

Annual Activity Report

of the Authorising Officer by Delegation

Year 2023

18 March 2024



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Introduction

The Ombudsman in brief

The Treaty on the functioning of the European Union empowers the Ombudsman to carry out inquiries into maladministration in the activities of the Union's institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, with the exception of the Court of Justice in its judicial role. Inquiries may be carried out in response to complaints, or on the Ombudsman's own initiative. The Ombudsman's independence is guaranteed by the Treaties.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights includes the right of EU citizens to complain to the Ombudsman. Companies, associations, and third country nationals resident in the EU also enjoy this right. The Ombudsman can deal with complaints about breaches of Charter rights, as well as other cases of maladministration. The Ombudsman therefore empowers citizens by helping them to realise their fundamental rights.

The Ombudsman's mission statement

Our mission is to help to support European citizenship. We do this by listening to citizens, to our stakeholders, and by working with the institutions of the EU to help to create a more accountable, transparent, ethical and effective administration.

Scope of the Annual Activity Report

The Annual Activity Report (AAR) of the authorising officer by delegation of the European Ombudsman is prepared in accordance with Article 74(9) of the Financial Regulation.

This AAR reports on the implementation of the Ombudsman's Annual Management Plan (AMP) for 2023 and focuses on the organisational, administrative, budgetary and financial aspects of the Office's activities in 2023. Annex 1 contains detailed information on the breakdown and allocation of human resources available to the Ombudsman. The Operating Framework, which sets out our main processes is attached as annex 2. The detailed report on the implementation of the budget in 2023 is attached as annex 3.

Outcomes of inquiries and efforts to improve good administration in the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, including events and outreach activities, are recorded in the Annual Report of the Ombudsman, which the Ombudsman will submit to Parliament later in the year. For ease of reference, the draft Annual Report for 2023 is annexed to this report (annex 4).



Highlights of the year

Main achievements in 2023

Real-life relevance and Impact

1. Achieved an overall acceptance rate of 81%;
2. Saw an increase of 20% in complaints within the mandate;
3. Opened 393 new inquiries on the basis of complaints and closed 369 complaint-based inquiries;
4. Opened 5 own-initiative inquiries and 5 strategic initiatives, including on how the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) complies with its fundamental rights obligations in the context of its search and rescue activities;
5. Registered 167 complaints in the area of public access to documents, the highest number recorded within a year;
6. Submitted a special report to the European Parliament on Commission delays in dealing with access to documents requests;
7. Hosted a conference on building a stronger EU integrity framework;

Citizens' awareness

8. Published a guide on access to EU documents;
9. Improved the online complaint form;
10. Added a dynamic section on the website homepage that displays recent updates in key inquiries;
11. Saw a significant rise of visitors to the website and a further rise of followers on all social media platforms;
12. Introduced automatic translation of content on the Website;
13. Hosted the annual ENO conference which focused on 'Protecting human rights: approaches to migration and artificial intelligence';
14. Hosted the fourth 'Award for Good Administration';
15. Adopted new implementing provisions;

Efficiency

16. Reached or exceeded the internal targets for two of the three complaint-handling KPIs;
17. Implemented new processes to further streamline the complaint-handling procedures;
18. Put in place a task force to monitor AI developments;
19. Reached a 95% occupation rate of establishment plan posts;
20. Achieved a budget implementation rate of 95%;
21. Introduced a scheme to promote sustainable mobility.



1. The structure and organisation of the Office

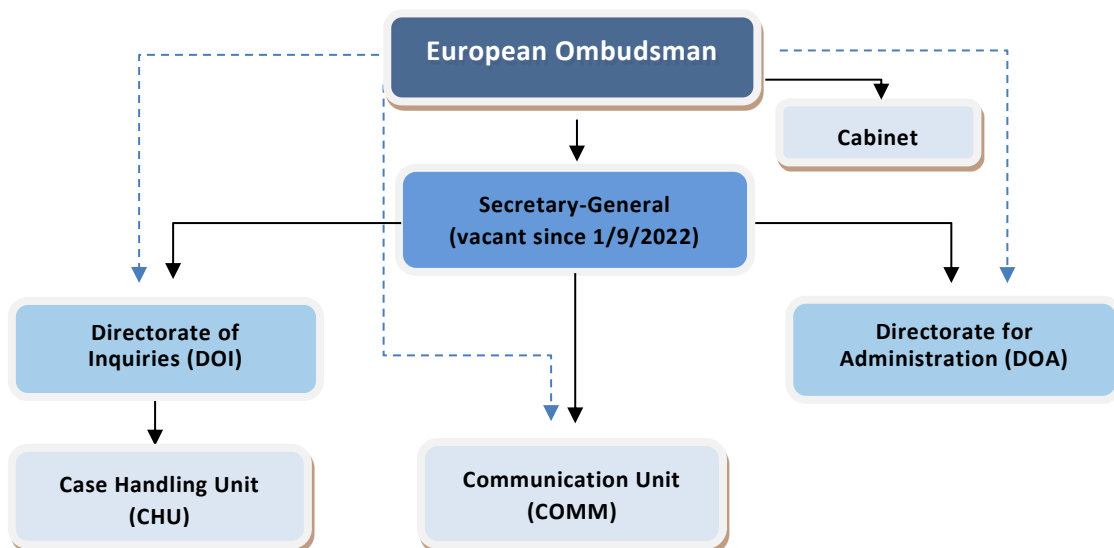
The **Cabinet (CAB)** works under the direct instruction of the Ombudsman. It advises and assists the Ombudsman to help ensure implementation of her vision, strategy and objectives. Cabinet members also liaise and represent the Ombudsman externally and draft speeches and articles on behalf of the Ombudsman.

The **Secretary-General (SG)** is responsible for the overall management of the Office and for ensuring coordination and implementation of the Ombudsman's strategy. Since the retirement of the Secretary-General in September 2022, the Directors and the Head of the Communication Unit report directly to the Ombudsman. Coordination is done at the Directorates' level with the support of the SG staff and the Ombudsman's Cabinet.

The **Directorate of Inquiries (DOI)**, which includes the **Case-handling Unit (CHU)** implements the Ombudsman's strategy in the area of complaints and inquiries.

The **Directorate for Administration (DOA)**, is responsible for all matters related to human resources (HR), budget and finance (FIN), process management, business continuity and infrastructure (PBI). The Directorate establishes and implements the appropriate internal control mechanisms and prepares information for the various budgetary control authorities. As of 1 September 2022, following the SG's retirement, the Director for Administration became the authorising officer by delegation.

The **Communication Unit (COMM)** supports the Ombudsman's objective of increasing citizens' awareness of the Office and co-ordinates the Ombudsman's relations with the European Network of Ombudsmen.





2. Our activities in 2023

The table and the scoreboard below show the results achieved in 2023 based on the priorities, actions and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets set out in the Annual Management Plan (AMP) for 2023.

The following sections provide an analysis of these results and further information on the activities carried out with reference to the main processes of the Operating Framework.

2.1 Implementation of AMP 2023 actions

The table below lists the actions under the six themes identified in the AMP 2023 and describes the state of implementation of each action.

Theme 1 - Enhancing the Ombudsman's impact in key areas			
Actions		Owner(s)	State of play
1	Enhance ethical lobbying across a range of IBOAs, including improved controls, better functioning of the Transparency Register and guidelines on declarations of interest.	DOI	Relevant work in 2023 included a strategic initiative on EP ethics and integrity enforcement; a strategic initiative on Commission travel expenses; an inquiry into how the secretariat of the EU Transparency Register assessed the information provided by two entities; an inquiry into the composition of the Commission's Regulatory Scrutiny Board and how it interacts with interest representatives, as well as public access to declarations of interest made by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board members.
2	Maintain focus on transparency in EU decision-making, notably regarding the environment, defence and energy	DOI	Relevant work in 2023 included a strategic initiative, followed by an own-initiative inquiry on possible conflicts of interest in evaluating defence funds; an own-initiative inquiry on the risk management of dangerous chemical substances by the European Commission; a strategic initiative on how the European Medicines Agency ensures proactive transparency concerning clinical trial data; inquiries into refused public access to documents concerning the EU-US Energy Security Task Force, the energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of the ceramics industry reported under the EU's emissions



			trading system, and EU environmental strategy and legislation.
3	Organise an European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO) seminar on the transparency of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.	COMM	This action was replaced by an ethics conference, which took place on 6 June 2023.
4	Organise capacity-building events on disability rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).	DOI-CHU	The EO contributed to several stakeholder events: PETI Annual Workshop on Disabilities, Webinar on EU funds and the role of fundamental rights bodies, Meeting with the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI).
5	Strengthen follow-up on compliance in inquiries.	DOI/DOA	Following the finalisation of compliance statistics for cases closed in 2022, a series of meetings in early 2024 seek to generate greater compliance with EO findings.
6	Complete the review of the Fast Track procedure and carry out a stakeholder survey in that context.	DOI/COMM/IT	A first draft of the review has been produced and will be finalised upon completion of the survey in early 2024.

Theme 2 - Engaging with stakeholders

Actions		Owner(s)	State of play
7	Organise the annual ENO conference and stakeholder conference.	COMM	The annual ENO conference took place in Brussels on 9-10 November 2023.
8	Work with other EU institutions to improve the application of the public access to documents rules, including dealing with resource intensive requests.	DOI	The following contributed to the implementation of this action: Recommendation in OII on Commission handling of public access requests. Recommendation in OII on Frontex handling of public access requests. Decision in case 2243/2022/SF on how the European Medicines Agency (EMA) deals with requests for public access to documents concerning a large number of documents. Presentations by the public access team at the Commission's access-to-documents coordinators meeting and the EU agency network on the EO's new guide on public access to documents.



9	Exchange good practices about statistics and performance measurement with other EU complaint handling bodies.	DOI-CHU	A concept note including an action plan and timetable was drafted in December. Implementation is planned in 2024.
10	Reach out to the European Court of Human Rights on areas of common interest, notably freedom of information.	DOI	Contacts are established with a presentation to be scheduled for Q1 2024.
11	Become a depositing institution at the Historical Archives of the EU in Florence.	DOA-PBI	The preparation of documents pertaining to the mandates of the first and second Ombudsmen were finalised and the actual deposit at the Historical Archives is expected in early 2024.

Theme 3 - Ensuring dynamic and relevant communications and outreach

Actions		Owner(s)	State of play
12	Organise the 2023 Award for Good Administration.	COMM	The award ceremony took place on 28 June 2023.
13	Communication campaign on the EO's long-term impact on the EU administration.	COMM	The EO impact overview is available on the website in all languages. The communication campaign took place in autumn 2023.
14	Communication campaign on public access to documents.	COMM/ DOI	The communication campaign around the access to documents guide was carried out in January 2023.
15	Communication campaign to promote new EO videos.	COMM	The communication campaign around the new EO videos started in March 2023.
16	Increase the user-friendliness of the EO website.	COMM/ DOA-IT	Updates to cases of public importance were added to the homepage (with images).

Theme 4 - Improving the management and the security of documents, information and data

Actions		Owner(s)	State of play
17	Improve and develop the existing online account for complainants to allow increased interaction through this account.	DOA-PBI	Since May 2023, complainants are able to add information to their complaints online. The online form was updated for clarity and makes it possible to categorise 'failure to reply' complaints. Future improvements will focus on access to documents complaints as well as explore how to make documents in the



			Case Management System (CMS) accessible in the complainant's account online.
18	Enhance the functionalities of Case Management System (CMS) to better support the work of users.	DOA-PBI	A key development was the reactivation and enhancement of the system that imports online complaints into the CMS automatically. This streamlined the workload for inquiries officers and assistants, while minimizing the risk of errors. Further improvements include a more advanced search function, with the possible use of AI.
19	Conclude a Service Level Agreement with the European Parliament in the field of ICT security, adopt an internal ICT security policy and take implementing measures.	DOA-PBI	A draft agreement between the responsible Directorate-General in Parliament and the European Ombudsman's services was reached. Following adoption, actions to implement the remaining measures will commence.
20	Implement the E-invoicing system to receive and process supplier invoices.	DOA-FIN	The E-invoicing system is being implemented. Contractors will be able to transmit electronic invoices through the 'Supplier portal' as soon as access to E-Prior (managed by the Commission) is granted.

Theme 5 - Strengthening efficiency and resilience

Actions		Owner(s)	State of play
21	Simplify the handling of failure to reply complaints and explore ways to streamline further the processing of information requests and outside the mandate complaints.	DOA/DOI	The procedure for handling straightforward failure-to-reply complaints was thoroughly reformed; enhancing efficiency and expanding assistants' roles, with improvements later applied across other complaint types. A 2022 pilot for simplifying out-of-mandate complaint processing delivered impressive results, speeding up responses and delegating many tasks from inquiries officers to DOA administrative assistants. Additionally, the method for processing information requests was streamlined, eliminating unnecessary steps including the registration of ephemeral documents.
22	Reflect on priority areas in which we could start deploying artificial intelligence.	DOI/DOA	The progress of AI in the EU institutions was closely followed through participation in many AI events organised by EUIBOAs and through the DOA's specific interactions with the European Commission (DG Translation), the Court of Justice of the EU, the European



			Parliament and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (GPT@JRC). To prioritise AI integration, a cross-office task force was established. It identified automatic translation as a first area of focus. As a result, AI was incorporated into the website in November 2023, improving the accessibility of information on the EO's work. Additionally, the Office focused on producing communication materials, using off-the-shelf tools to create presentations and internal tutorials.
23	Continue the review of financial policies and charters to ensure they are in line with the Financial Regulation.	DOA/FIN	Actions taken so far include updating the charters for the authorising officer by delegation and authorising officers by sub-delegation (in 2022) and adopting a revised charter for the Internal Auditor, a code of professional standards for staff responsible for the verification of financial operations and guidelines on exception reporting (in 2023). The review of the internal rules on the implementation of the budget is ongoing.
24	Review our recruitment strategies to attract the right profiles.	DOA-HR/DOI	A reserve list of 19 laureates was established following a selection procedure for temporary agents (inquiries officers) allowing vacancies to be filled more rapidly. Based on lessons learned from this procedure, the Office will revisit its vacancy notices and calls for expression of interest.
25	Obtain and implement the SYSPER¹ module on probation.	DOA-HR	This action was completed.
26	Adopt a leave and medical leave policy.	DOA-HR	This action was completed.
Theme 6 - Promoting an ethical, inclusive and sustainable work environment			
Actions		Owner(s)	State of play
27	Consolidate the use of the SYSPER ethics module and further refine the Office's	DOA-HR/All	SYSPER's ethics module has been fully deployed and is used by staff members for ethics related declarations and requests for

¹ Information system for the management of Human Resources.



	policies on ethics and good conduct.		authorisation The policies on ethics will be revised in early 2024.
28	Systematically check and offer improved equipment for home offices.	DOA-PBI	In the first half of 2023, an initiative was launched to improve staff's home office setups by providing improved equipment such as chairs and computer screens.
29	Introduce a scheme to promote sustainable mobility.	DOA-PBI	The EO adopted a decision, which provides for the payment of a mobility allowance to staff using sustainable modes of transport to come to work. In 2023, 34 staff members benefitted from this allowance.
30	Publish a targeted call for expression of interest to recruit a trainee with a disability.	DOA-HR/All	This action was completed and a trainee selected.
31	Produce a comprehensive welcome dossier for all new recruits.	DOA-HR	This action was completed.
32	Carry out a staff satisfaction survey.	SG/DOA-HR/All	A staff survey was launched in June 2023. An external consultant analysed the results and presented its report to the management team and to staff in September 2023.



2.2 Scoreboard 2023

KPI	Measurement	Owner	Targets 2023	Results 2023	Results 2022
KPI 1	Percentage of complaints within the mandate	Process Management	35%	37%	33%
KPI 2	Number of inquiries opened in cases of public importance (complaints, strategic inquiries and strategic initiatives)	Process Management	50	56 (46+5+5)	60 (49+4+7)
KPI 3	Acceptance rate (previous year's results – composite indicator)	DOI			
	3a - Overall acceptance rate		80%	81%	79%
	3b - Acceptance rate in cases of public importance		80%	75%	76%
KPI 4	Perception of our key stakeholders (rate of positive evaluation)	DOI	> 3 out of 5	2.85	3.06
KPI 5	Web activities (composite indicator)	ICT			
	5a - Visitors to the website		600 000	855 790	624 032
	5b - Advice given through the interactive guide to contact a member of the ENO		10 000	9 703	8 740
KPI 6	Social media activities (composite indicator)	COMM			
	6a - Increase of followers on social media				
	Twitter		+5%	+5.1% (1 757)	+9.86% (3 089)
	LinkedIn		+15%	+64.9% (5 825)	+49.96% (2 990)
	Instagram		+25%	+90.76% (6 578)	+91.95% (3 472)
	6b - Number of visits to the website through links posted on our social media channels		3 500	12 305	8 125
KPI 7	Handling of complaints and inquiries (composite indicator)	Process Management			
	7a - Proportion of cases in which the admissibility decision is taken in one month		95%	97%	96%
	7b - Average duration of inquiries		150 days	165 days	165 days
	7c - Clearance rate (cases closed compared to new cases registered in the reference period)		100%	100%	100%
KPI 8	Budget implementation (composite indicator)	FIN			
	8a - Rate of budget implementation		92%	95.4%	97%
	8b - Proportion of payments made within 30 days		100%	99.9%	99.7%



KPI	Measurement	Owner	Targets 2023	Results 2023	Results 2022
KPI 9	Management of Human Resources (composite indicator)	HR			
	9a -Occupation rate of establishment plan posts		95%	95%	91.8%
	9b - Percentage of workforce dedicated to core activities		65%	70.2% (with trainees) 67.8% (without trainees)	68.5% (with trainees) 66.2% (without trainees)
	9c - Average number of training days per staff member		5	4.4 (without language training) 5.5 (with language training)	3.5 (without language training) 4.7 (with language training)

2.3 Core activities

The Ombudsman's work and achievements regarding the core activities, including statistical data on complaints and inquiries, are described in detail in the Annual Report to the European Parliament for the year 2023, a draft version of which is enclosed with this report as annex 4. This section therefore gives only a brief overview of key developments and achievements, an analysis of the results in terms of the KPIs and cross-references to relevant sections of the draft Annual Report.

2.3.1 Proactive work

(i) Strategic inquiries and initiatives

Strategic inquiries and initiatives are a key aspect of the Ombudsman's proactive work. They include own-initiative strategic inquiries aimed at addressing systemic issues within the EU administration. They also include strategic initiatives, whereby the Ombudsman generally pursues important topics to encourage the EU administration to be as open, accountable, ethical and responsive to citizens as possible, without necessarily launching an inquiry. Strategic initiatives can also be useful for gathering information that could form the basis for future strategic inquiries.

In 2023, the Ombudsman dealt with nine strategic inquiries and eleven strategic initiatives on a diverse range of issues. Detailed information on the strategic inquiries and initiatives can be found in section 3 and in section 5.1.1 of the Ombudsman's draft Annual Report for 2023 (annex 4).

(ii) The European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO)

The ENO allows the European Ombudsman to have a positive impact on the ability of large numbers of European citizens to enjoy their rights under EU law, including fundamental rights under the Charter.



In practice and, where appropriate, the European Ombudsman advises complainants whose complaints are not within her mandate to contact the member of the ENO best placed to deal with them.

Furthermore, the query procedure allows members of the ENO to send questions to the Ombudsman about EU law-related issues. Query topics in 2023 included the European Health Insurance Card, restrictions on the free movement of people between EU Member States, and EU insurance rules.

The Ombudsman organised the annual ENO conference entitled 'Approaches to Contemporary Challenges'. The first session focused on migration and fundamental rights while the second session examined the lessons learned from public administrations using AI.

Detailed information on the ENO-related work is available in section 6.3 of the Ombudsman's draft Annual Report 2023 (annex 4).

2.3.2 Complaint handling

(i) Caseload and KPI results

The overall number of complaints registered in 2023 was 2 366 (compared to 2 223 in 2022). The overall number of new complaints dealt with in 2023 was 2 392, of which 886 were within the mandate. This compares to 2 238 complaints dealt with in 2022, of which 755 were within the mandate.

With a score of 37%, the result of KPI 1 - proportion of complaints within the mandate surpassed the target of 35% and was higher than in 2022 (33%).

In 2023, the Ombudsman opened and closed more complaint-based inquiries than in 2022, i.e. 393 inquiries were opened (329² in 2022) and 369 inquiries were closed (324 in 2022).

With 56 inquiries opened in cases of public importance, the result for KPI 2 remains above the target of 50.

The results of two of the three components of KPI 7 (efficiency: composite indicator for the handling of complaints and inquiries) are on or above the set targets. The proportion of admissibility decisions taken within one month reached 97% (the target is 95%) and the clearance rate reached the target of 100%. Only the average duration of inquiries, which was 165 days, did not reach the target of maximum 150 days. This reflects the fact that, in 2023, the Office continued closing inquiries that took longer than expected, often because they required several rounds of exchanges with the institutions concerned.

Information on the work on complaints and the outcome of inquiries is available in section 3 of the Ombudsman's draft Annual Report for 2023 (annex 4). Relevant statistical data can be found in section 5.

(ii) Complaints in the area of public access to documents and the Fast-Track procedure

In 2023, the Office received 167 complaints in the area of public access to documents, the highest number recorded within a year. The Ombudsman opened inquiries into 118

² The AAR for 2022 indicated 344 inquiries. This figure was corrected in 2023 after 15 cases on the same issue categorised as 'inquiries' in 2022 were finally closed as 'no grounds' in 2023.



complaints³, out of which 16 were dealt with under the Fast-Track procedure. It closed 106 inquiries⁴, out of which 22 were Fast-Track inquiries.

Despite the significantly higher number of complaints in this area, the cases received in 2023 were handled swiftly, with an average of 42 working days until the closure of a case. With respect to inquiries only, the average time until closure of a case was 64 working days.

Despite the increase in the number of cases, the share of Fast-Track inquiries was only 14% of all public access to documents inquiries, compared to 28 % in 2022 and 58% in 2021. This is because, in many cases, the institution concerned had not yet adopted a confirmatory decision when the complaint to the Ombudsman was made, meaning its final position was unknown. In such cases, the Ombudsman cannot deal with the case through the Fast-Track procedure.

Under the Fast-Track procedure, the Ombudsman endeavours to open inquiries within five working days and have a decision or outcome (such as a solution proposal or recommendation) within 40 working days. In 88% of the inquiries opened in 2023 through the Fast-Track procedure, the admissibility decision was taken within the indicative timeline, the average being of five working days. The Office issued an assessment within 40 working days in 33% of all cases that were opened in 2023 and in which the assessment was finalised, and within 60 working days in 66% of those cases. Overall, the average time to reach an outcome was 54 working days.

As regards findings, in 2023, the Office made a proposal for a solution in 16 cases and recommendations in six cases concerning public access to documents. The Office made suggestions for improvement in 11 cases. The institutions concerned accepted the Ombudsman's solution in five cases and her recommendations in four cases, which thus led to wider public access. Five solutions were not accepted, and for two recommendations and eight solutions proposed, a reply has not yet been received.

(iii) Impact, acceptance and follow-up

Information on the impact and achievements of the Ombudsman's work is included in Section 5.5 of the Ombudsman's draft Annual Report for 2023 (annex 4). This includes information on the acceptance rate of the Ombudsman's proposals to improve the EU administration. These proposals take the form of solutions, recommendations, and suggestions. The acceptance rate helps measure the extent to which, on an annual basis, the institutions follow up the Ombudsman proposals.

The analysis of how the EU institutions responded to the Ombudsman in 2022 shows that the acceptance rate was 81% overall compared to 79% in the previous year (target for KPI 3 is 80%). The institutions reacted positively to 67 out of the 83 proposals that the Ombudsman made to correct or improve their behaviour in cases closed in 2022. The acceptance rate in cases of public importance reached 75% (76% for cases closed in 2021).

The acceptance rate captures responses from the institutions at a particular point in time. It does not reflect all the efforts made by institutions over time to improve their administration and to address issues raised in Ombudsman inquiries. The Ombudsman attempts to recognise some of these good administrative practices through the 'Award for Good Administration', which is held every two years.

³ Out of the 118 inquiries opened in 2023, five inquiries were based on complaints received at the end of 2022 and 113 inquiries were based on complaints received in 2023.

⁴ Out of the 106 inquiries closed in 2023, 34 were opened in 2022 and 72 in 2023.



(iv) Revised Implementing Provisions

In August 2021, the Ombudsman's new [Statute](#) came into force, strengthening the Ombudsman's legal basis. The European Ombudsman adopted its revised [implementing provisions](#)⁵ on 21 June 2023 after the European Parliament adopted its [resolution](#) on the draft implementing provisions on 15 February 2023.

2.3.3 Communication and outreach

The Office continued its efforts to promote the work of the Ombudsman to the widest possible audience. It raised public awareness about specific inquiries, as well as the general role of the Ombudsman in maintaining high accountability and transparency standards in EU administration.

The sections below provide a summary of the communication and outreach activities. Further information is available in Section 6 of the draft Annual Report for 2023 (annex 4).

(i) Outreach activities and events

The Ombudsman presented the work of the Office during her annual press conference, held in April. At the press conference, the Ombudsman also gave an overview of the responses to her public consultation on transparency and participation in EU environmental decision making.

The Ombudsman took part in the European Youth Event (EYE2023) in Strasbourg in June. In an exchange with attendees, she answered questions about the Office's work as well as the important role good administration plays in upholding EU democracy.

Following allegations in late 2022 that non-EU governments had sought to buy influence in the European Parliament, the Ombudsman invited high-level speakers from the main oversight authorities as well as the European Commission and Parliament to discuss the gaps in the architecture of, and compliance with, the integrity framework. The panel debate, which took place in June, also focused on the proposal to create a new ethics body and its potential role in further improving the integrity of the EU administration.

On 28 June, the Ombudsman hosted the fourth Award for Good Administration. The overall prize honoured the work done by Eurojust and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to help document core international crimes and human rights violations.

As mentioned under 2.3.1 (ii) above, the Ombudsman organised the annual ENO conference in November, which dealt with the protection of human rights, focusing on migrants and AI in public administrations.

Throughout 2023, the Ombudsman and staff members also continued their outreach activities by giving interviews to the press, speaking at major academic and legal conferences and speaking to visitor groups.

(ii) Media and social media activities

There was an increase of 60% in the total number of press articles compared to 2022, with 72% of the media coverage coming from EU countries.

⁵ See OJ C/2023/161 of 10 October 2023.



In 2023, the Ombudsman's number of social media followers kept rising. The Ombudsman's Instagram account saw 91% growth in total followers (6 578 new followers compared to the 3 472 followers gained in 2022). On LinkedIn, the number of followers increased by 65% (+ 5 825 compared to the 2 990 new followers in 2022). On X, where the Ombudsman has the largest audience among its social media channels, the number of followers reached 36 188 in December 2023, which represented a 5% increase (+ 1 757).

To strengthen the public's knowledge of the long-term impact of the Ombudsman's work, the Office published a scrollable web story explaining the work done by the Ombudsman in several areas, and the impact it has had on the EU administration. This web story was supported by a social media campaign.

A social media campaign was also launched around the Award for Good Administration to encourage the sharing of good ideas and practices. A scrollable web story followed presenting the winning projects and highlights from the event.

(iii) Website

In the course of 2023, key inquiry documents were made more easily accessible through the addition of a dynamic section on the website homepage that displays recent updates. Several improvements to the website navigation were also made to make finding content more straightforward.

In addition, a series of videos presenting the Office's work and explaining key areas of inquiry were published on the website, including the homepage, and promoted on social media.

In terms of KPI results, the number of unique visitors to the website (855 790) is beyond the target (600 000) while the number of persons who received advice through the interactive guide to contact a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen (9 703) is just slightly below the target of 10 000.

2.4 Management Processes

On 25 January 2023, the Ombudsman issued the 2023 Annual Management Plan.

Throughout the year, the Ombudsman chaired weekly meetings of the management team.

Management monitored the implementation of the AMP actions, the casework statistics and the results in terms of the KPI targets.

Management also ensured the implementation of all business continuity measures and of the institution's duty of care, including through cooperation and coordination with the European Parliament and other institutions.

The Director for Administration held regular meetings with the Staff Committee, the Data Protection officers and the trainees.

In her capacity as authorising officer by delegation, the Director for Administration also represented the Office in its relations with the budgetary and control bodies.



2.5 Supporting processes

2.5.1 Information management

Information management is a collaborative task.

The Secretariat-General gathers and coordinates information related to overall management objectives (such as for the implementation of the annual management plan and key performance indicators), audits and various reports to supervisory bodies.

Information management related to the objective of ensuring consistent and rigorous assessments in the Ombudsman's case handling is supervised by the Director of Inquiries and the Ombudsman's Cabinet.

Promoting good records management and practices within the Office and information management relating to administration, human resources and finance are under the responsibility of the Director for Administration.

Applications for access to documents

In 2023, the Transparency Team dealt with 32 requests for public access to documents held by the institution. In three cases, the applicants sought a review of the initial decision (by making a 'confirmatory application'). There were 21 requests for access to complaint-related files and 11 requests for access to other administrative documents. In most cases, wide partial access was granted. The Ombudsman also received eight consultations from other institutions on the possible disclosure of documents originating from the Office. The Transparency Team provided its views swiftly and wide partial access could be granted.

Data protection

In 2023, the Data Protection Officer (DPO) continued to play an essential role in ensuring that the institution's data protection practices complied with the relevant regulations. The DPO was responsible for handling requests from data subjects and ensuring that the Office's processing of personal data was carried out in accordance with the applicable legal framework.

Furthermore, the DPO was consulted in eight events qualifying as data breaches. In two cases, a notification to the EDPS was made within the applicable 72-hour deadline and the data subjects were informed. The other cases did not warrant a notification to the EDPS as they were considered to be non-severe.

In some non-severe cases, the Ombudsman informed the data subjects in an effort of good administration, even though such information was not necessary under the EUDPR.

In 2023, the DPO continued to collaborate with the Internal Auditor in the context of its review of the Institution's Data Protection Framework and ensured implementation of the agreed actions with due dates in 2022/2023 (see also section 3.2.1 of this report).

The DPO was also involved in responding to inquiries and matters raised by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS).

At the date of this report, the Office is not aware of any complaints submitted to the EDPS against the Ombudsman.



2.5.2. Process management, business continuity, infrastructure and ICT

(i) Process management

Two important projects initiated in 2022 were completed in 2023.

The first initiative streamlined the handling of complaints that fall outside the Ombudsman's mandate. Resolution times were accelerated by simplifying the process and reducing the number of staff involved. Reallocating tasks to assistants in the Directorate for Administration and eliminating superfluous steps led to a more efficient use of the Directorate of Inquiries' resources. Complaints outside the Ombudsman's mandate were processed much faster as a result, with most complainants being informed of outcomes within a few days.

The second project reviewed the procedure for dealing with most of the 'failure to reply' complaints, which represent approximately one third of the Office's inquiries. With external guidance, a cross-institution team worked on eliminating unnecessary steps in the procedure. The change empowered assistants to take on a more active role in handling straightforward inquiries and strengthen their contribution to the Office's core activities. The project not only streamlined the relevant inquiry process but also improved the handling of various other inquiry types and the tools employed in these processes. This led to resource and time savings, ultimately benefiting the complainants through more efficient and responsive service delivery.

In addition to the two aforementioned projects, the procedure for processing information requests was simplified by eliminating unnecessary steps such as reducing the time-consuming task of registering ephemeral documents.

(ii) Document management

The European Ombudsman is set to become a depositing institution at the European Union Historical Archives. The preparation of documents relating to the mandates of the first and second Ombudsmen was finalised with the support of an archivist. The digitisation process of these documents is close to completion and the actual deposit at the Historical Archives is expected in early 2024.

(iii) Efforts to reduce the environmental footprint

The European Ombudsman rents office space in buildings of the European Parliament and uses its infrastructure, including IT, security, facilities management and canteens. As a result, the Ombudsman's environmental management is linked directly to, and benefits from, the efforts made by Parliament in this area.

The Office adopted a policy in April to offer a flat-rate contribution to staff who commute to and from their place of work using sustainable modes of transport. Car parking spaces remain limited whereas the bicycle infrastructure is continuously improving. The Office also actively promotes digitalisation to reduce the use of paper and facilitate the exchange and storage of documents; extensively uses the videoconference systems available in the two places of work to avoid missions; and encourages Green Public Procurement practices in all purchases and in organising events.

(iv) ICT activities

Throughout 2023, the Office's ICT activities continued to focus on facilitating the business continuity of all areas of work in the context of the post-pandemic arrangements. This



involved ensuring support for remote and hybrid activities for the daily work of staff and internal meetings as well as for external events.

Further ICT activities in 2023 included the purchase and installation of new equipment and the maintenance and development of internal tools such as the Case Management System, the Recruitment System as well as of the European Ombudsman's website, extranet and intranet.

In 2023, the online complaint form was updated to ensure that it captures all the essential information from the outset. The complainants' online platform was upgraded to facilitate better communication with the Ombudsman's Office. Moreover, a tool was deployed to streamline the integration of online complaints into the complaint management system. This has reduced the workload for assistants and the risk of human error while giving more time to analyse the substance of complaints.

In relation to ICT matters, the Office relies on, and collaborates closely with, the European Parliament, including on IT and cyber security, and is in the process of concluding a Service Level Agreement on IT Security. Furthermore, the Office relies on the European Commission for the integration and maintenance of all EU corporate tools used by the European Ombudsman and collaborates with both institutions for the use of Inter-institutional IT framework contracts. Regarding cybersecurity, the Office continues to follow the work done at the inter-institutional level.

The Office uses and promotes the use of open-source software whenever possible. The European Ombudsman's website, for example, uses only open-source software.

Finally, over the past year, the Office strategically focused on understanding and integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI). Staff across the institution were asked to assess the applicability of AI technologies in their field of activity and formulate strategies for potential adoption in specific scenarios, with a view to boosting operational efficiency and improving service delivery. A notable example of this approach is the implementation of machine translation technology on the website. This new feature improves the availability of content in languages for which no translation was previously offered, and demonstrates the Office's commitment to leveraging AI to enhance accessibility and communication.

2.5.3 Human Resources

(i) Personnel and office organisation

The Office has a highly qualified and multilingual staff that can deal directly with complaints about maladministration in most official EU languages and raise awareness about the Ombudsman's work throughout the EU. Our recruitment policy follows the general principles and employment conditions of the EU institutions and seeks to respond with agility to emerging needs.

In 2023, the Ombudsman's establishment plan comprised 75 posts, in addition to which, there was an average of seven contract agents working with the Office. Furthermore, eighteen trainees gained work experience at the Ombudsman's Office during the year. One of these trainees was selected following a call specifically aimed at candidates with disabilities.

Considering its small size, the Office continued to achieve a balanced geographical distribution in 2023 with 19 EU nationalities represented among staff and four nationalities represented among the five managers (see details in Annex 1).



A call for expression of interest, launched in 2022 and concluded in 2023, established a reserve list of 19 successful candidates six of whom joined the Office in September. The availability of this list makes it possible to recruit staff as soon as a post becomes available, thus considerably reducing the recruitment time. Furthermore, to retain in-house talent and optimize HR management, the Office organised three internal competitions in the second half of the year.

Assistants' contributions to the handling of complaints outside the Ombudsman's mandate (OMCs) was further consolidated with assistants handling almost two thirds (63%) of all OMCs. Moreover, the assistants' role has been central in implementing a leaner and speedier procedure for handling simple complaints about EU institutions' failure to reply to citizens' requests, with assistants handling 56% of these complaints. The performance gains are significant: inquiries officers have more time to focus on inquiries and strategic investigations and assistants have direct contact with the Office's core business and therefore a more rewarding work experience.

The introduction of SYSPER's probation tool simplified the monitoring of the probation procedure while the consolidation of SYSPER's ethics module further streamlined the handling of ethics-related declarations and authorisation requests. The Office's objective continues to be simplification, consistent application of rules and efficient use of resources.

(ii) Ethics and good conduct

As reported in previous Annual Activity Reports, the Ombudsman adopted a number of policies, guidelines and internal measures to ensure that staff conduct is in line with the highest ethical standards. In 2023, the whistleblowing policy was revised to further protect potential whistle-blowers and align it with the recent data protection regulation.

In the context of its review of the EO's ethical framework, the Internal Auditor made six recommendations to be implemented until 2024 (see section 3.2.1 of this report). To this end, all staff were asked to update their declarations of their spouses/partners' professional activities as well as revise, where necessary, their own conflict of interest declarations using SYSPER's ethics module.

Informing staff of their obligations during and after their time in the Office remains a priority: new staff and trainees are asked to declare their interests before they start so these can be taken into consideration in the assignment of cases; they also attend ethics related induction trainings delivered by the ethics correspondents and the HR team.

In line with the Ombudsman's zero-tolerance approach to harassment, raising staff awareness on harassment matters is a priority for the Office. An interactive training on 'Respect and dignity at work and our roles as actors, recipients and bystanders' was organised in December 2023 in both Strasbourg and Brussels. Staff's participation in this type of trainings is mandatory. The Guidelines for implementing the EO's anti-harassment policy and all other ethics-related policies and guidelines are published on a dedicated intranet page.

In the context of its review, the Internal Auditor carried out a survey about staff awareness on ethical matters in early 2023. The results showed that 90% of staff are aware of the Office's policy and guidelines about psychological and sexual harassment. A general staff survey carried out later in 2023, confirmed the high levels of staff awareness about ethical matters.

Along with the administration, the two ethics correspondents assist staff in finding solutions to potential problems, identifying the best reporting channel and relevant



procedure. They also play an important role in familiarising new staff and trainees with the Office's ethical standards. Their annual reports as well as information they share with staff are published on the intranet page dedicated to ethics and good conduct.

(iii) Working conditions and well-being

The Office's hybrid work policy (adopted in October 2021) supports the Ombudsman's ambition to promote a modern, digital and flexible work environment that enhances professional and private life balance and staff well-being. The policy, which is results-oriented and trust-based, provides for 40% average presence in the office per month and allows flexibility as regards daily working arrangements. It includes the right to disconnect and allows staff to work from outside the place of employment 15 days per year. A general staff survey carried out in July 2023 showed a satisfaction rate of 97% with respect to working arrangements.

To ensure the well-being of staff and optimal remote working conditions, the Office launched an initiative to improve staff's home office setups. This included providing improved equipment such as chairs and computer screens.

Furthermore, the European Ombudsman adopted a decision on leave and medical absence at the Ombudsman's Office to respect its duty of care towards staff while protecting the institution's interests and ensuring business continuity. The policy clarifies the applicable rules and the role of the EP's medical service in the handling of leave requests requiring a medical assessment. An accompanying training allowed staff to familiarise themselves with the decision and the services the EP's medical service offers.

While flexibility and remote work contribute to professional and private life balance, the need for social interaction and the sense of belonging to a team are equally important for the well-being of staff and an organisation as a whole. In 2023, the Office continued to focus on bringing staff and teams together physically to reinforce team spirit, facilitate the integration of recently recruited staff and improve communication. Staff were involved in trainings/events organised by the Office, including an all-staff retreat at Jean Monnet's house in Bazoches.

2.5.4 Budget and Finance

(i) Implementation of the 2023 budget

The appropriations available in the Ombudsman's budget for 2023 amounted to EUR 13 212 447 and included 75 establishment plan posts. Title 1 (Expenditure relating to persons working for the institution) amounted to EUR 10 652 347. Title 2 (Buildings, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure) amounted to EUR 2 264 700 and Title 3 (Expenditure resulting from special functions carried out by the institution) to EUR 295 400.

The detailed report on the implementation of the budget is attached to the present report (annex 3).

The following table shows expenditure in 2023 in terms of appropriations committed and paid (in Euros).



Title	Initial budget 2023	Final budget 2023⁶	Committed	Paid
Title 1	10 652 347	10 652 347	10 156 451.66	10 092 633.16
Title 2	2 264 700	2 211 700	2 129 430.54	1 973 128.68
Title 3	295 400	348 400	318 067.62	233 638.46
Total	13 212 447	13 212 447	12 603 949.82	12 299 400.30

The implementation rate (including appropriations carried over from 2023 to 2024) is 95.39% (compared to 96.97% in 2022). Of the total appropriations, 93.09% were paid (compared to 93.35% in 2022).

The amount of appropriations carried over from 2023 to 2024 is EUR 304 549.52, i.e. 2.3% of the 2023 budget (compared to EUR 442 208.74 carried over from 2022 to 2023, i.e. 3.6% of the 2022 budget).

Furthermore, 73.27% of the appropriations carried over to 2023 from 2022 were used (compared to 92.59 % in 2021).

In the following table, all totals are cumulative.

Indicators	Target 2023	Q1	Q1+Q2	Q1-Q3 2023	2023	(2022)
F1: Percentage of budget implementation	Total : 93%	26.2%	54.9%	76.3%	95.39%	(96.97%)
F2: Proportion of payments made within 30 days	Total : 100%	99.5%	99.7%	99.8%	99.9%	(99.7%)

The average time for payment of invoices from private providers of goods and services was 13.5 days (13 days in 2022).

(ii) Transfers

During 2023, one modification of the establishment plan and nine transfers between budget lines were necessary. These modifications of the initial budget are presented in detail in the annexed 'Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year' (annex 3). The total amount transferred was EUR 248 150 (1.88% of the total appropriations for 2023).

(iii) Procurement

Six very low-value contracts not exceeding EUR 15 000 were awarded following procurement procedures launched in 2023.

⁶ After transfers.



(iv) The 2024 Estimates

The estimates for the year 2024 were sent to the Commission, Parliament and the Council on 31 March 2023.

Total appropriations for 2024 are EUR 13 843 160, which represents an increase of EUR 630 713 or 4.8 % compared to the budget for 2023. Title 1 (Expenditure relating to persons working with the institution) amounts to EUR 11 196 351. Title 2 (Buildings, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure) amounts to EUR 2 405 409. Title 3 (Expenditure resulting from general functions carried out by the institution) amounts to EUR 241 400.



(v) Detailed list of the Ombudsman's missions in 2023 (as published on the website)

Start date	End date	Destination	Purpose	Accompanying Persons	Daily Allowance	Accommodation	Transport	TOTAL
09/01/2023	12/01/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events in Brussels	n/a	0*	€774,99	€240,53	€1.015,52
23/01/2023	26/01/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events in Brussels	n/a	0*	€1.061,96	€100,00	€1.161,96
30/01/2023	01/02/2023	Brussels	Meetings and media interviews	n/a	€227,59	€228,44	€381,10	€837,13
06/02/2023	08/02/2023	Brussels	External events and meetings	n/a	€245,55	€444,48	€254,10	€944,13
27/02/2023	02/03/2023	Brussels	Events and meetings	n/a	€325,77	€744,21	€477,10	€1.547,08
07/03/2023	10/03/2023	Frankfurt, Brussels	Meeting ECB in Frankfurt and events in Brussels	The Head of Cabinet and the Director of Inquiries accompanied the Ombudsman to Frankfurt	€363,72	€503,72	€328,20	€1.195,64
27/03/2023	31/03/2023	Brussels	Meetings and interviews	n/a	€432,87	€622,96	€100,00	€4.155,83
23/04/2023	28/04/2023	Brussels	Meeting and events	n/a	€517,65	€1.500,00	€254,00	€2.271,65
02/05/2023	05/05/2023	Dublin, Brussels	Event with Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, to mark 50 years since Ireland's entry into the EU.	n/a	€346,67	€637,68	€446,33	€1.430,68
10/05/2023	12/05/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events	n/a	€249,00	€413,48	€220,30	€882,78
14/05/2023	17/05/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events	n/a	€325,77	€610,72	€127,00	€1.063,49
22/05/2023	24/05/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events	n/a	€245,44	€906,51	€651,30	€1.803,25
05/06/2023	08/06/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events	n/a	€325,77	€466,31	€363,10	€1.155,18
12/06/2023	13/06/2023	Bazoches-sur-Guyonne	Staff retreat	n/a	n/a	n/a	€286,20	€286,20
25/06/2023	30/06/2023	Brussels	Awards for Good Administration	n/a	€553,35	€1.190,25	€478,20	€2.221,80
06/07/2023	07/07/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€147,26	€230,00	€254,00	€631,26
17/07/2023	18/07/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€107,10	€222,24	€436,10	€765,44
30/08/2023	01/09/2023	Alpbach, Austria	Participation in Alpbach forum**	n/a		€590,00		
05/09/2023	08/09/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€325,77	€767,87	€127,00	€1.220,64
18/09/2023	20/09/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€258,83	€590,48	€468,10	€1.317,41
24/09/2023	29/09/2023	Warsaw	Visit to EU agency and other engagements	Head of Cabinet; Legal Expert; Personal Assistant	€404,68	€962,44	€952,99	€2.320,11
04/10/2023	05/10/2023	Brussels	Event with HETICO	n/a	€151,73	€350,00	€430,10	€931,83
10/10/2023	12/10/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€258,83	€700,00	€381,10	€1.339,93
24/10/2023	10/11/2023	Ireland, Brussels	Event with the IE DFA in Dublin; meetings in Brussels	n/a	€388,88	€1.091,96	€1.071,80	€2.552,64
13/11/2023	15/11/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events	n/a	€223,12	€300,00	€362,10	€885,22
28/11/2023	30/11/2023	Brussels	Meetings and events	n/a	€258,83	€360,48	€270,10	€889,41
06/12/2023	07/12/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€165,12	€862,71	€254,10	€1.281,93
17/12/2023	20/12/2023	Brussels	Meetings	n/a	€352,54	€1.058,78	€479,60	€1.890,92
					TOTAL DAILY ALLOWANCE	TOTAL HOTEL	TOTAL TRANSPORT	TOTAL
					€7.201,84	€18.192,67	€10.194,55	€35.589,06

*The Ombudsman did not accept the daily allowance on these missions.

**Due to illness, the Ombudsman could not participate. However, the cost of accommodation could not be recouped.



3. Financial management and internal control

3.1 Efficiency and economy

Whenever possible, the Office seeks to make savings to ensure that the budgetary resources are used in the most economical and efficient way while ensuring effective implementation of the work programme and of additional needs identified for the year. In 2023, compared to 2022, the Ombudsman managed to make savings amounting to EUR 374 000. Costs were cut, namely by 8.54% on the appropriations for rent (from EUR 1 030 000 to 942 000); by 100% on those for fitting-out and installation works (from EUR 178 000 to EUR 0); by 16.67% on those for staff missions (from EUR 120 000 to EUR 100 000); and by 77.27% on those for communication activities (from EUR 110 000 to EUR 25 000).

The 2024 budget, prepared in 2023, makes reductions for an overall amount of EUR 82 155 in discretionary expenditure under Titles I, II and III of the Ombudsman's budget. The increase of appropriations under Title I and Title II offset by a decrease of appropriations under Title III limits the overall increase to 4.77% compared to the 2023 budget.

The following table shows the budget lines where reductions were made:

Title I	Budget 2023	DB 2024	+/- in €/2023	+/- in %/2023
A- 1 0 0 0 Salaries, allowances and payments related to salaries	474.605	459 500	-15.105	-3.18%
A- 1 6 3 1 Mobility	26.000	19 950	-6.050	-23.27%
Total A-2	500 605	479450	-21.155	-4.23%
Title II	Budget 2023	DB 2024	+/- in €/2023	+/- in %/2023
A- 2 3 0 0 Stationery, office supplies and miscellaneous consumables	5 500	3 500	-2.000	-36.36%
A- 2 3 0 1 Postage on correspondence and delivery charges	3 000	2 500	-500	-16.67%
A-2 3 0 2 Telecommunications	5 000	4 500	-500	-10.00%
Total A-2	13 500	10 500	-3 000	-22.22%

Title III	Budget 2023	APB 2024	+/- in €/2023	+/- in %/2023
B-3 0 3 Meetings in general	124 000	67 000	-57 000	-45.97%
B- 3 2 0 0 Documentation and library expenditure	4.000	3.000	-1.000	-25.00%
Total A-3	128 000	70 000	-58 000	-45.31%



3.2 Management and follow-up of controls

3.2.1 Recommendations from the Internal Auditor in 2023

Transversal follow-up of open actions from internal audit reports

The Internal auditor issued two transversal follow-up reports in 2023. In report 22/02 issued in January 2023, the Internal Auditor considered that the completion of eight of the twelve open actions will require additional time. These related to Business Continuity Management (one action) and Information and ICT Security (seven actions).

In report 23/02 issued in October 2023, the Internal Auditor closed the remaining open action related to Business Continuity Management as well as three of the four open actions related to the review of the Data Protection Framework. He concluded that the completion of eight open actions required more time, i.e. seven actions concerning ICT Security and one concerning Data Protection.

Internal Audit Report 22/03 - Review of the Ethical Framework

Internal Audit acknowledged the set of ethics-related documents adopted by the Ombudsman over the years, the setting up of an intranet section on ethics and good conduct and training initiatives, which all contribute to raising awareness regarding ethical principles and rules. Internal Audit also welcomed the establishment of ethics correspondents. To further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ethical framework, Internal Audit also agreed a six-point action plan with the Institution with implementation dates ranging from 31/12/2023 to 31/12/2024. Implementation of the relevant actions is ongoing.

Internal Audit Report 23/01 - The Internal Auditor's Annual Report for 2022

The Internal Auditor's annual report concluded that, based on the assurance and consulting work carried out and subject to adequate follow-up on the remaining open actions, there is nothing which came to the attention of the Internal Auditor that would impair the effectiveness and efficiency of the Institution's risk management, control and governance systems as well as its ability to attain its control objectives on a consistent basis.

Internal Audit Report 23/03 - Review of the Risk Management Framework

As part of its work programme for 2023, Internal Audit carried out a review of the Ombudsman's risk management framework. While acknowledging the commitment of the Ombudsman to develop its risk management framework, it also noted that there remains scope for enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness. Internal Audit therefore agreed a nine-point action plan with management with implementation dates ranging from 30/06/2024 to 31/12/2024. Implementation of these actions is ongoing.

3.2.2 Observations from the Court of Auditors

In the framework of the Statement of Assurance audits (SoA) 2022, the Court of Auditors indicated in its annual report that it did not identify any specific issues concerning the European Ombudsman.

The Office continued following up on the observations made by the Court of Auditors following its 2021 in-depth assessment of supervisory and control systems. Actions taken



so far include updating the charters for the authorising officer by delegation and authorising officers by sub-delegation (in 2022) and adopting a revised charter for the Internal Auditor, a code of professional standards for staff responsible for the verification of financial operations and guidelines on exception reporting (in 2023). Implementation of other open actions, including the revision of internal rules and procedures to align them to the latest update of the Financial Regulation, is ongoing.

3.2.3 Follow-up to the European Parliament’s discharge resolution

(i) 2021 discharge

On 10 May 2023, the European Parliament adopted the [discharge decision](#) for the 2021 budget. The Ombudsman sent its detailed [follow-up report](#) to Parliament on 19 July 2023.

(ii) 2022 discharge

On 13 October 2023, the Ombudsman sent its [replies](#) to the 2022 discharge questionnaire. The related hearing took place at the European Parliament on 25 October 2023.

At the time of writing this report, the decision on the discharge procedure for the 2022 budget has not been finalised. The Ombudsman will provide its detailed feedback to Parliament in a follow-up report.

3.2.4 Management of the internal control systems

The AMP for 2023 identified a number of actions to reinforce the effectiveness of our internal control standards. These actions and their state of implementation are reflected in the table below.

Actions to reinforce our internal control standards		
ICS and related action	Owner(s)	Implementation
ICS 2 - Ethical values Consolidate the use of the SYSPER ethics module and further refine the Office’s policies on ethics and good conduct.	DOA/Ethics correspondents	SYSPER’s ethics module was deployed and is used by staff members for ethics related declarations and requests for authorisation. The policies on ethics and good conduct will be revised in early 2024.
ICS 3 - Staff allocation Review our recruitment strategies to attract the right profiles.	DOA/DOI	A reserve list of 19 laureates was established following a selection procedure for temporary agents (inquiries officers) allowing the Office to fill vacancies rapidly.
ICS 8 - Processes and procedures Continue the review of the financial policies, the charters of financial actors and the exception register to ensure alignment with the Financial Regulation.	DOA-FIN	Actions taken so far include updating the charters for the authorising officer by delegation and authorising officers by sub-delegation (in 2022) and adopting a revised charter for the Internal Auditor, a code of professional



		standards for staff responsible for the verification of financial operations and guidelines on exception reporting (in 2023). The review of the internal rules on the implementation of the budget is ongoing.
ICS 10 - Business continuity Further improve our business continuity capabilities by adopting a training plan and conducting tests.	DOA-PBI/All	Testing and training & awareness plans are adopted and annexed to the Business Continuity decision. Implementation started in September 2023 and will continue in 2024.
ICS 11 - Document management Continue to raise awareness on document management requirements.	DOA-PBI	An extended session of the induction training, open to all staff, took place in September 2023. Meetings with individual teams are being organised to address specific needs and issues.
ICS 13 - Assessment of internal control systems Evaluate the feasibility of outsourcing the accounting activities.	DOA-FIN	As outsourcing of accounting activities has not proved possible, a solution to ensure business continuity was identified internally and will be implemented in early 2024.

3.2.5 Management of risks

Risk management is part of the Office's annual management cycle. Throughout 2023, the Office monitored the implementation of actions aimed at mitigating risks identified in the 2022 risk assessment exercise.

In the context of the Internal Auditor's 2023 review of the Ombudsman's Risk Management Framework (see 3.2.1. above), the Office reviewed how it assesses and manages risks. One of the key features of the new methodology (adopted in January 2024) is linking the assessment with the Office's operational objectives and thus the preparation of the Annual Management Plan. The methodology also clarifies roles and responsibilities and provides for increased involvement of staff and management in the process to embed risk-thinking into the planning phase of projects and activities.

A risk assessment exercise based on the draft new methodology was carried out in November 2023 prior to the adoption of the AMP for 2024. The exercise focused on a selection of operational objectives included in the draft AMP. The results of the assessment and of agreed follow-up actions are recorded in the risk register. Implementation of these actions is ongoing and will be monitored periodically. None of the potential risks analysed was ranked as critical.

There are thus no unmitigated risks that could have a significant impact on the implementation of the Ombudsman's Strategy or on assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives.



3.3 Control results

This section further reports on, and assesses, the elements identified by management that support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives⁷.

3.3.1 Effectiveness: the control results and benefits

The Ombudsman's Office uses internal control processes to ensure adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions it is responsible for, taking into account the nature of the payments concerned.

The control objective is considered to be achieved if (a) no significant internal control weaknesses were reported/detected; (b) no significant and/or repetitive errors occurred.

The table below shows the indicators which were put in place to monitor the effectiveness of controls for financial operations: (i) number and percentage of errors prevented (ex-ante control)⁸, (ii) number of errors corrected (ex-post control) and (iii) number of errors prevented for procurement procedures. The evolution of these indicators should be analysed over time.

Type of controls	Indicator	2021	2022	2023
Ex-ante and ex-post controls on financial operations and procurement procedures	Number of errors prevented (ex-ante)	22	18	27
	% of errors (ex-ante)	3.9%	2.31%	3.42%
	Number of errors corrected (ex-post)	0	0	0
	Number of errors prevented in procurement procedures (ex-ante)	0	0	0

Ex-ante controls are performed on 100% of payments, in order to detect and correct any procedural errors with or without financial impact. Errors detected were of a technical nature (encoding errors in ABAC, missing supporting documents) and were corrected before the payment was made. This confirms the strong deterrence effect that ex-ante controls have on financial transactions.

The ex-ante controls in the procurement procedures carried out in 2023 did not reveal any mistakes of a substantial nature but rather clerical ones, such as typos.

Ex-post controls in 2023 resulted in no financial errors detected. The ex-post controller recalled that the internal rules on implementation of the Ombudsman's budget still need to be updated in order to be in line with the Financial Regulation.

The analysis of the registry of overrides and non-compliance events in 2023 revealed three notifications of non-compliance events and one request for exception. The finance team

⁷ Art 36.2 FR: a) effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; b) reliability of reporting; c) safeguarding of assets and information; d) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and e) adequate management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of underlying transactions.

⁸ Number of errors prevented divided by the number of authorised payments.



continues to make staff members aware of the importance of financial procedures, namely to ensure availability of the budget before making an expense.

In conclusion, the analysis of the available control results and the assessment of the weaknesses identified has not unveiled any significant weakness that could have a material impact as regards the legality and regularity of the financial operations. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the control objective as regards legality and regularity has been achieved.

In 2023 and over the past years, the implementation of ex-ante and ex-post controls has not resulted in any financial correction/recovery order after payment. This is because no financial error was detected and administrative errors were corrected before payments were made. These results are expected to continue, resulting in no estimated future financial corrections (0%).

Benefits of these controls have also been identified. While it is possible to estimate the costs of the control processes, it is more difficult to quantify all the benefits of the errors prevented and detected. Financial benefits mainly consist in ex-ante detection of errors in financial operations.

The benefits of controls are mostly non-financial. They help ensure compliance with legal obligations (article 74(5) of the Financial Regulation), have a deterrent effect and help improve procedures. Extensive ex-ante controls ensure the respect of the “four eyes” principle and add an element of *security* to decisions taken by the authorising officer. The ex-ante verifier also monitors new developments in regulations and plays an advisory role to the financial team.

For procurement procedures, considering the complexity of these activities and the limited number of contracts awarded each year by the Ombudsman, systematic operational and financial verifications are necessary to prevent the risk of reputational damage and avoid litigation.

3.3.2 Efficiency: time indicators and other efficiency indicators

The principle of efficiency concerns the best relationship between resources employed and results achieved.

During 2023, a total of 819 payments amounting to EUR 12.62 million were made. Out of these, 99.9% were executed on time, with an average payment time of 13.5 days, thus significantly below the maximum of 30 days allowed.

There are still areas needing improvement such as reviewing procurement procedures, updating checklists and completing the implementation of the e-invoicing system.

3.3.3 Economy: the costs of controls

The principle of economy requires that the resources used by the institution in the pursuit of its activities shall be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality and at the best price.

Costs of controls mostly consist in staff costs. As the table below shows, the total cost of controls related to the European Ombudsman’s expenditure amounts to EUR 68 005 and represents 0.54% of the payments made in 2023 (0.48% in 2022 and 0.56% in 2021).



Title of Relevant Control System (RCS)	Ex-ante controls				Ex-post controls				Total	
		(a)	(b)	(c)		(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)
	Full time equivalent	Total costs (in EUR)	Funds managed ⁽¹⁾ (in EUR)	Ratio (%) (a)/(b)	Full time equivalent	Total costs (in EUR)	Total value verified (in EUR)	Ratio (%) (d)/(e)	Total estimated cost of controls (EUR)	Ratio (%) (g)/(b)
Procurement and Administrative expenditure	0,52	60.129	12.663.397	0,47%	3 weeks per year	7.876	219.034	3,60%	68.005	0,54%

⁽¹⁾ Funds managed = payments made

3.3.4 Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant efficiency indicators and control results, the Ombudsman's Office has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of the controls for which it is responsible.

The control strategy is considered adequate as, with a reasonable cost of controls, the main objectives were achieved on time. They provide reasonable assurance that the European Ombudsman's 2023 budget has been implemented effectively, on time and in compliance with the rules.

3.4 Whistleblowing and investigations by OLAF

The Director for Administration is not aware of any OLAF investigation or of any member of staff providing information under article 22(a) of the Staff Regulations in 2023.

3.5 Conclusions on the assurance

Results of controls of procurement, financial control and the analysis of exceptions support the conclusion that resources are used for the intended purpose and operations of the Office are legal and regular.

Analysis of the control results, ex-ante analysis of contracts and evaluation activities ensure sound financial management; the measures taken to protect information and assets also give assurance concerning the safeguarding of assets and information.

The follow-up of audit recommendations and the assessment of the internal control systems provide reasonable assurance that the control systems work as intended and fraud is prevented and detected.

Overall conclusion

The authorising officer by delegation has reasonable assurance that, overall, bearing in mind the level of expenditure and budget handled by the institution, suitable controls are



in place and are working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements are being implemented.

4. Reservations and impact on the statement

4.1 Materiality criteria

In order to decide whether a weakness is significant and must entail a reservation in the Annual Activity Report, the authorising officer by delegation ('AOD') bases their judgement on the following materiality criteria, which apply to the European Ombudsman's budget:

4.1.1 Scope criteria

The weakness falls within the scope of the AOD annual declaration: it relates to the reasonable assurance regarding the legality and regularity of financial transactions, the true and fair view, the use of resources for their intended purposes, sound financial management, non-omission of significant information, efficiency, the safeguarding of assets and the prevention and detection of fraud.

4.1.2 Qualitative criteria

Qualitative assessment includes an analysis of the causes and the types of error(s), considering also mitigating controls and/or corrective actions taken:

- the nature and scope of the weakness,
- the duration of the weakness,
- the existence of compensatory measures,
- the existence of effective corrective actions to correct the weaknesses,
- residual reputational, financial, operational and legal/regulatory risk,
- significant control system weaknesses,
- critical issues reported by the authorising officer by sub-delegation, the European Court of Auditors, the Internal Auditor and the European Anti-Fraud Office.

4.1.3 Quantitative criteria

The weakness is assessed as significant in quantitative terms where the monetary value of the problem or the amount considered at risk is above the acceptable level.

The European Ombudsman uses a residual error rate threshold of maximum 2% of the total annual expenditure, as applied by other institutions such as the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors.

The European Ombudsman has thus decided on 2% of the annual appropriations as the materiality threshold in this regard, namely: EUR 264 248.94.



4.2 Reservation

No reservation.

4.3 Conclusion

Based on the above, the Director for Administration of the European Ombudsman has issued the annual declaration with no reservation.



5. Declaration of assurance

I, the undersigned, Marie-Pierre Darchy,

Director for Administration,

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation, hereby declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view⁹.

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in the report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place provide satisfactory guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of self-assessments, the ex-post controls, the work and observations of the internal auditor, and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors for years prior to the year of this declaration.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported which could harm the interests of the European Ombudsman.

Done at Brussels,

Marie-Pierre Darchy
Director for Administration

⁹ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the service.



Annexes:

Annex 1: Human resources and professional training charts

Annex 2: The European Ombudsman's Operating Framework

Annex 3: Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2023

Annex 4: The European Ombudsman's draft Annual Report for 2023



Annexes

Annex 1: Human resources and professional training charts

A. Breakdown of human resources available to the Ombudsman

The European Ombudsman’s job-screening exercise is carried out in accordance with Article 53 of the Financial Regulation. It is based on the “*Inter-institutional job screening methodology*” developed by the European Commission.

The job screening is a top-down and across-the board analysis of all jobs based on the organisational chart. The aim is to classify the human resources under one of the following three categories according to the organisational role each job is serving: ‘Operations’, ‘Coordination and support’ and ‘Compliance’.

The categorisation of jobs is undertaken to identify the evolution of jobs in each role and with a view to increasing the proportion of jobs dedicated to ‘Operations’.

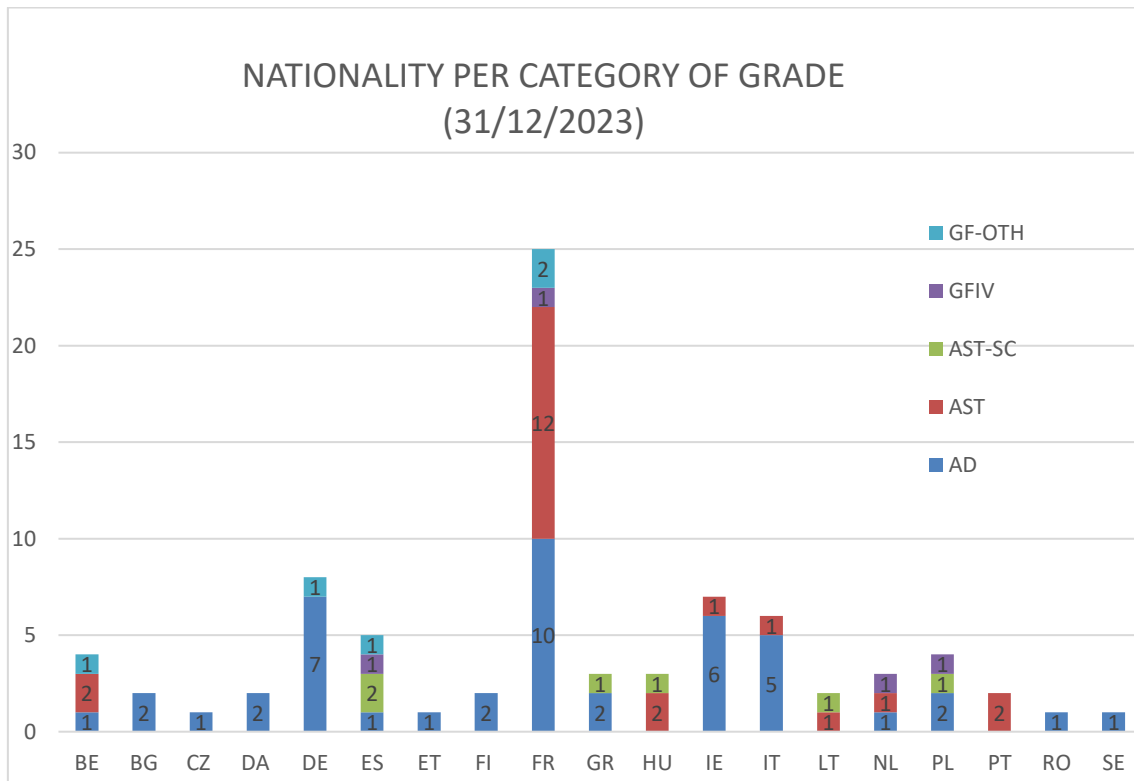
In December 2023, the categorisation of jobs performed by staff in the Ombudsman’s Office resulted in the following figures. For comparison with previous years, the table also shows the results including trainees (in brackets).

Job-Type category	Year N (%)	Year N-1 (%)	Year N-2 (%)
Coordination and support (including trainees)	21.5 (20.2)	22 (20.9)	22.9 (21.5)
Operations (including trainees)	67.8 (70.2)	66.2 (68.5)	64.2 (66.7)
Compliance (including trainees)	10.7 (9.6)	11.8 (10.6)	12.4 (11.8)

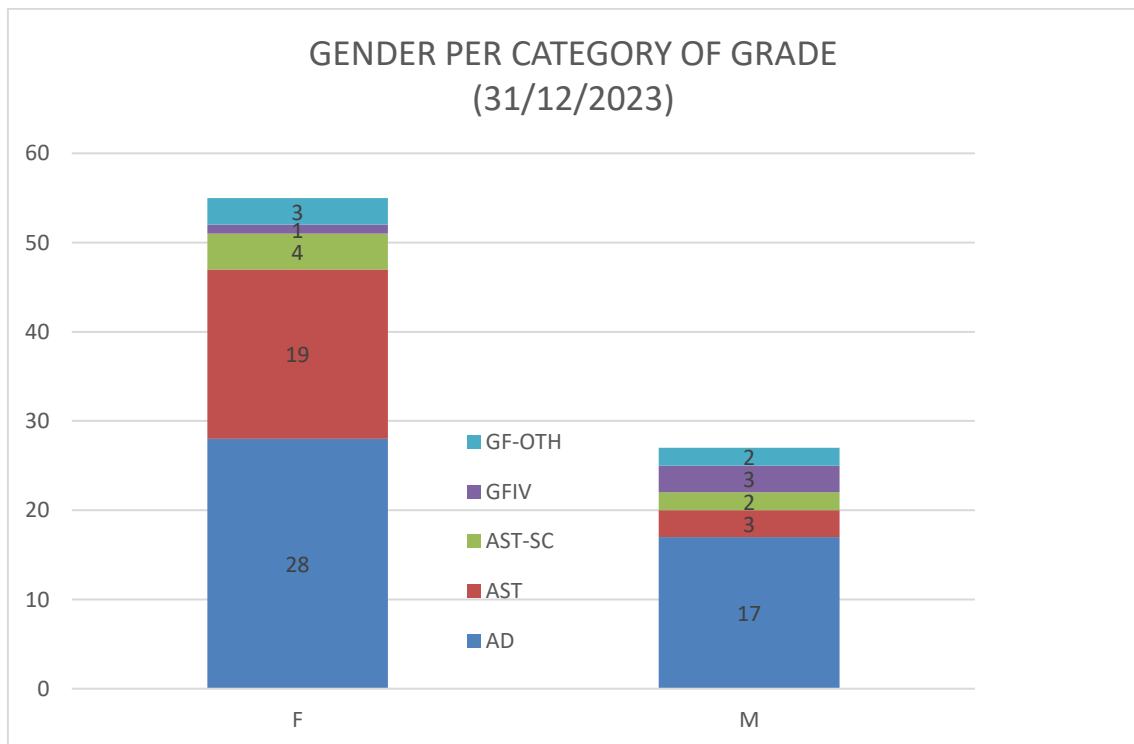
The three graphs below show the breakdown of staff respectively by nationality per category of grade, by gender per category and by gender and nationality among managers.



Graph 1 - Nationality per category of grade: snapshot on 31 December 2023

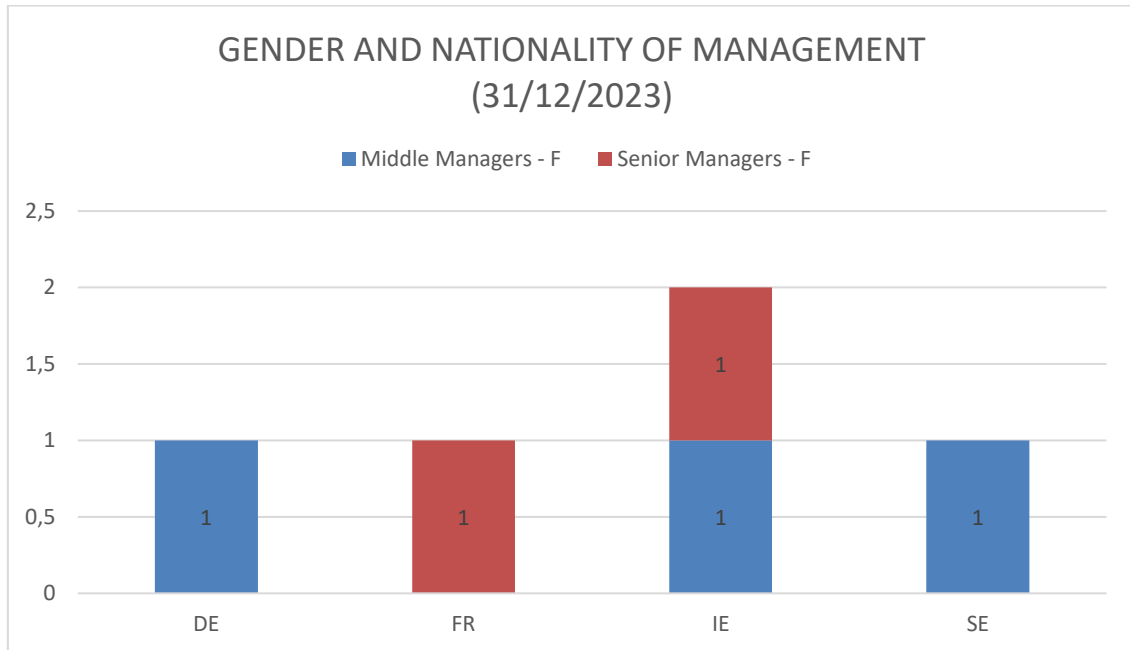


Graph 2 - Gender per category of grade: snapshot on 31 December 2023





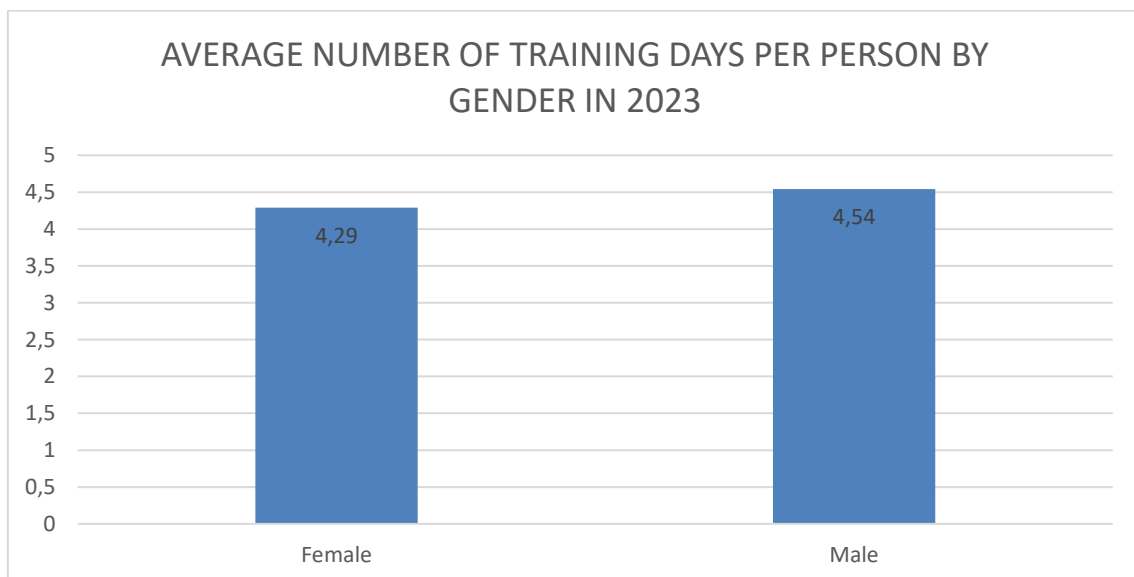
Graph 3 - Gender and nationality among managers: Snapshot on 31 December 2023



B. Number of days of professional training in 2023

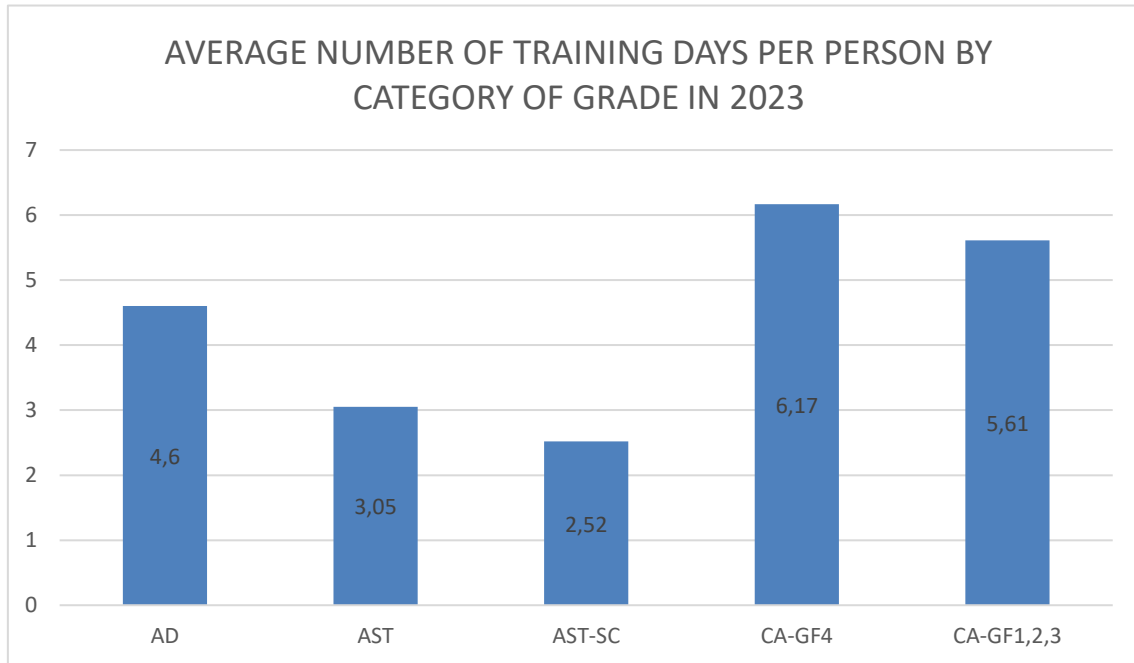
The average number of training days per staff member was 4.4 excluding language training. Graphs 4 and 5 below provide the breakdown of training days by gender and by category of grade. Graph 6 provides a breakdown of staff enrolled in language classes.

Graph 4 - Training days per person (excluding language training)



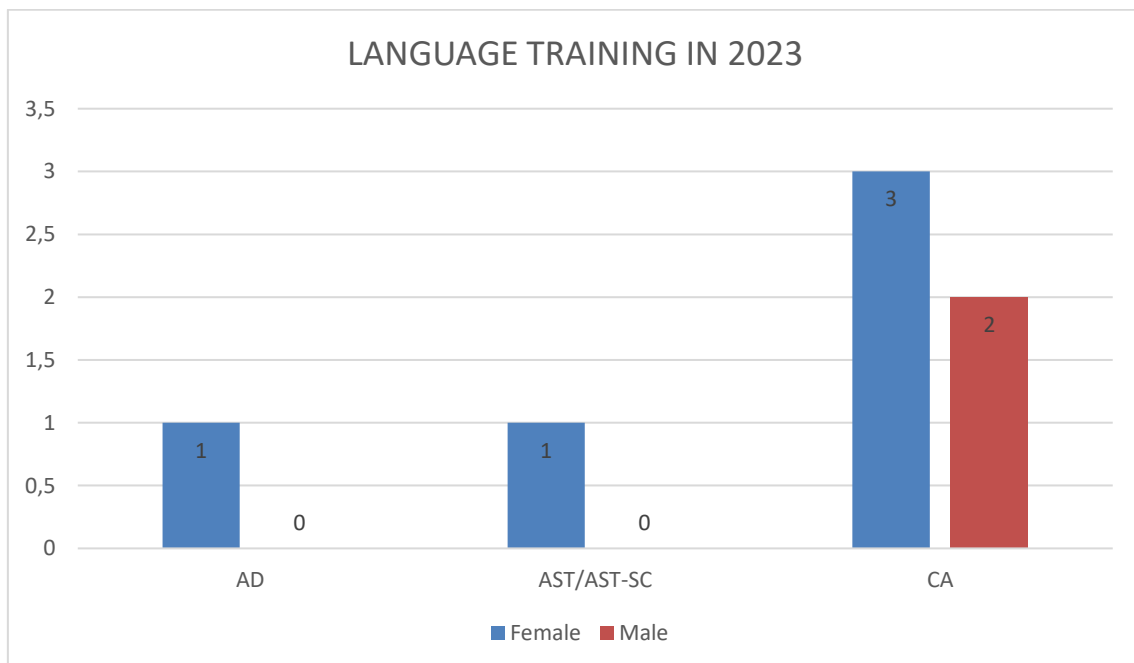


Graph 5- Training days by category of grade (excluding language training)



Graph 6 - Staff who took language classes by gender and by category of grade

In 2023, seven staff members were enrolled in language classes.





The following annexes are enclosed as separate documents.

Annex 2: The Ombudsman's Operating Framework (PowerPoint Presentation)

Annex 3: Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2023

Annex 4: Draft Annual Report 2023 of the European Ombudsman

The Ombudsman shall submit to the European Parliament a report on the outcome of inquiries every year. The Annual Report of the European Ombudsman for 2023 will be presented officially to the European Parliament later in 2024. A draft version is attached to the present report.

The report will subsequently be made available in all languages in the [annual reports](#) section of the Ombudsman's website.



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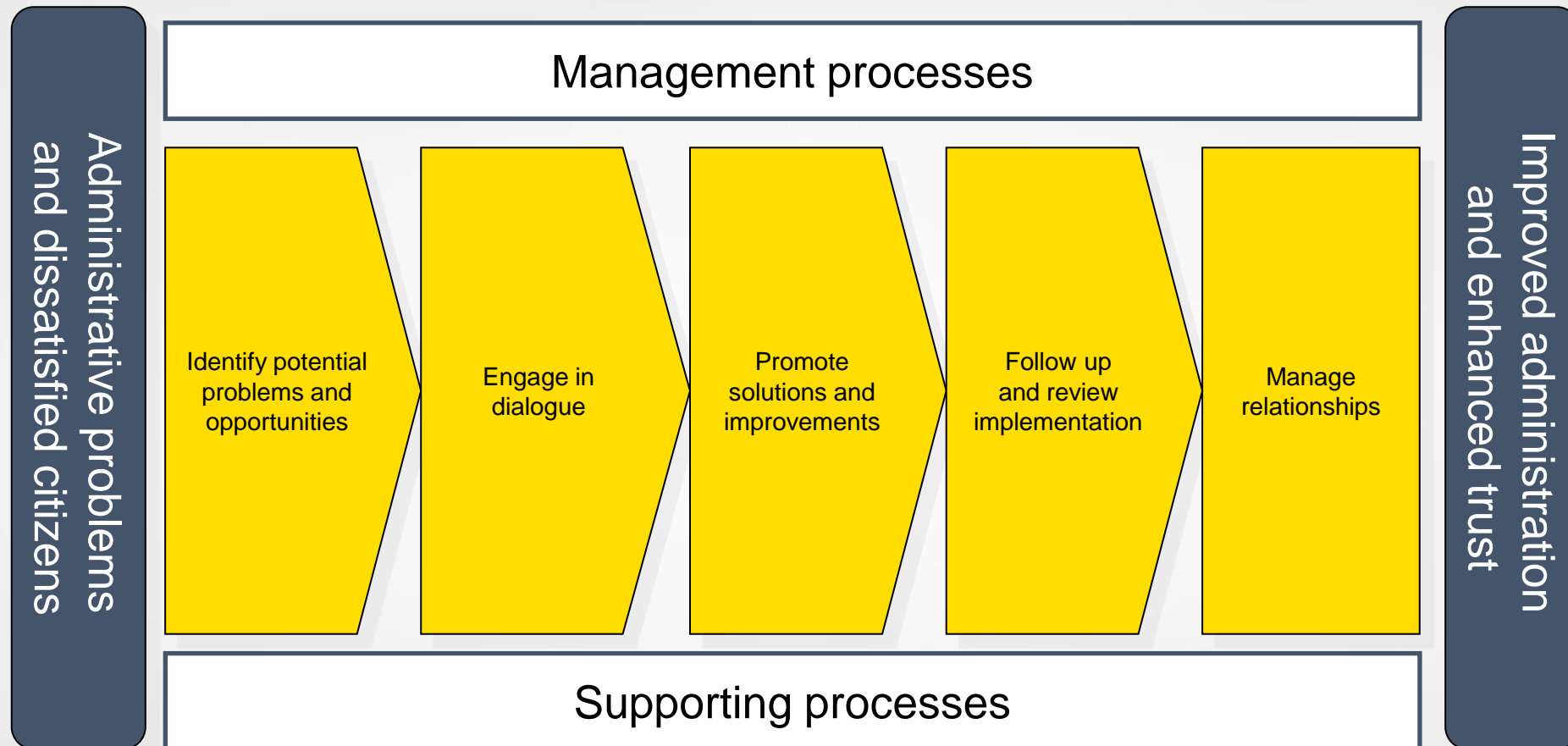
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OPERATING FRAMEWORK AND KEY PROCESSES

V14 – February 2024

Operating Framework



1. Management processes



1.1 Define Strategy

Review results of current or previous strategy



Conduct consultations



Draft (or revise) Strategy



1.2 Deploy Strategy

Annual Management Plan (AMP)



Mid-term review of the implementation
of AMP actions



Annual Activity Report (AAR)



2. Identify potential problems and opportunities

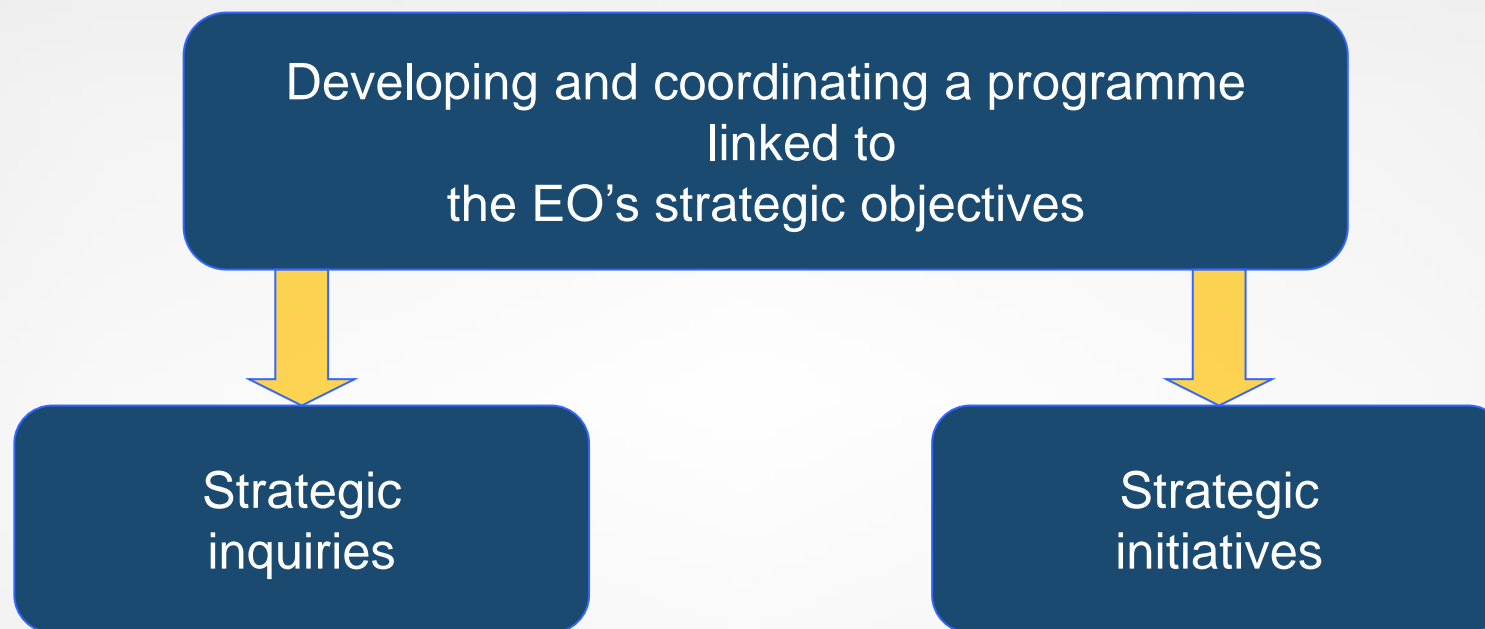
2.1 Proactive identification of systemic issues in the EO's fields of activity

2.2 Complaints

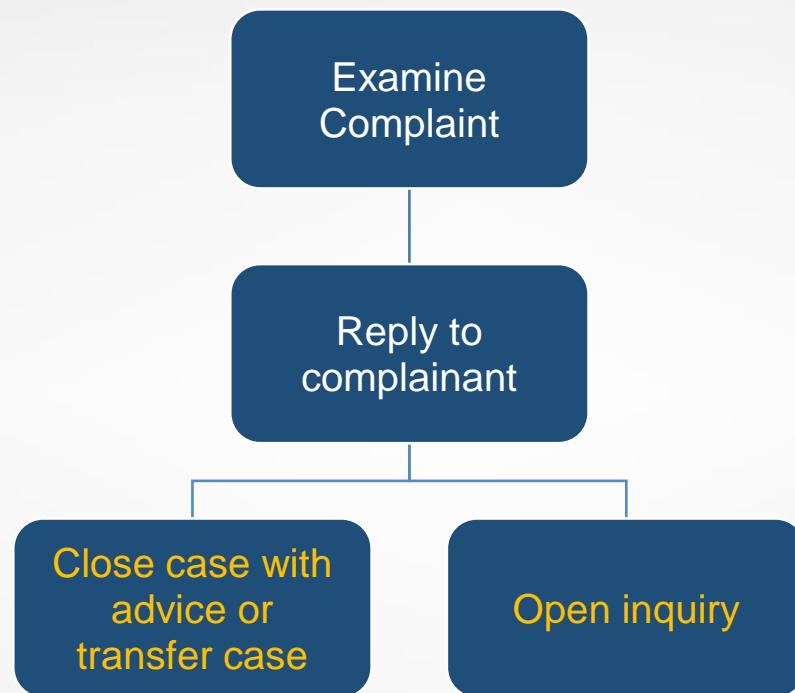
2.3 Other stakeholder input



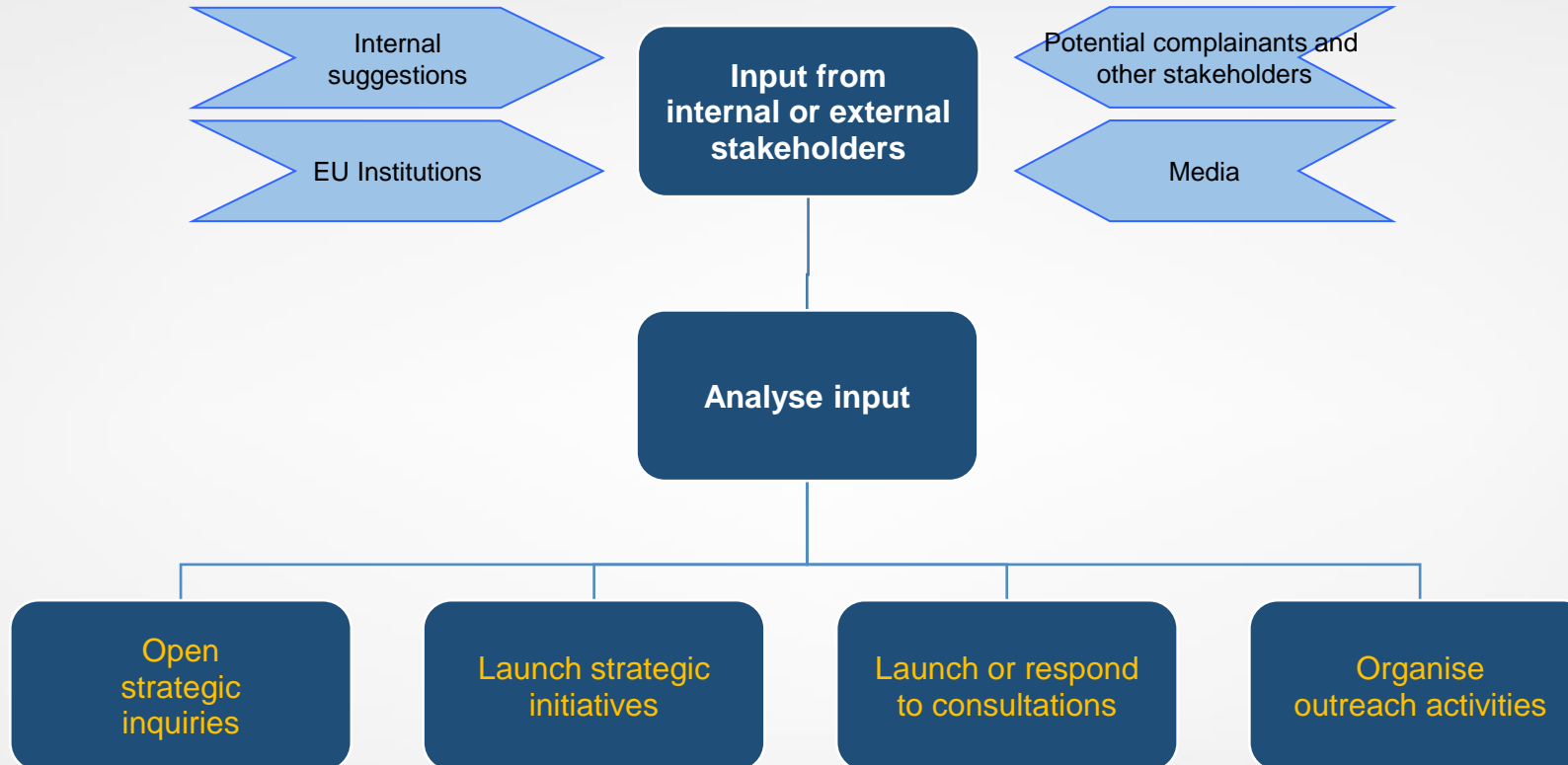
2.1 Proactive identification of systemic issues in the EO's fields of activity



2.2 Complaints



2.3 Other Stakeholder input



3. Engage in dialogue

In the context of

[3.1 Inquiries](#)

[3.2 Strategic initiatives](#)

[3.3 Consultations](#)

[3.4 Outreach and other activities](#)



3.1 Inquiries

Investigating complaints

Inquiries of
public importance

Fast-Track
inquiries
(Regulation
1049/2001)

Inquiries about
the institutions'
failure to reply

Strategic (own-initiative) inquiries

Queries from the ENO

Joint/parallel inquiries with the ENO



3.2 Strategic initiatives

Launching strategic initiatives



Inviting feedback from institution



Analysis of feedback
and follow-up



3.3 Consultations

Responding to consultations

Public consultations launched by EU institutions, requests from Committees of the European Parliament or from other stakeholders, ...

Launching consultations

Public, European Network of Ombudsmen, EDPS, ...



3.4 Outreach and other activities

Meetings and events with institutions
and other stakeholders

Target group activities

Proactive use of media,
including active social media engagement



4. Promote solutions and improvements

[4.1 Evaluation and recommendations in the inquiry process](#)

[4.2 Issuing general guidance](#)

[4.3 Informing and persuading](#)



4.1 Evaluation and recommendations

Solutions

Recommendations

Suggestions

Special Reports



4.2 Issuing general guidance

Practical recommendations for the EU
Administration

Thematic papers

Sharing and promoting
best practices



4.3 Informing and persuading

Publishing recommendations made in the context of inquiries

Publishing practical recommendations for the EU administration

Presentations to target audiences

Press releases and interviews

Organising thematic events



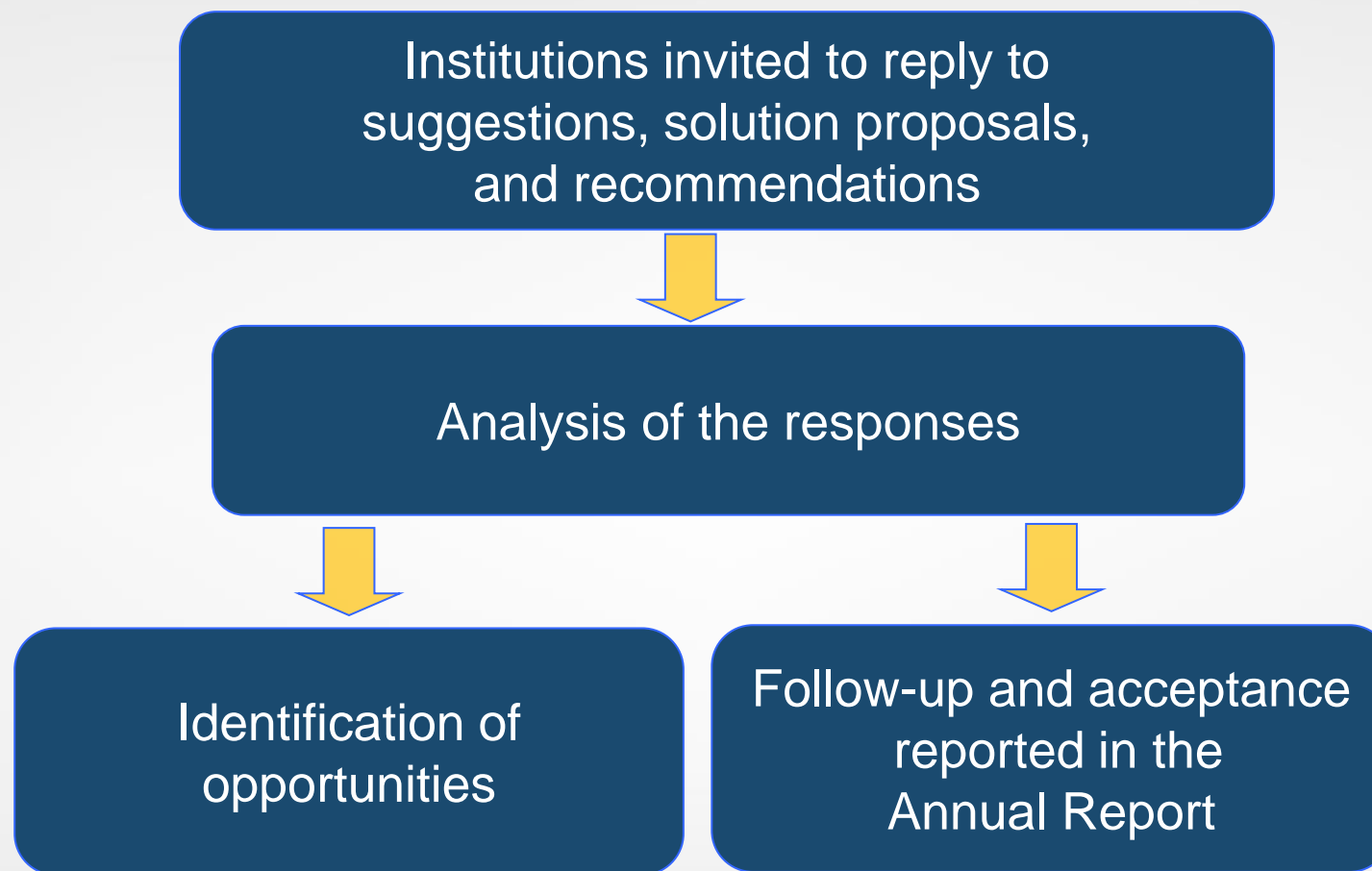
5. Follow-up and review implementation

[5.1 Acceptance analysis](#)

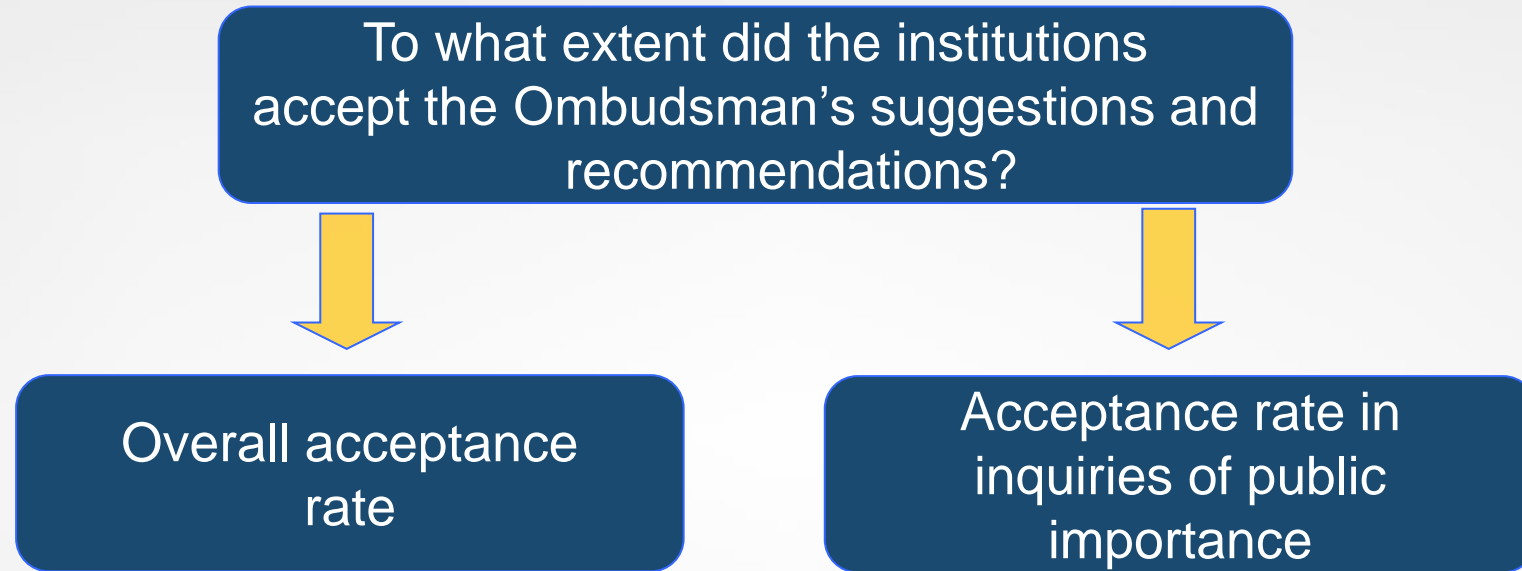
[5.2 Acceptance rate](#)



5.1 Acceptance analysis



5.2 Acceptance rate



6. Manage relationships

[6.1 Relations with complainants](#)

[6.2 Relations with the European Parliament](#)

[6.3 Relations with the European Network of Ombudsmen](#)

[6.4 Relations with other stakeholders](#)

[6.5 Recognising excellence in EU public service](#)



6.1 Relations with complainants

Dialogue throughout the life of the
complaint

Complainant feedback survey

Requests for review

Information on institutions'
follow-up



6.2 Relations with the European Parliament

Annual Reports

Special Reports

Meetings with MEPs

Appearances before Committees



6.3 Relations with the European Network of Ombudsmen

Transfer of cases

Parallel investigations

Queries

Seminars, workshops and other events

Electronic discussion forum and news
service

E-Newsletter



6.4 Relations with other stakeholders

(EU institutions, media, NGOs, ...)

Dialogue and feedback in the framework
of meetings, events and surveys



Analysis of the feedback



Identification of opportunities



6.5 Recognising excellence in EU public service



7. Supporting processes

[7.1 Human resources](#)

[7.2 Finances and controls](#)

[7.3 Information management](#)

[7.4 ICT](#)

[7.5 Administration](#)



7.1 Human Resources

Implementing HR policies

Ethics & good
conduct

Working environment
and conditions

Recruitment

HR
management

Learning &
Development

Internal
communication



7.2 Finances and controls

Preparation of Estimates

Budget Execution

Financial Management

Asset Management

Procurement

Financial Reporting

Accounting

Internal & External Audit



7.3 Information Management

Complaints management
system

Managing non-complaints
related documents

Implementing the EUCI
Decision

Historical archiving

Public Access to
information
and documents

Data protection



7.4 ICT

Implementation of priorities and projects

Maintenance, updating and
security
of existing systems

Management of
hardware, servers and
standard applications

Relations with external
service providers

Management of
framework contracts

Preparation of budget
and reporting on the
implementation of priorities

Management of
external procurement



7.5 Administration

Direct
administration

Process management

Infrastructure

Business continuity

Managing
interinstitutional
cooperation

European Parliament
(Buildings and associated
services, translation, ...)

European Commission
(PMO, ABAC, SYSPER 2,
ARES...)

Translation Centre





European
Ombudsman

REPORT ON BUDGETARY AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

European Ombudsman

Financial year 2023



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Introduction

This report has been drawn up in accordance with Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046 of 18 July 2018 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the Union, and in particular Article 249 thereof.

The report summarises the European Ombudsman's budgetary and financial management during 2023 and outlines the institution's financial situation, budget evolution and main events having an impact on the budgetary performance.

The 2023 budget implementation shows the following patterns:

- The implementation rate for commitments and payments is slightly lower compared to the previous year. The utilisation rate of appropriations amounts to 95,39% and payments represent 97,58% of total commitments, compared to respectively 96,97% and 96,27% in 2022. Appropriations carried-over to 2024 represent 3,03% of total commitments (3,03% in 2022).
- Nine transfers were organised during the year for a total amount of € 241 150 in order to reallocate funds to finance specific needs. Detailed information on the purpose of the transfers is provided in section 2.2 below.



1 - Revenue

Established entitlements for the financial year 2023 totalled € 1 611 105,90. They represent 100,27 % of the estimated revenue of € 1 606 772 (Table 1), compared to 104,13% in 2022.

The total revenue recovered as at 31 December 2023 (€ 1 610 457,60) represents 99,96% of the entitlements established in 2023.

The detailed table can be found in Annex I.

Table 1 - Established entitled 2023

(EUR)				
Title	Estimated revenue 2023	Established entitlements 2023	Total recovered 2023	% in total
3 - Administrative revenue	1.606.772	1.611.105,90	1.610.457,60	99,96%
4- Financial revenue, default interest and fines	-	67,86	67,86	100%
6- Revenue, contributions and refunds related to Union policies	-	-	-	0%
Total	1.606.772	1.611.173,76	1.610.525,46	99,96%

Of the € 1 610 457,60 in revenue recovered, € 1 609 547,75 (99,94%) represent deductions from the salaries of Members and staff (taxes and special levies on remuneration and pensions). Other revenue recovered in the financial year amounts to € 977,71 mainly related to recoveries on travel costs, public transportation and bank interests. Of the € 1 611 173,76 in established entitlements, € 1 610 525,46 (99,96%) were recovered. An amount of € 648,30 concerning travel costs was still to be recovered at 31/12/2023. By way of comparison, in 2022, deductions made from the salaries of Members and staff (taxes and special levies on remuneration and pensions) amounted to € 1 452 043,11 and other revenue for the financial year amounted to € 2 396,46.

2 - Expenditure

2.1 Final appropriations available, commitments and payments by title

Total appropriations available for 2023, appropriations committed, payments made during the year and the remaining amount to be carried over to 2023 are summarised in Table 2 and Table 3 below.

A more detailed analysis by chapter can be found in Table 5 to Table 10 below, together with explanatory notes on some specific chapters and/or items.



Table 2 - Final appropriations available and commitments by title

(EUR)

Title	Final appropriations	Appropriations committed	%
Title I - Expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	10.652.347	10.156.452	95,34%
Title II - Buildings, furniture, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure	2.211.700	2.129.431	96,28%
Title III - Expenditure resulting from general functions carried out by the institution	348.400	318.068	91,29%
Titles I, II and III - Total	13.212.447	12.603.950	95,39%

Table 3 - Commitments and payments by title

(EUR)

Title	Commitments	Payments	%	Carry-over	%
Title I - Expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	10.156.452	10.092.633	99,37%	63.819	0,63%
Title II - Buildings, furniture, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure	2.129.431	1.973.129	92,66%	156.302	7,34%
Title III - Expenditure resulting from general functions carried out by the institution	318.068	233.638	73,46%	84.429	26,54%
Titles I, II and III - Total	12.603.950	12.299.400	97,58%	304.550	2,42%



2.2 Budget transfers

During the financial year, the European Ombudsman made nine budgetary transfers totalling € 241 150 (Table 4). The aim of these transfers was to ensure that the European Ombudsman's various departments operated smoothly and that any related requirements were met.

Table 4 - Budget transfers in 2023

(EUR)		
Type de transfert	Number of transfers in 2023	Total amount transferred
Title to title	1	53.000
Chapter to chapter	1	43.000
Article to Article	1	8.900
Item to item	6	136.250
Total	9	241.150

The main budget lines impacted were the following :

Reductions:

- Rent: -8,06%
- Cleaning, maintenance and energy consumption: -13,38%
- Support for activities: -15,25%
- Meetings in general: -8,06%
- Communication and publications: -12%
- Documentation and library expenditure: -81,25%

Increases:

- Furniture: +333%
- Security and surveillance of buildings: +14%
- Studies: +260%
- Expenditure on archive resources: +131%
- Expenditure on recruitment: +167%
- Entitlements on entering the service, transfer and leaving the service: +183%
- Mission expenses: +20%
- Informatics: +13%

The reinforcement of the budget lines for furniture, security and surveillance of buildings, studies, expenditure on archive resources, expenditure on recruitment, entitlements on entering, transfer and leaving the service, mission expenses and informatics was possible thanks to the savings resulting from unused appropriations for rent, support for activities,



meetings in general, communication and publications, and documentation and library expenditure.

In order to improve the working conditions of staff at their home office and to reduce the risk of posture-related health problems, the European Ombudsman's Office decided in 2023 to provide ergonomic chairs to all staff who request them, equivalent to those available in the Ombudsman's premises. For this purpose, appropriations had to be transferred to budget line 212 'Furniture'.

For budget line 2003 'Security and surveillance of buildings', the costs for security and surveillance of buildings were higher in 2023 than initially estimated when preparing the 2023 draft budget. Therefore appropriations had to be transferred to this budget line.

Appropriations were transferred to budget line 3300 'Studies' in order to cover the cost of a study to be carried out by the European Parliamentary Research Service and whose purpose is to analyse best practices of four financing entities, in particular promotional and development banks and institutions, regarding the active publication of 'environmental information' in relation to projects that they finance directly and/or indirectly through 'intermediaries'.

In July 2022, the European Ombudsman announced the Office's intention to become a depositing institution at the Historical Archives of the European Union in Florence. A first batch of documents related to the mandates of the first European Ombudsman, Mr Jacob Söderman (1995-2003) as well as the second European Ombudsman, Mr Nikiforos Diamandouros (2003-2013) was prepared during the year 2023. With the aim of digitising the documents to be sent to Florence, a transfer of appropriations to budget line 3201 'expenditure on archive resources' was needed in order to cover support costs provided by an external archivist to organise, streamline, and execute the digitisation process.

The transfer of appropriations to budget line 1610 'Expenditure on recruitment' was needed in order to cover the fees for EPSO's support in organising internal competitions which were published at the end of September 2023.

Appropriations were transferred to budget line 1204 'Entitlements on entering the service, transfer and leaving the service' with the aim of covering payments due to the recruitment of new officials or temporary agents, who took up their duties during 2023.

The transfer of appropriations to budget line 104 'Mission expenses' was needed for the following reasons: (i) the initial appropriations for 2023 were based on the ones of previous years during which travel was limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic ; (ii) Inflation has caused expenditure for accommodations to increase, and (iii) in 2023 the Ombudsman was invited to and participated in more meetings and conferences with other institutions and external stakeholders than in previous years, during which she presented her work on issues of public interest.

Appropriations were transferred to budget line 2100 'Informatics' in order to cover the cost of updating our ICT equipment.

The effects of the transfers at item level are detailed in Annex 2.



2.3 Title I - Expenditure relating to people working with the Institution

Table 5 and Table 6 below summarise the final appropriations, commitments and payments for 2023 in Title I.

Table 5 - Final appropriations available and commitments in Title I

(EUR)

Chapters	Final appropriations	Appropriations committed	%
10- Members of the institution	511.605	487.541	95,30%
12- Officials and temporary staff	9.137.366	8.778.881	96,08%
14- Other staff and outside services	659.700	586.976	88,98%
16- Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	343.676	303.054	88,18%
Title I - Total	10.652.347	10.156.452	95,34%

In 2023, the utilisation rate of appropriations under Title I was 95,34% (in 2022, this rate was 97,15%).

Appropriations in Chapter 10 (Members of the institution) were used in 2023 at a rate of 95,30% (in 2022, the figure was 97,39%).

The utilisation rate for Chapter 12 (Officials and temporary staff) was 96,08% compared to 97,72% in 2022.

The utilisation rate for Chapter 14 (Other staff and outside services) was 88,98% compared to 89,20% in 2022.

Appropriations in Chapter 16 (Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution) were used in 2023 at a rate of 88,18% compared to 96,85% in 2022.



Table 6 - Commitments and payments in Title I

(EUR)					
Chapters	Commitments	Payments	%	Carry-over	%
10- Members of the institution	487.541	475.549	97,54%	11.992	2,46%
12- Officials and temporary staff	8.778.881	8.773.373	99,94%	5.508	0,06%
14- Other staff and outside services	586.976	583.803	99,46%	3.172	0,54%
16- Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	303.054	259.908	85,76%	43.146	14,24%
Title I - Total	10.156.452	10.092.633	99,37%	63.819	0,63%

In 2023, for Title I, payments totalled € 10 092 633, i.e. 94,75% of the final appropriations and 99,37% of the total commitments (in 2022, these rates were 95,94% and 98,75% respectively).

Commitments carried over automatically to 2023 in accordance with Article 12 of the Financial Regulation amounted to € 63 819, i.e. 0,60% of the final appropriations and 0,63% of the total commitments (in 2022, these rates were 1,21% and 1,25% respectively).

The largest proportion of the carry-over regarding Chapter 16 concerned staff training (€ 22 846,60) and the Crèches and childcare facilities (€ 16 588) for which legal obligations existed but invoices were not received or had been received but not fully processed by the end of the financial year.



2.4 Title II - Buildings, furniture, equipment and miscellaneous expenditure

Table 7 and Table 8 below summarise final appropriations, commitments and payments for 2023 in Title II.

Table 7 - Final appropriations available and commitments in Title II

(EUR)

Chapters	Final appropriations	Appropriations committed	%
20- Buildings and associated costs	1.373.000	1.371.550	99,89%
21- Data processing, equipment and furniture: purchase, hire and maintenance	355.000	352.347	99,25%
23-Current administrative expenditure	483.700	405.533	83,84%
Title II - Total	2.211.700	2.129.431	96,28%

The utilisation rate for appropriations in Title II reached 96,28% in 2023 (compared to 98,91% in 2022).

Table 8 - Commitments and payments in Title II

(EUR)

Chapters	Commitments	Payments	%	Carry-over	%
20- Buildings and associated costs	1.371.550	1.368.766	99,80%	2.784	0,20%
21- Data processing, equipment and furniture: purchase, hire and maintenance	352.347	232.101	65,87%	120.246	34,13%
23-Current administrative expenditure	405.533	372.261	91,80%	33.272	8,20%
Title II - Total	2.129.431	1.973.129	92,66%	156.302	7,34%

Payments totalled € 1 973 129, equivalent to 89,21% of the final appropriations and 92,66% of the commitments (in 2022, these rates were 90,57% and 91,57% respectively). Commitments carried over to 2024 in accordance with Article 12 of the Financial Regulation amounted to € 156 302, i.e. 7,07% of the final appropriations and 7,34% of the commitments (in 2022, these rates were 8,34% and 8,43% respectively).



The budget line which accounts for most of the carry-over of € 120 246 under Chapter 21 is budget item 2100 'Purchase, servicing and maintenance of equipment and software, and related work', with € 106 288, mainly for the order of renewal of licences and IT equipment (laptops) and for the development and maintenance of the EO's websites.

2.5 Title III - Expenditure resulting from general functions carried out by the institution

Table 9 and Table 10 below summarise final appropriations, commitments and payments for 2023 in Title III.

Table 9 - Final appropriations available and commitments in Title III

(EUR)

Chapters	Final appropriations	Appropriations committed	%
30- Meetings and conferences	241.000	214.029	88,81%
32- Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination	69.000	66.234	95,99%
33- Studies and other subsidies	36.000	35.405	98,35%
34- Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	2.400	2.400	100,00%
Title III - Total	348.400	318.068	91,29%

In 2023, the utilisation rate of appropriations under Title III was 91,29% (in 2022, this rate was 76,97%).

Table 10 - Commitments and payments in Title III

(EUR)

Chapters	Commitments	Payments	%	Carry-over	%
30- Meetings and conferences	214.029	159.954	74,73%	54.075	25,27%
32- Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination	66.234	35.879	54,17%	30.355	45,83%
33- Studies and other subsidies	35.405	35.405	100,00%	-	0,00%
34- Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	2.400	2.400	100,00%	-	0,00%
Title III - Total	318.068	233.638	73,46%	84.429	26,54%



Payments totalled € 233 638, equivalent to 67,06% of the final appropriations and 73,46% of the commitments (in 2022, these rates were 37% and 48,07% respectively). Commitments carried over to 2024 in accordance with Article 12 of the Financial Regulation amounted to € 84 429, i.e 24,23% of the final appropriations and 26,54% of the commitments (in 2022, these rates were 39,97% and 51,93% respectively).

In Chapter 30 'Meetings and conferences', the majority of the carry-over relates to budget line 300 'Staff mission expenses' (€ 25 213) and budget line 303 'Meetings in general' (€ 28 173) for which legal obligations existed but invoices or expense claims were not received or had been received but not fully processed by the end of the financial year.

In Chapter 32 'Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination', the majority of the carry-over concerns budget item 3201 'Expenditure on archive resources' (€ 19 217) and budget item 3210 'Communication and publications' (€ 10 964).

Additional details on the use of the appropriations of the year can be found in Annex 3.



3 - Appropriations carried over from 2022

The carry over of 2022 appropriations is shown in Table 11 below and in Annex 4.

Table 11 - Carry over of 2022 appropriations to 2023

(EUR)			
Chapters	Carry-over from 2022 to 2023	Payments on carry-over	Cancellations
10- Members of the institution	8.785	-	8.785
12- Officials and temporary staff	-	-	-
14- Other staff and outside services	1.207	394	813
16- Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	105.020	56.235	48.785
Title I - Total	115.012	56.629	58.383
20- Buildings and associated costs	5.315	5.315	-
21- Data processing, equipment and furniture: purchase, hire and maintenance	137.608	132.925	4.683
23- Current administrative expenditure	56.854	39.175	17.679
Title II - Total	199.777	177.415	22.362
30- Meetings and conferences	54.049	24.479	29.570
32- Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination	55.121	47.225	7.896
33- Studies and other subsidies	18.250	18.250	-
34- Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	-	-	-
Title III - Total	127.420	89.954	37.466
Title I, II and III - Total	442.209	323.997	118.211

Automatic carry-overs of appropriations (Article 12 of the Financial Regulation) from the financial year 2022 to the financial year 2023, which totalled € 442 209, gave rise to payments amounting to € 323 997, i.e. a utilisation rate of 73,27% compared to 92,59% in 2022.



Annex 1: Estimated revenue, established entitlements and entitlements carried over

Line	Heading	Revenues 2023 (in EUR)			
		Initial Budget	Establ Rights of the Year	Recovered of Year	To be recovered of Year
3000	Tax on remunerations	762.468	731.645,03	731.645,03	-
3001	Special levies on remunerations	137.022	134.925,04	134.925,04	-
300	Taxes and levies	899.490	866.570,07	866.570,07	-
3010	Staff contributions to the pension scheme	707.292	742.977,68	742.977,68	-
3011	Transfer or purchase of pension rights by staff	p.m	-	-	-
3012	Contributions to the pension scheme by staff on leave	p.m	-	-	-
301	Contributions to the pension scheme	707.292	742.977,68	742.977,68	-
Chapter 30	Revenue from staff	1.606.782	1.609.547,75	1.609.547,75	-
310	Sale of immovable property — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
311	Sale of other property	p.m	-	-	-
312	Letting and subletting immovable property — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
Chapter 31	Revenue linked to property	p.m	-	-	-
3202	Revenue from the supply of goods, services and work for other Union institutions, agencies and bodies — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
320	Revenue from the supply of goods, services and work — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
321	Refunds by other institutions or bodies of mission allowances — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
322	Revenue from third parties in respect of goods, services or work — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
Chapter 32	Revenue from the supply of goods, services and work - assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
330	Repayment of amounts wrongly paid — Assigned revenue	p.m	1.412,60	764,30	648,30
331	Revenue for a specific purpose (income from foundations, subsidies, gifts and bequests) — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
333	Insurance payments received — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
338	Other revenue from administrative operations — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
339	Other revenue from administrative operations	p.m	145,55	145,55	-
Chapter 33	Other administrative revenue	p.m	1.558,15	909,85	648,30
Title 3	Administrative revenue	1.606.782	1.611.105,90	1.610.457,60	648,30
400	Revenue from investments, loans granted and bank accounts	p.m	67,86	67,86	-
Chapter 40	Revenue from investments and accounts	p.m	67,86	67,86	-
Title 4	Financial revenue, default interest and fines	p.m	67,86	67,86	-
668	Other contributions and refunds — Assigned revenue	p.m	-	-	-
Chapter 66	Other contributions and refunds	p.m	-	-	-
Title 6	Revenue, contributions and refunds related to Union policies	p.m	-	-	-
Total		1.606.782	1.611.173,76	1.610.525,46	648,30



Annex 2: Changes in appropriations for the year

in EUR

Budget Line	Initial Budget 2023	Reductions	Transfers (+/-)	Appropriations Year 2023	Carry Over by Right Y-1
Article 1 00 - Salaries, allowances and payments related to salaries	474.605	0	-7.000	467.605	0
Article 1 02 - Temporary allowances	0	0	0	0	0
Article 1 03 - Pensions	0	0	0	0	0
Article 1 04 - Mission expenses	35.000	0	7.000	42.000	8.785
Article 1 05 - Language and data-processing courses	2.000	0	0	2.000	0
Article 1 08 - Allowances and expenses on entering and leaving the service	0	0	0	0	0
Chapter 10 - Members of the institution	511.605	0	0	511.605	8.785
12 00 Remuneration and allowances	9.104.366	0	-55.000	9.049.366	0
12 02 Paid overtime	3.000	0	0	3.000	0
12 04 Entitlements on entering the service, transfer and leaving the service	30.000	0	55.000	85.000	0
Article 1 20 - Remuneration and other entitlements	9.137.366	0	0	9.137.366	0
12 20 Allowances for staff retired in the interests of the service	0	0	0	0	0
12 22 Allowances for staff whose service is terminated and special retirement scheme for officials and temporary staff	0	0	0	0	0
Article 1 22 - Allowances upon early termination of service	0	0	0	0	0
Chapter 12 - Officials and temporary staff	9.137.366	0	0	9.137.366	0
14 00 Other staff	450.500	0	0	450.500	0
14 04 Graduate traineeships, grants and exchanges of officials	209.200	0	0	209.200	1.207
Article 1 40 - Other staff and externals	659.700	0	0	659.700	1.207
Chapter 14 - Other staff and outside services	659.700	0	0	659.700	1.207
16 10 Expenditure on recruitment	3.000	0	5.900	8.900	120
16 12 Further training	90.000	0	3.000	93.000	29.627
Article 1 61 - Expenditure relating to staff management	93.000	0	8.900	101.900	29.747
16 30 Social welfare	0	0	0	0	0
16 31 Mobility	26.000	0	0	26.000	0
16 32 Social contacts between members of staff and other social measures	7.000	0	0	7.000	180
Article 1 63 - Measures to assist the institution's staff	33.000	0	0	33.000	180
16 50 European Schools	167.676	0	-8.900	158.776	0
16 51 Crèches and childcare facilities	50.000	0	0	50.000	75.093
Article 1 65 - Activities relating to all persons working with the institution	217.676	0	-8.900	208.776	75.093
Chapter 16 - Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	343.676	0	0	343.676	105.020
TITLE I - EXPENDITURE RELATING TO PERSONS WORKING WITH THE INSTITUTION	10.652.347	0	0	10.652.347	115.012



Budget Line	Initial Budget 2023	Reductions	Transfers (+/-)	Appropriations Year 2023	Carry Over by Right Y-1
2000 Rent	942.000	0	-75.900	866.100	0
2001 Fitting-out and installation work	0	0	5.000	5.000	5.315
2002 Cleaning, maintenance and energy consumption	195.000	0	-26.100	168.900	0
2003 Security and surveillance of buildings	292.000	0	41.000	333.000	0
Article 2 0 0 - Buildings	1.429.000	0	-56.000	1.373.000	5.315
Chapter 2 0 - Buildings and associated costs	1.429.000	0	-56.000	1.373.000	5.315
2100 Purchase, servicing and maintenance of equipment and software, and related work	310.000	0	20.000	330.000	124.345
Article 2 1 0 - Equipment, operating costs and services relating to data processing and telecommunications	310.000	0	20.000	330.000	124.345
Article 2 1 2 - Furniture	3.000	0	10.000	13.000	3.457
Article 2 1 6 - Vehicles	12.000	0	0	12.000	9.805
Chapter 2 1 - Data processing, equipment and furniture: purchase, hire and maintenance	325.000	0	30.000	355.000	137.608
2300 Stationery, office supplies and miscellaneous consumables	5.500	0	0	5.500	523
2301 Postage on correspondence and delivery charges	3.000	0	0	3.000	1.476
2302 Telecommunications	5.000	0	0	5.000	1.500
2303 Financial charges	700	0	0	700	483
2304 Other expenditure	3.500	0	0	3.500	250
2305 Legal costs and damages	1.000	0	0	1.000	0
Article 2 3 0 - Administrative expenditure	18.700	0	0	18.700	4.232
Article 2 3 1 - Translation and interpretation	315.000	0	0	315.000	32.372
Article 2 3 2 - Support for activities	177.000	0	-27.000	150.000	20.250
Chapter 2 3 - Current administrative expenditure	510.700	0	-27.000	483.700	56.854
TITLE II - BUILDINGS, FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT AND MISCELLANEOUS OPERATING EXPENDITURE	2.264.700	0	-53.000	2.211.700	199.777



Budget Line	Initial Budget 2023	Reductions	Transfers (+/-)	Appropriations Year 2023	Carry Over by Right Y-1
Article 3 0 0 - Staff mission expenses	100.000	0	0	100.000	31.954
Article 3 0 2 - Reception and representation expenses	2.000	0	0	2.000	95
Article 3 0 3 - Meetings in general	124.000	0	-10.000	114.000	22.000
Article 3 0 4 - Internal meetings	25.000	0	0	25.000	0
Chapter 3 0 - Meetings and conferences	251.000	0	-10.000	241.000	54.049
3 2 0 0 Documentation and library expenditure	4.000	0	-3.250	750	749
3 2 0 1 Expenditure on archive resources	3.000	0	43.250	46.250	16.000
Article 3 2 0 - Acquisition of information and expertise	7.000	0	40.000	47.000	16.749
3 2 1 0 Communication and publications	25.000	0	-3.000	22.000	38.372
Article 3 2 1 - Production and dissemination	25.000	0	-3.000	22.000	38.372
Chapter 3 2 - Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination	32.000	0	37.000	69.000	55.121
3 3 0 0 Studies	10.000	0	26.000	36.000	18.250
3 3 0 1 Relations with national/regional ombudsmen and other similar bodies and support for activities of the European Network of Ombudsmen	0	0	0	0	0
Article 3 3 0 - Studies and subsidies	10.000	0	26.000	36.000	18.250
Chapter 3 3 - Studies and other subsidies	10.000	0	26.000	36.000	18.250
3 4 0 0 Miscellaneous expenses	2.400	0	0	2.400	0
Article 3 4 0 - Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	2.400	0	0	2.400	0
Chapter 3 4 - Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	2.400	0	0	2.400	0
TITLE III - EXPENDITURE RESULTING FROM GENERAL FUNCTIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE INSTITUTION	295.400	0	53.000	348.400	127.420
GRAND TOTAL	13.212.447	0	0	13.212.447	442.209



Annex 3: Use of appropriations for the year

in EUR

Budget Line	Appropriations Year 2023	Commitments	Payments	Available on Comt	Carry Over Right Y+1	Cancelled Appropriations
Article 1 0 0 - Salaries, allowances and payments related to salaries	467.605	445.540,82	445.540,82	-	-	22.064,18
Article 1 0 2 - Temporary allowances	-	-	-	-	-	-
Article 1 0 3 - Pensions	-	-	-	-	-	-
Article 1 0 4 - Mission expenses	42.000	42.000,00	30.007,74	11.992,26	11.992,26	-
Article 1 0 5 - Language and data-processing courses	2.000	-	-	-	-	2.000,00
Article 1 0 8 - Allowances and expenses on entering and leaving the service	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chapter 1 0 - Members of the institution	511.605	487.540,82	475.548,56	11.992,26	11.992,26	24.064,18
1 2 0 0 Remuneration and allowances	9.049.366	8.714.874,67	8.714.874,67	-	-	334.491,33
1 2 0 2 Paid overtime	3.000	-	-	-	-	3.000,00
1 2 0 4 Entitlements on entering the service, transfer and leaving the service	85.000	64.006,31	58.498,76	5.507,55	5.507,55	20.993,69
Article 1 2 0 - Remuneration and other entitlements	9.137.366	8.778.880,98	8.773.373,43	5.507,55	5.507,55	358.485,02
1 2 2 0 Allowances for staff retired in the interests of the service	-	-	-	-	-	-
1 2 2 2 Allowances for staff whose service is terminated and special retirement scheme for officials and temporary staff	-	-	-	-	-	-
Article 1 2 2 - Allowances upon early termination of service	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chapter 1 2 - Officials and temporary staff	9.137.366	8.778.880,98	8.773.373,43	5.507,55	5.507,55	358.485,02
1 4 0 0 Other staff	450.500	410.674,31	410.674,31	-	-	39.825,69
1 4 0 4 Graduate traineeships, grants and exchanges of officials	209.200	176.301,28	173.128,88	3.172,40	3.172,40	32.898,72
Article 1 4 0 - Other staff and externals	659.700	586.975,59	583.803,19	3.172,40	3.172,40	72.724,41
Chapter 1 4 - Other staff and outside services	659.700	586.975,59	583.803,19	3.172,40	3.172,40	72.724,41
1 6 1 0 Expenditure on recruitment	8.900	8.537,08	6.064,68	2.472,40	2.472,40	362,92
1 6 1 2 Further training	93.000	82.402,86	59.556,26	22.846,60	22.846,60	10.597,14
Article 1 6 1 - Expenditure relating to staff management	101.900	90.939,94	65.620,94	25.319,00	25.319,00	10.960,06
1 6 3 0 Social welfare	-	-	-	-	-	-
1 6 3 1 Mobility	26.000	12.261,82	12.261,82	-	-	13.738,18
1 6 3 2 Social contacts between members of staff and other social measures	7.000	5.607,95	4.368,66	1.239,29	1.239,29	1.392,05
Article 1 6 3 - Measures to assist the institution's staff	33.000	17.869,77	16.630,48	1.239,29	1.239,29	15.130,23
1 6 5 0 European Schools	158.776	144.244,56	144.244,56	-	-	14.531,44
1 6 5 1 Crèches and childcare facilities	50.000	50.000,00	33.412,00	16.588,00	16.588,00	-
Article 1 6 5 - Activities relating to all persons working with the institution	208.776	194.244,56	177.656,56	16.588,00	16.588,00	14.531,44
Chapter 1 6 - Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	343.676	303.054,27	259.907,98	43.146,29	43.146,29	40.621,73
TITLE I - EXPENDITURE RELATING TO PERSONS WORKING WITH THE INSTITUTION	10.652.347	10.156.451,66	10.092.633,16	63.818,50	63.818,50	495.895,34



Budget Line	Appropriations Year 2023	Commitments	Payments	Available on Comt	Carry Over Right Y+1	Cancelled Appropriations
2 0 0 Rent	866.100	866.039,06	866.039,06	-	-	60,94
2 0 0 1 Fitting-out and installation work	5.000	3.792,90	1.009,00	2.783,90	2.783,90	1.207,10
2 0 0 2 Cleaning, maintenance and energy consumption	168.900	168.841,02	168.841,02	-	-	58,98
2 0 0 3 Security and surveillance of buildings	333.000	332.877,14	332.877,14	-	-	122,86
Article 2 0 0 - Buildings	1.373.000	1.371.550,12	1.368.766,22	2.783,90	2.783,90	1.449,88
Chapter 2 0 - Buildings and associated costs	1.373.000	1.371.550,12	1.368.766,22	2.783,90	2.783,90	1.449,88
2 1 0 Purchase, servicing and maintenance of equipment and software, and related work	330.000	329.253,42	222.965,86	106.287,56	106.287,56	746,58
Article 2 1 0 - Equipment, operating costs and services relating to data processing and telecommunications	330.000	329.253,42	222.965,86	106.287,56	106.287,56	746,58
Article 2 1 2 - Furniture	13.000	12.853,97	8.543,76	4.310,21	4.310,21	146,03
Article 2 1 6 - Vehicles	12.000	10.240,08	591,48	9.648,60	9.648,60	1.759,92
Chapter 2 1 - Data processing, equipment and furniture: purchase, hire and maintenance	355.000	352.347,47	232.101,10	120.246,37	120.246,37	2.652,53
2 3 0 Stationery, office supplies and miscellaneous consumables	5.500	5.397,74	4.945,24	452,50	452,50	102,26
2 3 0 1 Postage on correspondence and delivery charges	3.000	3.000,00	1.020,00	1.980,00	1.980,00	-
2 3 0 2 Telecommunications	5.000	4.448,53	1.148,53	3.300,00	3.300,00	551,47
2 3 0 3 Financial charges	700	700,00	239,00	461,00	461,00	-
2 3 0 4 Other expenditure	3.500	2.362,02	1.997,02	365,00	365,00	1.137,98
2 3 0 5 Legal costs and damages	1.000	-	-	-	-	1.000,00
Article 2 3 0 - Administrative expenditure	18.700	15.908,29	9.349,79	6.558,50	6.558,50	2.791,71
Article 2 3 1 - Translation and interpretation	315.000	249.515,66	240.802,57	8.713,09	8.713,09	65.484,34
Article 2 3 2 - Support for activities	150.000	140.109,00	122.109,00	18.000,00	18.000,00	9.891,00
Chapter 2 3 - Current administrative expenditure	483.700	405.532,95	372.261,36	33.271,59	33.271,59	78.167,05
TITLE II - BUILDINGS, FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT AND MISCELLANEOUS OPERATING EXPENDITURE	2.211.700	2.129.430,54	1.973.128,68	156.301,86	156.301,86	82.269,46



Budget Line	Appropriations Year 2023	Commitments	Payments	Available on Comt	Carry Over Right Y+1	Cancelled Appropriations
Article 3 0 0 - Staff mission expenses	100.000	92.000,00	66.787,15	25.212,85	25.212,85	8.000,00
Article 3 0 2 - Reception and representation expenses	2.000	1.362,53	1.362,53	-	-	3.362,53
Article 3 0 3 - Meetings in general	114.000	101.001,81	72.829,09	28.172,72	28.172,72	215.001,81
Article 3 0 4 - Internal meetings	25.000	19.664,65	18.975,65	689,00	689,00	44.664,65
Chapter 3 0 - Meetings and conferences	241.000	214.028,99	159.954,42	54.074,57	54.074,57	271.028,99
3 2 0 0 Documentation and library expenditure	750	411,50	237,92	173,58	173,58	338,50
3 2 0 1 Expenditure on archive resources	46.250	44.694,26	25.477,06	19.217,20	19.217,20	1.555,74
Article 3 2 0 - Acquisition of information and expertise	47.000	45.105,76	25.714,98	19.390,78	19.390,78	1.894,24
3 2 1 0 Communication and publications	22.000	21.127,87	10.164,06	10.963,81	10.963,81	872,13
Article 3 2 1 - Production and dissemination	22.000	21.127,87	10.164,06	10.963,81	10.963,81	872,13
Chapter 3 2 - Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination	69.000	66.233,630	35.879,040	30.354,59	30.354,59	2.766,370
3 3 0 0 Studies	36.000	35.405,00	35.405,00	-	-	595,00
3 3 0 1 Relations with national/regional ombudsmen and other similar bodies and support for activities of the European Network of Ombudsmen	-	-	-	-	-	-
Article 3 3 0 - Studies and subsidies	36.000	35.405,00	35.405,00	-	-	595,00
Chapter 3 3 - Studies and other subsidies	36.000	35.405	35.405	-	-	595,00
3 4 0 0 Miscellaneous expenses	2.400	2.400,00	2.400,00	-	-	-
Article 3 4 0 - Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	2.400	2.400,00	2.400,00	-	-	-
Chapter 3 4 - Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	2.400	2.400,00	2.400,00	-	-	-
TITLE III - EXPENDITURE RESULTING FROM GENERAL FUNCTIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE INSTITUTION	348.400	318.067,62	233.638,46	84.429,16	84.429,16	274.390,36
GRAND TOTAL	13.212.447	12.603.949,82	12.299.400,30	304.549,52	304.549,52	852.555,16



Annex 4: Use of appropriations carried-over from 2022

in EUR

Budget Line	CARRY OVER BY RIGHT		CANCELLED APPROPRIATIONS	CARRY OVER BY DECISION
	Carry over by right	Payments CO Right		
Article 1 0 4 - Mission expenses	8.784,85	-	8.784,85	-
Chapter 1 0 - Members of the institution	8.784,85	-	8.784,85	-
Chapter 1 2 - Officials and temporary staff	-	-	-	-
1 4 0 4 Graduate traineeships, grants and exchanges of officials	1.207,32	394,08	813,24	-
Article 1 4 0 - Other staff and externals	1.207,32	394,08	813,24	-
Chapter 1 4 - Other staff and outside services	1.207,32	394,08	813,24	-
1 6 1 0 Expenditure on recruitment	120,00	-	120,00	-
1 6 1 2 Further training	29.626,63	19.575,64	10.050,99	-
Article 1 6 1 - Expenditure relating to staff management	29.746,63	19.575,64	10.050,99	-
1 6 3 2 Social contact between members of staff and other social measures	180,00	175,92	4,08	-
Article 1 6 3 - Measures to assist the institution's staff	180,00	175,92	4,08	-
1 6 5 1 Crèches and childcare facilities	75.093,00	36.483,00	38.610,00	-
Article 1 6 5 - Measures to assist the institution's staff	75.093,00	36.483,00	38.610,00	-
Chapter 1 6 - Other expenditure relating to persons working with the institution	105.019,63	56.234,56	48.665,07	-
TITLE I - EXPENDITURE RELATING TO PERSONS WORKING WITH THE INSTITUTION	115.011,80	56.628,64	58.263,16	-

Budget Line	CARRY OVER BY RIGHT		CANCELLED APPROPRIATIONS	CARRY OVER BY DECISION
	Carry over by right	Payments CO Right		
2 0 0 1 Fitting-out and installation work	5.314,96	5.314,96	-	-
Article 2 0 0 - Buildings	5.314,96	5.314,96	-	-
Chapter 2 0 - Buildings and associated costs	5.314,96	5.314,96	-	-
2 1 0 0 Purchase, servicing and maintenance of equipment and software, and related work	124.345,24	120.259,77	4.085,47	-
Article 2 1 0 - Equipment, operating costs and services relating to data processing and telecommunications	124.345,24	120.259,77	4.085,47	-
Article 2 1 2 - Furniture	3.457,10	3.457,10	-	-
Article 2 1 6 - Vehicles	9.805,28	9.208,02	597,26	-
Chapter 2 1 - Data processing, equipment and furniture: purchase, hire and maintenance	137.607,62	132.924,89	4.682,73	-
2 3 0 0 Stationery, office supplies and miscellaneous consumables	523,38	66,94	456,44	-
2 3 0 1 Postage on correspondence and delivery charges	1.475,78	232,25	1.243,53	-
2 3 0 2 Telecommunications	1.500,00	628,77	871,23	-
2 3 0 3 Financial charges	483,09	440,50	42,59	-
2 3 0 4 Other expenditure	250,00	184,29	65,71	-
Article 2 3 0 - Administrative expenditure	4.232,25	1.552,75	2.679,50	-
Article 2 3 1 - Translation and interpretation	32.371,80	26.508,10	5.863,70	-
Article 2 3 2 - Support for activities	20.250,00	11.113,94	9.136,06	-
Chapter 2 3 - Current administrative expenditure	56.854,05	39.174,79	17.679,26	-
TITLE II - BUILDINGS, FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT AND MISCELLANEOUS OPERATING EXPENDITURE	199.776,63	177.414,64	22.361,99	-



Budget Line	CARRY OVER BY RIGHT		CANCELLED APPROPRIATIONS	CARRY OVER BY DECISION
	Carry over by right	Payments CO Right		
Article 3 0 0 - Staff mission expenses	31.953,87	9.958,01	21.995,86	-
Article 3 0 2 - Reception and representation expenses	95,00	95,00	-	-
Article 3 0 3 - Meetings in general	22.000,00	14.425,61	7.574,39	-
Chapter 3 0 - Meetings and conferences	54.048,87	24.478,62	29.570,25	-
3 2 0 0 Documentation and library expenditure	749,31	326,70	422,61	-
3 2 0 1 Expenditure on archive resources	16.000,00	15.351,70	648,30	-
Article 3 2 0 - Acquisition of information and expertise	16.749,31	15.678,40	1.070,91	-
3 2 1 0 Communication and publications	38.372,13	31.547,02	6.825,11	-
Article 3 2 1 - Production and dissemination	38.372,13	31.547,02	6.825,11	-
Chapter 3 2 - Expertise and information: acquisition, archiving, production and dissemination	55.121,44	47.225,420	7.896,02	-
3 3 0 0 Studies	18.250,00	18.250,00	-	-
Article 3 3 0 - Studies and subsidies	18.250,00	18.250,00	-	-
Chapter 3 3 - Studies and other subsidies	18.250,00	18.250,00	-	-
Chapter 3 4 - Expenses relating to the Ombudsman's duties	-	-	-	-
TITLE III - EXPENDITURE RESULTING FROM GENERAL FUNCTIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE INSTITUTION	127.420,31	89.954,04	37.466,27	-
GRAND TOTAL	442.208,74	323.997,32	118.091,42	-

European Ombudsman Annual Report 2023

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1. Introduction



(Photo 1) Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman

It is my great pleasure to present the European Ombudsman Annual Report for 2023.

The increasingly complex EU decision-making environment – often fast-moving and involving a wide variety of stakeholders – reinforces the need for and importance of independent oversight bodies such as the European Ombudsman in ensuring that the European administration remains accountable and transparent.

My office's work includes reminding the EU institutions that while some situations may require quick political action, the default mode of a citizen-oriented administration should be one that enables public discussion and scrutiny.

In this light, I asked the European Parliament to support my recommendation to address as a matter of priority the significant delays by the European Commission in handling access to documents requests, particularly when reviewing its initial access decisions. This is only the second time that I have issued a Special Report to Parliament as European Ombudsman and it is a testament to the importance of this issue for democratic oversight. I am grateful to the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs for taking up the matter so promptly.

Ethical matters remained central throughout the year. I closely followed the reform process in the European Parliament following the corruption scandal at the end of 2022. While there have been some clear improvements to the Parliament's ethics framework, proper implementation and enforcement of the reforms will be key.

Migration-related inquiries featured strongly in 2023 as I opened an own-initiative inquiry aimed at clarifying Frontex's role in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea and, in a separate inquiry, asked the Agency to do more to ensure the fundamental rights of migrants are respected during 'debriefing interviews'. I also asked for more information about the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding, including whether the Commission had carried out a human rights impact assessment.

Migration was one the main topics at the European Network of Ombudsmen conference in the European Parliament in November. The gathering of national and regional ombudsmen also featured wide-ranging discussions on the use of AI in public administrations as well as the importance of high ethics standards in public life.

I was delighted to hold the fourth edition of the European Ombudsman Award for Good Administration in June. The award ceremony once again highlighted the many excellent initiatives and projects carried out by staff across the EU administration. The overall prize went to Eurojust and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for their work in helping civil society to document war crimes and crimes against humanity.

1. Introduction

The coming year is an important one for democracy in Europe and around the world. The choices people make at the ballot box will not only affect public policy but the functioning of democracy itself, including the checks and balances that safeguard fundamental rights and government accountability. Public administrations across the world will need to navigate the inherent tensions between their independence and the demands of government, using the public interest as their pole star. EU institutions are no different and it is part of the role of the European Ombudsman to act as their guide. As last year's Award for Good Administration shows, the EU is fortunate to have a cadre of hard-working, public-spirited, and independent-minded officials. I look forward to continuing to work with them to show how good public administration can help protect democracy and fundamental rights.

DRAFT

2. 2023 at a glance

2. 2023 at a glance

01 January

[Publication of guide on access to EU documents](#)

02 February

[Ombudsman discusses EU oversight framework with European Court of Auditors, European Anti-Fraud Office, and European Public Prosecutor's Office](#)

03 March

[Inquiry opened into how the European Personnel Selection Office \(EPSO\) carried out EU staff recruitment tests](#)

04 April

[Preliminary inquiry findings show lack of transparency in European Commission's interactions with tobacco lobbyists](#)

05 May

[Ombudsman addresses European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities](#)

06 June

[Award for Good Administration](#)

07 July

[Inquiry opened into role of European Border and Coast Guard Agency \(Frontex\) in search and rescue operations](#)

08 August

[Commission responds positively to Ombudsman's suggestions to draw up a fundamental rights impact assessment for EU-funded migration centres in Greece](#)

09 September

[Special report to the European Parliament on Commission delays in dealing with access to documents requests](#)

10 October

[Inquiry opened into how EU institutions deal with public access requests for legislative documents](#)

11 November

[European Network of Ombudsmen conference](#)

12 December

[Ombudsman highlights remaining concerns about Parliament's new ethics framework](#)

3. Key topics

3. Key topics

The Ombudsman helps people, businesses, and organisations facing problems with the EU administration. These can include a lack of transparency in decision making, delays or refusals in providing access to documents, violations of fundamental rights, and contractual issues. The following sections provide an overview of key cases related to particular areas.

3.1. Access to documents

EU citizens have broad rights to access documents held by the EU administration. If they face difficulties gaining access to these documents, they can turn to the Ombudsman for help.

Following an [own-initiative inquiry](#), the Ombudsman asked the European Commission urgently to deal with systemic delays in its handling of access to documents requests, noting that a fundamental rethink is needed to ensure it adheres to deadlines set out in the EU public access law (Regulation 1049/2001). The Ombudsman's inquiry revealed that when individuals seek a review of an access decision, known as a confirmatory request, the Commission misses the deadlines set out in the law in 85% of cases. In September, the Ombudsman sent a [special report](#) to the European Parliament, asking the institution for its formal support in getting the Commission to act on her recommendation. She discussed the report with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs in November.

The Ombudsman also opened an [own-initiative inquiry](#) into how the Commission, Parliament, and Council of the European Union handle public access requests for legislative documents. Previous Ombudsman inquiries have suggested that the three institutions are not fully adhering to EU law and, more specifically case-law, when it comes to these access requests.

After an [inquiry](#), the Ombudsman asked the Council to give full public access to an opinion of its legal service on a proposed minimum wage law, arguing that greater transparency while negotiations on the draft law were ongoing would have greatly facilitated public participation in the EU legislative process. The Council granted access to the requested document following the Ombudsman's recommendation. The Ombudsman also criticised the European Data Protection Board's (EDPB) negative response to multiple public access requests for preparatory documents concerning international data transfers. In response to the [Ombudsman's recommendation](#), the EDPB ultimately granted wider access to the requested documents.

The question of what constitutes an EU document continued to be an issue in 2023. The Ombudsman criticised the Commission's initial failure to include specific emails in the scope of an access request concerning exchanges on draft EU soil, forest, and climate adaptation strategies. During the [Ombudsman's inquiry](#), the Commission agreed to register the emails in question and examine whether they could be released.

In an [inquiry](#) concerning the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the Ombudsman concluded that its practice of automatically placing certain access to document requests in a chronological queue, independent of whether their handling would entail an excessive administrative burden, could not be considered good administration. Noting that EMA is already taking steps to phase out this queue, the Ombudsman asked the Agency to report back to her on its progress.

The Ombudsman also made suggestions to the European Investment Bank (EIB) for how it handles access to documents requests. In particular, she asked the EIB to assess access requests

3. Key topics

on their own merit and not in light of whether it already plans to publish the relevant documents later and to better explain how exactly disclosure could undermine interests protected by transparency rules when refusing access. The Ombudsman's suggestions followed an [inquiry](#) into how the Bank handled an access request for the summary of a project it is financing on the modernisation of an electricity distribution network in Poland. In response, the EIB said it would ensure it handles access requests in line with the Ombudsman's suggestions.

In an [inquiry](#) related to environmental decision-making, the Ombudsman criticised the Commission's refusal to provide access to documents concerning greenhouse gas emissions of the ceramics industry reported under the EU's emissions trading system (EU ETS). The Ombudsman disagreed with the Commission's reasoning that the requested documents did not include more information on emissions into the environment than what was already publicly available as well as the Commission's assessment that there was no overriding public interest in disclosure of the documents. She informed the Commission that she is considering conducting a broader inquiry into how it interprets the scope of environmental information and information related to emissions into the environment.

Tweet 1. Commission systemic delays in access to documents cases + special report to Parliament

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1704768185755697582>

Tweet 2. How EU institutions adhere to EU law in processing public access requests to legislative documents

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1709482025789665642>

Tweet 3. Council should give full public access to legal opinion related to proposed minimum wage law

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1645695391479009282>

3.2. Fundamental rights

Following the drowning of hundreds of people off the coast of Greece on 14 June, the Ombudsman opened an [own-initiative inquiry](#) into the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) when it comes to search and rescue missions. The Ombudsman asked to inspect a wide range of documents concerning Frontex's responsibilities in this area, including the formal report of the incident in question (Serious Incident Report) as well as reports of other recent incidents involving a considerable loss of life in the Mediterranean Sea. The Ombudsman's inquiry team subsequently met with Frontex representatives in Warsaw to clarify some of the information provided. The Ombudsman also asked Frontex to provide further documents for inspection.

In another initiative related to the role of EU institutions in upholding fundamental rights in border management activities, the Ombudsman asked for more information about the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in July between the EU and Tunisia. Specifically, the [Ombudsman asked](#) the European Commission how it plans to ensure respect for human rights in migration-related actions resulting from the agreement, which provides EUR 105 million in EU funding to Tunisia for border management. The Ombudsman asked the Commission if it carried out a human rights impact assessment prior to signing the MoU as well as whether it intends to carry out periodic reviews during the agreement's implementation. She further asked the Commission whether it has defined criteria for

3. Key topics

suspending funding if human rights are not respected. In a [separate inquiry](#), the Ombudsman asked the Commission how it ensures EU funds granted to Greece for border management do not contribute to fundamental rights violations.

Following an [inquiry](#) concerning a Frontex joint operation in Spain, the Ombudsman asked the Agency to do more to ensure the fundamental rights of irregular migrants are respected during debriefing interviews – interviews that gather information for risk analysis and the identification of cross-border crime suspects. She suggested that Frontex record interviewees' consent as well as ensure they receive information about their rights and access to an independent complaints mechanism. The Ombudsman also suggested that Frontex insist that the operational plans for any joint border management operation in a Member State include access to legal aid for migrants. Frontex accepted the majority of the Ombudsman's suggestions.

The Ombudsman welcomed the Commission's decision to work with local authorities to draw up a fundamental rights impact assessment of EU-funded migration management facilities in Greece (Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres), to make this assessment public, and to review it periodically. The Commission's commitment to these actions follows suggestions made by the Ombudsman in an [inquiry](#) into how the Commission ensures respect for fundamental rights in these facilities.

Following an [inquiry](#) into how the European External Action Service (EEAS) assesses human rights risks before providing support to non-EU countries to develop surveillance capabilities, the Ombudsman made a number of suggestions for improving the EEAS' Human Rights Guidelines. These include providing more information on the risk identification process, specifying that an assessment of the human rights impact of an activity should take place during every stage of that activity, and including data protection provisions with regards to information sharing sessions with local human rights organisations. In [another inquiry](#) related to assistance to non-EU countries for the development of surveillance capabilities, the Ombudsman suggested Frontex update the procedure it uses to assess the human rights impact and improve how this procedure is applied.

Tweet 4. Frontex role in rescue operations after tragedy in Greece
<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1684113297124065280>

Tweet 5. Commission and fundamental rights in EU-Tunisia MoU
<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1702593966061834252>

3.3. Ethical issues

Following allegations in late 2022 that non-EU countries paid for influence in the European Parliament, the Ombudsman had a series of exchanges with the Parliament on its plans to reform its ethics rules. In December, the Ombudsman welcomed the improvements the Parliament made to its ethics framework, such as a more detailed definition of conflicts of interest and the obligation for MEPs to publish meetings organised with registered lobbyists and with non-EU countries' diplomatic representatives, but said that there were [still concerns](#) around how the rules will be implemented and enforced. She urged the Parliament to ensure it has the necessary resources and arrangements in place to properly monitor and enforce the new rules.

3. Key topics

Following news that Qatar and organisations close to it had paid for business trips by a European Commission Director-General, the Ombudsman [asked the Commission](#) for information on travel costs paid for by third parties since 2021. Upon examining the statistics provided, she announced her intention to open an inquiry to assess the trips in question and identify whether the Commission took appropriate steps to mitigate potential conflicts of interest in these cases. She also urged the Commission to make public at least a summary of the information it had already shared with her on this matter.

In 2023, the Ombudsman looked at conflicts of interest risks in areas such as the European Defence Fund (EDF). She opened an [inquiry](#) into how the Commission ensures the absence of conflicts of interest among external experts evaluating EDF project proposals as, contrary to the general practice for the evaluation of proposals meant to receive EU funding, the Commission is not required to make public the names of the experts it consults for these projects.

The Ombudsman also asked the European Investment Bank (EIB) to [improve its conflict of interest rules](#) following the move of its vice-president to become the CEO of a national promotional bank in Italy. The vice-president had participated in the approval of financing agreements between the EIB and the national promotional bank in the weeks before his appointment as its CEO. The Ombudsman suggested that the EIB strengthen the oversight role of its ethics and compliance committee when it comes to the intended new jobs of management committee members. In response, the EIB said it had informed its ethics and compliance committee of the Ombudsman's proposals. It also said the committee now informs outgoing management committee members that their new contracts must not prevent them from reporting back on any conflicts of interest that arise during their post-service 'cooling off period'.

As part of her analysis in a [case](#) concerning potential conflicts of interest in the Commission's award of a contract for a study on EU policy on business mergers to a competition law consultancy, the Ombudsman positively assessed changes the Commission had recently made to its internal guidance on public procurement. She stated that the new guidance could strengthen how the institution deals with potential professional conflicts of interest in tenders, but that it needed to be diligently applied. The Commission terminated the contract in question during the Ombudsman's inquiry.

Tweet 6. Qatargate suggestions

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1734138795186946495>

Tweet 7. Inquiry into how Commission prevents conflicts of interest in the evaluation of European Defence Fund proposals

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1724353702990123366>

Tweet 8. How Commission dealt with concerns about conflict of interests relating to a contract for a study on EU policy on mergers

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1725153922476617794>

3.4. Accountability in decision making

The Ombudsman made a [series of suggestions](#) to the European Commission to help it ensure greater transparency and accountability with regards to the over EUR 700 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) meant to help the EU economy recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Her suggestions include asking

3. Key topics

the Commission to continue publishing preliminary assessments of Member States' payment requests, improve its handling of RRF-related access to documents requests, and ensure Member States that have not yet set up public portals containing data on major funding recipients do so. She also suggested the Commission encourage Member States to publish all RRF beneficiaries on these public portals.

With the EU having agreed a series of laws in the last few years aimed at protecting the environment and combatting climate change, the transparency of decision making in this area has been the focus of many recent Ombudsman inquiries. This year, the Ombudsman published an [overview of the results](#) of her public consultation on transparency and participation in EU decision making related to the environment. Respondents identified issues that make it difficult for them to follow or contribute to decision-making processes, including late publication of information, a lack of transparency around lobbying, and difficulties in accessing information about discussions on draft legislation. When it comes to the involvement of civil society in policymaking, respondents suggested the Commission should share preliminary positions on policies and legislation, and asked for greater transparency about who participates in public consultations.

Following the results, the Ombudsman launched an [own-initiative inquiry](#) into how the Commission manages risks related to dangerous chemicals. The inquiry aims to examine delays in introducing restrictions to mitigate the risks of specific chemicals, delays in placing chemicals on the list of substances where use is subject to prior authorisation, and delays in deciding on individual authorisations and conditions for authorisations. As part of the inquiry, the Ombudsman is looking at a selection of sample files to determine the causes of delays as well as transparency around the process.

When it comes to decision making related to public health, the Ombudsman encouraged the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to share preliminary plans as soon as possible for [publishing clinical trial data](#) related to medicines evaluation procedures completed while its proactive transparency policy was suspended between 2018 and 2023. The Ombudsman also identified several transparency concerns in the Commission's interactions with the tobacco industry. In [inquiry findings](#), she criticised the Commission's failure proactively to publish details of all its meetings with tobacco lobbyists as well as its failure to keep minutes of all these meetings. At the same time, the Ombudsman welcomed the Commission's commitment to assessing further the exposure of its departments to lobbying by the tobacco industry. She will provide the Commission with information it should communicate to senior staff to ensure this assessment is thorough and has asked the Commission to report to her on its outcome.

Following accountability concerns raised by a civil society organisation, the Ombudsman opened an [inquiry](#) into the Commission's decision to restrict publication of contact details in the 'Whoiswho' online EU staff directory to managers. Previously, the contact details of policy officers were also available on Whoiswho.

Tweet 9. Results of public consultation on environmental decision making
<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1650796881008549890>

Tweet 10. Commission's interactions with tobacco lobbyists
<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1737474225403756921>

Tweet 11. Who's who inquiry
<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7133434603440070656>

3. Key topics

3.5. Personnel issues

The Ombudsman conducted an [inquiry](#) into how the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) carried out 'pre-selection' tests as part of a procedure to recruit new staff into the EU civil service. The inquiry followed several complaints about the tests, specifically in relation to the requirement that they be exclusively carried out remotely. Candidates cited technical issues during the tests and problems with receiving assistance from EPSO and its contractor. The Ombudsman made a number of suggestions for improvement to EPSO, such as asking it to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how remote testing could impact equality of opportunity, ensuring technical requirements do not disadvantage certain candidates, and making sure candidates have access to instructions on how to troubleshoot during an exam and how to make a complaint.

The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) improved a selection procedure for external experts following an inquiry by the Ombudsman into how it had dealt with one particular application. During the course of the [inquiry](#), the EUAA changed the procedural and organisational aspects of the selection process that seemed problematic. The Ombudsman welcomed the changes.

Tweet 12. How EPSO carried out pre-selection tests

<https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1636654134886641664>

3.6. Grants and contracts

An NGO [turned to the Ombudsman](#) after the European Commission sought to recover costs following an audit of an EU-funded project on the rehabilitation of victims of torture. The Commission issued a debit notice to the NGO as it was the coordinator of the project. However, most of the costs considered ineligible were attributable to one of the project partners. Following the intervention of the Ombudsman, the Commission cancelled the recovery order totalling almost EUR 28 000 and said it would issue a new recovery order to the project partner responsible. The Ombudsman welcomed the Commission's decision.

After the European Parliament refused to grant access to its premises to the baby of an externally-contracted worker who wanted to breastfeed, the child's father [turned to the Ombudsman](#). The complainant noted that the Parliament grants access to the children of its own staff members. The Ombudsman found that the rule appeared to be disproportionate and at odds with the principle of equal treatment. The Parliament agreed to allow the worker to bring her baby on its premises and said it would change its rules.

4. Award for Good Administration

4. Award for Good Administration



The Ombudsman Award for Good Administration 2023 honoured the work done by the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to help document core international crimes and human rights violations. The two institutions combined their efforts to create guidelines to help civil society organisations collect and preserve information in a way that lets it become evidence in court.

(Photo 2) The European Ombudsman with representatives from the Award for Good Administration winning project: Cristina Ribeiro from the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and Matevz Pezdirc from Eurojust

The overall award winners were announced at a ceremony in the Solvay Library in Brussels on 28 June, which was opened by European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly and European Parliament President Roberta Metsola. Five specific category winners, a public vote winner, and a special award winner were also announced.

Speaking about the work of the winners, the Ombudsman said, "holding the perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations accountable brings justice for victims and may have a deterrent effect in future conflicts. History has shown how hard it can be to prosecute such crimes, which is why finding effective ways to collect and preserve evidence is so vital."

There were 57 projects nominated for the 2023 edition of the biennial award, which aims to recognise work done by EU public servants that has had a positive impact on people's lives in Europe and beyond.

An independent advisory board assessed the nominations and the Ombudsman chose the winners. This was the fourth iteration of the award, which was first introduced by the Ombudsman in 2017.



(Photo 3) During her speech, President Metsola thanked the Ombudsman and her team for their work and highlighted O'Reilly's personal and institutional commitment to high standards and their importance in supporting democracy.

Tweet 13. <https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1673984286368878593>

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

The European Ombudsman helps people, businesses, and organisations facing problems with the EU's administration by dealing with complaints they submit, as well as by seeking to promote good administrative practices by proactively identifying broader systemic issues within the EU institutions.

The Ombudsman is constantly seeking to improve internal procedures to ensure the Office deals with inquiries in the most efficient manner possible and to ensure that complainants have an optimal experience. In 2023, the Ombudsman simplified and streamlined procedures for handling out of mandate complaints and complaints concerning the EU administration failing to reply to emails or letters. The new procedures enable the Ombudsman's Office to deal with these complaints more efficiently, which also improves the experience of complainants.

Improvements to the Ombudsman's online complaint system have made it more user-friendly. Complainants can now more easily submit and follow the progress of their complaints.

The Office's diverse team of case handlers and the multilingual website reflect the Ombudsman's commitment to helping those seeking assistance in all 24 official languages of the EU.

While the Ombudsman is not always in a position to inquire into all complaints received, the Office nonetheless tries to help all those who seek assistance, for example by providing advice on other possibilities for redress.

5.1. Type and source of complaints

5.1.1. Overview of complaints and strategic inquiries

The Ombudsman may open an inquiry only into complaints that are within her mandate and have fulfilled the necessary 'admissibility criteria', such as the complainant having previously tried to resolve the matter directly with the institution involved.

The themes of the Office's work derive from the Ombudsman's mandate and the complaints received, which account for most cases. However, in addition to the core work on complaints, the Ombudsman also conducts wider strategic inquiries and initiatives into systemic issues in the EU institutions.

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

1 - Advice and complaints in 2023

17 550	People helped
14 423	Advice given through the Interactive Guide on the Ombudsman's website
2 392	New complaints handled
735	Requests for information replied to by the Ombudsman's services

2 - Inquiries by the European Ombudsman in 2023

398	Inquiries opened
393	complaint-based
5	own-initiative
372	Inquiries closed
369	complaint-based
3	own-initiative

3 - Topics of strategic inquiries in 2023

Ongoing

- The time taken by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to deal with requests for public access to documents
- The use by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) of remote testing in selection procedures to recruit EU civil servants
- How the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) complies with its fundamental rights obligations in the context of its search and rescue activities
- The risk management of dangerous chemical substances by the European Commission
- How the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission deal with requests for public access to legislative documents
- How the European Commission ensures that there are no conflicts of interest with external experts who assist it in evaluating projects under the European Defence Fund

Closed

- How the European Commission ensures respect for fundamental rights in EU-funded migration management facilities in Greece
- The time taken by the European Commission to deal with requests for public access to documents
- The transparency of the European Commission's interactions with representatives of the tobacco industry

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

4 - Topics of strategic initiatives in 2023 (requests for clarification, not formal inquiries)

Ongoing

- The European Commission and transparency in the context of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC)
- How the European Commission intends to guarantee respect for human rights in the context of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding

Closed

- How the Council of the EU ensures transparency of the decision making concerning sanctions against Russia
- How the EU Asylum Agency complies with its fundamental rights obligations and ensures accountability for potential fundamental rights violations
- Public consultation of the European Ombudsman on transparency in EU environmental decision making
- The information provided by the European Commission to unsuccessful bidders in the context of calls for tenders and proposals
- How the European Commission ensures that there are no conflicts of interest with external experts involved in evaluating project proposals under the European Defence Fund
- The transparency and accountability of the Recovery and Resilience Facility
- How the European Medicines Agency ensures proactive transparency concerning clinical trial data of medicines seeking EU marketing authorisation
- Improving the European Parliament's ethics and transparency framework
- How the European Commission deals with the provision by third parties of travel expenses and hospitality in the context of business trips

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

5 - National origin of complaints registered and inquiries opened by the European Ombudsman in 2023

Country	Number of complaints registered	Number of inquiries opened
Spain	402	37
Germany	241	50
Belgium	210	84
Poland	179	7
Italy	123	30
France	117	23
Portugal	103	4
Netherlands	72	24
Austria	65	19
Romania	60	3
Ireland	50	12
Greece	47	11
Sweden	45	6
Bulgaria	43	3
Croatia	42	2
Malta	41	5
Czech republic	35	10
Hungary	35	2
Finland	30	6
Cyprus	29	5
Slovakia	25	5
Luxembourg	23	8
Denmark	20	9
Lithuania	13	2
Slovenia	12	0
Latvia	6	0
Estonia	4	2
Other country (including UK)	291	24
Not known	3	0
Total	2 366	393

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

5.1.2. Complaints outside the Ombudsman's mandate (OMCs)

In 2023, the European Ombudsman processed around 1 500 complaints that did not fall within her mandate, mostly because they did not concern the work of the EU administration. Over 40% of these complaints came from Spain, Poland, and Germany. Spain alone accounted for 20%, with the two other countries accounting for 10% each.

For the most part, people approached the Ombudsman with issues concerning equal treatment or discrimination, court cases, consumer protection, banking, and administrative transparency. Their out of mandate complaints were primarily related to problems encountered with national, regional or local public authorities, governments and public service bodies, and national or international courts (such as the European Court of Human Rights). Citizens also directed a large number of complaints at private entities, including banks, online businesses and platforms, and healthcare institutions.

The Ombudsman also received out of mandate complaints related to the humanitarian crises in Ukraine and Gaza.

While the total number of complaints related to the COVID-19 pandemic has declined, measures put in place by national authorities to monitor and contain the spread of the virus did remain a notable source of out of mandate complaints in 2023.

Other out of mandate complaints concerned EU institutions, but were related to political or legislative work.

The Ombudsman replied to all those seeking help in the language of their complaint or of their preference. The replies clarified the Ombudsman's mandate and, as far as possible, advised complainants to turn to other bodies that could help. Although these were mainly national and regional ombudsman institutions, the Ombudsman also guided complainants to EU institutions (mostly the European Commission and the European Parliament), and networks, such as SOLVIT and the European Consumer Centres.

Where complainants were unhappy with specific EU legislation, the Ombudsman generally advised them to turn to the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions. She referred those who raised issues relating to the implementation of EU law to national or regional ombudsmen, or to EU networks such as Europe Direct.

The use of streamlined templates for handling out of mandate complaints, first introduced in 2022, enabled the Ombudsman's staff to reply to these complaints a lot faster in 2023 than in previous years.

6 - Number of complaints 2019-2023

	Complaints outside the mandate of the European Ombudsman	Complaints inside the mandate of the European Ombudsman	Total
2019	1 330	871	2 201
2020	1 420	728	2 148
2021	1 437	729	2 166
2022	1 483	755	2 238
2023	1 506	886	2 392

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

5.2. Against whom?

7 - Inquiries conducted by the European Ombudsman in 2023 concerned the following institutions

Inquiries	Own initiative Inquiries*	398 inquiries opened (393 + 5 OIs included)		
247	3*	European Commission	250	62.81%
46	1	European Personnel Selection Office	47	11.81%
15	1*	European Parliament	16	4.02%
10	1	Frontex	11	2.76%
7		European Anti-Fraud Office	7	1.76%
6	1*	Council of the European Union	7	1.76%
6		European Data Protection Supervisor	6	1.51%
6		European External Action Service	6	1.51%
5		European Union Intellectual Property Office	5	1.26%
33		Other EU Agencies (1)	33	8.27%
12		Other EU Institutions or bodies (2)	12	3.01%

(1) Including Europol (4), EMA (4), EACEA (3), EASO (3), FRA (2), EEA (2), HaDEA (2), EDA (1), ESMA (1), REA (1), ERA (1), eu-LISA (1), EBA (1), BEREC (1), EASA (1), EUISS (1), CINEA (1), CdT (1), EFCA (1) and EFSA (1).

(2) Including EIB (4), CJEU (3), EDPD (2), KDT-JU (1), EESC (1), and ECB (1).

*Of the five own-initiative inquiries opened, one (OI/4/2023MIK) concerns three different institutions: Council of the EU, EC and EP.

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

5.3. About what?

8 - Subject matter of inquiries closed by the European Ombudsman in 2023

Transparency and accountability	127	34.2%
Culture of service	80	21.5%
Recruitment	57	15.3%
Good management of personnel issues	34	9.1%
Proper use of discretion (including in infringement procedures)	33	8.9%
Proper management of infringement procedures	31	8.3%
Respect for fundamental rights	22	5.9%
Respect for procedural rights	21	5.6%
Grants, procurement, contracts	17	4.6%
Other	10	2.7%
Ethics	10	2.7%
Public participation in EU decision making	7	1.9%
Sound financial management	6	1.6%
Whistleblowing	1	0.3%

Note: In some cases, the Ombudsman closed inquiries with two or more subject matters. The above percentages therefore total more than 100%.

5.4. Results achieved

9 - Action taken by the European Ombudsman on new complaints dealt with in 2023

1 126	Advice given or case transferred to another complaints body	47.1%
873	Reply sent to inform the complainant that no further advice could be given	36.5%
393	Inquiry opened	16.4%

10 - Evolution in the number of complaint-based and own-initiative inquiries by the European Ombudsman

Year	Inquiries opened	Inquiries closed
2014	342	400
2015	261	277
2016	245	291
2017	447	363
2018	490	545
2019	458	560
2020	370	394
2021	338	305
2022	348	330

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

2023	398	372
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11 - Results of inquiries closed by the European Ombudsman in 2023

Settled by the institution, solutions achieved, solution partly achieved	206	55.4%
No maladministration	99	26.6%
No further inquiries justified	46	12.4%
Maladministration found, recommendation agreed by the institution	27	7.3%
Dropped by the complainant	3	0.8%
Dealt with by a Court (Art. 2.7)	1	0.3%

Note: In some cases, the Ombudsman closed inquiries on two or more grounds. The above percentages therefore total more than 100%.

12 - Length of inquiries closed by the European Ombudsman

in 2013 (13 months on average)	in 2023 (less than 6 months on average)	
101 (22%)	203 (54%)	Cases closed within 3 months
171 (37%)	114 (31%)	Cases closed within 3 to 12 months
65 (14%)	40 (11%)	Cases closed within 12 to 18 months
124 (27%)	15 (4%)	Cases closed after more than 18 months ¹

5.5. Impact and achievements

One of the overarching goals of the European Ombudsman is to achieve tangible improvements for complainants and the public in the EU administration. The Ombudsman does this by making proposals in the form of solutions, recommendations, and suggestions. The Ombudsman can also promote improvement through strategic initiatives, which are not formal inquiries. She may also prompt an institution to settle a matter even before a formal solution proposal or recommendation is made.

5.5.1. Acceptance rate

The acceptance rate is the percentage of positive replies to the total number of proposals (solutions, recommendations, and suggestions) made by the Ombudsman. As the Ombudsman gives institutions up to six months to follow up on suggestions made in her decisions closing inquiries, the acceptance rate for 2023 covers cases closed in 2022.

In 2022, the EU institutions cooperated satisfactorily with the Ombudsman in 81% of instances. Of the 83 proposals the Ombudsman made to correct or improve their administrative practices, the EU institutions reacted positively to 67 of them.

¹ Some complex cases require several rounds of consultations with the complainant and the institution concerned.

5. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public

13 - Acceptance rate

The acceptance rate is the percentage of positive replies to the total number of proposals (solutions, recommendations and suggestions) made by the Ombudsman.	
2018	77%
2019	79%
2020	81%
2021	79%
2022	81%

5.5.2. Broader impact

The acceptance rate captures responses from the institutions to proposals at a particular point in time and does not fully capture the long-term impact of the Ombudsman's work.

Even if institutions respond favourably to the Ombudsman's suggestions or recommendations, they often need time to put in place changes to their administrative practices. For example, the Ombudsman found maladministration in 2022 in an [inquiry](#) concerning how the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) dealt with a public access request related to a proposal to restrict lead in ammunition. EFSA's reply to the Ombudsman's recommendations was positive and the agency said it would change its rules and practices. As a result, EFSA made improvements in 2023 to the way it handles access to documents. For example, it published a guidance document to help those who want to submit access requests, amended internal rules to help shorten the time it takes to process requests, and began piloting a new IT tool to more efficiently handle requests and meet deadlines.

In [another inquiry](#) from 2022, the Ombudsman found that the manner in which the European External Action Service (EEAS) had informed an external expert that it was terminating his contract constituted maladministration. The following year, the EEAS informed the Ombudsman that it would organise awareness raising sessions to improve its working relationships with external experts employed through a contractor.

6. Communication and cooperation

6.1. Communication

Communication plays an important role in promoting the role and work of the Ombudsman to the widest possible audience, in sharing important updates with stakeholders and the EU administration, and in raising awareness about topics such as transparency, ethics, and accountability.

In the course of 2023, key inquiry documents were made more easily accessible through the addition of a dynamic section on the website homepage that displays recent updates. Several improvements to the website navigation were also made to make finding content more straightforward.



To strengthen the public's knowledge of the long-term impact of the Ombudsman's work, the office published a scrollable web story explaining the work done by the Ombudsman in several areas, and the impact it has had on the EU administration. This web story was supported by a social media campaign.

(Photo 4) Cover image of the scrollable web story

In addition, a series of videos presenting the

Office's work and explaining key areas of inquiry were published on the website, including the homepage, and promoted on social media.



The Ombudsman presented the work of the Office during her annual press conference, held in April. At the press conference, the Ombudsman also presented an overview of the responses to her public consultation on transparency and participation in EU environmental decision making.

(Photo 5) Annual press conference in Brussels

To spread the word about the winners of the biennial Award for Good Administration and to encourage the sharing of good ideas and practices, a social media campaign around the

award ceremony was followed by a scrollable web story presenting the winning projects and highlights from the event.

6. Communication and cooperation



The Ombudsman took part in the European Youth Event (EYE2023) in Strasbourg in June. In an exchange with attendees, she answered questions about the Office's work as well as the important role good administration plays in upholding EU democracy.

(Photo 6) European Youth Event 2023 in Strasbourg: the Ombudsman and members of her staff during the Q&A session

Following allegations in late 2022 that non-EU governments had sought to buy influence in the European Parliament, the Ombudsman invited high-level speakers from the main oversight authorities as well as the European Commission and Parliament to discuss the gaps in the architecture of, and compliance with, the integrity framework. The panel debate, which took place in June, also focused on the proposal to create a new ethics body and its potential role in further improving the integrity of the EU administration.

In terms of press coverage of the Ombudsman's work in 2023, there was an increase of 35% in the total number of press articles compared to the previous year, with 56% of all coverage coming from EU countries.

In 2023, the Ombudsman's number of social media followers kept rising, with particularly high growth seen on LinkedIn and Instagram. Increased profile activity, as well as a growing number of users looking for EU-related content on these two platforms, are important factors that influenced the positive performance. The Ombudsman's Instagram account saw 91% growth in total followers (6 578 new followers compared to the 3 472 followers gained in 2022). On LinkedIn, the number of followers increased by 65% (+ 5 825 compared to the 2 990 new followers in 2022). On X, where the Ombudsman has the largest audience among its social media channels, the number of followers reached 36 188 in December 2023, which represented a 5% increase (+ 1 757). There was also a strong improvement in the engagement rate, as well as a significant jump in mentions.

The Ombudsman and staff members also continued their outreach activities by giving interviews to the press, attending academic conferences, and speaking to visitor groups.

6. Communication and cooperation

6.2. Relations with EU institutions

6.2.1. European Parliament

(Photo 7) Emily O'Reilly with European Parliament President Roberta Metsola



The European Parliament elects the European Ombudsman at the beginning of each legislature, which makes the relationship between the two institutions particularly important.

In 2023, the Ombudsman met with the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, for the handover of the Office's annual report. She also discussed the integrity and transparency reforms the President launched following allegations in late 2022 that non-EU countries had paid for influence in the Parliament. These meetings, as well as the regular meetings the Ombudsman and her team had with MEPs from across the political spectrum, were key for ensuring continued trust and cooperation. The Ombudsman and staff members also presented the Office's work at several committee hearings and exchanges of views, such as at the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), the Committee on Foreign Interference and Disinformation (ING2), the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI), and the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI).

In September, the Ombudsman sent a special report to Parliament on the European Commission's systemic delays in handling access to documents requests. Parliament subsequently initiated a procedure in the LIBE committee to support the Ombudsman's report. A plenary vote on the resolution is expected in early 2024.

6.2.2. Committee on Petitions

The Committee on Petitions (PETI) is the parliamentary committee in charge of relations with the European Ombudsman as they both work to ensure that citizens' concerns are taken into account at EU level. In 2023, they continued to collaborate in areas such as the rights of people with disabilities as well as in the framework of the European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO), of which PETI is a member.

The Ombudsman and PETI Chair Dolors Montserrat met regularly in 2023 and Ms Montserrat was also a panel participant at the European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO) annual conference during a session focused on the EU elections and the election of the European Ombudsman.

6. Communication and cooperation

6.2.3. European Commission



As the largest EU institution, which has a significant impact on the lives of millions of people, it is not surprising that a large percentage of complaints to the Ombudsman concern the work of the European Commission. The working relationship with the Commission remained very constructive in 2023 with the Ombudsman holding meetings with several Commissioners. At staff level, close contacts were maintained between

the Ombudsman's Office and the Commission to ensure complainants' concerns could be addressed as effectively as possible.

(Photo 8) The European Ombudsman and International Ombudsman Institute directors Reinier van Zutphen (Dutch Ombudsman), Andreas Pottakis (Greek Ombudsman), and Peter Svetina (Slovenian Ombudsman) meet with Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas in November in Brussels

6.2.4. Other institutions, agencies, and organisations

Relations with different parts of the EU administration are an integral part of the Ombudsman's strategy 'Towards 2024'. Only through close cooperation can a long-lasting and positive impact on the EU administration be achieved. In February, the Ombudsman held a meeting with the President of the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the European Chief Prosecutor, and the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in preparation for the 'Building a stronger EU integrity framework' conference she was organising. During the course of the year, the Ombudsman also met with the President of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Executive Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

Tweet 14. <https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1623668943742181376>

6.2.5. UN Disability Rights Convention

The European Union is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), a binding international human rights instrument to 'promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity'.

Compliance with the UN CRPD in the EU is monitored by the [EU Framework for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which the European Ombudsman chaired in 2023. As a member of this framework, the Ombudsman plays close attention to the EU administration's implementation of the UN CRPD.

The Ombudsman dealt with a number of inquiries in 2023 related to the rights of persons with disabilities. In February, the Ombudsman closed her inquiry into how the European Commission applies the rule under the EU Staff Regulations concerning the granting of a double child allowance for assisting with the care of children with disabilities. The [inquiry](#) found that using thresholds on the degree of disability, which automatically excludes certain

6. Communication and cooperation

cases from consideration, is at odds with the EU administration's obligations under the UN CRPD. The Ombudsman asked the Commission to revise its approach. The Commission has since initiated a process for the whole EU administration to revise the applicable rules in order to ensure an individual substantive assessment of all applications for this type of allowance.

The Ombudsman's Office presented its work related to the rights of persons with disabilities at several events throughout the year, including at the [fifth European Parliament for Persons with Disabilities](#).

6.3. European Network of Ombudsmen

(Photo 9) One of the panels during the European Network of Ombudsmen conference



The European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO) is an informal network coordinated by the European Ombudsman, consisting of over 95 offices from across Europe, as well as the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions.

The theme of the 2023 ENO Annual Conference, held at the European Parliament in Brussels, was the protection of human rights. Its first

session focused on migration with participants reflecting on how and why migrants come to Europe and the crucial role ombudsmen play in exposing harm, protecting people's rights, and holding administrations accountable. The second session looked at the use of AI in public administrations with the discussions focused on the technology's benefits and potential drawbacks.

Through the queries procedure, ENO members are able to ask questions about EU law that arise during the course of their inquiries, with the European Ombudsman obtaining expert replies for them from the EU institutions. Query topics in 2023 included the European Health Insurance Card, restrictions to the free movement of people between EU Member States, and EU insurance rules.

As EU candidate countries may become members of the Network, 2023 also saw the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina join ENO.

Continuing her regular visits to the offices of national ombudsmen, the European Ombudsman travelled to Warsaw in September where she met with the Polish Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights. During her time in the Polish capital, she visited the headquarters of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). The Ombudsman also delivered a [keynote speech](#) at the University of Warsaw on 'the European Ombudsman in a geopolitical age: protecting human rights and accountability.'

6. Communication and cooperation

14 - Complainants advised to contact other institutions and bodies by the European Ombudsman in 2023 and complaints transferred (1 126 in total)

Member of the European Network of Ombudsmen	393	35%
National or regional ombudsman or similar body	373	33%
European Parliament's Committee on Petitions	20	2%
National administrations and other organisations	620	55%
European Commission	92	8%
SOLVIT	11	1%
Other EU institutions, bodies or agencies	10	1%

Tweet 15. <https://twitter.com/EUombudsman/status/1722946992257548716>

7. Resources

7.1. Budget

The Ombudsman's budget is an independent section of the EU budget. It is divided into three titles. Title 1 covers salaries, allowances, and other expenditure related to staff. Title 2 covers buildings, furniture, equipment, and miscellaneous operating expenditure. Title 3 covers the expenditure resulting from general functions that the institution carries out. In 2023, budgeted appropriations amounted to EUR 13 212 447.

To ensure the effective management of resources, the Ombudsman's internal auditor regularly checks the internal control systems and the financial operations that the Office carries out. As is the case with other institutions, the Ombudsman is also subject to the European Court of Auditors' review, which did not identify any specific issues in the context of its external audit work.

7.2. Use of resources

Every year, the Ombudsman adopts an [Annual Management Plan](#), which identifies specific actions that the office expects to take to meet the objectives and priorities of the Ombudsman's five-year strategy '[Towards 2024](#)'. The 2023 Annual Management Plan is the third one based on this strategy.

The Ombudsman has a highly qualified multilingual staff. This ensures that the Office can deal with complaints in the 24 official EU languages and raise awareness about the Ombudsman's work throughout the EU. The Office's hybrid work policy, which is results-oriented and trust-based, supports the Ombudsman's ambition to promote a modern, digital, and flexible work environment.

In 2023, there were 75 posts in the Ombudsman's establishment plan, in addition to which, there was an average of nine contract agents working with the Office. Eighteen trainees also gained work experience at the Ombudsman's Office over the course of the year.

The Ombudsman carried out a staff survey in 2023, which showed high overall levels of employee satisfaction and engagement.

Detailed information on the structure of the Ombudsman's Office and the tasks of the various units is available on the [Ombudsman's website](#).

8. How to contact the European Ombudsman

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By e-mail

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Online

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Instagram: [instagram.com/euombudsman](https://www.instagram.com/euombudsman)

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/272026](https://www.linkedin.com/company/272026)

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8. How to contact the European Ombudsman

If you require a large print version of this publication, please contact the European Ombudsman's office.

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