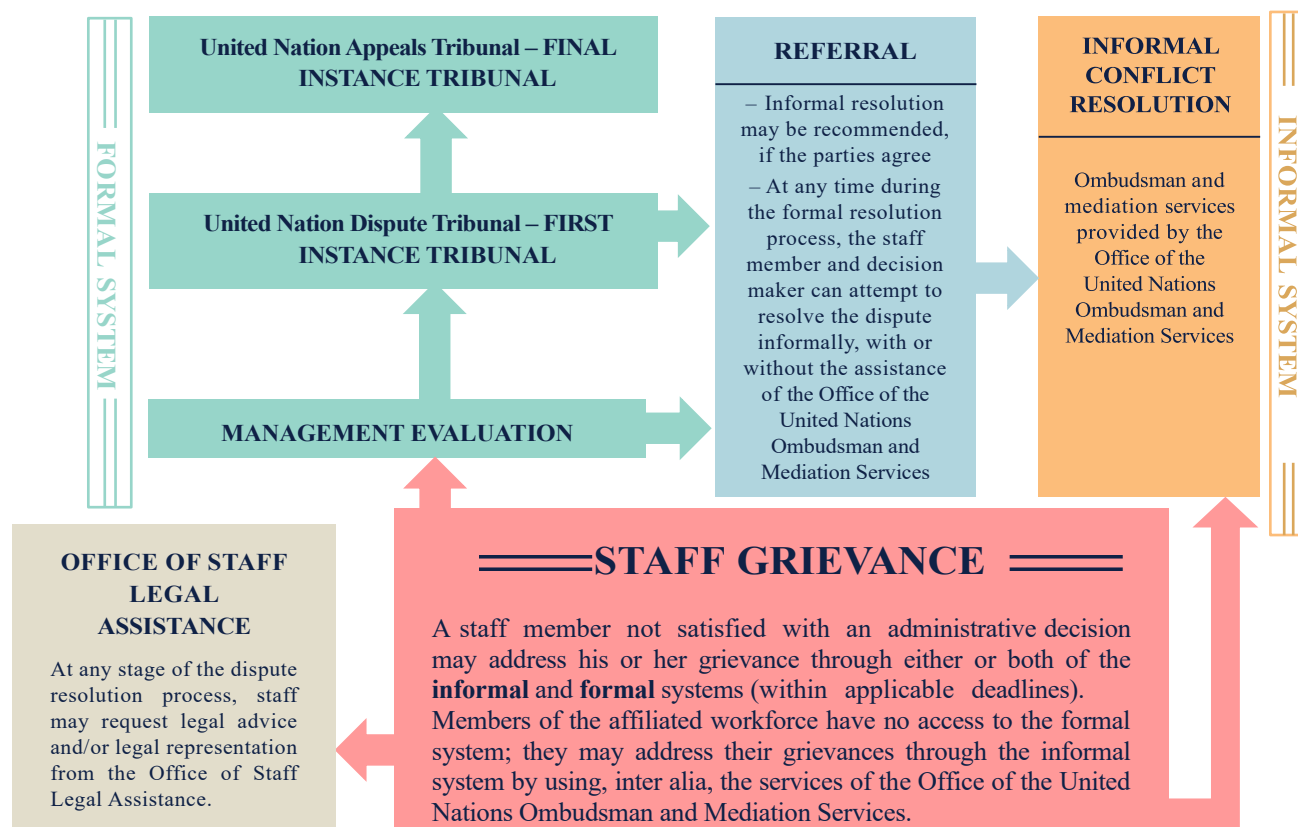
¹⁵ General Assembly resolution [61/261](#), para. 11.

¹⁶ General Assembly resolution [62/228](#), para. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 25 and 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 31 and 32.

Figure I
United Nations administration of justice process



Source: JIU, based on United Nations, A Staff Member's Guide to Resolving Disputes (2019).

B. Role of the function in the system of administration of justice applicable to United Nations system organizations under the jurisdiction of the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal

42. In contrast, the other organizations of the United Nations system still apply a system that has not undergone reform and that does not formally recognize the ombudsman and mediation function as its informal part. There is a diverse landscape for informal conflict resolution and its mechanisms in the specialized agencies and IAEA.

1. Role of the function in the internal justice system of the World Health Organization

43. Nevertheless, one organization (WHO) made informal conflict resolution a priority in its internal justice system. In 2016, WHO implemented a major reform following a 2014 external experts' report¹⁹ and decisions taken by its governing bodies.²⁰ Among other things, in 2014 the external experts had already recommended

¹⁹ Report of the External Panel of Experts on the Review of the Internal Justice System of the World Health Organization, 15 October 2014.

²⁰ World Health Assembly resolution WHA69.17 of 28 May 2016 on amendments to the Staff Regulations: dispute resolution (WHA69/2016/REC/1); and WHO Executive Board resolution EB138.R12 of 30 January 2016 on confirmation of amendments to the Staff Rules: internal justice reform and resolution EB138.R13 of 30 January 2016 on amendments to the Staff Regulations: dispute resolution.

that “the Ombudsman function should be formalized and included in the Staff Rules and be formally part of the dispute resolution chapter”.

44. The WHO Staff Rules, in section 12 (Dispute resolution), dedicate seven paragraphs to informal resolution. Para 1215.2 states that “the Director-General shall encourage and facilitate the use of informal channels to resolve work-related concerns”, while paragraph 1215.3 indicates that “staff members are encouraged to initiate or participate in informal means of resolution and to make good faith efforts to take action to address and resolve concerns as early as possible”. The revised system of internal justice in WHO was reviewed again in 2022.²¹

2. Role of the function in the internal justice system of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Labour Organization, the World Food Programme and the World Intellectual Property Organization

45. Although other specialized agencies did not review their internal justice systems, some stressed the relevance of informal conflict resolution, including mediation, and the role of the ombudsman and mediation function through provisions in their staff regulations and rules. Apart from WHO, this is the case at FAO, ICAO, ILO, WFP and WIPO. In the case of ICAO, the ICAO Service Code refers in its article I briefly to the ombudsperson, while the staff regulations and rules include detailed provisions on the role of the ombudsperson.²²

46. In the case of ILO, its staff regulations contain a chapter on conflict resolution that provides details regarding informal conflict resolution before turning to formal channels.²³ In the case of WIPO, its staff regulations and rules also include a chapter on conflict resolution, which contains detailed rules on informal conflict resolution, means of informal conflict resolution and the Office of the Ombudsperson.²⁴ Its regulation 11.3 explicitly states that “a staff member ... is strongly encouraged to resolve the matter through informal conflict resolution”. FAO²⁵ and WFP also revised their respective legal frameworks on the administration of justice with the aim of further enhancing the use of informal resolution. For example, in the WFP Human Resources Manual,²⁶ staff members are encouraged to resolve their grievances informally and as early as possible. This is further outlined in the WFP framework on mediation services.²⁷

47. The present review did not find references to informal conflict resolution and/or the ombudsman and mediation function in the staff regulations and rules of other specialized agencies (IAEA, ITU, UNIDO, UPU, UN Tourism and WMO).

48. The Inspector suggests that those organizations that lack references to informal conflict resolution in their staff regulations and rules introduce similar language at the time of the next revision highlighting the priority given to informal conflict resolution in their internal justice systems.

²¹ Review of the internal justice system of WHO/UNAIDS and its affiliated entities, 17 April 2022.

²² ICAO staff rule 101.16 (staff regulation 1.16), 1 January 2011, with all amendments up to 1 May 2021; and ICAO Service Code, staff regulations, article I.16, 2011, including all amendments up to 22 February 2021.

²³ ILO staff regulations, March 2021, chap. XIII, art. 13.1.

²⁴ Staff regulations and rules of the International Bureau of WIPO, chap. XI, regulations 11.1, 11.2 and 11.3, 1 October 2022.

²⁵ FAO Staff Rules, sect. 303.1.1; and FAO Manual, sect. 331.

²⁶ WFP Human Resources Manual, sects. VIII.2 and VIII.3.

²⁷ WFP circular OED2024/008 of 10 October 2024.

IV. Added value of the ombudsman and mediation function

49. In its 2015 report, JIU stated that “organizations without any informal dispute resolution function received on average twice as many grievances per year as the organizations with at least one mechanism”.²⁸ In the 2015 review, JIU also found that “the function of the organizational ombudsman has evolved over the years in the United Nations system organizations. Originally, the focus of the ombudsman was mainly providing services to staff to resolve workplace conflict through informal means and advising staff about their options . . . The role of the ombudsman today is to promote and support conflict management and conflict prevention”. The findings of the present review confirm these statements.

50. Since 2015, the function has evolved even further, which is reflected in the increased diversity of the services it offers, especially in the area of conflict prevention, and in the strong increase in the number of visitors and cases year over year. The question that remains, however, is what its added value is exactly and how to measure it, if at all.

51. The data contained in figure A.1 of annex I to the report of the Secretary-General on the administration of justice at the United Nations ([A/79/127](#)) provide a comprehensive assessment of the system of administration of justice for the period 2009–2023, indicating that the volume of requests handled by the ombudsman’s offices, the Office of Staff Legal Assistance and the management evaluation functions in the organizations is far greater than the number of cases before the United Nations Dispute Tribunal and the United Nations Appeals Tribunal. Figure A.1 shows the impact of early and consistently available informal resolution of disputes and how it minimizes the number of cases going to the formal element of the system, evidencing efficiency.

52. It is an established fact that each formal dispute resolution matter has a cost for an organization regardless of whether the matter may be decided in favour of the organization. The cost of a case before the United Nations Dispute Tribunal and the United Nations Appeals Tribunal consists of the cost for the judges and for the registry staff, legal representatives for the parties (some of whom are also staff), information technology services and other costs. Such costs are difficult to quantify and vary considerably due to the variation in staff costs for judicial and staff capacity, as well as the number of cases received and disposed of in any given period.

53. The United Nations Secretariat and participating funds, programmes and entities contribute on a “headcount” basis to the justice system. A small number of specialized agencies submit to the jurisdiction of either the United Nations Dispute Tribunal or the United Nations Appeals Tribunal, or only the latter, on a case-by-case payment basis. For such organizations, a fee structure for Tribunal cases was established in

²⁸ See [JIU/REP/2015/6](#), para. 40.

consultation with the Controller's Office.²⁹ At the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal, the fee is \$20,000 per case.

54. Furthermore, there is the time each case takes on its way through the formal channels until a judgment is issued. Cases not being resolved for a longer period have an impact on organizational culture: both on the staff member concerned and, consequently, on the internal working atmosphere. Unresolved conflicts have a bearing on loyalty, engagement, productivity and motivation. Productivity loss as a result of unresolved disputes is a cost to the organizations.

55. It is important to stress that, at any stage of a formal appeal process, turning to informal conflict resolution through the ombudsman and mediation function or other means is possible in all organizations reviewed. The functions involved in appeal processes and other complaints, such as human resources, review bodies or legal offices, were found to examine cases regardless of whether they might lend themselves to informal conflict resolution. Those functions often suggest using the ombudsman and mediation function for settling such cases informally. With regard to the tribunals, the present review found that they have referred only a few matters for mediation to UNOMS. For instance, in 2023, only three cases were sent for mediation to UNOMS from the United Nations Dispute Tribunal.

56. Based on an assessment of the statistics available, the figures show clearly that the number of cases that exhaust the formal channels for appeals is relatively low compared with the total number of staff. The present review found that most conflicts are resolved through informal means by the ombudsman and mediation function or other actors before being raised to the formal level, if at all.

57. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, with a total number of staff of 36,757, in 2023 there were 401 requests for management evaluation, of which the Management Advice and Evaluation Unit closed 345 by the end of that year. In 2023, the United Nations Dispute Tribunal received 198 cases and the United Nations Appeals Tribunal 116 cases. In comparison, in 2023 UNOMS had 2,014 requests for its services while the Office of Staff Legal Assistance had 1,388 requests for its services, of which 1,225 were closed through settlement or otherwise with or without the involvement of UNOMS.

58. To provide another example, the funds and programmes, with a total number of staff of 30,418, in 2023 received 83 requests for management evaluation, of which 12 decisions were appealed to the United Nations Dispute Tribunal. During the same period, the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes handled a total of 563 cases, again indicating that most issues are resolved informally. In UNHCR (with a total of 16,021 staff), there were 90 requests for management evaluation, of which

²⁹ The current fee structure is as follows:

- (a) A flat fee of \$14,153 per case filed before the United Nations Dispute Tribunal for adjudication of the substantive application and disposition of an application for suspension of action, if any, and any other motion filed in the case. Where proceedings before the Dispute Tribunal require transcription services, \$1,500 is added to the \$14,153 flat fee;
- (b) A flat fee of \$8,846 (62.5 per cent of the adjusted rate) for disposition of an application for revision, interpretation, correction, execution or a combination thereof of a judgment issued by the Dispute Tribunal, to be determined by the United Nations;
- (c) A flat fee of \$16,778 per case filed before the United Nations Appeals Tribunal for adjudication of the appeal by one or both parties to the case;
- (d) A flat fee of \$600 for disposition by an order of an interlocutory motion filed by either party before the Appeals Tribunal;
- (e) A flat fee of \$10,486 (62.5 per cent of the adjusted rate) for disposition of an application for revision, interpretation, correction, execution or a combination thereof of a judgment issued by the Appeals Tribunal. Where an application was filed to correct an error made by the Appeals Tribunal in the judgment, no fee shall apply.

12 decisions were appealed to the United Nations Dispute Tribunal, compared with the 634 cases handled by its ombudsman in 2023.

Table

Management evaluation requests and formal appeals, 2023

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Requests</i>	<i>Appeals to Dispute Tribunal</i>	<i>Cases handled by the Ombudsman</i>
UNDP	33	3	248
UNFPA	16	3	65
UNICEF	23	5	162
UNOPS	10	1	57
UN-Women	1	0	31
UNHCR	90	12	634

59. Although the caseloads are not entirely comparable, as the ombudsman function resolves issues at the inception level and also serves the affiliated workforce, the Inspector is of the view that the numbers speak for themselves and provide compelling evidence for the added value of the ombudsman and mediation function and its contribution to cost-effectiveness and a reduction of unnecessary costly litigation and associated costs.

60. Furthermore, as identified through the interviews, the more outreach and communication that is undertaken to promote the function, the more visitors seek its assistance, which in the end reduces the number of conflicts entering the formal channels. Apart from the contribution to cost-effectiveness, its mandate of informal conflict resolution and prevention of conflicts makes the function indispensable for fostering organizational culture and a harmonious working environment. Organizational culture is deemed to be highly dependent on the engagement of its personnel, while the culture of an organization is found to be decisive for organizational success. Through its activities and services, the ombudsman and mediation functions made an important contribution to organizational success.

61. In view of the challenges that organizations are facing and the dramatic impact of the financial crisis, the ombudsman and mediation functions play an important role in supporting and enhancing the culture of the United Nations and the environment in which its personnel work. In the view of the Inspector, the services the functions provide are decisive for promoting a harmonious workplace and allow for organizational success. The ombudsman and mediation offices clearly add value and create savings for the benefit of their organizations.

V. Establishment and evolution of the ombudsman and mediation function

A. Organizational set-up

1. The three pillars of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services

(a) United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services

62. Since 2008, the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services³⁰ has been a single, integrated and decentralized office that comprises three pillars: (a) the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman; (b) the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes; and (c) the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator at UNHCR.³¹

63. With a decentralized structure aimed at ensuring global reach and accessibility, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman has regional offices in eight locations: Bangkok; Beirut; Entebbe, Uganda; Geneva; Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Nairobi; Santiago; and Vienna, in addition to its headquarters in New York. The Office includes a Mediation Service. The present review found that the Mediation Service was established to provide mediation services for the three pillars of UNOMS. However, a separate Mediation Unit was created at the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes. Given the existence of two mediation services, the Inspector sees an opportunity for streamlining and a joint delivery of mediation services within UNOMS as a whole, especially as it is part of the same system of administration of justice.

64. The Office's independence, decentralized presence and professional expertise have contributed to growing demand for its services. The Office has received increased requests both from organizations from within the Secretariat (such as ITC and OHCHR) and from entities outside it (such as ITU, WIPO and WMO) to formalize service provision arrangements, thus reflecting confidence in the Office's capacity to provide trusted, informal conflict resolution services. For further information, see annex I.

(b) Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes

65. The Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, based at Headquarters in New York, provides dedicated informal dispute resolution services to UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women. In addition to at its main office, regional ombudsman posts have been established since 2020 in Bangkok, Dakar (moved to Copenhagen for logistical reasons in July 2025) and Istanbul, Turkey, and there is a mediation specialist in Panama City. A recent evaluation of the structure of the Office recommended that it consider expanding its ombudsman coverage in Latin America to allow for close coordination and cooperation with the United Nations ombudsman office in the region and increase efficiencies.³²

66. The Office includes the Mediation Unit, which provides workplace mediation services to personnel of the five organizations. In addition, the Office established the

³⁰ Initially established in 2002 as the "Office of the Ombudsman".

³¹ All three pillars are guided by the Secretary-General's bulletin on terms of reference for the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services ([ST/SGB/2016/7](#)).

³² Expert evaluation on the structure of the Office of the Ombudsman for the United Nations Funds and Programmes, recommendation 5.

Global Mediation Panel in 2020, composed of pre-approved external on-call mediators.

67. The Office also has the Respectful Workplace Facilitators programme, introduced as a pilot in UNDP and UNFPA in 2019 and subsequently expanded to UN-Women in 2020. The programme trains peer staff to serve as additional resources for addressing workplace conflict and is now active in over 70 country offices, with more than 100 active facilitators.

(c) Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

68. The Office has evolved significantly since its establishment, with the mediation function dating back to 1993 and the formal ombudsman function established in 2008, following the adoption of General Assembly resolution [61/261](#). Operating independently from other departments, the Ombudsman at UNHCR previously reported to the Deputy High Commissioner and, since 1 October 2025, has reported to the High Commissioner.

69. In addition to its main office in Geneva, the Office has posts in Bangkok and Panama City, while its posts in Budapest, Nairobi and Pretoria were abolished in the context of the financial crisis in October 2025. The lack of a formal presence in the Middle East and North Africa regions, as well as elsewhere in Africa, is compensated by field missions and virtual outreach. This decentralization enhances the Office's ability to respond to local contexts and cultural nuances, although sustaining this presence remains dependent on available resources.

70. UNHCR has established a support desk for workplace concerns, a triage and referral platform managed by the Ethics Office to assist personnel who are uncertain about where to direct their concerns. Notably, 47 per cent of the cases received by the support desk in 2024 were referred to the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, underscoring its central role in informal conflict resolution.³³

71. Although the Secretary-General's bulletin on terms of reference for the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services ([ST/SGB/2016/7](#)) outlines how UNOMS operates as a single, integrated and decentralized office structured in three pillars, including the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes and the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator at UNHCR, the review found that, in practice, these offices function as three separate and independent offices.

72. Given the current financial constraints and organizational challenges, the Inspector considers that fully implementing the integrated three-pillar model, as envisioned in the Secretary-General's bulletin, would be a strategic step towards enhancing coherence, fostering synergies and improving overall efficiency. This approach would also allow for better utilization of the geographical coverage and resources of all three offices, thereby contributing to greater cost-effectiveness and operational alignment. **The Inspector therefore suggests considering the full integration of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes and the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator at UNHCR into UNOMS, as envisaged by the Secretary-General in [ST/SGB/2016/7](#).**

³³ UNHCR, Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, Year in Review: 2024 report, 2025.

2. The ombudsman and mediation functions in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme

(a) United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

73. The ombudsman function at UNRWA was formally established in 2021 following the conclusion of a service agreement with UNOMS. Under the new framework, a regional ombudsman position was created to provide informal conflict resolution services to UNRWA staff and complementary personnel.

74. In 2023, following a decision by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the position became an ombudsman post, managed by UNRWA located in Amman. In addition to the ombudsman, the office currently operates with an additional conflict resolution specialist, one conflict resolution professional (consultant) and one local administrative support person. Given the wide geographical scope of UNRWA operations and a workforce exceeding 30,000 personnel, remote service delivery, including online appointments and virtual events, remains essential.

(b) World Food Programme

75. WFP maintains a dedicated, stand-alone function through its Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services, established in 2005 in response to staff feedback through the Global Staff Survey.

76. The Office is based at WFP headquarters in Rome, with a field presence supported by two outposted ombudsman officers in Nairobi and Dakar, covering the Africa region, as well as a consultant in Amman, supporting the Middle East and Asia. Plans to further strengthen field coverage to better serve the global workforce are on hold given the significant budget cut at WFP.

77. Since 2007, the Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services has managed the Respectful Workplace Advisers³⁴ network. Initially launched as an inter-agency pilot project in West Africa in collaboration with UNHCR and UNICEF, the network has steadily expanded since 2012. As of 2023, it included nearly 200 peer-nominated volunteers across WFP country offices, sub-offices, regional bureaux and headquarters. Advisers provide confidential, informal support to colleagues facing workplace issues, in addition to fulfilling their regular duties. They operate under dedicated terms of reference and a signed confidentiality agreement, working closely with the Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services.

3. The ombudsman and mediation functions in specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency

78. Larger organizations such as FAO, ILO and WHO have set up a stand-alone internal ombudsman and mediation function and thus follow more closely the model of the United Nations.³⁵ Considering the size of these organizations, in terms of total number of employees, opting for a stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function is in line with the recommendation made by JIU in its 2015 report.³⁶ Although it is a medium-size organization, ICAO³⁷ also set up a stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function in 2025.

³⁴ Title changed in 2025 to Respectful Workplace Allies.

³⁵ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 are as follows: FAO, \$2,398.5 million revenue and 15,639 personnel; UNESCO, \$842.1 million revenue and 4,762 personnel; and WHO, \$3,341.4 million revenue and 24,918 personnel.

³⁶ JIU/REP/2015/6, para. 42: “an organization with approximately 2,500 staff may want to consider employing a full-time ombudsman”.

³⁷ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 for ICAO: Can\$ 327.8 million and 912 personnel.

79. Another group of specialized agencies, mostly of medium size, have chosen other mechanisms for informal conflict resolution. ITU (which at the time of the present review had no function) and WIPO (which at the time of the present review had its own ombudsman and mediation function) concluded a joint arrangement with UNOMS for the provision of ombudsman and mediation services.³⁸ Under the memorandum of understanding concluded in November 2024, the two organizations will finance a P-5 post to be established for that purpose in Geneva under the authority of UNOMS.

80. Smaller organizations such as IMO, UPU and UN Tourism have adopted different models.³⁹ UPU outsourced the ombudsman and mediation function to the private sector, while UN Tourism works with an internal combined function and IMO uses the external services of the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution on a case-by-case basis.

81. Some organizations, although they are at or above the threshold for establishing a stand-alone internal ombudsman function as indicated in the 2015 JIU report, have no internal ombudsman and/or mediation mechanism in place for informal conflict resolution (IAEA and UNIDO).⁴⁰ They use other channels to try to resolve conflicts informally.

(a) Specialized agencies with an internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function

(i) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

82. The function mandated for informal conflict resolution at FAO was first established in December 2009 as a combined post of Ethics Officer and Ombudsman. Following the 2015 JIU report, the FAO Council in 2019 endorsed the separation of the combined post of Ethics Officer and Ombudsman, and a stand-alone Ombuds Office in FAO became operational in 2020.

83. Since 2023, the Office has been supported by four Ombuds Specialists (consultants) covering the English- and French-speaking African countries and the Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean, Near East and Europe regions.

84. In 2023, FAO also launched the Respectful Workplace Facilitator network, comprising 150 facilitators supporting its employees to address concerns. Facilitators do not handle specific cases but assist the Ombudsman in finding solutions.

(ii) International Civil Aviation Organization

85. ICAO is the most recent organization to establish its own stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function. In 2024, the organization (on the basis of a decision by its executive head) abolished the dual role (ombudsman services performed in addition to regular duties related to conference management) and established a full-time post of Ombudsman. The Inspector commends the organization for establishing this post, which reflects the importance given to informal conflict resolution and the prevention of conflicts for the sake of the culture of the organization.

86. During the interviews, however, it transpired that the newly created office has no budget allocated to it and needs to request resources from the executive office for conducting its activities. To address this shortcoming, **the Inspector suggests that**

³⁸ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 are as follows: ITU, SwF 180.7 million revenue and 1,001 personnel; and WIPO, SwF 489.3 million revenue and 1,705 personnel.

³⁹ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 are as follows: IMO, £68.3 million revenue and 321 personnel; UPU, SwF 97.4 million revenue and 276 personnel; and UN-Tourism, €28.6 million revenue and 207 personnel.

⁴⁰ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 are as follows: UNIDO, €336 million revenue and 2,281 personnel; and IAEA, €738.2 million revenue and 3,160 personnel.

ICAO assign a budget to its ombudsman function to strengthen its operational independence of the function.

87. To better respond to and serve its personnel globally, ICAO established in 2024 a network of trained Trustful Workplace Ambassadors. In addition to their regular duties, these ambassadors will act as additional access points to the informal conflict resolution process under the Ombudsman's direct supervision.

(iii) International Labour Organization

88. The function in ILO was established by the Collective Agreement on the Procedure for the Resolution of Grievances between the International Labour Office and the Staff Union, endorsed in 2000. This agreement was replaced in 2004 by the Collective Agreement on Conflict Prevention and Resolution between the International Labour Office and the Staff Union, during which the title of the function changed from Ombudsperson to Mediator. The main difference between the ILO Ombudsperson (2001-2004) and the ILO Mediator (2004 to present) is that the former Ombudsman had investigative powers and processed formal grievances.

89. Despite the use of the title of Mediator, the present review found that among the activities of the ILO Mediator, typical mediation services constituted only a small percentage of the workload, while the majority consisted of ombudsman activities. The Mediator Office in ILO also covers ombudsman and mediation services for the ILO International Training Centre in Turin, Italy, and the International Social Security Association.

90. Previously, ILO had a network of facilitators to enhance who supported the Mediator in providing additional regional access points. The voluntary part-time role held by selected staff members, in addition to their original positions, had limited functions, such as intakes and referrals, exercised under the Mediator's direct supervision.

91. While the former network is no longer active, its original purpose to enhance regional access and outreach remains relevant. **The Inspector suggests that ILO consider improving regional access, either by revisiting the network of facilitators model or exploring other mechanisms.**

(iv) World Health Organization (serving also the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS)

92. The WHO Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services was first established in 1974. The mandate of the ombudsman and mediation function not only covers WHO headquarters but also extends to the following entities administered by WHO headquarters: International Agency for Research on Cancer; United Nations International Computing Centre; UNAIDS; and WHO satellite offices such as the Global Conference and Training Centre, the Global Service Centre, the WHO Centre for Health Development (Kobe), the WHO Lyon Office and the WHO Office at the United Nations.

93. The Office is based at WHO headquarters in Geneva. The regional ombudsmen in the six WHO regional offices report to their respective WHO regional directors and are neither recruited by nor report to the Ombudsperson at WHO headquarters.

(v) UNAIDS

94. UNAIDS does not maintain a stand-alone internal ombudsman and mediation function. Instead, this function is administered by the WHO Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services.

95. In addition to its services, the WHO ombudsman and mediation function also provides upward feedback to UNAIDS leadership on systemic issues and emerging trends. This feedback mechanism supports leadership in identifying and addressing root causes of conflict, thereby contributing to a healthier organizational culture.⁴¹ The ombudsman function also collaborates closely with the UNAIDS Ethics Office to promote a shared understanding of organizational policies and practices and to address matters of mutual concern.⁴²

(b) Special cases

96. An alternative to not establishing an internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function is for smaller organizations to outsource the function.⁴³ Among the United Nations system organizations that use such a model, ITU, WIPO (even though it does not fit into the category of smaller organizations considering its total number of personnel) and WMO have concluded agreements with UNOMS for the provision of ombudsman and mediation services, albeit with different modalities. Based on lessons learned, UNOMS is currently reviewing agreements with view to streamlining them as much as possible. UNESCO is included among the “special cases”, as it currently does not have any stand-alone internal ombudsman and mediation function.

(i) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

97. UNESCO does not have a stand-alone internal ombudsman function. While the organization initially established a post of Ombudsman in 1974, it was abolished in 1992 and replaced with a college of mediators, composed of four retired staff members serving on a voluntary, pro bono basis. The college of mediators, which is placed under the Assistant Director-General for Administration and Management, has operated without significant changes in mandate over the past decade. It serves all UNESCO personnel.

98. Eligibility is limited to retirees under the age of 68. Beyond this age criterion, there is no structured selection process, standardized skills assessment or requirement for professional mediation training. While this set-up is appreciated by the Organization for its cost-effectiveness and institutional knowledge, the present review found that the appointed mediators are neither trained to engage in mediation or to resolve disputes informally nor do the members have a professional background and expertise in the subject matter. Furthermore, the former employment of some of them in human resources roles bears the risk of conflict of interest.

99. In UNESCO (in contrast to other organizations), the mandate of the Ethics Office covers many ombudsman activities, such as shuttle diplomacy, conciliation and mediation. Its terms of reference include “informal conflict resolution”, in particular for conflicts involving harassment. As a result, the UNESCO head of ethics handles around 300 cases related to informal conflict resolution annually, eight times as many as the college of mediators, which dealt with 38 cases in 2023. These numbers indicate that there is a greater tendency for the Organization’s workforce to approach the Ethics Office than the mediators for informal conflict resolution.

100. Following a recommendation of the UNESCO Oversight Advisory Committee in its 2023 annual report, the UNESCO Executive Board requested a feasibility study on the creation of an internal stand-alone ombudsman office. The feasibility study identified the need for an ombudsman function in UNESCO while also recommending a revision of the terms of reference of the Ethics Office to better align them with its core mandate.

⁴¹ WHO, Report of the Ombudsman (23 December 2020), EB148/INF./2, para. 3 and annex.

⁴² UNAIDS, Report of the Ethics Office (11 June 2021), UNAIDS/PCB (48)/21.6.

⁴³ JIU/REP/2015/6, para. 42: “Organizations with 1,000 or more staff may want to consider employing a part-time ombudsman or providing a joint service with another organization”.

101. The study, including a proposed decision by management to establish an ombudsman function in UNESCO, was submitted to the Executive Board. The Board expressed its support for establishing this function; its implementation, however, remains uncertain due to funding constraints.

102. In the view of the Inspector, the current situation, in which the Ethics Office performs the responsibilities of an ombudsman (at the expense of core ethics responsibilities) and the members of the college of mediators are not professional mediators, is not conducive to offering a workforce of 4,762 employees the appropriate means for informal conflict resolution and therefore needs revision.

103. Based on the findings of the present review and in concurrence with the feasibility study, **the Inspector suggests professionalizing the informal conflict resolution system in UNESCO through the establishment of a stand-alone internal ombudsman and mediation function at the earliest.**

(ii) World Meteorological Organization

104. Prior to 2017, WMO did not have an internal ombudsman and mediation function, as the relatively low total number of employees⁴⁴ did not justify the establishment of an internal stand-alone function. Following the recommendation of JIU in its 2015 report,⁴⁵ a suitable alternative solution was sought through an outsourcing arrangement.

105. This solution was facilitated by the organization's change in jurisdiction from the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal to the United Nations Appeals Tribunal in 2017, which led the Organization to the acquisition of a "full package" of services from the United Nations Secretariat, including the Office of Staff Legal Assistance, the Ethics Office and UNOMS, while the required review of internal appeals at the pre-tribunal stage (management evaluation) was outsourced to UNICEF. In 2017, WMO signed a memorandum of understanding with UNOMS for the provision of ombudsman and mediation services through the UNOMS regional ombudsman in Geneva at a fixed annual rate. The memorandum remains unchanged and is still in force. In 2020, the organization also accepted the jurisdiction of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal.

106. The present review found, however, that the memorandum of understanding does not include any reporting provisions on the services provided, or on any systemic issues identified to WMO management. In the view of the Inspector, including a provision on reporting in such an agreement would be of added value for the organization concerned. Against this background, **the Inspector suggests that, at the time of the next renewal of the memorandum of understanding, a provision on reporting be introduced to allow WMO to benefit from the findings of the ombudsman on trends and systemic issues identified.**

(iii) International Telecommunication Union and World Intellectual Property Organization

107. ITU and WIPO have recently adopted an alternative model, marking a first among United Nations system organizations. In November 2024, the two organizations signed a memorandum of understanding with UNOMS for the provision of ombudsman and mediation services. Under the agreement, UNOMS will establish

⁴⁴ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 are as follows: WMO, \$114.5 million revenue and 450 personnel.

⁴⁵ [JIU/REP/2015/6](#), para. 41: "Some organizations believe that smaller entities would best be served if the ombudsman function was shared with other organizations, similar to the model used by the United Nations funds and programmes."

an Ombudsman post in Geneva, which will be jointly funded by ITU and WIPO on a 50/50 basis for an initial period of one year.

108. The decision to adopt a joint model emerged from distinct organizational needs. At the time of the review, WIPO was operating a stand-alone ombudsman function, established in 2009. However, the post had been vacant for some time, with services provided by a temporary ombudsperson on a consultancy contract working part time. ITU, by contrast, had no ombudsman and mediation function in place. Instead, it relied on two internal staff members acting as voluntary mediators, a model widely viewed by staff as ineffective and unsustainable. Following the resignation of one voluntary mediator and difficulties in securing interim support, ITU leadership, in line with its new “organizational excellence” initiative under the 2023 transformation agenda, launched a re-evaluation of internal dispute resolution mechanisms.

109. The shared Ombudsman is expected to assume duties at the ITU and WIPO headquarters in Geneva in 2026. During the first pilot year, the newly appointed Ombudsman will allocate services equally between ITU and WIPO (50/50). The collaboration with UNOMS is seen by both organizations as a strategic advantage, as its regional presence could potentially support the regional offices of ITU and WIPO in the future.

(c) Smaller organizations

110. IMO, UN Tourism and UPU are among the smallest JIU participating organizations for which outsourcing the ombudsman and mediation function is an option given their limited workforce sizes, overall annual budgets and low formal case volumes.⁴⁶ Each of these three organizations has chosen a different approach for making ombudsman and mediation services available to its personnel.

(i) International Maritime Organization

111. Recognizing the size of the IMO secretariat and the low volume of internal appeal cases (no more than four formal cases over the past five years), the organization concluded that having an internal ombudsman function was neither necessary nor feasible. Instead, it relies on a combination of internal and external mediation mechanisms. IMO trained between 10 and 12 staff members from various departments, in addition to their primary duties as mediators and although not formally certified, to provide informal dispute resolution services upon request. Furthermore, certified mediators from panels maintained by the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution based in London, who operate independently, can provide services on demand.

112. At the time of the review, IMO was one of the organizations (together with ICAO, UPU and WMO, all of which had accepted the statute of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal earlier) that was in the process of finalizing an agreement with the Office of Administration of Justice to accept the jurisdiction of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal by June 2025, in addition to its previous acceptance of the statute of the United Nations Appeals Tribunal. As part of this transition, IMO will review further options, including formalizing mediation.

(ii) Universal Postal Union

113. UPU is the only organization that outsources the provision of ombudsman and mediation services to the private sector; it does so under a four-year contract, renewable once, following an open tendering process. The current service provider,

⁴⁶ Financial revenue and personnel figures for 2023 are as follows: IMO, £87.2 million revenue and 321 personnel; UN-Tourism, €28.6 million revenue and 207 personnel; and UPU, SwF 116.6 million revenue and 276 personnel.

based in Geneva, was appointed in 2021 and granted a second and final term in 2024. She operates under the direct supervision of the Human Resources Directorate, an arrangement that is in conflict with the Standard Operating Procedures of the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators. **The Inspector therefore suggests that UPU move the supervisory role to its executive head.**

(iii) World Tourism Organization

114. In UN Tourism, informal conflict resolution (referred to by the organization as “informal mediation”) is handled internally through a dual role carried out by a single staff member in addition to his or her regular duties in the human resources entity.

115. In the view of the Inspector, this arrangement does not offer the necessary level of independence, impartiality or professional expertise. **The Inspector therefore suggests that UN Tourism discontinue the current model and give its workforce access to professional ombudsman and mediation services, either through an agreement with an existing United Nations ombudsman function or by engaging external experts.**

(d) Organizations without an ombudsman or mediation function

116. IAEA and UNIDO are among the JIU participating organizations that lack an internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function, even though their staffing is at or above the recommended threshold for establishing their own internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function in accordance with the 2015 JIU report.⁴⁷ Services for informal conflict resolution are also not provided by the ombudsman and mediation function of another organization or by external professional mediators or similar experts. Instead, both organizations use alternative methods.

(i) United Nations Industrial Development Organization

117. To support informal conflict resolution and as a substitute for an ombudsman and mediation function, the organization in 2024 established the Employee Relations Unit in the Human Resources Department to assist staff and non-staff to resolve their conflicts informally. The Ethics Officer and Staff Council also play a role in informal conflict resolution. The present review found, however, that the services provided were primarily geared towards advising and training managers rather than addressing complaints of individual staff members.

118. Being neither independent nor impartial as part of the Human Resources Department, the Employee Relations Unit can hardly be considered a substitute for an ombudsman and mediation function, as the role of the Department, among other things, is to take administrative decisions. Thus, it cannot serve as a neutral actor in informal conflict resolution.

119. In the view of the Inspector, this arrangement does not offer the necessary level of independence, impartiality or professional expertise. Therefore, **the Inspector suggests that UNIDO discontinue the current model and give its workforce access to professional ombudsman and mediation services, either by establishing its own internal stand-alone function or through an arrangement with an existing United Nations ombudsman function.**

⁴⁷ JIU/REP/2015/6, para. 42: “An organization with approximately 2,500 staff may want to consider employing a full-time ombudsman.”

(ii) International Atomic Energy Agency

120. Similarly, IAEA, despite reaching the 2015 JIU staffing threshold, does not have an internal stand-alone ombudsman or mediation function or an arrangement with another organization for the provision of ombudsman and mediation services. The organization had previously explored the possibility of sharing ombudsman and mediation services with other international organizations, an option that was deemed unfeasible. Due to limitations in human and financial resource capacities, IAEA did not establish a stand-alone ombudsman or mediation function and instead decided to facilitate informal conflict resolution through the Staff Relations Unit established within the Human Resources Department.

121. Structurally, the function is resourced with a Staff Relations Specialist (P-4) reporting to the Head of Human Resources Management, a Human Resources Specialist (P-4) focusing on performance management, two Staff Relations Officers (P-3) and a Staff Relations Assistant (G-5), all full-time and reporting to the Staff Relations Specialist.

122. Being part of the Human Resources Department, the Unit lacks the required independence, objectivity and impartiality and suffers from the inherent risk of conflicts of interest, as its staff members can be called by the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal, before which they have to disclose details of the issues and cases they handle.

123. Furthermore, noting the resourcing of the Staff Relations Unit, the Inspector fails to see why budgetary and human resources constraints prevented the organization from establishing its own ombudsman function or, at a minimum, concluding an arrangement with the ombudsman function of another organization for the provision of these services. **The Inspector expresses serious concerns and requests IAEA to implement the recommendation from the 2015 JIU report to establish its own internal stand-alone ombudsman and mediation function to give its workforce access to professional ombudsman and mediation services.**

B. Policy framework, mandate and terms of reference of the ombudsman and mediation function

124. The work of the ombudsman and mediation functions in the United Nations system organizations is guided by a policy framework composed of a number of key documents, including terms of reference, the Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators developed by the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators,⁴⁸ standard operating procedures, provisions in staff rules and regulations on informal conflict resolution and, in some cases, mediation-specific policies and a range of administrative and supplementary policies. Collectively, these documents define the mandate, scope of work, professional standards and operational parameters of the function, and contribute to ensuring consistency, integrity and effectiveness across the system.

125. A foundational component of this framework is the terms of reference, which formally establish the mandate and scope of the ombudsman and/or mediation function. At the time of the present review, 8⁴⁹ out of 11 ombudsman and/or mediation functions in United Nations system organizations had approved terms of reference. Regarding the exceptions, the terms of reference at UNRWA had been drafted during

⁴⁸ www.un.org/ombudsman/sites/www.un.org.ombudsman/files/standards-of-practice-network-en.pdf.

⁴⁹ UNOMS, Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, FAO, ILO, UNHCR, WFP, WHO and WIPO.

the time of the review but were not yet finalized. UNESCO, on the other hand, does not maintain a stand-alone terms of reference document but instead relies on the section of its Human Resources Manual entitled “Item 9.4 mediation”, which was last updated in 2010. Similarly, ICAO does not have formal terms of reference in place, and the role of the ombudsperson is currently defined only through other descriptions.

126. The review further found that even where terms of reference exist, they are often outdated. With the exception of two organizations (FAO and WIPO), all existing terms of reference had not been revised since 2016 or earlier, with one entity (WHO) still operating under a version adopted in 2007. Given the substantial evolution of the ombudsman and mediation functions over the past decade, including expanded responsibilities and greater engagement in proactive conflict prevention, this lack of regular review represents a significant institutional risk.

127. The Inspector reiterates the importance of ensuring that terms of reference remain relevant and reflective of evolving mandates and operational realities. Furthermore, they should take into account the provisions of the Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators. Considering these findings, the Inspector reiterates recommendation 1⁵⁰ from the 2015 JIU report, which remains highly relevant, and urges organizations to implement it at the earliest. Furthermore, the Inspector underlines the need for organizations to develop and adopt terms of reference for those ombudsman and mediation functions that do not have them.

128. The following recommendation is intended to enhance transparency and accountability.

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

129. In parallel, many organizations reported maintaining standard operating procedures to operationalize ombudsman and mediation services. These procedures support internal consistency, define procedural steps and clarify roles and responsibilities. The Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators, most recently updated in 2023, have been widely referenced across entities as serving as a common foundation for principles such as independence, confidentiality, informality, impartiality and neutrality.

130. In terms of mediation-specific guidance, only a few functions (UNOMS, Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, UNHCR, WFP and WHO) reported having dedicated instruments such as mediation rules, a code of conduct for mediators, a framework on mediation services or a formal mediation policy in place, the majority of which had last been updated in 2024. To develop a general framework for mediation guidelines, the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators has initiated a working group.

⁵⁰ “The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations, in consultation with staff representatives and the existing ombudsmen, should review, update and disseminate across their respective organizations the terms of reference of the ombudsman, giving due consideration to the direction provided by the present report and using a staff-management consultation mechanism.”

131. Taken together, these instruments form the backbone of the regulatory and operational framework enabling ombudsman and mediation services across the United Nations system. In the view of the Inspector, sustained attention to the continued validity, clarity and accessibility of these documents will be essential for maintaining the independence, credibility and effectiveness of the function.

132. The core responsibilities of the ombudsman and mediation functions are broadly consistent across the system and typically include a range of informal conflict resolution tools, including mediation, shuttle diplomacy and referral, as well as the identification of systemic trends. However, the mandate of the function was found to have evolved in recent years, with several organizations expanding their services to include conflict coaching, restorative dialogue, team facilitation, and awareness and prevention initiatives, reflecting changing organizational needs and an increasing emphasis on early conflict prevention and a harmonious workplace culture.

133. In some cases, the offices have also been invited to take on ad hoc responsibilities, such as supporting internal campaigns or facilitating dialogue on sensitive issues, including racism and sexual harassment. These roles are often assumed in response to internal initiatives or management requests. While such engagement can offer opportunities for collaboration, offices emphasized the importance of preserving operational independence and neutrality.

134. In all organizations, the mandate of the ombudsman and mediation function extends beyond staff to encompass various categories of the affiliated workforce. This marks a notable shift from the findings in the 2015 JIU report, which included that access to ombudsman services was, in most cases, restricted to staff members. Organizations now routinely include consultants, individual contractors, United Nations Volunteers, interns and other affiliated personnel within the scope of the services of the ombudsman and mediation function.

135. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, this expansion was formalized through General Assembly resolution 78/248 of 22 December 2023, in which the Assembly regularized a pilot initiative enabling non-staff personnel to access the services of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services within existing resources. All other organizations with an ombudsman and mediation function reported similar inclusion. The Inspector considers this a good practice given the clearly disadvantaged and unprotected environment in which the affiliated workforce operates, lacking access to the formal justice system. This evolution reflects a shared institutional commitment to fairness, inclusivity and equal access to informal conflict resolution, regardless of contractual status. For further details, see annex I.

C. Professional standards and best practices

136. The Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators, developed through the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators, draw upon international best practices, including those of the International Ombuds Association (IOA)⁵¹ and those contained in the 2015 JIU report. These standards are based on five core principles: independence, impartiality, confidentiality, neutrality and informality. These principles ensure that ombudsman offices serve as designated neutral resources, offering confidential and impartial services to address workplace concerns through informal means.

137. IOA continues to play an important role in promoting professional standards of practice and offering practitioner certification and continuing education. While IOA

⁵¹ See www.ombudsassociation.org/standards-of-practice-code-of-ethics.

is widely recognized, interviewees stressed that its value for globally operating international organizations such as the United Nations is limited, considering their mandate and activities. The limitations result primarily from the focus of IOA on the private and academic sectors in North America, where most of its membership is based.

138. The present review found that, in the field of informal dispute resolution, in addition to IOA, there is a wide range of available educational opportunities, accreditations and certifications. These offerings vary in scope and provide a foundational understanding of ombudsman work. Many, however, are tailored to specific job markets or sectors and are not directly applicable to the United Nations system.

139. Within the United Nations system, professional development is supported through inter-agency collaboration and knowledge-sharing platforms such as the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators in CEB member organizations and the Network of Ombuds and Mediators of Multilateral Organizations (NOMMO; formerly Ombudsmen and Mediators of the United Nations and Related International Organizations (UNARIO)).⁵²

140. UNOMS plays a key role in promoting coherence and excellence across the system. UNOMS training⁵³ and peer exchange initiatives are designed to ensure that ombudsman professionals remain current with evolving legal frameworks, organizational dynamics and staff needs.

141. In the field of mediation and coaching, there is also a broad array of training and certification programmes available. The Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes provides a structured curriculum that includes a one-day course entitled “Mediation: the right choice at the right time” and a two-day course on conflict management training designed to build foundational mediation skills and conflict resolution techniques.

142. There is no uniform approach for recruiting ombudsmen and mediators across United Nations system organizations. Overall, organizations consider a combination of education and professional experience in fields such as alternative dispute resolution, public administration, law, social sciences and human resources as a solid basis for selection to ombudsman and mediation roles. This is often combined with desirable training or certification in informal dispute resolution. These criteria are viewed by organizations as a strong foundation for attracting candidates who also support the broader United Nations goals of achieving gender balance and geographical diversity.

143. Only ILO and UPU include a certification or accreditation as an ombudsman practitioner among their eligibility criteria. For the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, FAO, ICAO, UNHCR and WHO, it remains a desirable criterion in the selection process. For UNOMS, UNESCO, UNRWA, WFP and WIPO, certification or accreditation is neither a requirement nor a desired criterion. For further details, see annex II.A.

⁵² The name was changed from UNARIO to NOMMO by a decision of its members at the twenty-first annual meeting, held from 9 to 11 September 2025.

⁵³ See <https://fpombudsman.org/training>.

VI. Independence of the ombudsman and mediation function

A. Independence as a prerequisite for effectiveness

144. Independence is a foundational principle for an effective ombudsman and mediation function. The credibility, utility and value of the ombudsman role hinges on its operational and institutional independence. Without such independence, the function cannot effectively fulfil its mandate as a neutral and confidential resource for staff, nor can it support early conflict resolution or contribute meaningfully to a healthy workplace environment.

145. The principle of independence is articulated in numerous standards and resolutions, including the Secretary-General's bulletin on terms of reference for the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services ([ST/SGB/2016/7](#)) and the Standards of Practice for United Nations system Ombudsman and Mediators. These norms define independence both institutionally and operationally. Institutionally, it requires that the ombudsman office not be subordinate to any management unit, and that the head of the function report directly to the executive head of the organization. Operationally, independence is characterized by sole discretion in managing cases, the ability to act free from interference, and the authority to determine the scope and manner of engagement with staff concerns.

146. In its 2015 report, JIU recognized that the absence of full independence, either perceived or actual, undermines the ombudsman's ability to be effective. The present review builds upon these concerns and reaffirms that independence remains a prerequisite not only for effective service delivery but also for the integrity of the broader system of administration of justice. Personnel may be reluctant to seek assistance from an ombudsman perceived as aligned with management or constrained in the ability to act. This undermines the early resolution of conflicts and can contribute to a culture of mistrust or disengagement. Independence therefore not only supports the operational effectiveness of the function but also contributes to a healthy workplace culture, encouraging staff to raise concerns without fear of retaliation or bias.

147. Independence further enables the ombudsman to surface broader systemic issues and advise leadership accordingly. For this role to be effective, the ombudsman must hold a sufficiently senior position and have direct and unimpeded access to senior leadership. When the ombudsman is positioned too low in the hierarchy or reporting lines are unclear, it becomes difficult to bring forward broader concerns.

148. To be effective, independence must be protected through formal provisions and continuously reinforced in practice. Best practices include transparent and inclusive selection processes involving staff representatives and management, term limits and post-employment restrictions. Such measures help protect the individual serving in the role from both real and perceived pressure. Organizations that fail to ensure the independence of their ombudsman and mediation function risk weakening the credibility and trust essential to informal conflict resolution. Conversely, those that strengthen this pillar are better positioned to foster a harmonious workplace, reduce litigation and promote a culture of accountability and respect.

B. Assessment of independence

1. Institutional positioning

149. Across organizations, the concept of independence as it applies to the ombudsman and mediation function is articulated in formal documentation in various ways. Most organizations reference independence in their terms of reference or

equivalent documents, although the level of detail differs considerably. In some organizations,⁵⁴ independence is explicitly defined in institutional and operational terms, highlighting that the function is structurally separate from management and that all case-related decisions lie solely with the ombudsman. These definitions emphasize a clear separation from management and formal decision-making structures.

150. In others,⁵⁵ references to independence are more general, without outlining specific institutional safeguards. Where such clarity is lacking, the function's ability to assert its autonomy may be undermined and staff confidence in its impartiality may be affected. In the view of the Inspector, clearly defining and operationalizing the principle of independence in governing documents is therefore essential to reinforcing the integrity and institutional positioning of the ombudsman and mediation function. **The Inspector suggests that organizations review the relevant documents with a view to defining the independence of the function in institutional and operational terms.**

2. Level of position

151. The level of the position held by the head of the ombudsman and mediation function varies across organizations. At the most senior level, the head of UNOMS is appointed at the Assistant Secretary-General level and provides services to the Secretariat and its departments and offices. This level of seniority reflects an institutional commitment to preserving the independence and reach of the function. Starting in 2026, ITU and WIPO will utilize the services of UNOMS under a memorandum of understanding, including through a newly appointed ombudsman at the P-5 level.

152. Among the organizations that maintain dedicated ombudsman offices, the head of the ombudsman function is at the D-1 level in four entities: Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, UNHCR, WFP and WHO (which also supports UNAIDS). However, during the review period, UNHCR downgraded this position to the P-5 level due to dramatic funding constraints. A further seven organizations, including FAO, ICAO, ILO and UNRWA, place the head of the function at the P-5 level. A comparison with the ethics function shows that, in the majority of organizations (13 out of 22), the heads of the ombudsman and ethics functions are placed at equivalent levels. For further details see annex II.A.

3. Selection and appointment

153. The independence of the ombudsman and mediation function is significantly influenced by the procedures governing the selection and appointment of its head. In its report, JIU identified this area as the most critical in need of improvement, suggesting that selection processes ensure both the actual and perceived independence, neutrality and impartiality of the function. Key safeguards were identified, including the involvement of staff representatives. In its 2015 review, JIU found that “expressions such as ‘in consultation with’, ‘following input from’ or ‘in agreement with’ to describe the involvement of staff representatives in the ombudsman appointment process may appear satisfactory in a written document; however, in the absence of a common understanding of what they mean in practice, the process will not be improved”.⁵⁶

154. The present review found that the authority to appoint the head of the ombudsman function rests with the executive head in all organizations reviewed. For

⁵⁴ Such as UNOMS, Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, WFP, WHO and WIPO.

⁵⁵ Such as ICAO, ILO, UNHCR and UNRWA.

⁵⁶ JIU/REP/2015/6, paras. 48–49.

nine ombudsman and mediation functions (UNOMS, FAO, ICAO, ILO, UNESCO, UNHCR, WFP, WHO and WIPO), staff representatives are involved in the selection process. This participation takes various forms, ranging from full membership on the selection panel, as is the case in UNOMS, to participation in an observer capacity in other settings. Active engagement reinforces the credibility of the process and enhances staff confidence in the impartiality of the selected candidate. In a few organizations (Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, UNRWA and UPU) staff representatives are not involved at all. The absence of staff consultation in these cases may undermine perceptions of neutrality and reduce institutional trust in the function.

4. Dismissal/removal

155. Across all organizations reviewed, the decision to dismiss or remove the head of the ombudsman function rests solely with the executive head. While this is a common arrangement, it can present a risk to perceived independence if not counterbalanced by procedural safeguards. For the head of UNOMS, the decision is taken by the Secretary-General and, in the case of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, the authority lies with the Executive Director of UNICEF (in consultation with the executive heads of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN-Women), as the head of the office is contractually appointed under that organization. Staff representative involvement in dismissal procedures is rare. Only three organizations (ICAO, ILO and WFP) formally involve or consult staff representatives in the dismissal or removal process. In all other cases, the decision is taken unilaterally by the executive head. Introducing structured procedures, including staff consultation or oversight body notification, would provide additional institutional protection and reinforce the independence and continuity of the role.

156. The following recommendation is intended to enhance the transparency and accountability in the selection process for the heads of the ombudsman and mediation functions.

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.

5. Term limits

157. Term limits are widely recognized as a good practice for safeguarding the independence of the ombudsman and mediation function, as well as of other accountability and integrity functions. The majority of the heads of the ombudsman and/or mediation functions have established term limits of four or five years, with several allowing for renewal for one additional term. Only two organizations (ICAO and UNRWA) have no formal term limits in place, creating a potential risk to independence by allowing indefinite service at the discretion of the executive head. For further details, see annex II. **The Inspector suggests that ICAO and UNRWA introduce term limits for the heads of their ombudsman and mediation function at the earliest.**

6. Post-employment restrictions

158. Post-employment restrictions serve as a complementary safeguard to prevent conflicts of interest and protect the perceived impartiality of the function. Most organizations prohibit the heads of the ombudsman function from taking up further employment within the same organization following the end of their term. However, ICAO and UNRWA do not currently apply such restrictions. The absence of this safeguard may undermine the perceived neutrality of the function and could compromise trust in its independence, in particular in cases in which the ombudsman returns to a staff position within the same organization.

159. The following recommendation is intended to enhance transparency and accountability.

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.

7. Consecutive contracts during one term

160. The Inspector noted with concern that, in some organizations, the term of office of the head of the ombudsman and mediation function is split into several consecutive contracts in addition to an initial probationary period. This is especially the case for FAO, ICAO, ILO and WHO. The Inspector considers this piecemeal approach a serious impediment to the independence and security of tenure of the ombudsman and mediation function. Therefore, she is of the view that the organizations concerned need to discontinue this practice.

161. Similar concerns were expressed in the JIU review of the ethics function in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2021/5), in which it was stated “the practice of issuing multiple contracts over the period of one term of office in a piecemeal manner is inconsistent with the role of the head of ethics and shows a lack of understanding of the standards that apply to this position. This practice constitutes a serious impediment to the required level of independence and security of tenure of the head of the ethics function”. The Inspector underlines that this concern and the resulting recommendation apply equally to the heads of other integrity and accountability functions such as the ombudsman and mediation functions.

162. A related good practice observed in nine organizations, including the United Nations Secretariat, UNHCR and WFP, is the issuance of a single contract covering the entire term. This approach avoids reliance on multiple or short-term contracts, probationary periods or periodic renewals, all of which could create dependencies or perceptions of conditional tenure. Ensuring that the contract aligns with the full duration of the designated term reinforces the stability and operational independence of the role.

8. The case of the World Health Organization

163. With regard to the position of the head of the Office of the Ombudsperson at WHO, the present review found that it took two years to fill the post, which had been vacant since mid-July 2022. Although a five-year term is foreseen for the incumbent,

the Ombudsman, when taking office in the second half of 2024, received only an initial contract for a one-year probationary period, which was planned to be followed by two two-year contracts. As the Ombudsman reached retirement age in mid-2025, the contract was not extended, and the position became vacant again.

164. Looking at it from a systemic point of view, the Inspector expresses concerns about the impact such actions have, i.e. leaving the post vacant again creates a perception that informal conflict resolution is not a priority.

165. The following recommendation is intended to enhance transparency and accountability.

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. Performance evaluation

166. Approaches to performance evaluation of the head of the ombudsman and mediation function vary widely across the organizations, reflecting different approaches to balancing independence with accountability. In some organizations, such as the United Nations Secretariat and WHO, the head of the function signs an annual compact with the Secretary-General or Director General, which serves as the primary performance assessment tool. In the case of the Secretariat, this compact is reviewed by the Management Performance Board, a mechanism intended to support leadership accountability. A similar model exists for the head of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, who is assessed through a compact-style appraisal within the performance system of UNICEF. This compact focuses on managerial competencies, leadership and fiduciary responsibilities, but does not assess the delivery of ombudsman services per se, in recognition of the function's operational independence.

167. In contrast, several organizations, including FAO, ICAO, UNHCR, UNRWA and WIPO, apply standard internal performance management frameworks that involve direct supervisors or senior leadership. These systems generally align with organization-wide human resources policies but risk undermining independence if not carefully adapted to the unique character of the ombudsman role. As noted by JIU in its 2015 report, subjecting an ombudsman to the regular performance evaluation processes applied to staff disregards the distinct nature of the function and can expose the incumbent to undue influence or retaliation, thereby compromising the neutrality and credibility of the role.⁵⁷ Therefore, **the Inspector requests the organizations concerned to implement recommendation 7 of the 2015 JIU report at the earliest.**

168. UNHCR has sought to mitigate this risk by including explicit protections to prevent performance evaluations from being used to justify dismissal based on case-related performance. ILO employs alternative approaches to preserve independence and accountability by relying on the Joint Negotiation Committee, chaired by the Assistant Director General and informed by input from the Staff Union and other committee members.

⁵⁷ JIU/REP/2015/6, para. 124.

10. Reporting lines

169. A reporting line of the heads of the ombudsman and mediation function to the executive heads is a critical determinant of institutional independence. This applies to all cases, except ILO, given the latter's tripartite structure, under which the mediator reports to the Joint Negotiation Committee, consisting of representatives of the Staff Union and of management. Furthermore, a few heads of the function (UNOMS, WFP, WHO and WIPO) also report to their governing bodies, in general through presentation of their annual reports.

11. Access to senior management and related management groups

170. Access to senior management and senior management groups represents a key channel through which the ombudsman and mediation function can follow emerging workplace issues and raise early warnings. In the majority of organizations, the ombudsman has regular meetings with the executive head (or a designated representative). For example, at ICAO, the ombudsman meets weekly with the Secretary-General. At WHO, the ombudsman meets monthly with the Chef de Cabinet.

171. The present review found that only six heads of the ombudsman function have access to senior leadership meetings, typically as an observer or ex officio participant. This includes heads of function in UNOMS, ICAO, UNHCR, UNRWA and WHO, while the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes is regularly invited to senior management meetings in UNICEF. For further details, see annex II. Such access enhances the visibility of the function at the strategic level and its position in the hierarchy. **The Inspector suggests that the executive heads who have not yet done so ensure access of the heads of the function to senior management groups.**

VII. Activities and services of the ombudsman and mediation function

A. Ombudsman and mediation services

172. The present review found a lack of clarity among personnel of United Nations system organizations regarding the activities and services provided under the mandates of the ombudsman and mediation functions. Furthermore, as responsibilities have evolved over time and continue to evolve, new activities and services have been and are being added. This expansion highlights the need to clearly outline and explain the full range of activities and services offered. While not all organizations provide the same activities and services or refer to them in the same way, depending on the defined agreements, this section aims to present an overview of the potential scope of services encompassed by the ombudsman and mediation functions.

173. As illustrated on the UNOMS web page⁵⁸ in the “Our Services” section, the activities and services provided by the ombudsman and mediator can be broadly grouped into three main categories: services to individual visitors; services to groups and teams; and services for the organization. Some services in the individual visitors and the groups and teams categories may overlap, while those under services for the organization tend to be more distinct.

174. Services to individual visitors (and potentially to groups and teams) typically include:

- (a) Listening: providing a safe and confidential space to discuss workplace concerns without fear of retaliation;
- (b) Discussion, identification and evaluation of options: assisting individuals in brainstorming and evaluating various options for addressing workplace challenges, thus enabling informed decision-making;
- (c) Conflict coaching: offering one-on-one or group coaching with a conflict resolution practitioner to develop effective strategies for resolving issues before they escalate;
- (d) Facilitation of dialogue: with the visitor’s consent, the ombudsman may facilitate dialogue between the visitor and a third party;
- (e) Shuttle diplomacy: acting as an intermediary when parties prefer not to meet face-to-face, helping them work towards conflict resolution;
- (f) Restorative justice: a process aimed at healing and reconciliation following formal or disciplinary processes;
- (g) Informal fact-finding: without initiating a formal investigation, the ombudsman may informally gather facts related to the origin of a dispute, with the requestor’s agreement. This may involve contacting human resources staff, the requestor’s supervisors or senior managers;⁵⁹
- (h) Mediation.

175. At the time of the present review, workplace restoration or restorative processes were among the ombudsman services added to the mandate of UNOMS and to that of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes. The 2024

⁵⁸ www.un.org/ombudsman.

⁵⁹ For example, in [ST/SGB/2016/7](#): “An ombudsman shall address work-related issues through informal means, including mediation, listening, providing and receiving information, identifying and reframing issues, exploring a range of options and undertaking informal fact-finding.”

report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services⁶⁰ indicates how the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services is “more frequently being requested to assist with workplace restoration and reintegration following formal or disciplinary processes”, while the 2023 report⁶¹ specifies the need to “enhance its internal capacity to better support the relevant teams in repairing and restoring damaged relationships in post-investigation situations through restorative processes, as envisaged in Secretary-General’s bulletin [ST/SGB/2019/8](#).”

176. It is noted in that bulletin that “the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services and the Staff Counsellor, within their respective terms of reference and on a confidential basis, may assist in workplace restoration efforts through informal resolution methods. Examples of support offered are: (a) post-investigation or post-disciplinary process interventions; (b) rebuilding trust between individuals; (c) team interventions and coaching towards change.”⁶²

177. The review found that workplace restoration or restorative processes have not yet been formally included in the mandates of the ombudsman and mediation functions of other United Nations system organizations.

178. Services for the organization relate primarily to the ombudsman and mediation function’s reporting and feedback relationship with the organization it serves. A key responsibility is to identify and report systemic issues and organizational trends—while maintaining confidentiality and avoiding the identification of individuals or specific cases. Through this mechanism, organizations are informed of recurring systemic issues and trends, enabling them to make informed decisions and revise, and thus improve, policies, procedures and initiatives.

179. Although the range of services outlined in the present section relates primarily to the core functions of the ombudsman, mediation is another important service that is offered by most of them as an integral part of their mandate.

180. Mediation can be initiated at the request of the parties involved or the parties may be referred to the ombudsman and mediation function at any time and at any level of the formal appeal process. Mediation is a structured, collaborative process designed to manage and help to resolve workplace disputes, concerns and differences with the assistance of an impartial third party.⁶³ It is considered particularly effective when the parties seek to resolve a specific, clearly identified issue. The mediator employs specialized communication and negotiation techniques but does not impose decisions; the parties retain full control over the outcome. Mediation can conclude with a legally binding and enforceable agreement, which may include financial compensation. For further details, see annex I.

1. Other activities

181. In addition to services provided to individual visitors and groups, the function is also engaged in a variety of other activities. These include awareness-raising initiatives aimed at promoting the role of the ombudsman and at fostering cultural change among the personnel of the organizations served. Such activities may involve participating in town hall meetings, organizing training sessions and workshops and conducting various initiatives that encourage a speak-up culture, discourage

⁶⁰ [A/79/156](#), para. 71.

⁶¹ [A/78/170](#), para. 92.

⁶² [ST/SGB/2019/8](#), para. 6.13.

⁶³ [A/79/156](#), annex.

retaliation, promote civility and inspire participants to take concrete actions that contribute to positive cultural transformation.

182. UNOMS has launched several initiatives, including:

(a) **Community civility communication (C3) workshops.** Delivered by UNOMS staff, these workshops aim to introduce a new dynamic in workplace interactions and emphasize the importance of dignity, providing participants with a shared language to describe and navigate these dynamics;

(b) **Civility cafés.** Facilitated by UNOMS, these gatherings offer employees at all levels a space to discuss meaningful issues, share diverse perspectives, listen to one another and ideally identify actionable steps to improve civility in the workplace.

(c) **Dialogues on racism.** Developed by UNOMS conflict-resolution experts, this dialogue model creates a safe space for participants to exchange perspectives and experiences related to racism in the workplace.⁶⁴

183. Other initiatives include:

(a) **Rendez-vous virtual cafés at UNHCR.** In 2024, UNHCR organized two virtual cafés to provide safe and inclusive spaces for nearly 700 colleagues from diverse backgrounds to openly share their experiences and insights. These dialogues allowed staff to voice concerns and offer feedback to management in a constructive and respectful setting, helping to foster a more collaborative and inclusive workplace culture;

(b) **“Speak Up” sessions at WFP.** Since 2018, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services of WFP has collaborated with the human resources entity to participate in “Speak Up” sessions. These sessions aim to raise awareness among staff about informal conflict resolution avenues to address their concerns and promote the ombudsman function as a key resource;

(c) **Capacity-building by the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes.** The Office has organized capacity-building sessions on conflict management and conflict prevention or managing emotions in conflicts, in addition to briefings on its services.

2. Main issue categories

184. Any workplace issue or question brought to the ombudsman and mediation function by a visitor is considered a case. A case may, however, involve more than one issue. The workplace concerns raised for consultation, information or action fall into nine main issue categories and include several sub-issues. These relate to: (a) compensation, benefits and entitlements; (b) supervisory relationships; (c) peer and colleague relationships; (d) job and career; (e) prohibited conduct and compliance; (f) safety, health, well-being and physical environment; (g) services/administration; (h) organizational, leadership and management; and (i) values, ethics and standards. These are based on the agreed definitions developed by the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators in an attempt to harmonize the categorization of issues and make them relevant to the United Nations workplace.

B. Cross-functional collaboration

185. While the ombudsman and mediation function operates independently, it should not be viewed as conducting its activities in isolation from the rest of the organization or from the ombudsman and mediation functions of other international organizations.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

On the contrary, effective cross-functional collaboration between the ombudsman and mediation offices and other functions in the organizations is not only necessary for achieving its objectives but also highly beneficial for the culture and working atmosphere of organizations. Furthermore, collaboration among the ombudsman and mediation functions in the United Nations system is indispensable for, inter alia, coherence of approach and the identification of good practices. Collaboration therefore supports both the well-being of the organization and the effectiveness of the ombudsman function.

186. Interaction and collaboration within organizations usually occurs with the departments responsible for human resources, legal matters, internal oversight, ethics and risk management, and with staff representatives. In principle, such collaboration is mutually beneficial. The organization gains insights into the ombudsman's activities and can discuss emerging trends and systemic issues. At WHO, the ombudsman is regularly invited as an observer to the meetings of the Accountability Group, which includes representatives of the organization's ethics, human resources, business operations and internal oversight departments. At UNFPA, the ombudsman has observer status in the Integrity Group. WFP is the only organization in which the ombudsman holds observer status in the organization's Risk Management Committee. The Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services is invited to contribute to the Executive Director's annual assurance exercise, a key component of the WFP risk management framework.

187. An additional value that cross-functional collaboration brings to the ombudsman and mediation function is the referral mechanism. This involves redirecting individuals to the ombudsman office when appropriate, thereby raising their awareness of the function and clarifying how to access it. Often, when employees are unsure where to seek support, they turn to human resources offices, staff representatives or occasionally legal offices, which may then give them the option to seek advice from the ombudsman and mediation office.

C. Annual reporting

188. Providing an annual report is a core responsibility of the ombudsman and mediation function. This type of reporting is categorized by UNOMS as a "service to the organization". The annual reports are a key instrument through which the ombudsman and mediation function communicates its activities, including systemic insights. These reports typically include anonymized data on caseloads, emerging workplace trends and thematic insights as well as information on systemic issues. All 10 stand-alone internal ombudsman and mediation functions issue an annual report. Of these, however, only four (UNOMS, WFP, WHO and WIPO) present the annual report to their governing body or legislative organ as an established practice. As of 2025, the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes was invited to present its annual report to the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women. The Inspector considers the lack of presentation of annual reports to governing bodies a serious lacuna that prevents these bodies from considering ombudsman- and mediation-related matters, including systemic issues and the status of workplace culture in the organization.

189. In most organizations, the report is issued under the name of the ombudsman or mediation function. However, in the case of the United Nations Secretariat, the report is prepared by the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services and submitted as a report of the Secretary-General under the administration of justice agenda item. In its first report on the proposed programme budget for 2024 ([A/78/7](#)), the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions considered that

the “Secretary-General and the Ombudsman should explore the submission of future reports of the Office as reports of the Ombudsman to the General Assembly, with any comments from the Secretary-General submitted as a separate report” and the General Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Advisory Committee. The Inspector fully concurs with the recommendation made and notes discussions between the Secretary-General and UNOMS to explore the possibility of an alternate arrangement for the submission of reports of the Ombudsman to the General Assembly. In the view of the Inspector, this development reflects a broader recognition of the importance of reinforcing the perceived independence and institutional standing of the function through the way in which it communicates with governing bodies.

190. The following recommendation is intended to enhance transparency and accountability.

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.

1. Management response

191. Official feedback from executive management in response to ombudsman annual reports remains uncommon. Only a few organizations issue management responses, in particular with regard to the observations or recommendations made. Notable examples include the United Nations Secretariat (via the report of the Secretary-General on the administration of justice), WHO (while this good practice was discontinued in 2024 and 2025, it is planned to be reinstated in January 2026) and WFP. As noted in the 2015 JIU report, not addressing systemic issues in a formal context is a missed opportunity for management on their follow-up, as well as a missed opportunity to promote visibility and the usefulness of the ombudsman office.⁶⁵ The absence of such responses limits organizational follow-up on the issues identified, weakening both accountability and the perceived effectiveness of the function. Strengthening both the dissemination of reports and institutional engagement with the ombudsman’s findings remains an area for further development across the system.

192. The Inspector considers the issuance of a formal management response to be a good practice, as it fosters accountability and signals organizational and leadership commitment to addressing systemic concerns and supporting informal conflict resolution. Therefore, **the Inspector suggests that organizations issue management responses to the annual reports of their ombudsman and mediation function for presentation to their governing bodies.**

Public availability of annual reports

193. In most cases, the annual reports of the ombudsman and mediation function are made publicly available through the official websites of their organizations. This is the case for UNOMS, the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes (serving UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women), as well as

⁶⁵ JIU/REP/2015/6, para. 104.

for FAO, ILO, WFP, WHO and WIPO. This practice enhances transparency, promotes a broader awareness of workplace issues and strengthens the credibility and visibility of the function. Public access to such reports enables staff, stakeholders and oversight bodies to better understand organizational challenges and the role of the ombudsman in addressing them.

194. By contrast, some organizations treat these reports as internal documents. For example, UNESCO (report of the college of mediators),⁶⁶ UNHCR and UPU produce reports that are intended solely for internal use. For further details, see annex VI.

195. The following recommendation is intended to enhance transparency and accountability.

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.

2. Identification of systemic issues or observations and recommendations made in annual reports

196. Organizations are informed of systemic issues and trends through the annual reports, which enables them, together with the findings of other functions such as ethics, internal oversight and human resources, to revise policies and adjust procedures where necessary. In some cases, the annual reports of the ombudsman and mediation functions also contain explicit recommendations for changes to policies and practices. As noted in the 2015 JIU report, the organizational ombudsman function had already begun to evolve from a role with a focus on case management and identification of systemic issues to that of a change agent that contributes to better managerial practices.⁶⁷ For further details, see annexes VI and VII.

D. Outreach activities and promotion of the “informal first” approach

1. “Informal first” approach

197. The “informal first” approach is a core principle guiding the ombudsman and mediation function within United Nations organizations. It advocates for the resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns through informal channels before turning to formal mechanisms, through dialogue, consultation, coaching and mediation. The approach is grounded in a recognition that early, proportionate conflict resolution can help reduce workplace tensions, preserve working relationships and avoid unnecessary escalation into formal disputes. To this end, the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators has prepared recommendations and a toolkit for its members to promote the ‘informal first’ approach among members organizations.

198. The General Assembly has repeatedly underscored the importance of informal conflict resolution as a first step. In its resolution [77/260](#), the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to increase awareness among staff of the possibility of having

⁶⁶ The UNESCO Ethics Office also provides ombudsman services and includes related information in its publicly accessible annual reports.

⁶⁷ [JIU/REP/2015/6](#), para. 102.

conversations with the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services to explore informal resolution, including mediation, as a first step, where feasible, prior to filing a formal complaint.

199. In response, a significant step was taken in 2023 with the circulation of a memorandum from the Chef de Cabinet to all heads of entities across the United Nations Secretariat, entitled “Informal conflict resolution: the preferred first step in resolving workplace concerns”. The memorandum reaffirmed the Secretariat’s institutional commitment to informal mechanisms and encouraged managers and staff alike to utilize the services of UNOMS as a primary step in addressing concerns. UNOMS reported an increase in outreach and engagement with senior leadership following the dissemination of the memorandum, indicating its effectiveness in fostering greater visibility and buy-in.

2. Informal First Champions initiative

200. To further embed the “informal first” approach into organizational culture, UNOMS launched the Informal First Champions initiative in 2024. With the endorsement of the Management Committee, the Office introduced a communications toolkit for the use of designated “champions” in order to support senior managers in effectively communicating with personnel on the informal resolution process, help to raise awareness and promote trust in the use of ombudsman services, thus recognizing the influence of leadership in shaping workplace norms and attitudes.

201. In parallel, UNOMS has worked with senior managers and key stakeholders such as the Office of Administration of Justice, staff counsellors, staff federations, conduct and discipline focal points, human resources officers and medical services to promote the “informal first” approach more broadly. Inter-agency collaboration through the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators has played an instrumental role in advancing the “informal first” campaign system-wide. The approach has gained broad recognition as a good practice across the system.

3. Mediation pledge and similar initiatives

202. In the Office of the Ombudsman for Funds and Programmes, a similar, yet distinct, model was established through the “mediation pledge”. Under this initiative, all five Executive Directors of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women formally committed to consistently considering mediation as a resolution pathway for workplace conflict. The Office uses the signed pledges in its communications and outreach. Given recent and upcoming leadership changes, the Office is currently exploring the possibility of renewing the initiative, giving consideration to adopting the full “informal first” toolkit to enhance alignment and visibility.

203. Other organizations have also launched targeted initiatives to reinforce the “informal first” approach. In May 2024, UNHCR introduced a multi-year mediation campaign entitled “Resolution is more than a solution”, highlighting the “informal first” approach to resolving workplace issues through open dialogue and mutual understanding. This initiative equips staff and managers with practical tools and resources to engage in constructive conflict resolution.

204. At WIPO, following advice from the Independent Advisory Oversight Committee during the Committee’s seventy-first session in December 2023, a series of guidance materials were developed to steer staff towards appropriate informal and formal mechanisms. This included the “Guide to a respectful and harmonious workplace”, updated in 2024, and a targeted one-page resource on addressing sexual harassment, providing clear steps on reporting channels, confidentiality and available support. The guide on sexual misconduct was prepared jointly by the Ombudsperson,

the offices responsible for ethics, human resources, internal oversight and legal matters, and the Staff Council.

4. Outreach efforts and raising of awareness of the function

205. The present review found that, compared with 2015, awareness of ombudsman and mediation services has increased considerably, due largely to more comprehensive and sustained outreach efforts. Outreach is recognized as a core pillar of effective ombudsman and mediation functions, playing a critical role not only in raising awareness of informal resolution mechanisms, but also in building trust and clarifying the scope, boundaries and value of the function.

206. Most offices reported undertaking a wide range of outreach activities, including webinars, in-person briefings, knowledge cafés, conflict resolution training sessions and participation in staff induction programmes and staff representatives' meetings. A notable example is the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, who is regularly invited to the annual meetings of the staff association, an approach the Inspector considers as a good practice and a valuable opportunity for engagement. Several ombudsman functions have also invested in producing multilingual outreach materials to improve accessibility and understanding among diverse personnel across regions and duty stations.

207. In organizations with decentralized operations, regional and field outreach is a critical dimension of awareness-raising. The Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, for example, actively travels to regional hubs and country and field offices to engage directly with staff and promote the use of informal mechanisms. Similarly, FAO and WFP conduct field visits to reach staff in country offices and remote duty stations. Other organizations such as UNRWA and WHO utilize virtual platforms, including webinars and e-learning tools, to maintain accessibility in resource-constrained environments.

5. Tone at the top

208. The tone set by senior leadership also plays a critical role in encouraging the use of informal services. While more progress is needed in this area, positive examples were observed in organizations⁶⁸ whose executive heads or senior managers publicly endorsed informal conflict resolution as a first-response option, in all-staff town halls, for example. Similarly, initiatives such as the previously mentioned Secretariat-wide memorandum and the joint mediation pledge serve as strong institutional examples of leadership-driven efforts to encourage and promote informal resolution as a preferred first step.

6. Collaboration with internal stakeholders

209. Strategic collaboration with internal stakeholders has further reinforced outreach efforts. Ombudsman offices across the system reported working closely with human resources offices, ethics offices, staff representatives and legal offices to coordinate messaging, streamline referrals and jointly host awareness events. These partnerships help to embed informal resolution within broader organizational frameworks and encourage cross-functional support for early intervention.

210. Beyond the ombudsman offices, several formal system actors actively promote informal pathways. The Office of Staff Legal Assistance encourages clients to consider informal options early in the process and works closely with UNOMS to resolve matters amicably where possible. In 2023, the Office of Staff Legal Assistance

⁶⁸ For example, in IAEA, UNESCO, UNHCR and UNRWA.

conducted outreach events in Addis Ababa, Beirut, Nairobi, Juba, The Hague, and Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania,⁶⁹ some of them jointly with UNOMS. The Management Advice and Evaluation Section has also institutionalized “informal first” messaging in its formal intake processes, including online forms that prompt staff to consider ombudsman support without prejudice to their rights. Such coordinated efforts reinforce a shared commitment to preventing unnecessary escalation and integrating informal tools into the full dispute resolution landscape.

⁶⁹ Report of the Secretary-General on the administration of Justice at the United Nations (A/79/127), para. 101.

VIII. Capacity and performance

A. Resources and capacity (human and financial)

211. The structure and staffing of ombudsman and mediation functions vary widely across the United Nations system organizations. Most organizations maintain relatively small offices, with the majority staffed by a single ombudsperson at the P-5 or D-1 level, in some cases assisted by consultants or by General Service staff providing administrative support, the latter at times only on a part-time basis. Based on 2023 data, 7 of the 11 ombudsman and mediation functions reviewed operated with only one ombudsperson at the Director or Professional level: FAO, ILO, UNRWA, WHO and WIPO each maintain a single ombudsperson position, while two organizations, ITC and WMO, receive ombudsman services through UNOMS and therefore account for less than one full-time ombudsperson each.

212. In contrast, a limited number of organizations have established larger ombudsman and mediation structures. UNHCR, UNOMS, WFP and the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes maintain between three and five ombudsman staff at the Director or Professional level.⁷⁰

213. The overall size and composition of each office is influenced by multiple factors, in particular the size of the workforce that the function is servicing, the organizational structure and the geographical reach, but also the volume and complexity of the caseload and available funding. The sections that follow consider how these staffing levels align with organizational needs and whether current capacities are adequate to deliver mandated services effectively and equitably.

214. Figure II below outlines the ratio of staff at the Director or Professional level⁷¹ within the ombudsman and mediation function to the total number of personnel served by each respective function, based on 2023 data. To enable clearer comparative analysis, organizations are arranged in descending order according to the overall workforce size. For the purposes of this figure, the data for UNOMS include personnel from the United Nations Secretariat,⁷² including the JIU participating organizations UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat and UNODC. Similarly, the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes is treated as a single function supporting the combined workforce of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women, as the proportional service time allocated to each agency is not disaggregated.

215. Three organizations (ITC, UNESCO and WMO) are presented differently due to their unique structural arrangements. ITC and WMO are serviced by UNOMS and therefore do not have dedicated ombudspersons; however, for the sake of comparison, each is counted as having one ombudsperson, even though this does not reflect the actual allocation of resources. UNESCO relies on a college of mediators composed of four retired staff members who provide services on a voluntary and pro bono basis. The Ethics Office at UNESCO also assumes an extensive mandate, encompassing

⁷⁰ The Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes is servicing the largest number of personnel (60,538).

⁷¹ Some offices rely on full-time consultants who provide ombudsman and mediation services. Due to a lack of detailed information on the consultancy positions, for the purposes of figure II, only staff positions at the Professional or Director level are included in this comparison. For further details on the full composition of ombudsman and mediation offices across organizations, see annex IV.

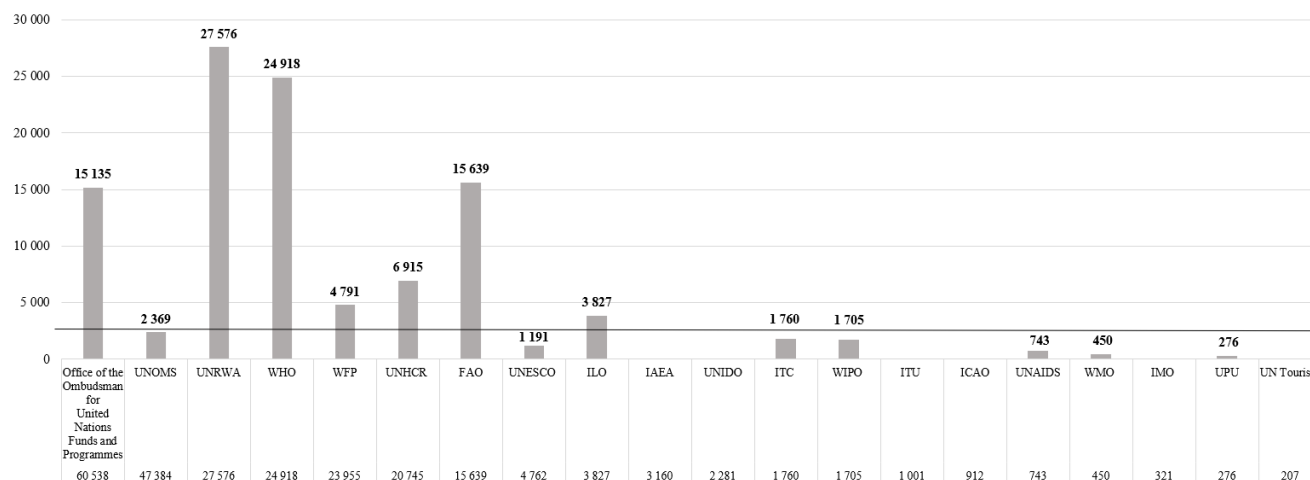
⁷² See [A/79/584](#), figure II, which uses the seven-entity grouping approach: corporate service entities; field-focused entities; Headquarters-based entities; offices away from Headquarters; peace operations, which include peacekeeping operations; special political missions and other political presences; regional economic commissions; and the resident coordinator system.

several responsibilities commonly associated with the ombudsman and mediation function across the United Nations system.

216. Figure II illustrates the number of personnel served per ombudsperson at the Director or Professional level across organizations. This metric provides a comparative indication of the relative staffing intensity of each function in relation to its workforce size, and may serve as a useful, albeit approximate, reference point for assessing the adequacy of resources. For further details, see annex IV.

Figure II

Number of personnel served by one staff position ombudsperson at the Director or Professional level, 2023



Source: Prepared by JIU.

1. 2015 Joint Inspection Unit benchmarks

217. In its 2015 report, JIU provided a broad benchmark suggesting that organizations with approximately 2,500 staff may want to consider employing a full-time ombudsman. (This threshold is represented by the red line in figure II). In addition, it suggested that organizations with 1,000 or more staff may want to consider employing a part-time ombudsman or making arrangements for these services with another organization. In an informal recommendation in that report, JIU identified IAEA, UNESCO and UNRWA as being on the threshold of needing an ombudsman and that a thorough review and analysis of their present informal conflict resolution mechanisms was desirable.⁷³ Since then, UNRWA has indeed established an ombudsman function, doing so in 2021, and UNESCO conducted a feasibility study in 2025 that confirmed the need for an internal stand-alone ombudsman function. The UNESCO Executive Board has decided to establish this function but its decision has yet to be implemented. In contrast, IAEA has not yet established an ombudsman function, despite a total workforce of 3,160 in 2023.

218. It is important to note that the mandate of UNOMS was formally extended to include non-staff personnel, but on condition that this expanded coverage be implemented within existing resources. This decision was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution [78/248](#), adopted on 22 December 2023. Specifically, in paragraph 11 of that resolution, the Assembly “decides to regularize the pilot project for access of non-staff personnel to the services of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, within existing resources”. This development reinforces the importance of inclusive access to informal conflict resolution

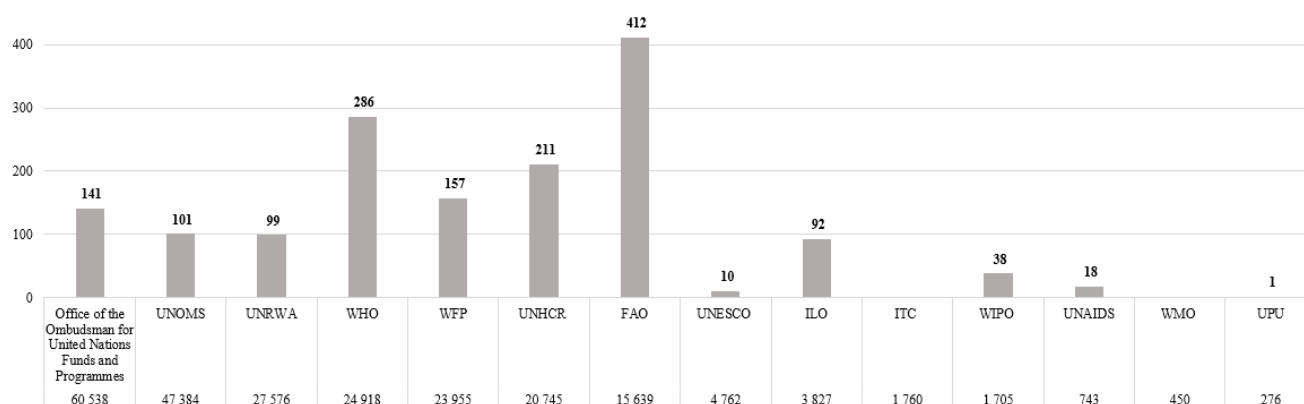
⁷³ JIU/REP/2015/6, para. 42.

mechanisms but also underscores the increasing demands placed on UNOMS without a corresponding adjustment in budgetary or staffing allocations.

219. In paragraph 42 of its 2015 report, JIU states that, “even though there is no rule as to how many cases an ombudsman can handle or how many cases will come up against an organization, some statistics and interviews with ombudsman practitioners showed that one ombudsman could, depending on tasks other than individual case management, handle a maximum of 200 cases a year.”

220. Figure III further complements this analysis by presenting the average number of cases handled per ombudsperson at the Director or Professional level in 2023, based on data published in annual reports. This metric offers an additional perspective on caseload distribution relative to staffing capacity. As ITC and WMO are serviced by UNOMS, disaggregated case data covering those entities was not available. At UNESCO, caseload figures relate to the college of mediators.

Figure III
Average caseload per ombudsman at the Director or Professional level, 2023



Source: Prepared by JIU.

2. Adequacy of resources

221. It is important to recognize that, in recent years, the responsibilities of ombudsman and mediation functions have expanded beyond individual case management to include broader activities such as proactive outreach, training, capacity-building and the monitoring of systemic workplace trends. The sufficiency of staffing levels must therefore be evaluated not only against caseload volume, but also in relation to the full scope of mandated responsibilities and activities. The 2015 JIU benchmark does not therefore reflect the current scope of responsibilities. In addition, effective service delivery requires consideration of geographical distribution, linguistic capabilities and time zone coverage, and the ability to reach personnel in field operations and remote duty stations. Without adequate staffing that reflects these operational realities, the accessibility and impact of the ombudsman and mediation function are diminished.

222. The adequacy of resources allocated to ombudsman and mediation functions across the United Nations system remains a widespread concern. Most organizations reported that current human and financial resources were insufficient or only marginally adequate to meet the responsibilities of the function. Several offices indicated that, even where budgets had remained stable, current allocations did not support the full implementation of mandates, particularly in terms of ensuring regional coverage, proactive outreach and sustained mediation support.

223. For instance, UNOMS noted that its current resources are insufficient to provide accessible services to staff and non-staff outside of headquarters locations, with specific gaps identified in the Middle East and hardship duty stations. The ombuds offices of UNHCR and WFP indicated that, while basic operations are being maintained, additional resources are needed to broaden the field presence and meet increasing demand for mediation and outreach. In addition, the offices in FAO, ICAO and WHO referenced restricted mission activity due to financial limitations.

224. The activities that are most frequently cited as not being carried out in full due to resource constraints include regional presence, proactive outreach and awareness-raising, in-person services, restorative interventions, training and data analysis. These limitations affect the accessibility, visibility and effectiveness of the function. Several offices noted a negative impact on the capacity to support complex or multi-party cases and to provide preventive services such as long-term conflict coaching or group interventions.

225. Today, ombudsmen are expected not only to address individual conflict cases but also to play a proactive role in conflict prevention, workplace culture, trend analysis, training and outreach. Caseload volume alone cannot serve as the sole indicator of resourcing needs. Furthermore, the review found that limited resources often hinder the overall effectiveness of the function, particularly in ensuring regional presence, linguistic reach and proactive engagement with personnel across diverse duty stations.

226. While recognizing the ongoing funding constraints faced by many organizations, the Inspector emphasizes that the adequacy of the resourcing of the ombudsman and mediation functions must be reassessed in light of their evolving mandates, their important contribution to cost-saving and the increasing expectations with regard to their activities and services.

227. The following recommendation is intended to enhance the effectiveness of the ombudsman and mediation 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.

B. Process for determination and approval of resources

228. Approaches to determining the human and financial resources required for the ombudsman and mediation function vary significantly across organizations and reflect a mixture of centralized budgetary processes, needs-based assessments and cost-sharing mechanisms. In the case of UNOMS, resource determination adheres to the Organization's budgetary framework and instructions issued by the Office of the Controller, using approved staffing tables and level of resources as a baseline. A proposal is accordingly submitted by the United Nations Ombudsman, which is then reviewed by the Secretary-General, who decides on the final level of resources to be submitted to the General Assembly, the body that holds the ultimate authority for approval.

1. Funding arrangements for the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes

229. In 2020, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women signed a memorandum of understanding, which set out the budgetary process for the annual budget of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes. It included provisions on the sharing of the cost, which is based on an annual head count at each agency as specified in the annex to the memorandum of understanding.

230. Under the memorandum of understanding, by 30 September of each year, the Office for United Nations Funds and Programmes proposes a draft annual budget for the coming year. The budget must be agreed by the five organizations by 30 November of that year. UNDP, which coordinates this arrangement, is required to issue a consolidated budget proposal by September each year, with final cost apportionments and invoicing before 31 December of that year. However, the arrangement is contingent on timely payments, with delays affecting the Office's ability to provide services. In 2020, the organizations' shares were as follows: UNDP, 41.1 per cent; UNICEF, 34.9 per cent; UNFPA, 8.9 per cent; UNOPS, 10.5 per cent and UN-Women, 4.6 per cent.

231. While the funding arrangement appears sound in theory, the present review found that its practical application was uneven and raised a number of concerns. For example, all posts of the Office are allocated by UNDP, and the cost is shared among the five agencies, while there are two mediator positions that are not cost-shared and are directly funded by UNICEF.

232. Similar issues regarding the resourcing of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes have already been identified by two different assessments. A 2023 UNDP audit noted, among other things, delays in the payments to be made by UNDP, which could have an impact on the Office's ability to provide services. A subsequent 2024 external evaluation made several recommendations to ensure that the Office is adequately funded.

233. The following recommendation is intended to enhance control and compliance with regard to the funding of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes.

Recommendation 8

The Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and 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.

234. If the matters around the funding situation of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes continue, the Inspector is of the view that other options need to be explored. One option she suggests is to integrate the budget of the Office into the UNOMS budget structure. Once the UNOMS budget is adopted, the five organizations (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women) would need to provide their shares.

235. Other organizations use a range of methods to determine the resource needs of their ombudsman and mediation functions. UNHCR applies a combination of operational requirements, strategic resource frameworks and staffing considerations grounded in principles of diversity and adaptability to determine resource needs. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees retains ultimate authority over

budget decisions and may revise proposed allocations on the basis of organizational financial priorities.

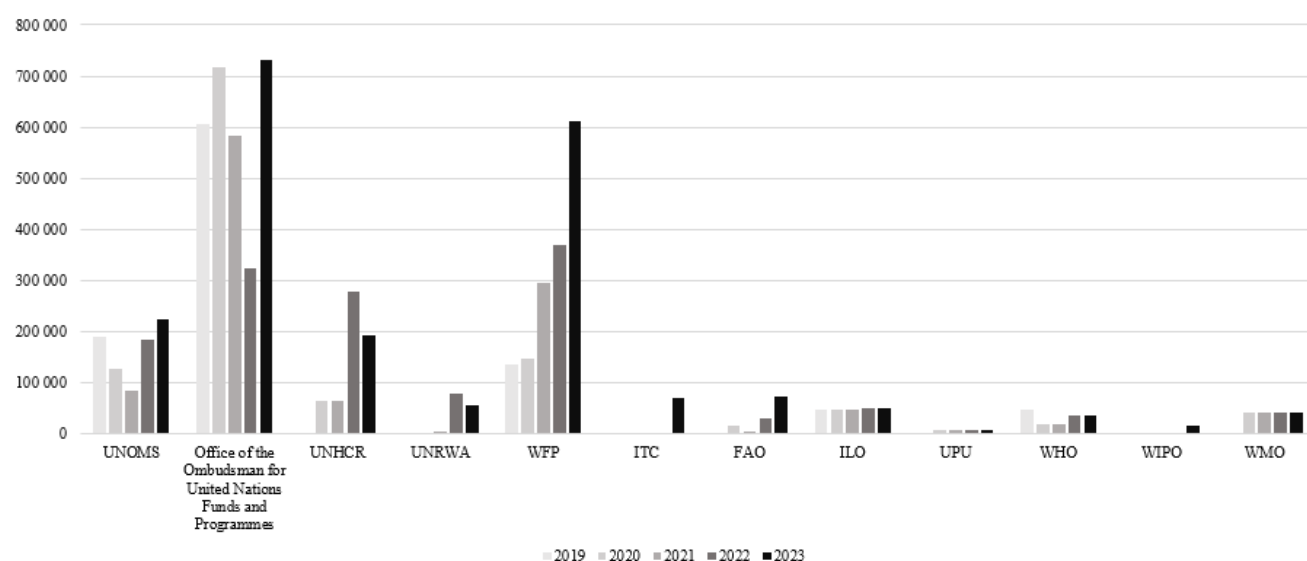
236. WFP, while lacking predefined criteria, considers workload data, staffing levels, support for new initiatives and strategic expansion planning. Following the submission of the annual management plan by the Executive Director, the Executive Board makes the final decision, taking into consideration reviews and inputs by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the FAO Finance Committee.

237. Agencies such as FAO and ICAO indicate that they base resource decisions on internal needs assessments conducted by the ombudsman. However, final budgetary allocations are determined through their broader programme budget processes. At FAO, for instance, resource proposals are incorporated into the programme budget submitted by the Director-General to the governing body, which holds the final decision-making authority on budget approval. At ILO, the process is governed by its biennial programme and budget cycle, in line with strategic priorities and guidance provided by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. UNRWA bases its needs on a combination of inputs, including the number of users and visitors, survey data, benchmarking with other United Nations ombudsman offices and the function's ability to fulfil its mandate. However, actual resources are subject to the availability of donor or United Nations funding.

238. While the decision-making process for resource allocations varies across organizations in terms of the structure and degree of internal consultation, the final authority for the proposed programme budget typically rests with executive heads and the final approval with governing bodies.

Figure IV

Budget of the ombudsman function (without staff cost)



Source: Prepared by JIU.

239. Despite their important role in fostering informal conflict resolution and organizational learning, the present review found that many ombudsman and mediation functions across the United Nations system operate with limited financial and human resources. In several organizations, these budgets are already small and are insufficient to allow the function to fully deliver on its mandate. In the current

climate of financial uncertainty affecting the United Nations system, where multiple entities face liquidity challenges and funding shortfalls with serious consequences not only for operational activities but also for the organizations' workforces, the Inspector expresses concern that these small and already constrained budgets may be further reduced. In some cases, mandates have expanded (e.g. to include non-staff personnel or additional services and activities) without a corresponding increase in resources. For further details, see annex V.

240. Even minor budgetary reductions can have a significant impact on operations, such as limiting outreach activities, reducing regional coverage or scaling back mediation efforts. The Inspector is of the view that such constraints may be particularly detrimental at a time when reliance on informal resolution mechanisms is more critical than ever. They may also weaken the preventive role of the function and limit its ability to address conflict at an early stage, thereby increasing the risk of escalation into formal disputes and the associated costs, including litigation.

241. The present review found that, in some organizations, ongoing financial pressures have resulted in decisions to leave key posts vacant (WHO) or downgrade the level of the position held by the head of the ombudsman function and move the reporting line under administrative units (UNHCR). These developments reduce the visibility, accessibility and perceived independence of the function, which may deter staff from using the service. Such trends risk undermining the effectiveness of informal conflict resolution mechanisms and may lead to greater reliance on formal processes, including litigation and increased cost.

242. The Inspector is mindful of the fact that most organizations are grappling with the effect of severe funding constraints, which lead to budget cuts, as well as downsizing and downgrading actions. These actions, however, if applied to integrity and accountability functions (i.e. internal audit and oversight, evaluation, ethics and ombudsman), can have a negative impact on the work of those entities, which already operate with limited resources.

243. The Inspector expresses her concerns about these actions, since the need for robust, independent and effective accountability and integrity functions is even more critical. She therefore suggests a prudent approach, as the financial savings may result in increased costs elsewhere. Furthermore, they may have a negative impact on organizational culture and the work environment at a time when the engagement of personnel is needed more than ever. The important contribution and added value of these functions to cost saving in other areas should be taken in consideration.

2. Allocation of a dedicated budget to the ombudsman and mediation function

244. All ombudsman and mediation functions that have a dedicated budget allocated to them have full authority over the management of resources.⁷⁴ However, the present review identified a few functions that have no dedicated resources at their disposal.⁷⁵ This prevents them from providing services in alignment with evolving organizational needs. A dedicated budget is considered essential to preserve effectiveness, impartiality and relevance in a changing work environment. **The Inspector recommends that the ombudsman and mediation functions be granted a dedicated budget with full authority to utilize and manage their allocated financial and human resources.**

⁷⁴ This applies to UNOMS, the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, FAO, UNHCR, UNRWA, WFP and WHO.

⁷⁵ ICAO, ILO, UNESCO and WIPO.

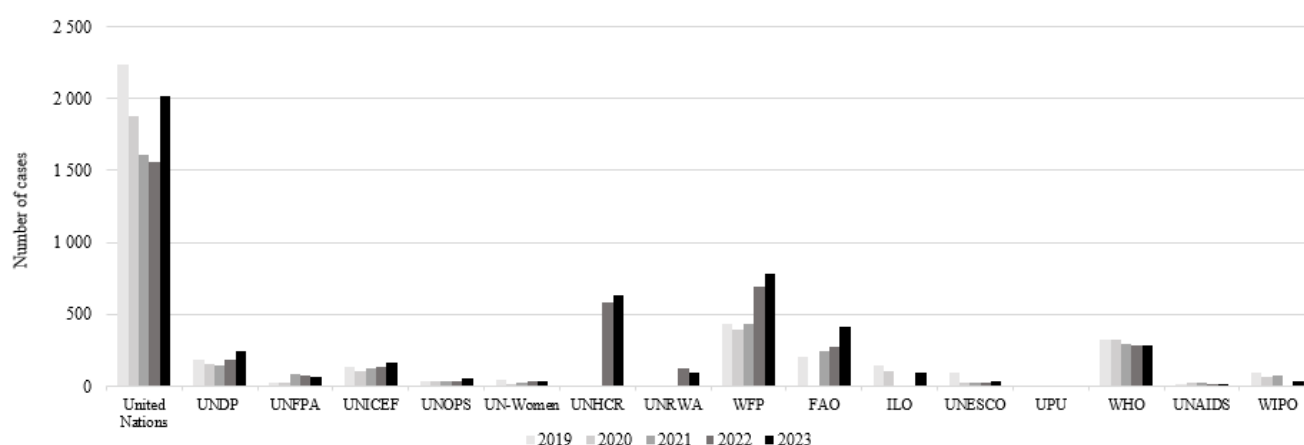
C. Case management

245. Casework constitutes a core element of the ombudsman and mediation function. The analysis of case data provides insight into the operational load of ombudsman offices across organizations.

246. Ten functions systematically report the number of cases handled annually through their ombudsman or mediation offices in their annual reports. These are UNOMS, the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes, FAO, ILO, UNESCO, UNHCR, UPU, WFP, WHO and WIPO. Of these, only seven organizations (FAO, ILO, UNESCO, UPU, WFP, WHO and WIPO) also report on the number of visitors served. While the number of cases does not necessarily equate to the number of individual visitors, since a single case may involve multiple parties or a single visitor may result in multiple cases, for the purposes of the present review and to support cross-organizational comparison, the number of cases has been used as the main reference point.

247. Figure V presents the annual case volumes for organizations between 2019 and 2023. The United Nations Secretariat consistently reported the highest number of cases, exceeding 1,500 annually, although a slight decline of 10 per cent was observed over the five-year period. Several entities experienced significant increases in case volumes during this period, most notably UNFPA (160 per cent), FAO (97 per cent), WFP (82 per cent) and UNOPS (54 per cent). An increase in the number of cases does not necessarily indicate a deterioration in workplace culture or a rise in conflict; rather, it may reflect enhanced visibility, proactive outreach and increased trust in the ombudsman function. Conversely, declining figures may not suggest a healthier work environment, but could point to limited access, resource constraints or low staff awareness. For further details, see annex III.

Figure V
Annual case counts by organization, 2019–2023



Source: Prepared by JIU.

248. In its 2015 review, JIU identified the absence of harmonized procedures and standards for case classification across the United Nations system as a fundamental gap. While some alignment in issue categorization had been observed, there was no common framework to determine what constituted a “case” or how it should be recorded or managed. In its report, JIU recommended the elaboration of a harmonized case management manual (recommendation 4).

249. In 2025, the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators achieved a key milestone by finalizing a common definition of a “case” for ombudsman and mediation services across the United Nations system. This effort was led by a dedicated working group established to address the long-standing discrepancies among organizations in the way that casework has been defined and documented. The objective was to promote greater consistency, comparability and accountability in case reporting. The agreed definitions, endorsed by the Network, aim to provide clarity not only in terms of internal workload tracking but also in communications with oversight bodies and staff. Starting in 2026, greater coherence will be achieved, as the number of cases will be the only metric reported in the annual reports.

250. The Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators also adopted accompanying guidance on the definition of related terms such as “visitor” and “issue”, recognizing that a single case may encompass multiple issue categories. These standardized definitions are expected to improve the quality and consistency of data reporting and help to better assess the adequacy of resourcing in relation to actual workloads.

D. Assessment of performance and effectiveness

251. The performance and effectiveness of the ombudsman and mediation function are assessed to varying degrees across the United Nations system. While 12 organizations (United Nations, FAO, ICAO, ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNRWA, UN-Women and WHO) reported that they conduct some form of performance assessment, the methodologies, frequency and the benchmarks used for evaluation differ significantly, and formalized systems are not consistently in place.

252. In most organizations, performance assessments are administered internally through staff surveys, user feedback mechanisms or standard internal evaluation tools. For example, UNOMS conducts annual global satisfaction surveys, post-activity surveys and stakeholder consultations. These tools assess adherence to core ombudsman principles and user satisfaction, with summary findings integrated into the annual report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly. The Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes primarily collects feedback on mediation services through post-service surveys. Comprehensive results are published in the annual mediation newsletters, and a summary is included in the annual report. The Office has extended this in 2025 to include surveys for closed Ombudsman and mediation cases. UNHCR assesses its function using a mix of user feedback, mediation resolution rates, de-escalation rates, outreach efforts and reporting on field missions, which are reported to the High Commissioner and included in reporting to Member States through the Standing Committee.

253. Similarly, ILO and UNRWA assess the performance of the ombudsman and mediation function through internal mechanisms. At ILO, the performance of the function is reviewed annually based on pre-defined outputs set at the beginning of the cycle, with input from the Joint Negotiation Committee. In addition, starting in 2025, ILO will conduct its first all-staff survey to gather broader feedback on the function’s effectiveness. UNRWA complements its standard performance evaluation system with all-staff surveys results, which are shared Agency-wide for the evaluation of the function from a staff perspective. At FAO, while the function was previously evaluated through key performance indicators outlined in the Ombudsman annual workplan, the current Ombudsman is in the process of developing key performance indicators to guide the assessment of the performance of the function.

254. Several organizations, including UNESCO, WFP and WIPO, reported having no formal assessment of the ombudsman/mediation function in place. In some cases, while the function may provide basic reporting on caseloads or activities, no formal evaluation framework or performance criteria are applied. This absence of structured performance assessment weakens accountability mechanisms and limits opportunities for continuous improvement.

255. The Inspector recommends that organizations establish transparent and inclusive mechanisms to assess the performance of their ombudsman and mediation functions, in order to build confidence in their relevance and effectiveness. Assessments of the performance of the function not only support institutional accountability but also contribute to greater confidence in the relevance and effectiveness of the function.

IX. System-wide cooperation and coherence

256. In its 2015 report, JIU stressed that, given that the work of an ombudsman is strictly guided by the principle of confidentiality and that ombudsman practitioners have no counterpart in their organizations, there is little room for exchange within the organization. In the report, JIU stated: “Consequently, interacting and sharing experiences, ideas and practices with other ombudsmen is important for organizational ombudsman practitioners of the United Nations system organizations.”

257. Against this background, the present review examined which opportunities, such as professional associations and networks, currently exist for the ombudsman and mediators of United Nations system organizations for the sharing of information, knowledge and experience as well as for collaboration aimed at coherence and harmonization.

A. International Ombuds Association

258. One of the existing professional networks is the International Ombuds Association. During the interviews, the Association was seen as a valuable reference point within the previously mentioned limitations, which could serve as a basic orientation point regarding professional standards. The distinct practice of United Nations ombudsman required, however, tailored approaches. Therefore, the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators was seen as the primary orientation point for the ombudsman and mediators of the United Nations system and a catalyst for harmonization and standard-setting.

B. Network of Ombuds and Mediators of Multilateral Organizations, formerly Network of Ombudsmen and Mediators of the United Nations and Related International Organizations

259. Another professional network is the Network of Ombuds and Mediators of Multilateral Organizations (NOMMO), formerly the Network of Ombudsmen and Mediators of the United Nations and Related International Organizations (UNARIO), which has existed since 2007 and brings together ombudsman practitioners and mediators from multilateral intergovernmental organizations, including of the United Nations system and related organizations, and international and regional financial institutions. Its membership includes the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, the Asian Development Bank, the European Central Bank and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Its purpose is to share best practices, exchange ideas and experiences and engage in professional development and networking. It claims to promote inter-agency collaboration and cooperation in a very informal manner. The network meets annually, provides training and hosts a web platform for its members. It is considered by United Nations ombudsmen and mediators mostly as a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas. The network has not issued any benchmarks or standards that are relevant for the United Nations system.

260. Before the creation of UNARIO in 2007, meetings were held between the ombudsmen of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions from 2003 to 2005 to explore ways of achieving a common understanding of the role of the ombudsman in these organizations and to harmonize related practices and operations. At its annual meeting in 2004, the group decided to establish a working group for a common system approach to be presented to CEB.

261. In 2006, the members of the group decided to change the name of the group to “Network of Ombudsmen and Mediators of the United Nations and Related International Organizations” (UNARIO) and to expand the membership to non-United Nations system organizations. As a result, more ombudsmen and mediators from multilateral organizations outside the United Nations system joined the group. The members also decided to keep this network informal, and thus did not formalize its status.

262. With the expansion of UNARIO, there was no dedicated space for ombudsmen and mediators of United Nations system organizations to discuss and work on matters relevant to their work in the United Nations system. Against this background, JIU suggested in its 2015 report that “the ombudsman practitioners in the United Nations system organizations create a subgroup within UNARIO so that specific United Nations-related issues can have a higher profile and receive the necessary attention”.

C. Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators in organizations that are members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

263. In 2019, several ombudsman and mediators from the United Nations system created the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators, which is open to all organizations that are members of CEB. The Network meets once a year in person and has quarterly virtual meetings. It liaises with CEB on cross-cutting workplace matters at the United Nations system level, such as mental health and well-being. Its focus is on harmonizing the informal conflict resolution work and related practices within the United Nations system. The Network is chaired by the United Nations Ombudsman and it maintains a library of its outputs as well as tools and templates used by the members of the Network for different informal conflict resolution matters.

264. Given the concerns expressed by interviewees about the suitability of UNARIO (now NOMMO), with its wide membership, to discuss and resolve specific United Nations-related matters, the Inspector considers the creation of their own network within the limits of the CEB membership to be a good solution to overcome the UNARIO-related challenges and to achieve system-wide coherence. It also implements the suggestion made by JIU in its 2015 report.

265. The findings of the present review confirm that collaboration through the Network of United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators has facilitated the development of best practices tailored to the unique needs of the United Nations system, including standards of practice, the “informal first” campaign, classification of case issues/sub-issue and case closure standardization. Within the Network, several working groups have been formed to address practice issues of mutual interest, such as working groups on mediation, accountability, case definition, artificial intelligence in conflict resolution, restorative processes, and case cost calculation approaches.

266. In the view of the Inspector, these are commendable results that make an important contribution to the coherence and harmonization of ombudsman practices and the development of applicable standards and best practices to meet the unique needs of the United Nations workforce.

X. Ombudsman and mediation functions in international organizations outside the United Nations system

A. International Monetary Fund

267. Since 1979, IMF has maintained an autonomous and independent Office of the Ombudsperson, separate from its Ethics Office. Anchored in the principles of independence, confidentiality and impartiality, the Ombudsperson's role is to address employment-related concerns by offering informal guidance and support, in alignment with an "informal first" resolution approach.⁷⁶

268. As outlined in the terms of reference of the Office of the Ombudsperson,⁷⁷ the Ombudsperson's authority encompasses full independence and autonomy from any entity of the Fund; unrestricted access to any staff member, contractual employee or vendor personnel, including executive management and the personnel in their offices; and access to all records relevant to their mandate.

269. The Ombudsperson has a broad mandate to review employment-related issues brought by any persons who have access to their services and to assist in their informal resolution.⁷⁸ The Office is required to publish an internal annual report to the Executive Board and all personnel (staff, contractual employees, and executive management and the personnel in their offices), in which it summarizes the volume and nature of cases, indicating which were resolved and explaining unresolved matters.⁷⁹ In addition, the Ombudsperson is expected to alert the Managing Director, Executive Board or individual Executive Director regarding any systemic issues that emerge from individual cases. Lastly, the Ombudsperson may also issue recommendations to those with the authority to implement them.

270. The Ombudsperson may not be called as a witness or compelled to provide information in any administrative or judicial proceedings, within or outside the Fund. Confidentiality is fundamental to the Ombudsperson's role. All cases and visitors are kept strictly confidential. The only exception to confidentiality is a situation of imminent risk of serious harm where no reasonable alternative exists.

271. Established in 2012, the independent and neutral Mediation Office forms the second informal tool available for current and former staff members and contractual employees to solves workplace issues. Distinct from the Ombudsperson Office, the Mediation Office conducts and oversees the mediation of workplace disputes, under the Fund's Mediation Rules, and provides coaching, group facilitation and training. Mediation is entirely voluntary and no party to a dispute is obliged to attend or participate.

B. World Bank

272. The World Bank uses a conflict resolution system that is different in set-up and mandate from the system in place in United Nations system organizations. In 2023, the World Bank established the Ethics and Internal Justice Services Vice-Presidency

⁷⁶ International Monetary Fund, "External panel of experts' review of the IMF's dispute resolution system", *Policy Papers*, vol. 2022, No. 032 (June 2022). Available at: <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/007/2022/032/article-A002-en.xml>.

⁷⁷ Terms of reference of the Office of the IMF's Ombudsperson (2023). Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/hrd/ombuds.htm>.

⁷⁸ As defined in the terms of reference, an employment-related issue refers to "any matter relating to Fund employment or the Fund work environment, including but not limited to any formal employment action, inter-personal dispute, supervisory relationships and concerns of undue influence in the performance of their functions."

⁷⁹ The annual report is not publicly available.

to provide comprehensive and coordinated services related to Staff Rules compliance and to address work-related concerns and grievances. The newly established unit encompasses, under a single umbrella, the functions performed by Internal Justice Services and the Ethics and Business Conduct Department. Through Internal Justice Services, staff can use confidential channels to seek guidance on workplace issues and resolve conflicts. These include Ombuds Services, the Respectful Workplace Advisors programme, Mediation Services and Peer Review Services. The Ethics and Business Conduct Department is another trusted resource for staff seeking guidance on compliance and workplace issues and for preventing and addressing misconduct.⁸⁰ Therefore, the merging of these two services (Ethics and Internal Justice Services) has reorganized the conflict resolution framework into the following four distinct subdivisions addressing workplace issues: Client Services (including the Respectful Workplace Advisors programme); Ethics, Advice and Early Interventions Department; Mediation and Formal Reviews Department; and Ombuds Services.⁸¹

273. Ombudsmen and Respectful Workplace Advisors are appointed under Staff Rule 9.02, which defines their role, functions and mandate. According to Staff Rule 9.02, paragraph 1.03, “an Ombudsman acts as an impartial source of assistance in the resolution of staff concerns”.⁸² Access is limited to current and former World Bank Group staff members.

274. A World Bank Ombudsman has a broad mandate to provide confidential, independent, impartial and informal guidance – including advice, information, procedures and resources – for individuals seeking help with workplace issues. An Ombudsman is expected to alert management to trends and issues that should be addressed and to provide recommendations for improving staff-related policies within the World Bank Group. Lastly, an Ombudsman has a mandate and responsibility to administer the Respectful Workplace Advisors programme.⁸³

275. In carrying out its duties, the Ombudsman function exercises authority with full independence from any group or official of the World Bank Group. An Ombudsman has direct access to the President and to all staff-related records except medical files. An Ombudsman or Respectful Workplace Advisor cannot be called as a witness in hearings or investigations in any formal grievance process.

276. Confidentiality is a cornerstone of the work of an Ombudsman or Respectful Workplace Advisor. The only exception to the confidentiality and discretion exercised by an Ombudsman or Respectful Workplace Advisor is where there appears to be imminent threat of serious harm. A Respectful Workplace Advisor may consult an Ombudsman on matters raised, without disclosing the identity of the individual concerned.⁸⁴

277. Appointed by the President, each Ombudsman serves a five-year term, which is renewable, subject to consultation with World Bank Group Staff Association representatives. After his or her term, an Ombudsman is ineligible for other World Bank appointments for a period of two years, except for approved short-term consultancy roles within the Ombuds Services or Mediation Services offices.

278. The Respectful Workplace Advisors programme is a network of volunteer peers across the World Bank Group who provide informal and confidential support to staff

⁸⁰ World Bank, *A New Era in Development: Annual Report 2023* (Washington, D.C., 2023).

⁸¹ See the website of Ethics and Internal Justice Services, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/unit/ethics-and-internal-justice-services>.

⁸² World Bank Staff Manual, Staff Rules. Available at: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/152671420564551470-0220012015/render/StaffManual.pdf>.

⁸³ See the website of Ombuds Services, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/unit/ombuds-services#1>.

⁸⁴ World Bank Staff Manual, Staff Rules, Rule 9.02, para. 9.01.

facing workplace issues. Nominated by their colleagues in their country office or work unit in Washington, D.C., Respectful Workplace Advisors serve a four-year term. They offer confidential, trusted and readily accessible resources to staff members who feel uncomfortable using routine channels such as supervisors or human resources staff.⁸⁵

279. Separate from Ombuds Services, Mediation Services offers confidential, informal and impartial support to all World Bank personnel, including current staff, former employees and consultants, in resolving workplace conflicts. It also provides group facilitation, team-building and mediation training. Mediation Services relies on voluntariness and the consent of all parties. If a mutually acceptable solution is reached, the mediator may draft a memorandum of understanding to record the agreement, which becomes binding once it is signed by all parties.

C. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

280. While OECD does not currently have an ombudsperson, they have had mediation services in place for the past six years. These mediation services are provided by two external professional consultants, who each work six days a month, focusing on, inter alia, cases in the organization and requests received. OECD currently has 4,000 staff members.

281. The organization is in the process of updating its internal justice system. It is working towards establishing a more systematic approach to internal dispute resolution while addressing the cultural gap among staff in understanding the mediation system.

282. The issues most frequently referred to mediation involve conflicts related to performance. Mediation has been successful in resolving disputes between supervisors and staff members on performance.

283. Issues related to administration typically go directly to the tribunal servicing OECD. For example, in a case involving the pension plan, a few staff members immediately pursued the formal process without even considering mediation first. OECD has its own tribunal and does not use the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal.

284. The OECD system of administration of justice is undergoing considerable changes this year, led by the legal team with the support of an external consultant. The goal is to streamline the rules of the tribunal. In addition, the human resources entity is advocating for a review of the appeals committee and to try to streamline formal appeals into one process.

285. Against this background, there has been a shift towards more informal conflict resolution in OECD, with its administration becoming more open to dialogue. Last year, a training session was conducted for supervisors, in which the importance of engaging in informal conflict resolution was emphasized. Overall, there has been a shift in culture and mindset within the organization.

286. The mediators are professionally trained for their roles. The selection process begins with an open vacancy announcement, followed by interviews. A subset of candidates is then presented to the Secretary-General of OECD for final selection. The criteria for selection are outlined in the job description. This is a paid consultancy position, with a dedicated budget item for it.

⁸⁵ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/unit/respectful-workplace-advisors>.

Overview of the ombudsman and mediation function

Organization	Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function	Name of the function	Governing body/ legislative organ decision	Internal administrative instruction	Terms of reference and date of last update	Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports	Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice	Scope/who is covered	Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)
United Nations Secretariat and its departments and offices									
United Nations, including UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-HABITAT and UNODC	Yes (since 2002)	Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services	General Assembly resolutions 55/258 , 56/253 , 61/261 , 62/228 , 63/253 , 65/251 and 66/237	Staff rule 11.1, as contained in ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1	ST/SGB/2016/7 , 22 June 2016	(a) Discussion of options; (b) Conflict coaching; (c) Mediation; (d) Shuttle diplomacy; (e) Team process; (f) Outreach; (g) Training	Guided by core principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality, confidentiality and informality ICSC standards of conduct for the international civil service and Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	All United Nations personnel (staff and non-staff)	Bangkok (2), Entebbe (2), Geneva (3), Goma (4), Nairobi (3), Santiago (2) and Vienna (2)
Funds and programmes									
UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women	Yes (since 2002) Shared with UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women	Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes	Executive boards of UNDP, UNOPS, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women	Staff rule 11.1, as contained in ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1	ST/SGB/2016/7 , 22 June 2016	(a) Channelling visitor within the system; (b) Listening/ guidance/ conflict coaching; (c) Shuttle diplomacy; (d) Fact-finding; (e) Mediation; (f) Outreach; (g) Training	Guided by core principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality, confidentiality and informality ICSC standards of conduct for the international civil service and Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	Personnel and affiliated personnel of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women	Dakar (2), Istanbul (2), Bangkok (2) and Panama City (1) 120 Respectful Workplace Facilitators in 78 country offices

Organization	Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function	Name of the function	Governing body/ legislative organ decision	Internal administrative instruction	Terms of reference and date of last update	Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports	Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice	Scope/who is covered	Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)
UNHCR	Yes (ombudsman function since 2008)	UNHCR Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator ^d	General Assembly resolution 61/261	ST/SGB/2016/7 UNHCR/IOM/063-FOM/062/1993 Staff rule 11.1, as contained in ST/SGB/2023/1/Rev.1	ST/SGB/2016/7	(a) Facilitating informal conflict resolution; (b) Preventing conflict escalation; (c) Conflict competence awareness and skill-building; (d) Promoting fairness and equity (e) Engagement with other stakeholders	Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	Affiliated personnel with a UNOPS contract, United Nations Volunteers, interns, consultants and retirees The Office can exceptionally extend support to individuals currently not employed by UNHCR regarding concerns or conflicts related to UNHCR workplaces	Budapest (1), Nairobi (3), Panama City (1) and Pretoria (1)
UNRWA	Yes (since 2021)	Office of the Ombudsman	No	General Staff Circular No. 07/2021 Staff rule 11.1 on informal resolution (2018) Statute of the UNRWA Dispute Tribunal and rules of procedure (staff regulations 11.1-11.5)	None	(a) Informal dispute resolution, including mediation; (b) Training; (c) Outreach; (d) Reporting; (e) Coaching;	Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	Staff, former staff and complementary personnel, including consultants, limited duration contractors, daily paid workers, volunteers and interns.	None
WFP	Yes (since 2005)	Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services	No	WFP Executive Director circular on mediation services	OED 2012/009, 2012	(a) Capacity-building; (b) Facilitation and mediation; (c) Team climate assessment; (d) Team climate coaching; (e) Maximizing the benefits of the Respectful Workplace Adviser network	Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	WFP employees (staff and non-staff)	Rome (headquarters) Outposted ombuds offices in WFP regional bureaux for the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe, East Africa and West Africa 190 Respectful Workplace Advisers

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function</i>	<i>Name of the function</i>	<i>Governing body/ legislative organ decision</i>	<i>Internal administrative instruction</i>	<i>Terms of reference and date of last update</i>	<i>Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports</i>	<i>Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice</i>	<i>Scope/who is covered</i>	<i>Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)</i>
Other United Nations bodies or entities									
ITC	Serviced by UNOMS	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat	See United Nations Secretariat
UNAIDS	Serviced by WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO
Specialized agencies and IAEA									
FAO	Yes (since March 2020; before March 2020, dual function with ethics)	FAO Ombuds Office	Resolution CL161/4 (April 2019)	FAO Manual, sect. 331	Terms of reference of the Ombuds Office (2021)	(a) Prevent and resolve workplace conflict through the provision of neutral analysis and guidance on issues, outlining options for resolution; (b) Provide an independent, informal forum for FAO personnel to seek guidance and/or raise any issues of concern regarding their employment; (c) Act as a third-party interlocutor to facilitate communication; (d) Coaching; (e) Mediation; (f) Independent and impartial advice to the Director General on organizational trends or systemic issues	Guided in the conduct of its work by 5 core principles: independence, neutrality, impartiality, confidentiality and informality FAO Code of Ethical Conduct FAO Administrative Manual Generally accepted international standards of practice for organizational ombudspersons Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	FAO employees (staff and non-staff)	Rome (headquarters) 4 Ombuds Specialists (consultants) covering the English- and French-speaking African countries, Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean, Near East and Europe regions
IAEA	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function</i>	<i>Name of the function</i>	<i>Governing body/ legislative organ decision</i>	<i>Internal administrative instruction</i>	<i>Terms of reference and date of last update</i>	<i>Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports</i>	<i>Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice</i>	<i>Scope/who is covered</i>	<i>Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)</i>
ICAO	Yes (newly created stand-alone function since 2024; before 2024, a dual function in addition to conference management)	Ombudsperson	Decision of the Secretary-General	Staff rule 101.16 Staff regulation 1.16 ICAO Service Code, annex I, para. 94 a-d	None	(a) Advise staff of their options, and the different avenues open to them; (b) Provide a channel for dialogue and conciliation between staff members, supervisors and the Administration in the event of disagreements or disputes; (c) Assist and counsel staff members individually in the event of problems and grievances relating to the terms and conditions of employment, their working conditions or their relations with supervisors and colleagues	ICAO Service Code Staff Rules Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	Staff and non-staff (including consultants, secondees and interns)	Montreal
ILO	Yes (since 2001)	Office of the Mediator	No	Creation of Ombudsperson position: Collective Agreement on the Procedure for the Resolution of Grievances between the International Labour Office and the Staff Union (September 2000) Replacement of Ombudsperson by Mediator: Collective Agreement on Conflict Prevention and Resolution between the International Labour Office and the Staff Union (February 2004)	Yes (2004)	(a) Conflict coaching; (b) Facilitation; (c) Shuttle diplomacy; (d) Mediation services	Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators ICSC standards of conduct for the international civil service	Staff of ILO, International Social Security Association and International Training Centre	Geneva Network of approximately 60 voluntary facilitators at the various regional sites of ILO promote access to the informal procedures for all ILO employees

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function</i>	<i>Name of the function</i>	<i>Governing body/ legislative organ decision</i>	<i>Internal administrative instruction</i>	<i>Terms of reference and date of last update</i>	<i>Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports</i>	<i>Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice</i>	<i>Scope/who is covered</i>	<i>Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)</i>
IMO	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ITU	No (Starting in 2026, serviced by UNOMS) ^b	See United Nations Secretariat	No	Under consideration	Yes (as per the annex to the memorandum of understanding of 2024)	n/a	ITU Staff Regulations and Staff Rules ICSC standards of conduct for the international civil service Code of Ethics for ITU Personnel	All personnel	No
UNESCO	No	College of mediators (composed of retired staff working on a pro bono basis) and Ethics Office	Created in 1992 upon a decision of the Director General	Human Resources Manual, sects. 9.4 (Mediators) and 16.2 (Anti-harassment policy) and 18.1 (Ethics Office)	Human Resource Manual, 15 February 2010	(a) To receive and examine comments and complaints from staff members concerning problems of a personal nature which they may encounter in their working conditions or in their relations with colleagues or supervisors, including those cases identified by management as susceptible to mediation; (b) To assist disputing parties in finding a solution and to advise and make suggestions or recommendations on actions needed to settle conflicts; (c) To report regularly to the Director General on the overall	Ethic and codes of conduct in the context of UNESCO rules and regulations	All personnel	No

Organization	Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function	Name of the function	Governing body/ legislative organ decision	Internal administrative instruction	Terms of reference and date of last update	Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports	Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice	Scope/who is covered	Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)
						conclusions they draw from the matters they have had to deal with, and make to him or her any recommendation s they consider appropriate			
UNIDO	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UN Tourism	No	n/a	No	n/a	None	Mediation	Principles of fairness, confidentiality and neutrality during mediation	Staff	No
UPU	No (outsourced to a service provider from the private sector)	Office of the Ombudsperson	No	Administrative instruction No. 37 (Office of the Ombudsman) Administrative instruction No. 34/Rev 1 (Conflict resolution mechanisms related to discrimination, abuse of authority and harassment)	Yes (included in the 2024 consultancy agreement)	(a) Resolution of disputes through mediation; (b) Provision of advice and recommendations for change, proposing solutions to interested parties within the organization to resolve disputes, as required; (c) Provision of guidance and information on the procedures to be followed; (d) Drawing key issues to the attention of executive management in order to promote healthy behaviour in the workplace	Principles of independence, impartiality, confidentiality, fairness and neutrality United Nations standards and codes of conduct	Staff and non-staff	No

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function</i>	<i>Name of the function</i>	<i>Governing body/ legislative organ decision</i>	<i>Internal administrative instruction</i>	<i>Terms of reference and date of last update</i>	<i>Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports</i>	<i>Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice</i>	<i>Scope/who is covered</i>	<i>Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)</i>
WHO	Yes (1974)	Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services	No	Information note 30/2016 WHO Manual, sect. III.12.2 (Informal resolution – mediation) Provision 1215 of the WHO Staff Rules	Yes (2007)	(a) Hear and advise staff members with problems or grievances relating to the terms and conditions of their employment, their working conditions and/or their relations with colleagues; (b) Assist all parties concerned to reach a fair solution through fact-finding, mediation, discussion and the involvement of all parties; (c) Provide information, guidance and referral as may be appropriate; (d) Identify trends, issues and concerns regarding policies, procedures and overall performance of duties and responsibilities and work climate, without breaching confidentiality or anonymity; (e) Advise the Director General on corrective and preventive	Guided by core principles of independence, impartiality, informality and confidentiality Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators	Staff of WHO, UNAIDS, the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the United Nations International Computing Centre; WHO satellite offices	Yes (Geneva (headquarters)) WHO regional offices for Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Pacific have full-time ombudsmen

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Stand-alone ombudsman function and/or mediation function</i>	<i>Name of the function</i>	<i>Governing body/ legislative organ decision</i>	<i>Internal administrative instruction</i>	<i>Terms of reference and date of last update</i>	<i>Types of services as per the 2023 annual reports</i>	<i>Applicable code of conduct or standard of practice</i>	<i>Scope/who is covered</i>	<i>Regional/field representation of ombudsman office (number of positions in 2023)</i>
						action as may be appropriate; (f) Act as a resource for best practices in relation to the Ombudsperson's function across the Organization and facilitate the exchange of information and experience in this respect; (g) Ensure regular evaluation of the impact of the Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services through surveys of the perceptions of general staff, and of visitors to the Office			
WIPO	Yes (stand-alone function until 2025) Starting in 2026, WIPO will be serviced by UNOMS and share an ombudsman with ITU ^c	Office of the Ombudsperson at WIPO	Yes	Office instruction No. 35/2019	2019	(a) Access and outreach; (b) Conflict resolution and mediation; (c) Systems building; (d) Community support	WIPO Code of Ethics IOA Code of Ethics Standards of Practice for United Nations System Ombudsman and Mediators UNARIO principles	WIPO staff and non-staff	None (Geneva (headquarters))
WMO	No (since 2024 serviced by UNOMS)	See UNOMS	Secretary General's decision of January 2020 to outsource the services to UNOMS	No	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	WMO staff and non-staff	No

^a UNHCR is currently working on a revised ombuds policy, and the proposal from the Ombudsman to change the name to “Ombudsperson”.

^b ITU and WIPO negotiated in November 2024 a joint memorandum of understanding with UNOMS on the provision of ombudsman and mediation services. starting in 2026.

^c Ibid.

Annex II

Arrangements and independence modalities related to the ombudsman and mediation function

A. Arrangements regarding the position of the head of the ombudsman and mediation function

Organization	Level of position of head of ombudsman/mediation function	Level of the head of ethics	Full-time post	Position open to external candidates	Professional background in ombuds/mediation required	Professional certification or accreditation required	Appointed by the executive head	Staff representatives involved or consulted in appointment	Dismissal or removal by executive head	Staff representatives involved or consulted in dismissal or removal	Term limits	Contract covers the full period of the term	Post-employment restrictions
United Nations Secretariat and its departments and offices													
Office of the United Nations Ombudsman	Assistant Secretary-General	D-2	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes (as members of the selection committee)	Secretary-General	No	Yes (5-year term, renewable once)	Yes	Yes
Funds and programmes													
Office of the Ombudsman for UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women	D-1	D-1, except for UN-Women (P-5)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (by UNICEF, in consultation with the executive heads of the other funds and programmes and the Secretary-General)	No	UNICEF Executive Director (as UNICEF is the employing organization), in consultation with the executive heads of the other funds and programmes	No	Yes (5-year term, renewable once)	No	Yes
UNHCR	D-1; since mid-2025, downgraded to P-5	D-1; since mid-2025, downgraded to P-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (in consultation with the Secretary-General)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (5 years)	Yes	Yes
UNRWA	P-5	P-5	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No (2-year fixed term contract with a one-year probationary period)	No

Organization	Level of position of ombudsman/mediation function	Level of the head of ethics	Full-time post	Position open to external candidates	Professional background in ombuds/mediation required	Professional certification or accreditation required	Appointed by the executive head	Staff representatives involved or consulted in appointment	Dismissal or removal by executive head	Staff representatives involved or consulted in dismissal or removal	Term limits	Contract covers the full period of the term	Post-employment restrictions
WFP	D-1	D-1	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (4 years, renewable once)	Yes	Yes
Other United Nations bodies or entities													
ITC	Serviced by UNOMS	See United Nations Secretariat	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS
UNAIDS	Serviced by WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO
Specialized agencies and IAEA													
FAO	P-5	P-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (5-year term, renewable once)	No (full term after a probationary period (1+4 years))	Yes
IAEA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ICAO	P-5	P-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No (full contract after a probationary period)	No
ILO	P-5	P-5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (5-year term)	No (probationary period (2+2+1 years))	Yes (for a period of 5 years)
IMO	n/a	P-5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ITU	Starting in 2026, serviced by UNOMS P-5	P-5	No, shared 50 per cent with WIPO	Yes	Yes	No	No (contract with UNOMS)	Yes	No (contract with UNOMS)	No	No (one-year pilot)	n/a	Yes
UNESCO	n/a	P-5	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNIDO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UN Tourism	P-4 (combined function with the human resources entity)	P-4	No	n/a	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No

Organization	Level of position of head of ombudsman/mediation function	Level of the head of ethics	Full-time post	Position open to external candidates	Professional background in ombuds/mediation required	Professional certification or accreditation required	Appointed by the executive head	Staff representatives involved or consulted in appointment	Dismissal or removal by executive head	Staff representatives involved or consulted in dismissal or removal	Term limits	Contract covers the full period of the term	Post-employment restrictions
UPU ^a	External service provider from private sector	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes (4 years, renewable once)	Yes	Yes
WHO	D-1	D-2	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	5 years	No (probationary period followed by two two-year contracts (1+2+2))	Yes (for a period of 5 years)
WIPO	Until 2025, P-5 Starting in 2026, P-5 serviced by UNOMS	P-5	No (shared 50 per cent with ITU)	Yes	Yes	No	No (contract with UNOMS)	Yes	No (contract with UNOMS)	No	No (one-year pilot)	n/a	Yes
WMO	Serviced by UNOMS	P-5	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	Yes	See UNOMS	See UNOMS

^a Ombudsman and mediation function outsourced to the private sector.

B. Arrangements regarding reporting lines, performance evaluation and level of authority of the head of the ombudsman and mediation function

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Reporting line to executive head</i>	<i>Reporting line to governing body</i>	<i>Evaluation of the performance of the head of the function</i>	<i>Dedicated budget</i>	<i>Authority over human and financial resources of the function</i>
United Nations Secretariat and its departments and offices					
UNOMS	Yes	Yes	Yes (through a compact with the Secretary-General)	Yes	Yes
Funds and programmes					
Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN-WOMEN)	Yes	Yes (upon invitation starting from 2025)	Yes (through a compact-like appraisal with the UNICEF Executive Director)	Yes	Yes
UNHCR, Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator	Yes	No	Yes (through standard internal performance management)	Yes	Yes
UNRWA, Office of the Ombudsman	Yes	No	Yes, through standard internal performance management	Yes	Yes
WFP, Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation services	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Other United Nations bodies or entities					
ITC	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS
UNAIDS	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO
Specialized agencies and IAEA					
FAO, Ombuds Office	Yes	No	Yes (through standard internal performance management)	Yes	No
IAEA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Reporting line to executive head</i>	<i>Reporting line to governing body</i>	<i>Evaluation of the performance of the head of the function</i>	<i>Dedicated budget</i>	<i>Authority over human and financial resources of the function</i>
ICAO, Ombudsperson	Yes	No	Yes (through standard internal performance management)	No	No
ILO, Office of the Mediator	No	No	Yes (performance appraisal through the Joint Negotiation Committee)	No	No
IMO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ITU, serviced by UNOMS	No	No	Review after one-year pilot	Yes	No
UNESCO, college of mediators	Yes	No	n/a (retired staff members serving pro bono)	No	No
UNIDO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UN Tourism	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UPU, Office of the Ombudsperson	Yes	No	No	n/a	n/a
WHO, Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services	Yes	Yes	Yes (through a compact with the Director General)	Yes	No
WIPO, Office of the Ombudsperson	Yes	Yes	n/a	No	No
WMO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Annex III

Caseloads and visitors: data available in the annual reports of the ombudsman/mediation function

Organization	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors
United Nations Secretariat and its departments and offices												
United Nations, including UNCTAD, UNEP and UNODC	2 238	No data available	1 880	No data available	1 611	No data available	1 560	No data available	2 014	No data available	2 049	No data available
Funds and programmes												
UNDP	189	No data available	151	No data available	143	No data available	181	No data available	248	No data available	277	No data available
UNFPA	25	No data available	25	No data available	83	No data available	73	No data available	65	No data available	79	No data available
UNHCR	No report issued		No report issued		No report issued		587	791	634	858	714	More than 1,050
UNICEF	134	No data available	104	No data available	126	No data available	135	No data available	162	No data available	215	No data available
UNOPS	37	No data available	37	No data available	33	No data available	38	No data available	57	No data available	87	No data available
UNRWA	No data available		No data available		No data available		124	No data available	99	No data available	180	No data available
UN-Women	43	No data available	14	No data available	24	No data available	31	No data available	31	No data available	52	No data available
WFP	433	433	397	397	430	430	692	692	786	786	653	No data available
Other United Nations bodies or entities												
ITC	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available
UNAIDS ^a	19	19	29	29	22	22	14	14	18	18	No data available	No data available
FAO	209	209	No report issued		242	242	278	278	412	412	No report issued	No report issued
IAEA	n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a	
ICAO	No data available		No data available		No data available		No data available		No data available		No data available	No data available
ILO	146	146	101	101	No report issued		No data available		92	369	98	275

Organization	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors	Caseload	Visitors
IMO	n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a	
ITU	n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a	
Specialized agencies and IAEA												
UNESCO ^b	98	98	23	No data available	28	28	30	30	38	38	No report issued	No report issued
UNIDO	n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a	
UN Tourism	No data available		No data available		No data available		No data available		No data available		No data available	No data available
UPU	5	5	No report issued		5	5	5	5	1	1	6	6
WHO	329	329	323	323	296	296	283	283	286	286	No report available	No report available
WIPO	92	230-250	68	No data available	80	No data available	No report issued		38 ^c	49	36 ^d	40 ^e
WMO	n/a	n/a	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available

^a Serviced by the WHO Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services.

^b Data provided by the college of mediators.

^c The report covers the period from April 2023 to March 2024.

^d Data through August 2024.

^e Ibid.

Annex IV

Number of personnel serviced by one ombudsman/mediator as at 31 December 2023

<i>Ombudsman and mediation function</i>	<i>Total number of personnel (staff and non-staff) as at 31 December 2023</i>	<i>Total number of staff as at 31 December 2023</i>	<i>Total number of non-staff as at 31 December 2023</i>	<i>Total number of personnel of the ombudsman office (staff and non-staff) in 2023</i>	<i>Number of personnel serviced by one staff member (at the Professional (P) or Director (D) level) of the ombudsman office in 2023</i>	<i>Caseload of the ombudsman office in 2023</i>	<i>Number of visitors of the ombudsman office in 2023</i>	<i>“Utilization rate” in 2023^a</i>
Office of the United Nations Ombudsman	47 384	36 757	10 627	20 (UNOMS): (1 D + 19 P)	2 369	2 014	No information available	n/a
Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes ^b	60 538	30 418	30 120	4 (1 D + 3 P)	15 135	563	No information available	n/a
UNDP	23 087	7 677	15 410	..	..	..	..	..
UNFPA	5 227	3 152	2 075	..	..	..	..	..
UNICEF	23 162	17 640	5 522	..	..	..	..	..
UNOPS	5 226	659	4 567	..	..	..	..	..
UN-Women	3 836	1 290	2 546	..	..	..	..	..
UNHCR	20 745	16 021	4 724	3 (1 D + 2 P)	6 915	634	858	4.1 per cent
UNRWA	27 576	251	27 325	1 (1 P)	27 576	No information available	No information available	n/a
WFP	23 955	2 646	21 309	5 (1 D + 4 P)	4 791	786	786	3.28 per cent
ITC	1 760	411	1 349	1 (UNOPS contract)	1 760	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNAIDS	743	646	97	See WHO	See WHO	18	18	2.42 per cent
FAO	15 639	3 289	12 350	1 (1 P)	15 639	412	413	2.64 per cent
IAEA	3 160	2 555	605	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ICAO	912	657	255	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ILO	3 509	3 509	0	1 (1 P)	3 827 ^c	92	369	9.64 per cent
IMO	321	256	65	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ITU	1 001	761	240	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNESCO	4 762	2 459	2 303	4 retired staff members serving pro-bono	n/a	38	26	0.55 per cent
UNIDO	2 281	671	1 610	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

<i>Ombudsman and mediation function</i>	<i>Total number of personnel (staff and non-staff) as at 31 December 2023</i>	<i>Total number of staff as at 31 December 2023</i>	<i>Total number of non-staff as at 31 December 2023</i>	<i>Total number of personnel of the ombudsman office (staff and non-staff) in 2023</i>	<i>Number of personnel serviced by one staff member (at the Professional (P) or Director (D) level) of the ombudsman office in 2023</i>	<i>Caseload of the ombudsman office in 2023</i>	<i>Number of visitors of the ombudsman office in 2023</i>	<i>“Utilization rate” in 2023^a</i>
UN Tourism	207	89	118	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UPU	276	243	33	1	276	1	1	0.4
WHO	24 918	9 419	15 499	1 (1 P)	24 918	286	286	1.15 per cent
WIPO	1 705	1 045	660	1 (1 P)	1 705	38	49	2.87 per cent
WMO	450	350	100	See UNOMS	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

^a Utilization rate is calculated based on the number of visitors in relation to the total workforce.

^b Covering UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women.

^c The Mediator Office in ILO also covers ombudsman and mediation services for the International Training Centre in Turin and the International Social Security Association. Total number of staff served is 3,827.

Annex V

Human and financial resources of the ombudsman and mediation function

Ombudsman and mediation function	Number of personnel in ombudsman function (staff and non-staff)						Budget of ombudsman function (without staff cost)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Currency	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Office of the United Nations Ombudsman	30	30	30	31	31	Headquarters (14) Bangkok (2) Beirut (1) Entebbe (2) Geneva (3) Goma (4) Nairobi (3) Santiago (2) Vienna (2)	United States dollars	190 323	125 470	83 800	183 100	224 640
Office of the Ombudsman for UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women	6	10	11	11	10	1 D-1 1 P-5 2 P4 4 G-5 Mediation only: 1 P-4 1 P-2	United States dollars	607 254	718 174	584 350	322 400	732 448 ^a
UNHCR	5	6	6	10	9	Headquarters (3) Budapest (1) Nairobi (3) Panama City (1) Pretoria (1)	United States dollars	n/a	64 862	64 862	277 713	190 865
UNRWA	n/a	n/a	2	5	5	1 P-5	United States dollars	n/a	n/a	1 259	77 168	55 400
WFP	7	10	11	17	11	11	United States dollars	136 168	145 771	294 621	368 190	612 598
ITC	UNOMS services used at no cost	UNOMS services used at no cost	UNOMS services used at no cost	UNOMS services used at no cost	1	\$45,000 service fee paid to UNOMS	United States dollars	UNOMS services used at no cost	UNOMS services used at no cost	UNOMS services used at no cost	UNOMS services used at no cost	68 045 for the post of a consultant hired on a UNOPS contract
UNAIDS	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	United States dollars	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO

Ombudsman and mediation function	Number of personnel in ombudsman function (staff and non-staff)						Budget of ombudsman function (without staff cost)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Currency	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
FAO	n/a (dual function with ethics)	2	2	2	4	Headquarters (1) Nairobi (1) Buenos Aires (1) Singapore (1) Milan (for French-speaking African countries (1))	United States dollars	n/a	16 506	2 389	28 223	72 321
IAEA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ICAO	1 + 1 part-time Dual function in addition to conference management until and including 2024	1 + 1 part-time	1 + 1 part-time	2 + 2 part-time	2 + 2 part-time		Canadian dollars	n/a	n/a	n/a	4 000	n/a
ILO	1	1	1	2	2	1 mediator	United States dollars	45 857	45 581	45 581	48 574	48 574
IMO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ITU	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNESCO	6 (1 G-4, 4 retired staff serving pro-bono and 1 Ethics Adviser) ^b	6 (1 G-4, 4 retired staff serving pro-bono and 1 Ethics Adviser)	6 (1 G-4, 4 retired staff serving pro-bono and 1 Ethics Adviser)	6 (1 G-4, 4 retired staff serving pro-bono and 1 Ethics Adviser)	6 (1 G-4, 4 retired staff serving pro-bono and 1 Ethics Adviser)	Headquarters: 6 (1 G-4, 4 retired staff serving pro-bono and 1 Ethics Adviser (P-5))	United States dollars	1 500 compensation per mediator	1 500 by mediator	1 500 by mediator	1 500 by mediator	1 500 by mediator
UNIDO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UN Tourism	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UPU	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	Swiss francs	n/a	7 500 fee paid to service provider	7 500 fee paid to service provider	7 500 fee paid to service provider	7 500 fee paid to service provider

Ombudsman and mediation function	Number of personnel in ombudsman function (staff and non-staff)						Budget of ombudsman function (without staff cost)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Currency	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
WHO	3	3	3	2 ^c	2	Headquarters: 1 Head of Office 1 Mediator 1 Administrative Assistant	United States dollars	47 500	19 250	19 250	34 250	34 250
WIPO	1	1	1	1	2	1 Ombudsperson (part time)	Swiss francs	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14 000
WMO	n/a	Serviced by UNOMS	Serviced by UNOMS	Serviced by UNOMS	Serviced by UNOMS	Serviced by UNOMS	Swiss francs	n/a	40 000 service fee paid to UNOMS	40 000 service fee paid to UNOMS	40 000 service fee paid to UNOMS	40 000 service fee paid to UNOMS

^a The higher operational costs in 2023 were due to two office vacancies (one Ombudsman (D-1) and one Conflict Resolution Officer (P-4)), which led to increased reliance on external consultants and resumption of travel following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

^b The Ethics Adviser in UNESCO also provides ombudsman services.

^c Due to the vacant position of the ombudsman function.

Annual reporting of the ombudsman and mediation function

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Annual report presented to governing body/legislative organ</i>	<i>Annual report issued as report of the ombudsman or as report by the executive head</i>	<i>Annual report publicly available</i>	<i>Annual report includes information on systemic issues/systemic observations</i>	<i>Annual report includes recommendations to management</i>	<i>Separate management response presented to governing body/legislative organ</i>
United Nations Secretariat and its departments and offices						
Office of the United Nations Ombudsman	Yes	Executive head	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Funds and programmes						
Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women)	Yes	Ombudsman	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
UNHCR	No	Ombudsman	No	Yes	No	No
UNRWA	No	Ombudsman	n/a	Yes	Yes	No
WFP	Yes	Ombudsperson	Yes	Yes	Yes ^a	Yes
Other United Nations bodies or entities						
ITC	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNAIDS	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO
Specialized agencies and IAEA						
FAO	No	Ombudsperson	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
IAEA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ICAO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ILO	No	Mediator	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
IMO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Annual report presented to governing body/legislative organ</i>	<i>Annual report issued as report of the ombudsman or as report by the executive head</i>	<i>Annual report publicly available</i>	<i>Annual report includes information on systemic issues/systemic observations</i>	<i>Annual report includes recommendations to management</i>	<i>Separate management response presented to governing body/legislative organ</i>
ITU	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNESCO	No	College of mediators	No	No	No	No
UNIDO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UN Tourism	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UPU	No	Ombudsperson	No	No	No	No
WHO	Yes	Ombudsperson	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, with a gap in 2024 and 2025
WIPO	No	Ombudsperson	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
WMO	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

^a Called “areas for improvement”.

Systemic and key issues identified and systemic observations made in annual reports of the ombudsman and mediation function

Organization	2020	2021	2022	2023
United Nations Secretariat and its departments and offices				
Office of the United Nations Ombudsman	(a) Policy and structural misalignment; (b) Leadership challenges; (c) Workplace culture; (d) Mental health; (e) Coaching gaps; (f) COVID-19 impacts	(a) Workplace conflict; (b) Impact of COVID-19; (c) Mental health and well-being; (d) Flexible work arrangements; (e) Leadership and management; (f) Accountability; (g) Policy implementation; (h) Communication and dialogue	(a) Mental health and well-being; (b) Workplace behaviour; (c) Formal processes and reintegration; (d) Racism in the workplace	(a) Workplace context; (b) Resource constraints; (c) Mental health and well-being; (d) Fostering a harmonious workplace; (e) Reinforcing United Nations values; (f) Performance management; (g) Early intervention and reintegration; (h) Addressing racial bias
Funds and programmes				
Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women)	(a) Racism; (b) COVID-19 impact on work; (c) Issues related to United Nations Volunteers; (d) Restructuring concerns; (e) Transparency issues in communication; (f) Mobility stress; (g) Lack of staff consultation	(a) Interpersonal differences at work; (b) Underperformance and performance-improvement plans; (c) Burnout and mental health at work during the COVID-19 pandemic	(a) Vaccination concerns; (b) Disability accommodation; (c) Contractual inequities in emergencies; (d) Inconsistent flexible work policies; (e) Relocation issues; (f) Workplace issues;	(a) Support for mental health and disabilities; (b) Ineffective conflict resolution and psychological safety; (c) Unclear and misused performance evaluation practices; (d) Disruptive organizational decisions; (e) Weak organizational culture around reporting

Organization	2020	2021	2022	2023
			(g) Lack of civility and accountability;	and addressing misconduct
			(h) Managerial failures;	
			(i) Inequitable career progression and opaque recruitment;	
			(j) Limited supervisory support	
UNHCR	No report issued	No report issued	(a) Downsizing processes and communication strategy;	(a) Downsizing processes and communication strategies;
			(b) Performance management and appraisal competencies and compliance;	(b) Benefits and compensation;
			(c) Adaptation to organizational changes and transformation	(c) Performance management and appraisal competencies
UNRWA	No report issued	No report issued	No report issued	No report issued
WFP	(a) Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging;	(a) Impact of COVID-19 on mental health;	(a) Issues around the formal justice system;	(a) Job security;
	(b) Gender and racial biases;	(b) Psychological safety in teams;	(b) Feedback and performance management;	(b) Communication issues;
	(c) Anti-racism	(c) Workforce planning;	(c) Workplace mental health;	(c) Flexible work concerns;
	(d) Mental health and neurodiversity;	(d) Compliance	(d) Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging	(d) Supervisor-employee conflicts
	(e) Transparency;			
	(f) Internal system of justice			
Other United Nations bodies or entities				
ITC	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS	See UNOMS
UNAIDS	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO	See WHO

Organization	2020	2021	2022	2023
Specialized agencies and IAEA				
FAO	No report issued due to pandemic limitations and the establishment of the separate function only in March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Exploitation of affiliated workforce; (b) Access to justice; (c) Mobility cases; (d) Performance management system; (e) Harassment and abuse of authority; (f) Gender disparity; (g) Respect and morale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Precarious contracts; (b) Harassment and abuse; (c) Job satisfaction and well-being; (d) Hardship duty stations; (e) Internal justice system; (f) Return-to-office issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Harassment and abuse of authority; (b) Performance management; (c) Burnout; (d) Internal justice; (e) Decentralized office structure
IAEA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ICAO	No report issued	No report issued	No report issued	No report issued
ILO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Evaluative and peer relationships; (b) Workplace conflict resolution; (c) Mediator's office capacity; (d) Anti-harassment policy and formal complaints 	No report issued due to absence of mediator in 2021 and 2022	No report issued due to absence of mediator in 2021 and 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Supervisory relationships; (b) Job and career; (c) Prohibited conduct and compliance; (d) Peer and colleague relationships; (e) Safety, health, well-being and physical environment; (f) Organizational, leadership and management; (g) Values, ethics and standards
IMO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Organization	2020	2021	2022	2023
ITU	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNESCO ^a	(a) Performance assessment; (b) Work overload; (c) Misinterpretation of the organization's official documents; (d) Communication gaps between the stakeholders involved in a conflict	(a) Performance assessment; (b) Setting or revising objectives; (c) Work overload; (d) Supervisory hierarchy; (e) Misinterpretation of the organization's official texts; (f) Communication gaps between the stakeholders involved in a conflict	(a) Workplace harassment; (b) Misinterpretation of the rules governing the preparation of performance evaluations	(a) Psychological harassment; (b) Interpersonal conflict related to team working methods; (c) Hierarchical conflict; (d) Performance appraisal; (e) Job reclassification; (f) Staff mobility
UNIDO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UN Tourism	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UPU	n/a	(a) Tensions or issues within work teams; (b) Difficulties with the supervisor; (c) Issues and questions related to the procedures in force within UPU	(a) Tensions or issues within work teams; (b) Difficulties with the supervisor; (c) Issues and questions related to the procedures in force within UPU	(a) Tensions or issues within work teams; (b) Difficulties with the supervisor; (c) Issues and questions related to the procedures in force within UPU
WHO	(a) COVID-19 pandemic impact; (b) Diversity and racism	(a) COVID-19 pandemic impact; (b) Culture change	(a) Informal first approach; (b) Dignity; (c) Hybrid working environment	(a) Support for staff members; (b) Performance appraisals; (c) Need for restorative processes
WIPO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
WMO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

^a As listed in the annual reports of the Ethics Office.