

## **OMBUDSPERSON AND MEDIATION SERVICES DIVISION**

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2025**



**THEME:  
TOWARDS EXCELLENCE IN FACILITATING  
CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

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**A WORD FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON**

Dear Colleagues,

The Ombudsperson and Mediation Services (OMS) is dedicated to assisting staff members within the organization by providing a safe environment for discussing issues or concerns, exploring options for conflict resolution, and bringing systemic issues to management for resolution.

The Office operates in a manner that preserves the confidentiality of those seeking services, maintains a neutral and impartial position with respect to the concerns raised, works at an informal level of the organizational system compared to more formal channels like the Grievance Panel and the Administrative Tribunal, and is independent of formal organizational structures.


OMS provides a vital service and serves as a trusted advisor, engaged by the organization to inform critical decisions that have a lasting and positive impact. The Office serves as a safe, off-the-record resource for staff members, decision-makers, and stakeholders, seeking ways to identify and address workplace issues and other concerns. Separate from but complementing the work of Human Resources, Legal, and Compliance, the Ombudsperson understands that addressing conflict is often the crucible through which staff members and the organization must pass before fairness, positive change, and progress can be achieved.

OMS empowers staff to address conflicts and concerns while aiding the organization in assessing risks, enhancing culture, refining responses, and tackling issues that obstruct their goals. For any organization seeking a trusted resource to navigate today’s complex social and work environment, the Office of the Ombudsperson serves as a transformative force toward a more ethical, engaged, fair, and empowered organization and staff throughout the African Union.

The Ombudsperson will listen to you, discuss your concerns, demystify policies, and help you through conflict coaching or confidence coaching on how you can self-advocate.

Our work, as individuals and as a collective, is grounded in principles of fairness, equity, and respect for every person within our organization. I am sharing with the leadership and staff members our report covering the period from January 2024 to June 2025. This report will focus on three key areas central to our mission: career development, staffing issues, and performance management.

Each of these components plays a critical role in shaping the experience of our staff and the overall effectiveness of our organization. It is through these areas that we can empower individuals, foster a culture of growth, and address challenges that may arise as we work together in our shared mission.

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## 1. CAREER DEVELOPMENT: A Path to Growth and Fulfillment

At the heart of any successful organization is the commitment to fostering the growth of its staff members. Career development is not merely an obligation, it is an opportunity for each individual to realize their fullest potential, for our staff to feel valued, and for our organization to benefit from the diverse talents and perspectives that each person brings.

As Ombudsperson, I hear many stories from individuals seeking greater clarity about their career paths, the skills needed to advance, and the support available for their professional development. Staff members express frustration about the organization not prioritizing internal candidates when competing for vacant positions. Furthermore, they have raised concerns regarding the delays in the implementation of SACA, which has resulted in many positions not being advertised. Additionally, staff members have voiced their frustration that some positions are being removed from SACA and advertised, even though several staff members have already competed for those positions in SACA and are still waiting for their results.


It is critical that African Union Commission takes proactive steps to ensure that career development is accessible to all. This means investing in mentorship programs, ensuring training opportunities are available to a wide range of staff, and creating a clear roadmap for growth within our organization. It also means that Rule 35.1 of the Staff Regulations and Rules on Internal Recruitment is applied in filling vacant posts.

Moreover, the organization must recognize that career development is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We must tailor opportunities to the unique aspirations and needs of individuals, whether that involves lateral movements, transfer to organs, or support for those pursuing leadership roles. By doing so, management cultivates a workforce that feels empowered, engaged, and driven to excel.

## 2. STAFFING ISSUES: Addressing the Challenges Faced by the Organization

While career development is a critical area of focus, management must also acknowledge that staffing issues remain one of the most significant challenges within our organization.

One of the issues I often hear about in my role is the need for more transparent, fair, and efficient recruitment processes. This organization is home to some of the most talented professionals in Africa and from our diaspora, yet the African Union Commission (AUC) must constantly strive to ensure that our staffing practices are inclusive and that it continue to attract diverse talent. The challenge of balancing the need for specialized expertise with the desire for broader representation and inclusivity must remain at the forefront of management discussions must also address the retention of its top talent. Ensuring that the staff feel supported, appreciated, and valued is just as important as bringing in new team members. It is essential that management continuously assess the work environment and adjust to ensure that everyone has the resources and support needed to thrive. This includes providing opportunities for advancement, fair compensation (salary review), and a positive, inclusive workplace culture.

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### 3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: Supporting Success and Accountability

Finally, performance management is crucial in ensuring that both individual and organizational goals are met. However, performance management should not be viewed merely as an evaluative process, it must be an ongoing conversation that is rooted in support, growth, and collaboration.

As Ombudsperson, I hear from staff who feel that the performance management system does not always provide them with constructive feedback or the clarity they need to improve. The management and staff members must work together to ensure that performance management is not seen as a bureaucratic hurdle, but as an essential tool for professional development. It must be a two-way process in which feedback is exchanged openly, and challenges are addressed with respect and empathy.

Performance evaluation should not be perceived as a tool to disadvantage staff members who are not favored by their supervisor or to unfairly benefit those who are preferred.

Moreover, performance management must be aligned with the organization's values. It should be clear, transparent, and equitable, ensuring that every staff member has a fair opportunity to succeed. This includes providing the necessary resources for training, ensuring that goals are realistic, and recognizing the efforts of those who contribute to AU mission, whether through formal awards or informal appreciation.

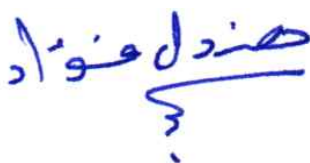
#### Moving Forward Together

In conclusion, the work of career development, staffing, and performance management is deeply interconnected. Leadership must approach these areas with a mindset that values each staff member as a unique contributor to our collective success. AUC must ensure that every person feels supported in his/her professional journey, that it attracts and retains a diverse pool of talent, and that performance management is seen as a tool for growth, rather than just assessment.


As an Ombudsperson, I am here to listen, to offer guidance, and to work with each of you to ensure that the organization is a place where all can thrive. Together, we can create an environment where career development is nurtured, staffing challenges are addressed, and performance management leads to success and fulfillment for all.

I submit the report for your consideration and information.

**Fouad Hendel**



## **SECTION A: NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE** **OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE**

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## 1. GENERAL

Extracted from the Terms of Reference approved in December 2024 by the former Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC).

### 1.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

The Ombudsperson and Mediation Services (OMS) acts as the informal, independent recourse mechanism for addressing work-related employee grievances within the African Union. The Office reports directly to the President of the African Union Commission and is tasked with the following mandate:

- (a) *Advise and guide the Union, officials, and staff members on managing workplace conflict, and mediate grievances and interpersonal disputes across all African Union organs, institutions, and offices.*
- (b) *The Office of the Ombudsperson shall promote non-adversarial means of managing employment-based relations between Officials and Staff Members and the Management through conciliation, mediation and negotiation in line with the provisions of these Regulations and Rules.*
- (c) *The mandate of the Ombudsperson shall be limited to addressing matters arising from administrative decisions taken in violation of an Official, and Staff Member's terms and conditions of employment; as outlined in Rule 69.2 of the African Union Staff Regulations and Rules. The Ombudsperson also adheres to the international standards of practice of the International Ombuds Association, in which he became a member in March 2024.*

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## 1.2 OMS'S THREE FUNCTIONS

1. **OMBUDSING:** The Ombudsperson responds to grievances from staff or the African Union by managing and facilitating resolution through a flexible, problem-solving approach. The primary role of the Ombudsperson is to informally assist in resolving these grievances.

Grievances encompass issues related to the administration of benefits, professional concerns, and staff employee relations, all of which the Ombudsperson addresses directly. OMS will establish systems to ensure confidentiality of grievances, safeguarding information from records, official documents, staff members, and management.

2. **ADVISING:** Providing independent advice and recommendations to management on addressing shortcomings in employment policies, procedures, and practices. Unlike the Ombudsperson and mediation roles, the advisory function is not case-specific. It aims to provide cross-cutting and upward feedback on systemic issues while offering solutions for any deficiencies in employment policies, procedures, and practices. However, the recommendations made by the Ombudsperson are not binding.
3. **MEDIATING:** Overseeing the provision of mediation services before a matter reaches the Staff Grievance Panel or as an alternative to the Administrative Tribunal. Mediation can also be used with the agreement of the parties to pause proceedings while attempting to settle the issue before the Ombudsperson.


Mediation is initiated either at the request of a staff member, management, or through referral. It is a cost-effective alternative to formal trials, offering the advantage of allowing the parties to maintain control over the process. This can lead to a formal and binding agreement without the need to disclose settlement details to third parties

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### 1.3 INDEPENDENCE

The Ombudsperson reports outside the typical structures of the organization. He traditionally reports to the highest level of our organization, which is the Cabinet of the Chairperson, to provide objective advice and enhance his work. Being independent allows the Ombudsperson to maintain an insider-outsider perspective. He also conveys trends and concerns upward to leaders, including the highest level of the organization and other decision-makers throughout. OMS's independence is supported in several structural ways:


- i) The Ombudsperson reports directly to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and operates independently of line management.
- ii) The Ombudsperson holds no other position within the organization that could compromise its independence.
- iii) The Ombudsperson has sole discretion over whether or how to address specific concerns, trends, or systemic issues and may act on concerns identified through direct observation.
- iv) The Ombudsperson has access to all African Union information and staff members.
- v) The Ombudsperson has the authority to select the staff of the Ombudsperson Office and to manage its budget and operations.
- vi) Except as expressly provided for, caution should be exercised to avoid excessive involvement in the African Union's internal processes, while balancing this caution against the requirements of the advisory role.

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## 1.4 NEUTRALITY AND IMPARTIALITY

Neutrality and impartiality are crucial for fostering the trust and confidence of staff and management, enabling the Ombudsperson to effectively facilitate the resolution of grievances. These principles are upheld through various measures:

- i) The Ombudsperson strives for impartiality, fairness, and objectivity in the treatment of staff members and consideration of issues.
- ii) The Ombudsperson advocates for fair and equitable administration of processes, without representing staff members within the organization.
- iii) As a designated neutral party, the Ombudsperson reports to the Chairperson of the Commission and operates independently without affiliation to any compliance functions within the organization.
- iv) The Ombudsperson holds no additional roles within the African Union that could compromise his neutrality.
- v) The Ombudsperson is not aligned with any formal or informal African Union associations that could create real or perceived conflicts of interest.
- vi) The Ombudsperson has no personal interest in, or potential gain or loss from, the outcome of any issue.
- vii) The Ombudsperson is responsible for addressing the legitimate concerns and interests of all staff members involved in the matter under consideration.
- viii) The Ombudsperson helps develop a range of responsible options to resolve problems and facilitates discussions to identify the best solutions.


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## 1.5 CONFIDENTIALITY

The management and disclosure of information are essential to the work of the Ombudsperson. While confidentiality is crucial in certain cases, disclosing information is vital for ensuring independence and impartiality. In some situations, disclosure is necessary to achieve solutions. The privilege of confidentiality is overridden when there is an imminent risk of serious harm, and no other reasonable options are available. The Ombudsperson has the authority to determine the existence of such a risk.

The Ombudsperson maintains strict confidentiality for all communications with those seeking assistance and takes all reasonable steps to safeguard this confidentiality, including:


- i) The Ombudsperson maintains confidentiality of all communications unless explicitly permitted to disclose them during informal discussions, and even then, only at the Ombudsperson's sole discretion.
- ii) The Ombudsperson does not disclose, and must not be compelled to disclose, the identity of any individual who contacts the Ombudsperson.
- iii) The Ombudsperson acts on an individual's issues only when that staff member's express permission and within the agreed extent, unless such action can be taken without compromising the individual's identity.
- iv) The Ombudsperson does not provide testimony in any formal processes within the African Union and resists testifying in formal processes outside the African Union, even when granted permission or requested to do so.
- v) The Ombudsperson identifies trends, patterns, issues, and concerns related to policies and procedures, including potential future issues, and provides recommendations for addressing them responsibly, all without breaching confidentiality or anonymity.

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## 1.6 COMMUNICATION:

The effectiveness of the OMS is crucial for its success and hinges on the quality of communication regarding matters brought to the Office. The Ombudsperson aims to improve interactions with its constituency through the following practices:

- i) When addressing issues systematically, such as providing cross and upward feedback, the Ombudsperson ensures that the identity of individuals is protected.
- ii) The Ombudsperson does not keep records of the parties involved, but he keeps data.
- iii) The Ombudsperson stores information, including notes, appointments, and calendars, in a secure manner that is protected from unauthorized access.
- iv) A consistent and standard procedure is followed for the destruction of such information.
- v) The Ombudsperson prepares data and reports in a way that maintains confidentiality.
- vi) Communications made to the Office do not constitute formal notices to the African Union. The Ombudsperson does not act as an agent for the African Union or accept formal notices but directs staff members to the appropriate channel for making formal notices.


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## 1.7 INFORMALITY AND OTHER STANDARDS

The flexibility inherent in informality allows the African Union to address issues before they escalate to formal disputes or litigation. In this role, the Ombudsperson is committed to listening, exchanging information, identifying and framing issues, and developing responsible options. With discretionary permission, the Ombudsperson may also engage in informal shuttle diplomacy.

In practical terms, the process operates as follows:

- i) The Ombudsperson helps individuals explore new methods for resolving their own problems.
- ii) The Ombudsperson serves as an informal, off-the-record resource for resolving concerns, examining procedural irregularities, and addressing broader systemic issues when appropriate.
- iii) The Ombudsperson does not make binding decisions, mandate policies, or formally adjudicate matters on behalf of the African Union.
- iv) The Ombudsperson's role complements but does not replace formal recourse channels.
- v) Engagement with the Office is voluntary and is not a mandatory step in any grievance process or African Union policy.
- vi) The Ombudsperson does not participate in formal investigative or adjudicative procedures. When formal investigations are requested, the Ombudsperson directs staff members to the relevant departments.
- vii) The Ombudsperson adheres to the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, stays professionally current through continuing education and provides opportunities for staff to pursue professional training.

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## 1.8 REPORTING TO THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION:

The Ombudsperson reports to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in accordance with the Staff Regulations and Rules. The OMS operates independently from the African Union's Senior Management Team. Its activities are detailed in an Annual Report, which will be published on its website and accessible to all staff members.

Occasionally, the Office prepares and submits reports that address comments and recommendations related to identified shortcomings in the African Union's employment policies, procedures, and practices. These reports are shared exclusively with Management and the relevant organizational units, and they do not carry binding authority.

Comprehensive reports on systemic feedback are periodically provided to the Chairperson. These reports provide an overview of systemic issues that occurred during the specified period and include recommendations for addressing them. Additionally, the Office meets monthly with the Human Resources Directorate, Office of the Legal Counsel, the Office of Internal Oversight, the Administrative Tribunal and other Directorates and stakeholders to discuss a range of technical briefings and issues.

## 2. THE OMBUDSPERSON'S ROLE

The Ombudsperson has a unique role. He serves as confidential, informal, impartial, and independent support for staff members and the organization.

What does he do in this unique role? He listens, he holds space, he demystifies policies, and he helps staff members by doing conflict coaching or confidence coaching on how they can self-advocate.

He can facilitate discussions between two parties or large groups, and he can identify patterns occurring within our organization.

He helps to promote fairness.

He helps the group by improving trust, and he helps the group by doing some consensus-building sometimes.

He doesn't participate in investigations or produce findings to those investigations.

He doesn't take corrective measures, and he doesn't hold that space nor do he create policy and maintain records.

He is not part of any formal process. However, he does have relationships with those that hold those spaces.

### 2.1 AN ALTERNATIVE INTERNAL DISPUTE MECHANISM

The Ombudsperson's main objective is to help facilitate the resolution of issues on employment grievances between staff themselves and between staff and the organization. While not all problems can be resolved, OMS's approach provides a process through which parties are more likely to find mutually satisfactory solutions. The aim is to identify concerns, address systemic issues, and work with the parties towards useful options.


### 2.2 RAISING A GRIEVANCE

#### 2.2.1 Grounds for a Complaint

Grievance may include anything that affects the staff members in the day-to-day delivery of their duties. For the purposes of management of the issue, the complaints are classified as follows:

- Benefits and Compensation
- Performance Evaluation
- Separation
- Career and Development
- Conduct
- Policies and Procedures

The Ombudsperson may, at the close of the intervention, advise the staff member or management of the outcome of his intervention.

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## 2.2.2 Who can lodge a complaint

Any staff member or management, whether based at Headquarters, a Liaison Office, or a Regional Office, may raise concern regarding an issue. The Ombudsperson reserves the right, at his discretion, to decline considering grievance if it is not deemed to have been brought to the Office's attention in a timely manner.

## 2.2.3 Timelines for handling complaints

An issue presented to the Ombudsperson should typically be resolved within four (4) weeks. The grievance will be monitored using internal systems, and standard timelines will be followed. However, if the complexity of the issue or specific circumstances make this timeline impractical, an alternative timeframe will be discussed and mutually agreed upon by the parties involved. The following steps will normally be followed in response to grievances received:

Step 1: Staff requests for a meeting

Step 2: Case Intake

Step 3: Assessment discussion

Step 4: Exploring options open to the parties

Step 5: Monitoring and follow-up

Step 6: Conclusion

## 2.2.4 Receiving and assessing complaints

### 2.2.1 Case Initiation

At the case initiation stage, the Ombudsperson receives grievance and establishes the framework for addressing the issue in accordance with the Office's Ethical Practice.

The Ombudsperson ensures that the matter falls within the OMS's mandate and, if not, directs staff to the appropriate office.

The Ombudsperson then follows a six-point approach to resolve the issue.

### 2.2.2 Separate staff from the problem

Human beings are not projects; they have emotions and feelings and may often feel disillusioned by the situation at hand. Emotions can sometimes cloud the objective merits of a case. The Ombudsperson's role is to help staff members shift their perspective, encouraging them to work together in addressing the problem, rather than viewing each other as adversaries.

### **2.2.3 Focus on interests, not positions**


The goal of negotiation is to satisfy the underlying interests of staff members, rather than simply focusing on their stated positions.

### **2.2.4 Invent options for mutual gain**

Generate a wide range of potential solutions that advance shared interests and creatively reconcile differing interests.

### **2.2.5 Insist on using objective criteria**

Apply fair standards, such as expert opinions, established practices, or legal frameworks, to guide the resolution.

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### **3. DUTIES OF THE OMBUDSPERSON**

Once grievance is received, the Ombudsperson should develop a strategic framework.

#### **3.1 ANALYZE THE ISSUE**

In this phase, the goal is to fully understand the issue. Gather and organize information, considering potential miscommunication, emotional hostility, and biased perceptions.

#### **3.2 PLANNING STAGE**

This stage focuses on generating ideas and deciding on the best course of action, explore realistic options, and devise strategies to address interpersonal issues while managing expectations effectively.


#### **3.3 DISCUSSION STAGE**

During discussions, the Ombudsperson is mindful of differences in perception, feelings of frustration or anger, and communication challenges using active listening skills to encourage progress toward a resolution.

#### **3.4 CLOSING STAGE**

Extended sessions may lose their effectiveness and risk escalating into disputes thus we use reality checks and strategic interventions to ensure the issue is addressed both efficiently and effectively.

## **SECTION B: ANALYSIS OF MAIN ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT FROM JANUARY 2024 TO JUNE 2025**

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## 1. CASE LOAD CLASSIFICATION

### 1.1 HARASSMENT WITHIN ORGANS AND LIAISON OFFICES

Staff members have reported incidents of harassment in both the Organs and Liaison offices. This includes abuse of power, inappropriate behavior by superiors or colleagues, and a lack of a safe environment to report such incidents. Furthermore, there seems to be inconsistency in application of Rules and Policies between Organs and the Headquarters.

#### **Immediate Action to be taken in addressing harassment:**


To effectively combat harassment, it is imperative to operationalize the **Ethics and Integrity Department**, which will be tasked with the implementation and management of a **confidential reporting system**. This system will allow staff members to report instances of harassment or inappropriate behavior in a secure and anonymous manner, ensuring their protection and the integrity of the process.

Furthermore, management should consider conducting periodic visits to various Organ offices to ensure that responsibilities are being carried out in accordance with established protocols, and that the delegation of power is not being misused or overstepped. Additionally, the Office of the Legal Counsel (OLC) should take proactive steps to ensure that all Organs receive a clear and formal delegation of power directly from H.E. the Chairperson. This delegation should be explicit and comprehensive, outlining the precise scope of authority and the mandate that each Organ is entrusted with, thereby minimizing ambiguity and reinforcing accountability within the organization.

**Awareness Session:** to foster a respectful and harassment-free workplace, it is essential to organize regular workshops on workplace behavior, respect, and conflict resolution. These workshops should be designed to educate staff members at all levels, with particular emphasis on supervisors, who are often in positions of influence. The training should focus on the importance of maintaining a professional and inclusive environment, as well as recognizing and addressing inappropriate behaviors before they escalate.

To ensure the session's effectiveness, it should be mandatory for all staff members, with refresher courses scheduled regularly. In addition, supervisors should receive specialized training focused on leadership responsibility, ensuring they are equipped with the skills to handle sensitive situations such as complaints, conflicts, or allegations of harassment, with professionalism and discretion.

**Investigation:** A clear and formal investigation procedure for harassment complaints is critical to ensure that any allegations are taken seriously and addressed promptly. The process should be transparent, impartial, and thorough to maintain trust in the organization's commitment to tackling harassment.

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## 1.2 ISSUES RAISED CONCERNING APPLICATION OF SRR, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

There are incidents reported that addresses the issue of the inconsistent application of Rules and Policies within the organization. Observations and feedback indicate that policies are not uniformly enforced across departments. This inconsistency is contributing to reduced morale, confusion, and potential legal and operational risks. The following discrepancies have been observed.

**Remote work:** It has come to our attention that some staff members are working remotely based on informal agreements with their supervisors. This has led to concerns among other staff members who have not been able to afford the same opportunity, resulting in perceptions of inconsistency and unfairness.


Additionally, there have been instances where international staff are working from their home countries. This practice presents potential legal and financial risks to the organization, particularly in areas such as the staff member maintaining his/her international entitlements while working from their home country and in cases of medical and other emergencies.

While remote work can offer increased productivity and flexibility for certain roles, the organization currently lacks a formal policy governing remote work arrangements. The absence of clear guidelines has contributed to uneven application across departments and raises compliance concerns.

To ensure fairness, transparency and alignment with the SRR, it is recommended that the Human Resources Directorate (HRMD) develop a comprehensive remote work policy. This policy should define eligibility criteria, approval processes, and performance expectations. A standardized approach will help maintain organizational consistency, mitigate risk, and support the staff members' engagement.

**Leave approvals:** Concerns have been raised regarding the leave approval process, particularly with instances of supervisors rejecting leave requests without providing sufficient justification. Additionally, it has been observed that some staff members are proceeding on leave without obtaining the necessary formal approval.

To facilitate effective work planning and ensure consistent staffing levels within Departments, Directorates, Divisions, and Units, Heads of Departments/Directorates are required to prepare an annual leave roster in consultation with their staff members. This roster should be finalized and submitted to the Human Resource Directorate (HRMD) before the beginning of the next year calendar. This process is in accordance with Rule 47.10 of the Staff Regulations and Rules (SRR), which stipulates that HRM should consolidate and publish an Annual Leave Roster by March each year. Adhering to this timeline will enable supervisors to plan appropriately for staff absences and ensure staff members are able to utilize their leave entitlements in a timely and organized manner.


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**Payment of Education Allowance:** Non-regular staff members have reported not receiving their education allowance entitlements, as outlined in the 2010 SRR. Despite a decision by the Member States to retroactively compensate eligible non-regular staff, they have not received the payments, even after submitting all required documentation.

It is essential that both the Human Resource and Finance Departments collaborate to ensure that these payments are processed promptly and in accordance with the established guidelines. Timely disbursement of the education allowance is critical not only for maintaining staff morale but also for upholding the organization's commitment to fairness and compliance with its regulatory framework.

**Acting Appointments:** Reports have emerged that certain staff members are being assigned responsibilities associated with higher-level positions without being formally designated as Acting Officers or Officers-in-Charge. This issue is particularly prevalent among non-regular staff, despite the SRR explicitly stating that non-regular staff should not act in substantive posts.

This practice raises concerns about fairness, transparency, and adherence to organizational policies. To address this, it is imperative that acting appointments be made in accordance with the SRR, and that all staff assuming higher responsibilities receive the appropriate recognition and official designation. Ensuring compliance will help maintain organizational integrity and staff trust.

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### 1.3 CONCERNS REGARDING TRANSPARENCY AND CLARITY IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The recruitment process is seen as slow and cumbersome, with long delays in hiring, unclear criteria, and inconsistencies in the process. This has led to gaps in staffing and an increase in workload for existing staff members. The staff members have also expressed their dissatisfaction regarding not giving any priority to internal candidates, which is a breach of the SRR.

It has been observed that there is a growing concern among staff regarding the transparency and clarity of the current recruitment processes. Specifically, a lack of clear communication around selection criteria, evaluation methods, and decision-making procedures has led to perceptions of inconsistency and potential bias.

Additionally, there have been concerns raised regarding the composition of interview panels. Specifically, it has been noted that some panelists may not possess the necessary qualifications or expertise related to the subject matter of the positions they are evaluating. This has led to questions about the effectiveness of the interview and shortlisting processes.

Moreover, there appears to be a lack of standardized guidance provided to panelists on how to assess candidates consistently and fairly. As a result, both candidates and panelists face uncertainty about the criteria being used in the selection process, which undermines the clarity and perceived fairness of the overall recruitment procedure.


In some instances, internal candidates have reported limited access to information about the outcomes of the recruitment process. This has contributed to frustration and diminished trust in the fairness and objectivity of the process.

#### 1.3.1 Clear Policy and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

A transparent and well-communicated recruitment framework is essential for maintaining staff confidence, supporting career development, and ensuring the selection of the most qualified candidates based on merit. Addressing concerns related to recruitment processes will not only boost internal morale but also enhance the organization's reputation for fairness, equity, and professionalism within the Human Resources Directorate (HRMD). It is therefore imperative that the recruitment policy be reviewed and updated to address these concerns comprehensively. Additionally, recruitment procedures should be clearly defined and communicated to ensure transparency throughout the entire process.


#### 1.3.2 Prioritizing Internal Candidates

In accordance with Rule 35.1, vacant positions can be advertised internally first to promote career progression and internal mobility among existing staff members. Currently, all positions are advertised both internally and externally simultaneously. Management should consider adopting a practice of initially advertising vacancies internally before opening them to external candidates. This approach supports staff motivation and demonstrates a commitment to valuing internal talent.

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### 1.3.3 Clear Communication

Effective communication is critical in managing expectations and ensuring a smooth recruitment process. Timelines, application procedures, and status updates should be clearly communicated to all applicants, especially internal candidates. Keeping candidates informed about the progress and outcomes of recruitment exercises fosters transparency and helps maintain trust in the process.

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## 1.4 TRANSFER / MOBILISATION PROCESS OF STAFF MEMBERS

Staff members have expressed dissatisfaction regarding the perceived lack of transparency and fairness in the processes governing staff transfers and mobilizations. Concerns have been raised about favoritism and inconsistencies in how decisions are communicated and implemented, leading to a sense of uncertainty and mistrust among staff members.

In addition, some staff members have requested transfers as a means to escape a toxic work environment. Rather than formally submitting grievances against their directors or heads of division, these staff members opt to seek transfers as an alternative solution.

To address these issues, it is essential that the Human Resource Directorate (HRMD) develops and disseminates clear, objective, and standardized guidelines governing staff transfers and mobilizations. Transparent communication of these policies will help ensure that the processes are perceived as equitable and consistent across the organization.

Moreover, the full functionality of the Ethics and Integrity Directorate must be ensured and strengthened. This Directorate serves as a critical platform where staff can safely report grievances and seek resolutions without feeling compelled to request transfers as a means of escape. By providing a trusted and impartial avenue for addressing workplace concerns, the organization can foster a healthier work environment and reduce unnecessary staff movements.


## 1.5 LACK OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

There is a notable gap in career development opportunities within the organization. Staff members have reported a scarcity of training programs, limited mentorship opportunities, and a lack of clearly defined career progression pathways. This situation has resulted in widespread dissatisfaction and diminished motivation among staff.

Several staff members have expressed frustration at remaining in the same positions within their respective departments for more than ten (10) years, without opportunities for advancement or transfer to other departments or organs.

While Rule 35.1 of the Staff Regulations and Rules (SRR) explicitly addresses internal recruitment, in practice, internal candidates are not prioritized. Positions are frequently advertised both internally and externally, which, although intended to be inclusive, often limits the career growth prospects for existing staff members. Furthermore, the SRR stipulates that promotions are contingent upon competitive recruitment processes. This means that even staff members with outstanding performance records can only ascend to higher positions through open competition, as there is no separate internal promotion mechanism.

To enhance staff development and retention, the organization should consider strengthening internal recruitment practices as per the SRR, expanding targeted training and mentorship programs, and establishing clearer career pathways that recognize and reward staff members' performance and potential.

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## 1.6 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The performance appraisal process is frequently delayed, resulting in frustration among staff members who perceive that their efforts and achievements are neither evaluated fairly nor in a timely manner. Such delays can undermine staff members' engagement and trust in the performance management system.

Additionally, non-regular staff members who have reached the maximum step within their grade (step 10) experience significant demotivation due to the absence of salary increments beyond this point. Despite their long tenure and contributions often comparable to, or exceeding, those of regular staff, these staff members feel undervalued and overlooked.

This lack of advancement opportunities and recognition negatively impacts morale and can lead to decreased productivity and commitment. Addressing these concerns by ensuring timely appraisals and reviewing progression to the next step for non-regular staff is essential to maintaining a motivated and equitable workforce


## 1.7 STAFF MANAGING CRITICAL ROLES WITHOUT VALID CONTRACTS

There have been reported instances where staff members are working without valid contracts. This may include expired contract and staff members waiting on new appointment decisions. Allowing staff members to work under these circumstances exposes the organization to avoidable legal and financial risks. Additionally, this situation hinders the organization's ability to ensure compliance with the Staff Regulations and Rules.

## 1.8 TRIBUNAL CASES

It has come to our attention that a total of USD 3,412,284.02 (Three million four hundred twelve thousand two hundred eighty-four Dollars) has been lost in tribunal cases over the past ten years. A contributing factor to this substantial loss could possibly be the lack of timely and adequate responses to staff concerns, which in turn has created the perception that management is unwilling or uninterested in addressing staff members' concerns.

With the operationalization of the Ethics and Integrity Directorate, it is anticipated that staff members will be able to exhaust all internal mechanisms to address administrative concerns and for conflict resolution before resorting to submitting a case to the Administrative Tribunal. This structured approach is expected to enhance internal accountability, improve grievance handling, and significantly reduce the organization's exposure to costly tribunal cases.

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## 2. ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED TO ADDRESS STAFF WELLNESS:

### 2.1 INITIATIVES IN OPERATIONALIZING OF THE ETHICS AND INTEGRITY DIRECTORATE

The operationalization of the Ethics and Integrity Directorate marks a significant step toward strengthening institutional accountability, transparency, and trust. This Directorate is central to addressing the critical issues previously identified, including the effective resolution of staff grievances and the enforcement of ethical standards across the organization.

The Leadership has already taken commendable steps in this direction. Notably, the appointment of the Head of Ombudsperson and Mediation Services, and the recruitment process for the Director of the Ethics and Integrity Directorate is currently underway.

Once fully operational, the Directorate will facilitate the timely resolution of grievance cases, reinforce accountability through an active Disciplinary Board, and contribute to the reduction of matters escalated to administrative tribunal. This initiative is pivotal in fostering a culture of fairness, integrity, and professionalism within the organization.

### 2.2 REVIEW OF THE INSURANCE POLICY


HRMD, in collaboration with the Medical Unit, is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the staff insurance policy. The aim is to develop a policy framework that is both responsive to the needs of employees and aligned with best practices in employee welfare.

This initiative underscores the organization's commitment to promoting staff well-being by ensuring that the insurance coverage is adequate, inclusive, and tailored to support the physical and mental health of all personnel.

### 2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

HRMD remains committed to strengthening the organization's governance framework by developing robust policies and administrative procedures. This process is particularly focused on addressing gaps identified in the revised Staff Regulations and Rules.

New policies and procedural guidelines will ensure consistency, enhance administrative efficiency, and provide clear standards aligned with organizational values and operational expectations. By institutionalizing these frameworks, HRMD aims to enhance transparency and improve decision-making across all levels.

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## 2.4 REVIEW OF COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

The organization has not reviewed its salary and benefits structure for the past (8) eight years. This is in contravention with 2010 as well as the 2023 Staff Regulations and Rules, which require the organization to review its salary and benefits structure every three/five years. However, this provision has not been implemented in recent cycles.

To address this, HRMD is initiating a comprehensive review of the current compensation and benefits package. The process includes the engagement of external consultants to conduct comparative analysis and provide recommendations. This review will ensure that the organization remains competitive in attracting and retaining top talent, while also maintaining fairness and equity in staff remuneration.

## 2.5 OPEN DOOR POLICY

By implementing an open-door policy, the management has offered numerous benefits to both staff members and management by fostering a culture of transparency, trust, and collaboration. It encourages open communication, allowing staff to freely share their concerns, ideas, or feedback with leadership without fear of retribution.

This early and direct exchange of information helps management identify and address issues proactively, often before they escalate. Furthermore, an open-door policy will boost staff members' morale and engagement by making individuals feel heard and valued, which in turn enhances job satisfaction and promotes a positive work environment.

By creating a space where dialogue is welcomed, we can strengthen internal relationships, drive continuous improvement, and ultimately support better decision-making.


## 2.6 TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND AFRICA DAY CELEBRATION

The Staff Association has played a vital role in fostering a sense of community, unity, and open communication within the organization through the successful organization of key staff engagement events.

One of the most impactful initiatives has been the coordination of town hall meetings, which have provided an inclusive platform for all staff members to engage directly with the new leadership, raise concerns, seek clarification on organizational matters, and contribute ideas. These forums have significantly enhanced transparency, encouraged dialogue, and strengthened the relationship between staff and management by promoting a culture of openness and mutual respect.

In addition to these important meetings, the Staff Association has also taken the lead in organizing Africa Day celebrations, an event that goes beyond cultural recognition to serve as a powerful tool for team building, staff cohesion, and organizational morale. By bringing staff members together in a spirit of celebration and solidarity, Africa Day has helped to reinforce a shared identity and a positive workplace culture that values diversity, heritage, and unity. These initiatives demonstrate the Staff Association's commitment to staff welfare, inclusivity, and the promotion of a collaborative organizational environment.

## **SECTION C: LAUNCH OF VALUES PROMOTION CHAMPIONS (VPC) PROGRAM**

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## 1. GENERAL

The VPC Program is an essential extension of Ombudsperson and Mediation Services (OMS) commitment to a respectful, supportive, and values-driven workplace. All staff are encouraged to engage with VPCs as early as possible when workplace concerns arise. Ignoring a conflict does not make it disappear, it often leads to escalation. Through informal, peer-led support, the VPCs offer a safe, trusted pathway to resolve concerns constructively.

## 2. WHY THE VPC PROGRAM IS NECESSARY


Conflict, when not addressed promptly or constructively, can escalate and result in lowered morale, impaired productivity, and disengagement. Especially in decentralized environments like regional offices, where proximity to formal recourse mechanisms may be limited, the VPC Program offers:

- **Proximity and accessibility:** Champions are peers, easily reachable and trusted within their local office contexts.
- **Prevention through early intervention:** By addressing issues informally, before they escalate into formal complaints or legal disputes, the program reduces both institutional risk and emotional strain on staff.
- **Support for transformation:** As the AUC undergoes continuous change, the VPCs act as stabilizing agents who reinforce the core values of mutual respect, collaboration, and integrity.

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE VPC PROGRAM

The VPC Program should be built on three main objectives:

1. **Support the informal resolution of workplace conflicts:** VPCs are trained to listen without judgment, help staff explore resolution options, and encourage collaboration between parties in conflict.
2. **Monitor emerging trends and risks:** Champions observe and report on patterns of workplace issues, without disclosing individual identities, helping leadership proactively improve the environment.
3. **Serve as a communication bridge:** VPCs relay relevant, generalized insights to OMS and senior management, ensuring that systemic issues receive the necessary attention at the institutional level.

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## 4. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF VPCS

VPCs are carefully selected volunteers, nominated by peers based on trust, integrity, and interpersonal skills. Their responsibilities include:

- Being the **first point of contact** for colleagues facing workplace difficulties.
- Upholding **confidentiality, neutrality, and independence** in all interactions.
- Helping colleagues **explore informal, collaborative options** to resolve conflicts.
- Communicating generic, non-identifiable trends to their respective **Directors General, Country Managers, or Deputy Directors**, as well as to OMS.
- Submitting **statistical logs with anonymized feedback** to help inform OMS's strategic interventions.

## 5. BENEFITS TO THE ORGANISATION

The VPC Program delivers measurable and strategic benefits:


- **Enhances workplace morale** and staff empowerment by promoting dignity and mutual respect.
- **Reduces the financial and** emotional cost associated with formal conflict resolution mechanisms.
- **Promotes consistency in values and conduct** across all offices.
- **Contributes to institutional learning** by highlighting recurring issues and recommending systemic improvements.

## 6. GUIDING FRAMEWORK: VPC STANDARD OF PRACTICE

To maintain quality and consistency, the "VPC Guide to Working with a Visitor" outlines:

- Clear definitions of the VPC's roles and boundaries.
- Ethical standards of confidentiality, impartiality, and accountability.
- Practical steps for handling conversations with staff seeking assistance.
- Referral mechanisms when issues exceed the informal scope of the VPC's function.

## **CONCLUSION**

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This report presents a comprehensive review of key organizational challenges affecting staff morale, operational efficiency, and institutional compliance. Major issues include incidents of workplace harassment, inconsistent application of Staff Regulations and Rules (SRR), lack of transparency in recruitment and staff mobility processes, limited career development opportunities, and delayed performance evaluations. These concerns have contributed to a perception of unfairness, reduced trust in leadership, and significant financial losses, most notably over USD 3.4 million in tribunal cases over the past decade.

In response, several strategic initiatives have been launched, including the operationalization of the Ethics and Integrity Directorate and ongoing policy reviews related to addressing the gaps of the revised Staff Regulations and Rules and staff wellness. The introduction of staff engagement platforms such as town hall meetings, the Value Promotion Champions (VPC) program, and open-door policies will further demonstrate a commitment to fostering a transparent and inclusive workplace culture.

To ensure sustained improvement, it is essential to institutionalize these reforms through clear policies, regular training, effective communication, and a strong accountability framework. By addressing systemic gaps and strengthening internal processes, the organization can rebuild trust, enhance performance, and create a respectful, equitable, and professionally fulfilling work environment for all staff.

In sum, I would like to note my gratitude for the opportunity to have been asked to function as the first Ombudsperson of the AUC. It is a real privilege, and I look forward to further developments and interactions with the AUC and its Organs.