European Ombudsman



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

EN

European Ombudsman

ANNUAL REPORT
2024

EN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction 2

2. 2024 at a glance 4

3. Key topics 5

3.1. Accountability in decision making 5
3.2. Participation in decision making 7
3.3. Fundamental rights 8
3.4. Access to documents 9
3.5. Transparency 11
3.6. Ethics 12
3.7. Recruitment 13
3.8. Grants and contracts 14

4. Complaints and inquiries: how we help the public 15

4.1. Type and source of complaints 15
4.2. Against whom? 20
4.3. About what? 21
4.4. Results achieved 22
4.5. Impact and achievements 25

5. Communication and cooperation 26

5.1. Communication 26
5.2. Relations with EU institutions 28
5.3. European Network of Ombudsmen 30
5.4. Ombudsman's visit to Italy 32

6. Resources 33

6.1. Budget 33
6.2. Use of resources 33

7. How to contact the European Ombudsman 34

1

INTRODUCTION



Teresa Anjinho, European Ombudsman

I am honoured to have taken up the position of European Ombudsman in February 2025 and it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report of the European Ombudsman for 2024, which covers a full year of activities led by my predecessor.

The EU institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies are the public face of the EU. It is crucial for them to maintain accountability, a service-oriented approach, and transparency to foster citizen trust, meaningful engagement, and a robust democratic culture amidst the complexities of the European and global landscape.

In 2024, the European Ombudsman conducted inquiries into a wide range of issues, including the transparency of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council, the Regulatory Scrutiny Board's interactions with lobbyists, Frontex's handling of maritime emergencies, and the Council of the EU's assessment of potential conflicts of interest related to the commercial sponsorship of its rotating presidency.

Requests for public access to documents held by EU institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies continued to account for a significant proportion of inquiries.

The European Ombudsman also benefitted from the Parliament's support in early 2024, which endorsed the conclusions of the Ombudsman regarding the need for the European Commission to comply with legal deadlines for processing these requests.

The Office continued to focus on key emerging areas, such as artificial intelligence, which has the potential to enhance the efficiency of the EU public administration but requires rigorous human oversight.

As the newly elected European Ombudsman, I am committed to ensuring that the EU administration maintains a strong citizen-oriented approach to its work. I will uphold the principles of integrity, openness, and dedication, striving to empower every citizen to engage with the EU institutions with confidence that their concerns will be addressed fairly and transparently.

It is an honour for me to begin this new chapter, building on the work of my predecessors and the Ombudsman staff. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge all those who have held this public responsibility over the past 30 years, from the inaugural Ombudsman, Jacob Söderman, to Nikiforos Diamandouros, and especially Emily O'Reilly and her team for their efforts in ensuring a smooth transition.

I look forward to cooperating with all EU institutions, agencies, offices, and bodies to continue the important mission of this Office.



Teresa Anjinho

2

2024 AT A GLANCE

01 January

EU personnel office asked to improve recruitment testing for new EU staff

02 February

Ombudsman calls for changes to EU search and rescue rules and a public inquiry into deaths in Mediterranean

03 March

Parliament unanimously approves Ombudsman special report on access to documents

04 April

Panel debate on how public administrations can be both resilient and responsive in a volatile and polarised political environment

05 May

Ombudsman delivers a keynote speech at the 13th International Ombudsman Institute World Conference

06 June

Ombudsman makes proposals to improve transparency of EU-US Trade and Technology Council

07 July

Ombudsman examines delays in Commission's handling of infringement complaints

08 August

Communication campaign on improved ethics standards in the EU administration

09 September

Council encouraged to assess risks around use of sponsorship by rotating presidency

10 October

Ombudsman finds that Commission delays concerning decisions on dangerous chemicals is maladministration

11 November

Ombudsman criticises Commission failure to identify documents related to meeting between its President and President of Tunisia

12 December

Teresa Anjinho elected European Ombudsman by the European Parliament

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, ethical concerns, violations of fundamental rights, and contractual issues. The following sections provide an overview of key inquiries related to particular areas.

3.1. Accountability in decision making

With ongoing rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI) posing challenges when it comes to accuracy, potential bias, explainability, and human oversight in public administration, the Ombudsman examined how the European Commission decides on and uses artificial intelligence (AI) in its decision making. The Ombudsman welcomed that the Commission has publicly set out its approach to using AI as well as taken measures to ensure its use of AI systems complies with the recently-adopted AI Act. At the same time, the Ombudsman asked the Commission to consider adopting a voluntary code of conduct for systems not deemed 'high risk' to ensure their use is in line with the principles of good administration. The Ombudsman also proposed that public officials responsible for human oversight of AI receive adequate training on the risks and errors produced by AI systems and on how to critically examine and verify AI-produced results. In addition, the Ombudsman encouraged the Commission to reflect on what information it will make publicly available around future AI projects and to consider carrying out public consultations on the possible adoption or development of powerful new AI tools.

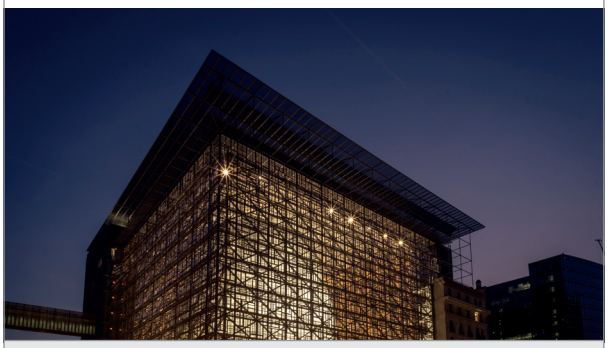


We have made a set of proposals to help the European Commission ensure the use of AI in its decision making is transparent, ethical and accountable.

Following an inquiry, the Ombudsman criticised the Commission for its persistent failure to meet the legal deadlines for preparing authorisation decisions concerning dangerous chemicals. The inquiry found that it takes the Commission an average of 14.5 months to prepare draft decisions even though the deadline for doing so is three months. The Ombudsman noted that these delays represent a threat to human health and the environment because most companies can continue to use the chemical substances during the authorisation process. As a significant cause of these delays may be the lack of sufficient information in many companies' applications, the Ombudsman called on the Commission to ensure companies submit applications that contain all the necessary information and prioritise the rejection of applications that do not. To improve the public's ability to follow progress on each authorisation file as well as

European Ombudsman

We encourage @EUCouncil to assess if its guidance for presidency sponsorships is effective at avoiding conflicts of interest and reputational risks for the EU. We note there is still lack of transparency around sponsor's identity, nature of support, and what they gain in return.



We encourage the Council of the European Union to assess if its guidance for presidency sponsorships is effective at avoiding conflicts of interest and reputational risks for the EU. We note there is still a lack of transparency around sponsors' identity, the nature of support, and what they gain in return.

understand outstanding issues and reasons for delays, the Ombudsman also asked the Commission to publish more substantial summaries of the committee meetings where national representatives vote on authorisation.

The Ombudsman encouraged the Council of the European Union to assess whether its guidance for corporate sponsorship of its rotating presidency is effective at mitigating potential conflicts of interest and reputational risks for the EU, and to explore possible measures to help mitigate these risks. The Ombudsman commended the Council for adopting the guidance following an earlier inquiry in 2019 and for taking steps to ensure Member States are aware of it, but said that the Council had still not fully addressed public concerns around the use of corporate sponsorship. In particular, there continues to be a lack of transparency around the identity of sponsors, the nature of their support, and what they gain in return. In addition, although the Council had prohibited the use of its own logo, sponsors were still able to use the presidency logo for commercial purposes.

The Ombudsman welcomed measures taken by the Commission to reduce delays in its handling of complaints alleging infringements of EU law, improve how it communicates with individual complainants, and better communicate information of interest for the public on its dedicated infringements website. Noting that the handling of infringement complaints is a matter of significant public importance, the Ombudsman encouraged the Commission to continue to make improvements in this area.

The Ombudsman also welcomed the Commission's decision to follow the solution proposal to verify whether the information it used to revise the risk classification of brain stimulation devices for non-medical purposes is representative of the most recent scientific evidence. The Ombudsman had opened an inquiry into the issue after receiving several complaints concerning the decision to reclassify these devices to the highest risk class within the Medical Devices Regulation.

European Ombudsman

We have found maladministration in @EU_Commission failure to meet legal deadlines for preparing authorisation decisions concerning dangerous chemicals.

Decisions take 14.5 months on average despite 3-month deadline, with the chemicals remaining in use during the process.



We have found maladministration in the European Commission's failure to meet legal deadlines for preparing authorisation decisions concerning dangerous chemicals. Decisions take 14.5 months on average despite a 3-month deadline, with the chemicals remaining in use during the process.

3.2. Participation in decision making

A number of Ombudsman inquiries in 2024 concerned how the EU administration ensures its decision making reflects a diversity of views, including from civil society, various economic sectors, and citizens.

For example, the Ombudsman asked the European Commission to do more to ensure the composition of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board – a body that reviews and issues opinions on draft impact assessments that accompany proposals for new EU legislation or evaluations of existing legislation – includes sufficient expertise in macro– and microeconomics, social policy, and environmental policy. This diversity of expertise corresponds to requirements set out in a Commission communication on the Board published in 2015. As part of meeting this goal, the Ombudsman suggested the Commission clearly describe the criteria it applies for selecting Board members.

European Ombudsman

We have asked @EU_Commission to do more to ensure balance of expertise on its Regulatory Scrutiny Board including in macro – and microeconomics, social policy, and environmental policy – the three pillars of sustainable development.

We have asked the European Commission to do more to ensure a balance of expertise on its Regulatory Scrutiny Board including in macro– and microeconomics, social policy and environmental policy – the three pillars of sustainable development.

Following a complaint from two non-governmental organisations, the Ombudsman urged the Commission to reflect on whether the composition and mandate of the EU Energy Platform Industry Advisory Group are appropriate given its current tasks. The Ombudsman also asked the Commission to ensure that where expert groups contain only corporate members for justifiable reasons, other interested stakeholders are granted observer status whenever possible. In a different inquiry, the Ombudsman suggested the Commission ensure all relevant stakeholders in the area of pesticides have the opportunity to provide their views on topics that are discussed with industry. The Ombudsman also suggested the Commission develop a dedicated webpage to publish information and documents about all upcoming events it organises on pesticides as soon as they become available.

European Ombudsman

We have asked @EU_Commission how it works on urgent legislative proposals, such as the recent amendment to CAP legislation, and how it assesses whether proposals are consistent with climate-neutrality objectives in the European Climate Law.



We have asked the European Commission how it works on urgent legislative proposals, such as the recent amendment to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) legislation, and how it assesses whether proposals are consistent with the climate-neutrality objectives in the European Climate Law.

The Ombudsman welcomed the Commission's creation of a complaint mechanism through which people can raise concerns about the activities and functioning of European Reference Networks (ERNs) – virtual networks that help patients with complex or rare diseases by facilitating discussions between healthcare providers from across Europe. The move to create the complaint mechanism followed an Ombudsman inquiry into how the Commission handled concerns about guidelines developed by an ERN for Pierre Robin sequence – a rare condition affecting a baby's jaw and mouth.

After environmental organisations raised concerns about how the Commission prepared a proposal to amend the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Ombudsman opened an inquiry into how the Commission works on 'urgent' legislative proposals. The organisations questioned whether the public had been appropriately consulted on the proposal as well as whether the Commission had sufficiently examined whether the changes to the CAP affected the long-term environmental sustainability of EU agriculture. The Ombudsman asked the Commission whether it has internal procedures for deciding on whether to bypass

impact assessment requirements for urgent legislative proposals and how it observes the principle of evidence-based decision-making in these circumstances.

Following a complaint from a non-governmental organisation, the Ombudsman opened an inquiry into how the Commission complied with its rules regarding public and stakeholder consultations when it carried out what it calls a 'targeted data collection' on the impact of the wolf population in the EU. In particular, the Ombudsman asked the Commission to clarify the nature and procedural framework of the targeted data collection as well as why it had departed from its Better Regulation Guidelines on stakeholder consultations in this case.

3.3. Fundamental rights

European Ombudsman

PRESS RELEASE – We call on @Europarl_EN, @EUCouncil, and @EU_Commission to establish an independent commission to assess the reasons for the large numbers of deaths in the Mediterranean and to learn from the Adriana shipwreck.



We call on the European Parliament, Council of the EU', and European Commission to establish an independent commission to assess the reasons for the large numbers of death in the Mediterranean and to learn from the Adriana shipwreck.

"If Frontex has a duty to save lives at sea, but the tools for it are lacking, then this is clearly a matter for EU legislators."

The Ombudsman concluded her own-initiative inquiry into how the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) meets its fundamental rights obligations when it comes to search and rescue. The inquiry was launched following the drowning of hundreds of people off the coast of Greece when the boat Adriana sank in June 2023. The Ombudsman found that current EU search and rescue rules leave Frontex reliant on the actions of Member States when it comes to saving lives at sea. During the Adriana incident, Frontex had offered to provide aerial surveillance of the boat to Greek authorities on four separate occasions, but received no response. The Ombudsman called on the EU legislators to consider revising EU rules on search and rescue.

Based on the results of the inquiry, the Ombudsman made a number of suggestions to Frontex. In particular, the Ombudsman suggested that if Frontex's Fundamental Rights Officer identifies persistent violations of fundamental rights by a Member State in responding to maritime emergencies or if the agency itself becomes aware of serious violations following formal inquiries or court judgements, it should consider terminating or suspending its activities with that country. The Ombudsman also suggested Frontex develop internal guidelines on issuing emergency signals such as Mayday calls and ensure its fundamental rights monitors are sufficiently involved in decision making on maritime emergencies. In a reply to the Ombudsman, Frontex said it had increased the capacity of the Fundamental Rights Officer team assigned to monitor aerial surveillance and introduced new measures such as a stand-by duty system to improve coverage during specific periods.

In another migration-related inquiry, the Ombudsman criticised the Commission's failure to inform the public how it assessed human rights risks before signing the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU includes provisions related to combating irregular migration as well as EU financial support

for the provision of equipment, for training and technical support for Tunisian border management, for combatting anti-smuggling operations, and for reinforcing control of borders.

The Ombudsman found that despite repeated claims that it was not required to conduct an explicit human rights impact assessment (HRIA) before signing the agreement, the Commission had in fact completed a similar assessment exercise. A formal HRIA would have been preferable as these are normally made public, which can increase the effectiveness of mitigating measures against potential human rights problems.

The Ombudsman called on the Commission to publish a summary of the assessment exercise it conducted. In addition, the Ombudsman asked the Commission to set out and publish concrete criteria for when it would suspend EU funding to projects in Tunisia due to human rights violations. The Ombudsman also asked it to encourage its implementing partners to set up complaint mechanisms where individuals can report alleged violations of their human rights in the implementation of the funds.

European Ombudsman

We call on the European Commission to be more transparent about #humanrights information it relied on before signing an agreement with Tunisia that includes EU funds for border management. It should also set out and publish explicit criteria for suspending EU funding.



We call on the European Commission to be more transparent about the human rights information it relied on before signing an agreement with Tunisia that includes EU funds for border management. It should also set out and publish explicit criteria for suspending EU funding.

3.4. Access to documents

Access to documents continued to be a major topic of inquiries with a new Ombudsman report on work in this area showing a marked increase in the number of public access complaints in recent years, rising from 95 in 2021 to 167 in 2023. In 2024, the number of complaints rose once again to 212.

One particular problem often encountered by those requesting documents is long delays in the time it takes to have an initial access decision reviewed. In March 2024, the European Parliament unanimously approved the Ombudsman's special report calling on the European Commission to urgently deal with systemic delays in its handling of access requests. This report followed a 2023 inquiry in which the Ombudsman found that the Commission misses the legal deadlines for reviewing initial access decisions in 85% of cases.

The Ombudsman concluded an own-initiative inquiry into how the Council of the European Union and the Commission handle public access requests for legislative documents. The inquiry revealed that while the two institutions disclosed a large amount of legislative documents, in many instances they applied the exceptions under the EU access to documents law too broadly. For example, when using the protection of ongoing decision-making processes as a reason for refusing access to documents, both institutions relied on arguments that were vague, abstract, and unsubstantiated. Their reasoning, including that disclosure would result in external pressure or public misinterpretation, has also already been dismissed by the European Court of Justice. The Ombudsman asked the institutions to promptly disclose legislative documents, to refuse access only in truly exceptional circumstances, and to inform third parties making submissions during the law-making process that their submissions may be disclosed.

There were also a number of complaint-based inquiries concerning legislative documents. For instance, the Ombudsman criticised the Commission's refusal to grant access to documents concerning the revision of EU rules on food information to consumers. She also criticised the same institution's refusal to provide access to stakeholder and Member State input concerning the EU 'Nature Restoration Law'. While the Commission did eventually grant wide access to the documents, it did so only after the law had been adopted, effectively preventing the complainant from using the documents to participate in the decision-making process.

European Ombudsman

We have found maladministration in @europeancommission refusal to grant access to documents concerning EU law on food information to consumers NutriScore. We urge it to give full effect to EU case law, which calls for high transparency for legislative documents.



We have found maladministration in the European Commission's refusal to grant access to documents concerning EU law on food information to consumers Nutri-Score. We urge it to give full effect to EU case law, which calls for high transparency for legislative documents.

In another inquiry concerning legislative documents, the Ombudsman found it regrettable that the Commission had not followed her recommendation to give greater access to documents related to a legislative proposal to combat online child sexual abuse. The Ombudsman found that the Commission should have disclosed the documents to enable the public to scrutinise how stakeholder input had informed its legislative proposal and to verify that it had acted independently and exclusively in the public interest.

European Ombudsman

We strongly regret @EU_Commission's refusal to follow our recommendation and give greater #AccessToDocuments related to the legislative proposal to combat online child sexual abuse #CSAM.



We strongly regret the European Commission's refusal to follow our recommendation and give greater access to documents related to the legislative proposal to combat online child sexual abuse.

European Ombudsman

We welcome that @euasylumagency has accepted our proposal to grant greater public access to documents related to reception conditions in Greek migration management facilities.



We welcome that the European Union Agency for Asylum has accepted our proposal to grant greater public access to documents related to reception conditions in Greek migration management facilities.

In a positive development, the Ombudsman welcomed the European Union Agency for Asylum's (EUAA) decision to follow her solution proposal and grant wide access to documents related to reception conditions in Greek migration management facilities. Noting that under EU access to documents rules, what matters is the content of a document and not its form, the Ombudsman also commended the EUAA's thorough identification of documents for this access request, in particular its email exchanges.

The Ombudsman asked the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to provide lists of documents it identifies as falling within the scope of access requests, arguing that failing to do so undermines the right of people asking for access to submit informed requests for review. While Frontex said it would provide lists in the future, the Ombudsman remained dissatisfied that it would only do so 'where deemed necessary' and 'on a case-by-case basis'. She said she would monitor Frontex's new practice and may revisit the matter based on future possible complaints.

In another inquiry related to the identification of documents, the Ombudsman criticised the Commission's failure to identify any documents covering exchanges with Member States or internal exchanges concerning the preparation of a meeting between its President, the Italian and Dutch Prime Ministers, and the President of Tunisia on an important Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). She noted that holding such a high-level meeting would have required prior exchanges between different departments in the Commission, as well as with Member States. Despite this, none of the 13 documents the Commission identified concerned these types of exchanges and the Commission did not provide any reasonable explanation for their absence.

3.5. Transparency

The Ombudsman made a series of proposals to the European Commission to improve transparency and stakeholder participation in the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (EU-US TTC) – a platform for transatlantic coordination on regulatory issues such as the digital economy, supply chain resilience, and artificial intelligence. In particular, the Commission should make public agendas ahead of ministerial and working group meetings, as well as provide guidance to its departments so that they can ensure publicly available information is consistent across the various working groups. The Ombudsman also asked the Commission to do more to ensure it obtains sufficiently inclusive and diverse input from interested parties and clearly communicate how the EU-US TTC considers this input. In addition to the EU-US TTC, the Ombudsman encouraged the Commission to apply these suggestions to other trade and technology councils, such as the one launched with India in 2023.

The Ombudsman opened an own-initiative inquiry into how the Commission applies rules meant to ensure transparency and stakeholder participation when it comes to the nearly 1 100 expert groups that provide it with specialised advice. While the Commission revised its rules on the creation and operation of expert groups in 2016 following a previous Ombudsman inquiry, civil society and academics have raised concerns about how the Commission is applying these new rules. The Ombudsman's questions to the Commission focus on issues such as how it ensures public information about expert groups is meaningful and up-to-date as well as how individual expert groups decide whether their deliberations should be public.

European Ombudsman

We have made a series of proposals to @EU_Commission to improve transparency and stakeholder participation in the EU-US Trade and Technology Council #TTC

We have made a series of proposals to the European Commission to improve transparency and stakeholder participation in the EU-US Trade and Technology Council.

European Ombudsman

We have opened an own-initiative inquiry into how @EU_Commission ensures transparency and stakeholder participation within the nearly 1 100 expert groups that provide it with specialised policy advice.



We have opened an own-initiative inquiry into how the European Commission ensures transparency and stakeholder participation within the nearly 1 100 expert groups that provide it with specialised policy advice.

While acknowledging that the Commission has a duty to protect its staff from undue influence, the Ombudsman found that it should have more proactively and comprehensively explained its decision to restrict the publication of contact details in its 'Whoiswho' online EU staff directory. The Ombudsman had opened an inquiry into the issue after an organisation representing civil society organisations from across Europe complained that the Commission's decision to limit publication to managers undermined transparency and made it more difficult for the public to interact with it.

3.6. Ethics

The Ombudsman welcomed the European Commission's decision to start obliging staff moving to the private sector to mention that restrictions were imposed on them in public communications about their future position. The Commission implemented the new policy after the Ombudsman asked it about the move of a director in its competition department to the Brussels office of a US law firm. To make the new policy more effective, the Ombudsman suggested the Commission require staff to describe these restrictions accurately and meaningfully.

In another revolving doors case, the Ombudsman opened an inquiry concerning how the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) dealt with the moves of two former staff members to positions related to combatting online child sexual abuse, a subject they allegedly worked on at Europol. The complainant in this case was concerned with how the agency assessed the risk of potential conflicts of interest before approving the two staff members' post-service activity requests.

European Ombudsman

We suggest the European Commission make public all opinions issued by its ethics committee concerning former commissioners' post-mandate jobs.

This would improve transparency and public scrutiny around the Commission's ability to ensure these jobs are compatible with post-mandate duties.



We suggest the European Commission make public all opinions issued by its ethics committee concerning former commissioners' post-mandate jobs.

This would improve transparency and public scrutiny about the Commission's ability to ensure these jobs are compatible with post-mandate duties.

To improve transparency and public scrutiny around the Commission's ability to ensure the post mandate activities of former commissioners are compatible with their obligations, the Ombudsman suggested the Commission make public all future opinions adopted by the Independent Ethics Committee concerning these activities. Former commissioners are required to give the Commission two months' notice when they intend to pursue a professional activity during the two years following their departure. The Commission then examines whether the intended activity is compatible with their post service obligations, consulting with the Independent Ethics Committee in cases where it is related to the former commissioner's portfolio. Under current practices, if a commissioner withdraws an approval request following a negative opinion from the ethics committee, the Commission does not publish the committee's opinion.

Following an inquiry, the Ombudsman asked the EU Transparency Register's Secretariat to carry out more thorough and meaningful investigations when it comes to public complaints concerning alleged breaches of the code of conduct by registered organisations. In particular, the Ombudsman suggested that the Secretariat seek to verify information that is doubtful or uncertain through independent sources as well as ask registrants for additional information when needed. In addition, the Secretariat should ensure clear guidance when it comes to determining whether different organisations have links with each other. The Ombudsman had opened the inquiry following a complaint about how the Secretariat had handled claims that two organisations had failed to disclose their links with the food industry and with each other, as well as the sources of their funding.

European Ombudsman

We have asked the EU Transparency Register's Secretariat to carry out more thorough and meaningful investigations when it comes to public complaints concerning alleged breaches of the code of conduct by registered organisations.

We have asked the EU Transparency Register's Secretariat to carry out more thorough and meaningful investigations when it comes to public complaints concerning alleged breaches of the code of conduct by registered organisations.

The Ombudsman found that the Commission did not properly assess conflict of interest allegations concerning its Agriculture Commissioner. An organisation had lodged an infringement complaint with the Commission concerning Polish agricultural legislation. The complaint was assigned to the Commission's agriculture department, after which the organisation alerted the Commission that the Agricultural Commissioner's brother was among the members of the Polish Parliament who had proposed the legislation at issue. The Ombudsman found that the manner in which the Commission assessed the potential conflict of interest was flawed and asked it to review its decision making on the infringement complaint. The Ombudsman also suggested that, in future similar cases, the Commission should suspend relevant decision making until it has established whether there is a conflict of interest.

The Ombudsman concluded an own-initiative inquiry into how the Commission ensures experts evaluating European Defence Fund (EDF) proposals do not have conflicts of interest. 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 EDF-backed projects. The Ombudsman found that the Commission largely relies on the information submitted by candidates in its assessment and encouraged it to proactively look for additional information that may indicate conflicts of interest. The inquiry also showed that there is no systematic review of the financial interests of experts. To help remedy this, the Ombudsman suggested the Commission ask candidates to complete a detailed declaration of interests.

Building on an earlier initiative, the Ombudsman conducted an own-initiative inquiry into how the Commission deals with third parties paying for work travel and hospitality for its senior staff. The inquiry revealed shortcomings in how the Commission records its assessment of potential conflicts of interest in these cases. To rectify this, the Ombudsman suggested the Commission record its substantive conflict of interest assessment of requests as well as the nature and value of third party contributions to work travel.

3.7. Recruitment

The Ombudsman carried out several complaint-based inquiries related to the use of remote testing by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO). The inquiries concerned how EPSO had treated candidates' concerns related to problems they had encountered during remote tests administered by EPSO's contractor, including technical problems in launching tests, a lack of or improperly working tools on the testing platform, and excessively long waiting times before a supervisor was available.

In six inquiries, the Ombudsman found maladministration. In particular, the Ombudsman noted that EPSO had failed to properly address the complainants' arguments, had demonstrated a lack of flexibility in doing so, or had taken unreasonable decisions. She also criticised EPSO for often providing complainants with contradictory information concerning how to prove they had faced problems and for rejecting complaints even when candidates had followed the instructions for reporting technical issues.

Following the Ombudsman's decisions, EPSO decided to give four complainants an opportunity to redo the tests. In addition to the cases that were closed with a finding of maladministration, EPSO also settled two other cases during the Ombudsman's inquiry by deciding to invite the complainants to retake the tests. In response to a suggestion and remarks by the Ombudsman, EPSO said it would ensure it is possible to retroactively review the functionality of tools used by candidates during the tests and make it possible in the future to automatically provide candidates with a copy of their answers and the correct answers after testing.

3.8. Grants and contracts

During the course of an Ombudsman inquiry, the European Commission agreed to cancel a debit notice for ineligible costs issued to the coordinator of a consortium that carried out an EU-funded project supporting networks of young entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors. Instead, it said it would recover from each project partner the ineligible costs attributable to them. The Commission had originally argued it was not possible to recover the costs directly from project partners but reassessed the case after the Ombudsman opened an inquiry. In another inquiry into a similar issue, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) agreed to reverse its decision to recover certain illegible costs from an Austrian research and educational institution related to a grant agreement under the Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies (Tempus programme). Among other things, the Austrian institution had taken issue with EACEA's decision to issue the debit note to it and not to specific beneficiaries and to consider ineligible the costs of Ukrainian staff.

The Commission also said it would cancel a debit notice to a non-governmental organisation (NGO) involved in an EU-funded project in Burkina Faso. The NGO argued that the Commission was wrong in finding that certain costs related to the project were ineligible for the funding. During the Ombudsman's inquiry into the issue, the Commission reassessed the matter and found that the costs could in fact be considered eligible under the grant agreement.

The Ombudsman welcomed the Commission's decision to follow her solution proposal to reimburse nearly EUR 10 000 in staff costs claimed by an NGO for one of its staff members who participated in an EU programme for supporting higher education in the ASEAN region. Even though external auditors had concluded that the staff costs were reasonable, the Commission originally argued that the employment contract for the staff member did not meet the minimum requirements for such contracts. It reversed its decision after the Ombudsman found certain issues in its assessment.

4

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 the 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 committed to continuously improving its procedures to ensure inquiries are handled in the most efficient and effective manner, providing complainants with an optimal experience. In 2024, the Ombudsman took steps to refine its online complaint form, incorporating intuitive guidelines that assist complainants in submitting comprehensive and well-documented complaints that fall within the Ombudsman's mandate. This improvement helps the Office quickly initiate the complaint-handling process upon receipt. Additionally, the Ombudsman introduced machine translation of online complaints to facilitate the swift assignment of complaints to case handlers.

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.

4.1. Type and source of complaints

4.1.1. Overview of complaints and strategic inquiries

The Ombudsman may open an inquiry only into complaints that are within the 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.

Advice and complaints in 2024

17 770 People helped



14 782 Advice given through the Interactive Guide on the Ombudsman's website



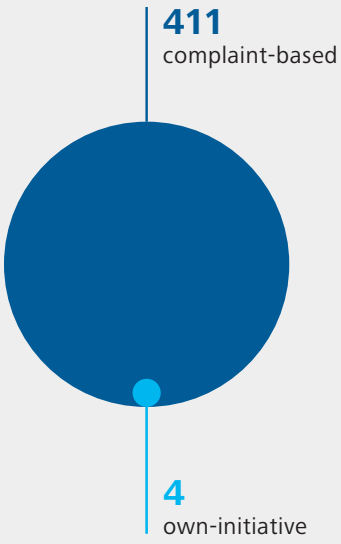
2 264 New complaints handled



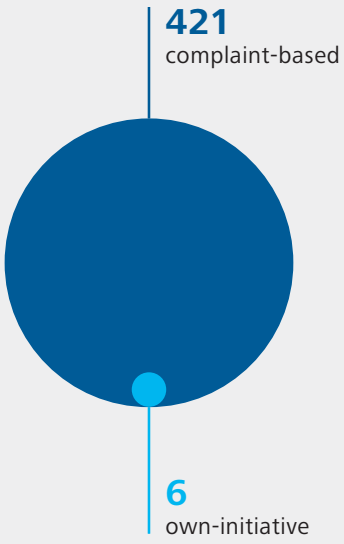
724 Requests for information replied to by the Ombudsman's services

Inquiries by the European Ombudsman in 2024

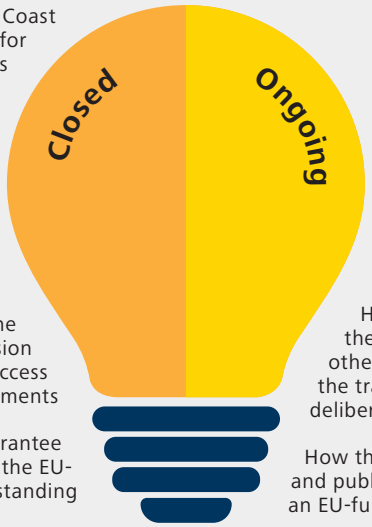
415
Inquiries opened



427
Inquiries closed



Topics of strategic inquiries in 2024



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

How the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission handle requests for public access to legislative documents

How the European Commission intends to guarantee respect for human rights in the context of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding

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

The risk management of dangerous chemical substances by the European Commission

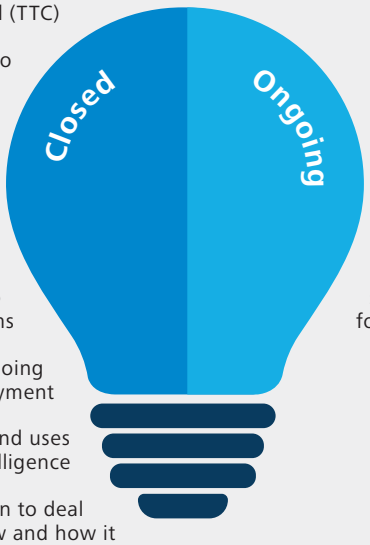
How the European Commission deals with third parties paying for work travel and hospitality for its staff members and assessed potential conflicts of interest

How the European Commission applies the rules governing expert groups and other similar entities, notably as regards the transparency of the membership and deliberations of the groups

How the European Commission dealt with the use and publication of a study produced under an EU-funded contract

Topics of strategic initiatives in 2024

(requests for clarification, not formal inquiries)



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

Sponsorship of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

How the European Commission handles revolving door moves by senior staff members from its Directorate-General for Competition to corporate law firms

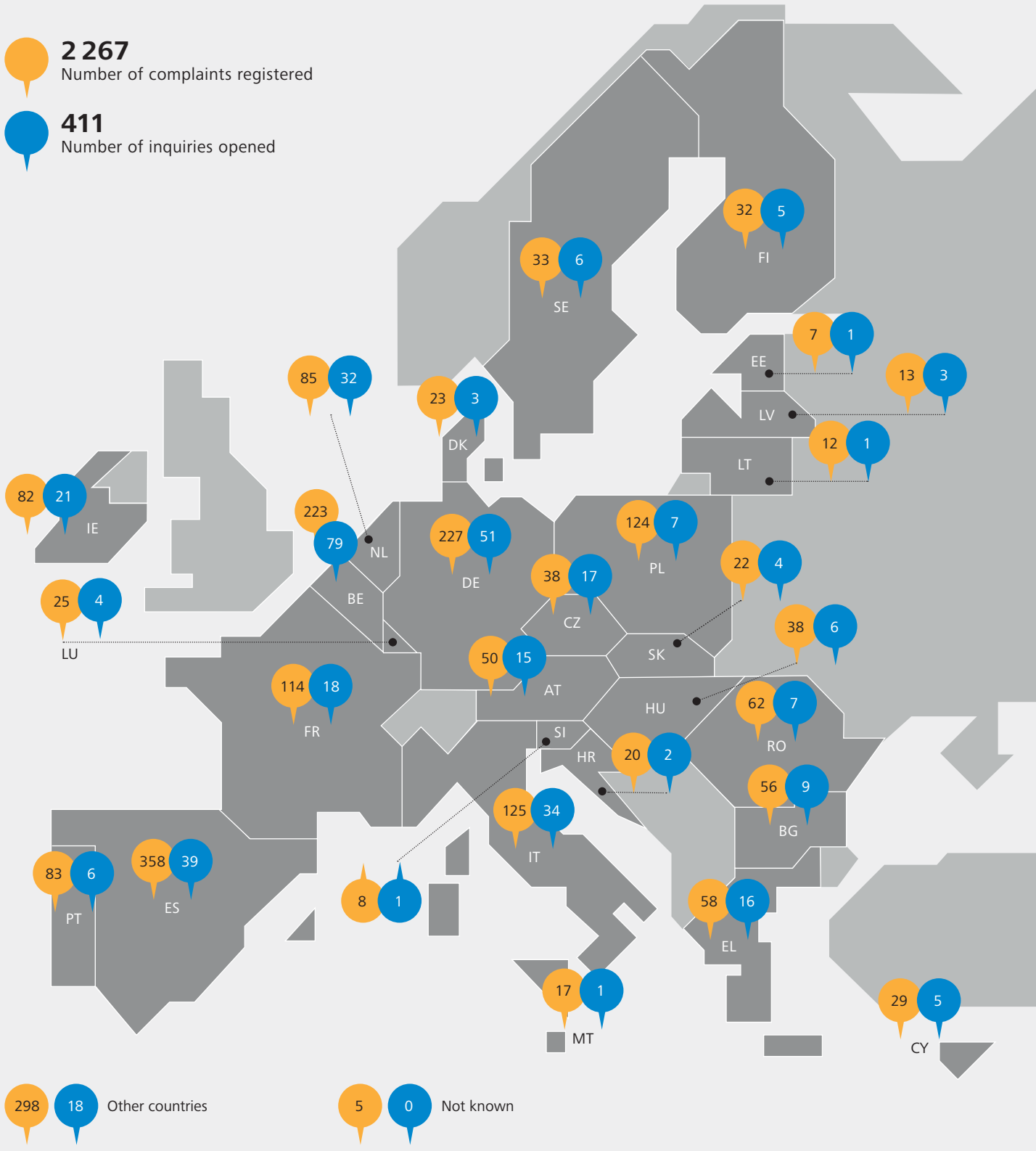
The European Commission's ethics rules for outgoing commissioners and post-mandate employment

How the European Commission decides on and uses artificial intelligence

The time taken by the European Commission to deal with complaints about infringements of EU law and how it communicates about infringement procedures

How the European Commission ensures that the revised rules governing the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme (JSIS) for EU staff guarantee comprehensive coverage for disability-related health needs

National origin of complaints registered and inquiries opened by the European Ombudsman in 2024



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

In 2024, the European Ombudsman processed nearly 1 400 complaints that did not fall within her mandate, mostly because they did not concern the work of the EU administration. Nearly 36% of these complaints came from Spain, Germany, and Poland. Spain alone accounted for 19%, with the two other countries accounting for 10% and 7% respectively.

People mostly turned to the Ombudsman with issues concerning equal treatment or discrimination, consumer protection, court cases, corruption, and employment. More than half of these out of mandate complaints primarily arose from citizens' dissatisfaction with their dealings 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 directed at least 20% of complaints to private entities, including banks, online businesses and platforms, airlines, and institutions of learning.

Other out of mandate complaints the Ombudsman received concerned the political or legislative work of EU institutions. The ongoing humanitarian crises in Ukraine and in the Middle East also generated a number of complaints.

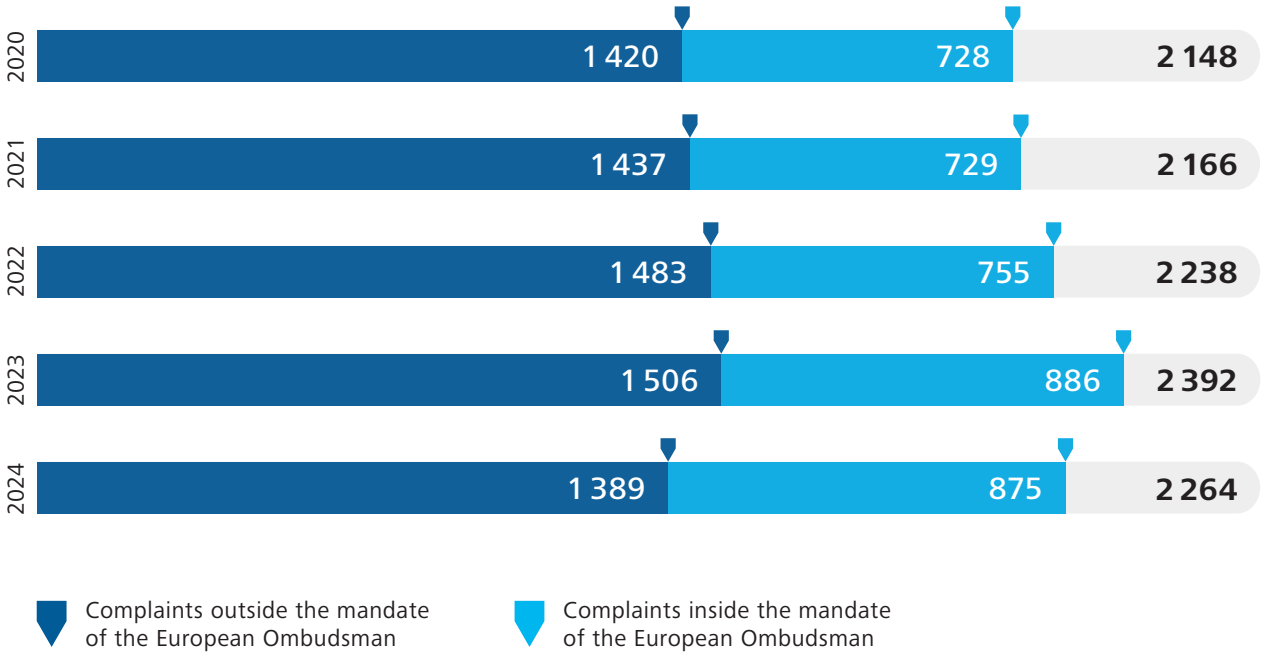
The Ombudsman replied to all those seeking help in the language of their complaint or of their preference. The replies clarified the Ombudsman's mandate and, as far as possible, advised complainants to turn to other bodies that could help. While these were usually national and regional ombudsman institutions, the Ombudsman also guided complainants to citizens' advice bureaux and other consumer protection organisations in the Member States.

When appropriate, complainants were advised to contact EU institutions (mostly the European Commission and the European Parliament), or 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.

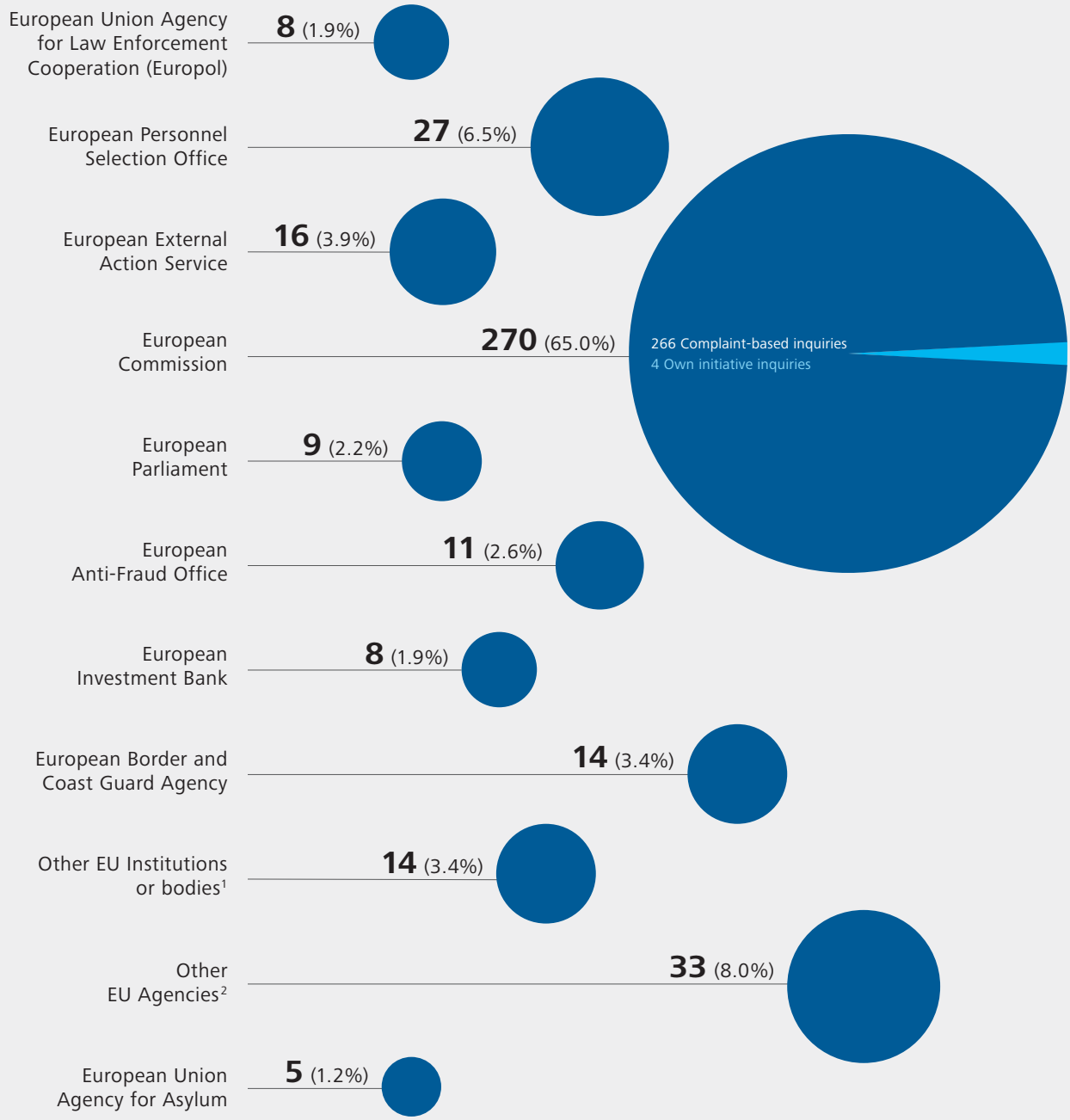
The continued use in 2024 of streamlined templates for handling out of mandate complaints, first introduced in 2022, further increased the speed at which the Ombudsman's staff replied to these complaints.

Number of complaints 2020-2024



4.2. Against whom?

Inquiries conducted by the European Ombudsman in 2024 concerned the following institutions

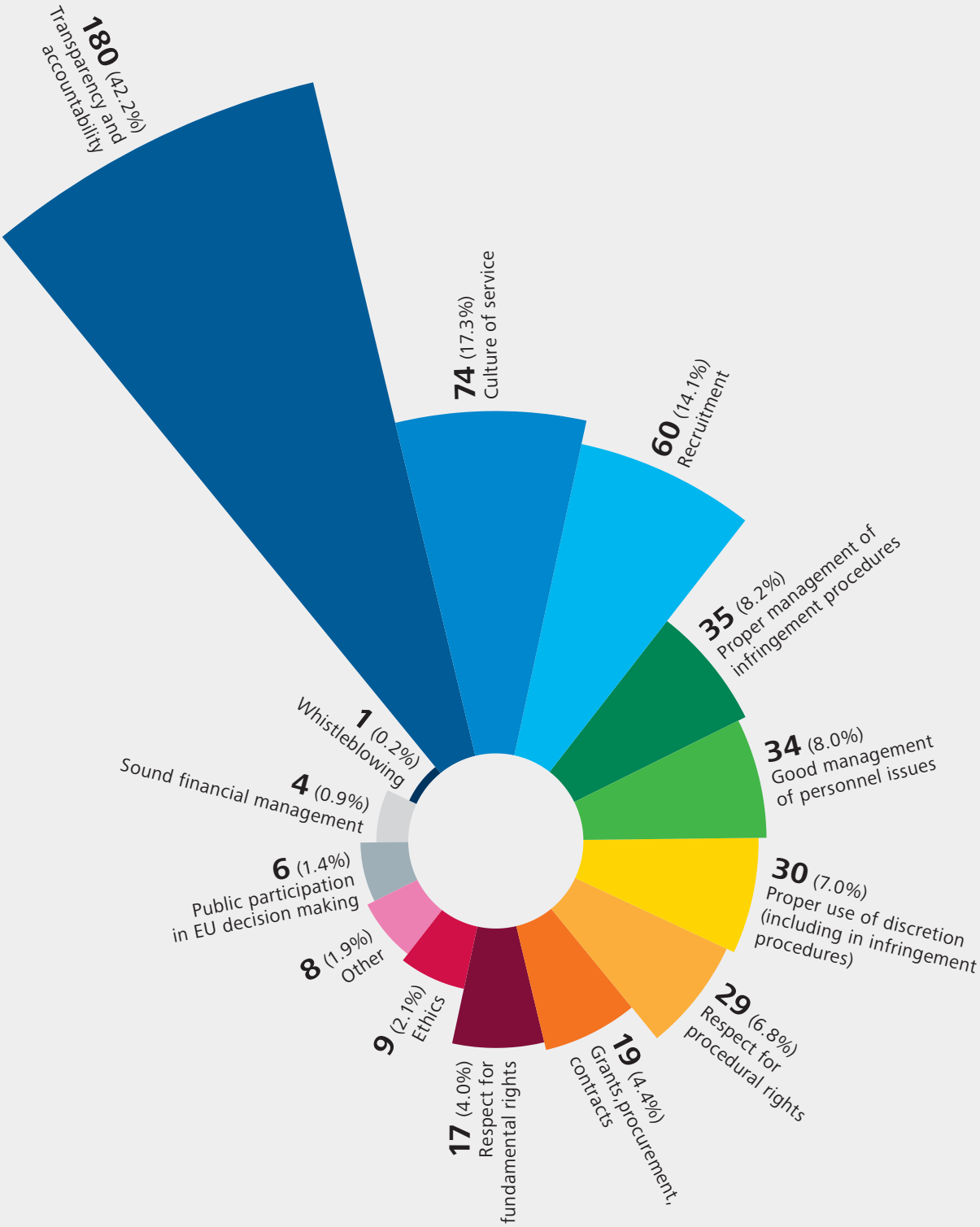


1. Council of the EU (3), ECB (3), EDPB (2), EDPS (1), APPF (1), CJEU (1), EU Council (1), CoR (1) and EuroHPC JU (1).

2. ENISA (4), EUIPO (4), REA (3), ERA (3), EACEA (3), eu-LISA (2), CEPOL (2), EIOPA (2), HADEA (2), CdT (1), EUSPA (1), EIT (1), EMA (1), ELA (1), CINEA (1), EFSA (1) and Eurofound (1).

4.3. About what?

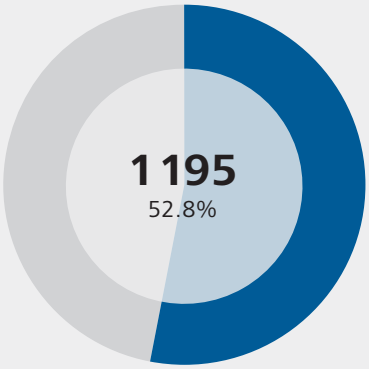
Subject matter of inquiries closed by the European Ombudsman in 2024



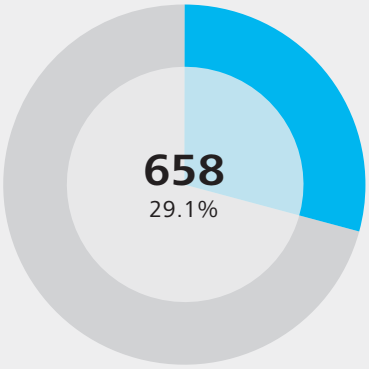
Note: In some cases, the Ombudsman closed inquiries with two or more subject matters. The above percentages therefore total more than 100%.

4.4. Results achieved

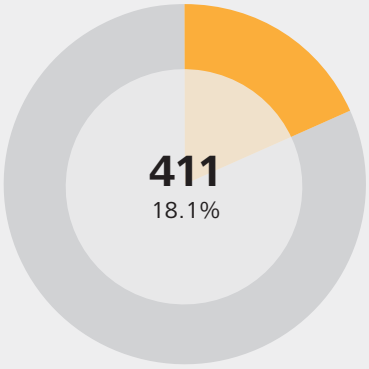
Action taken by the European Ombudsman on new complaints dealt with in 2024



Advice given or case transferred to another complaints body

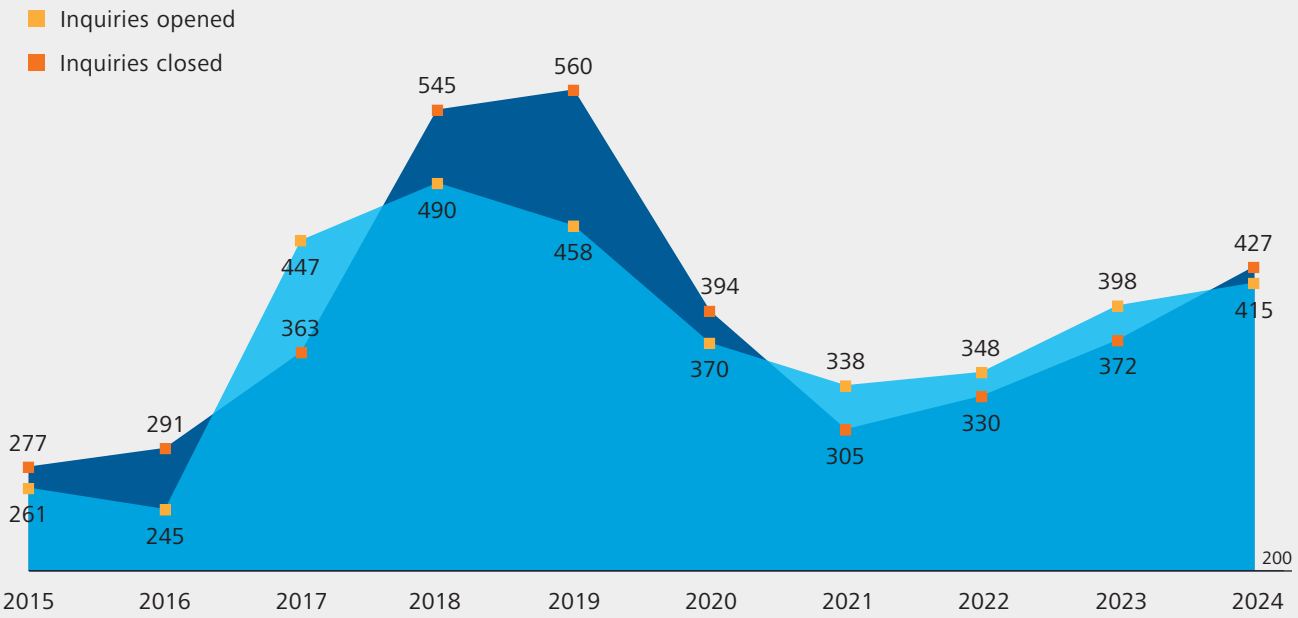


Reply sent to inform the complainant that no further advice could be given

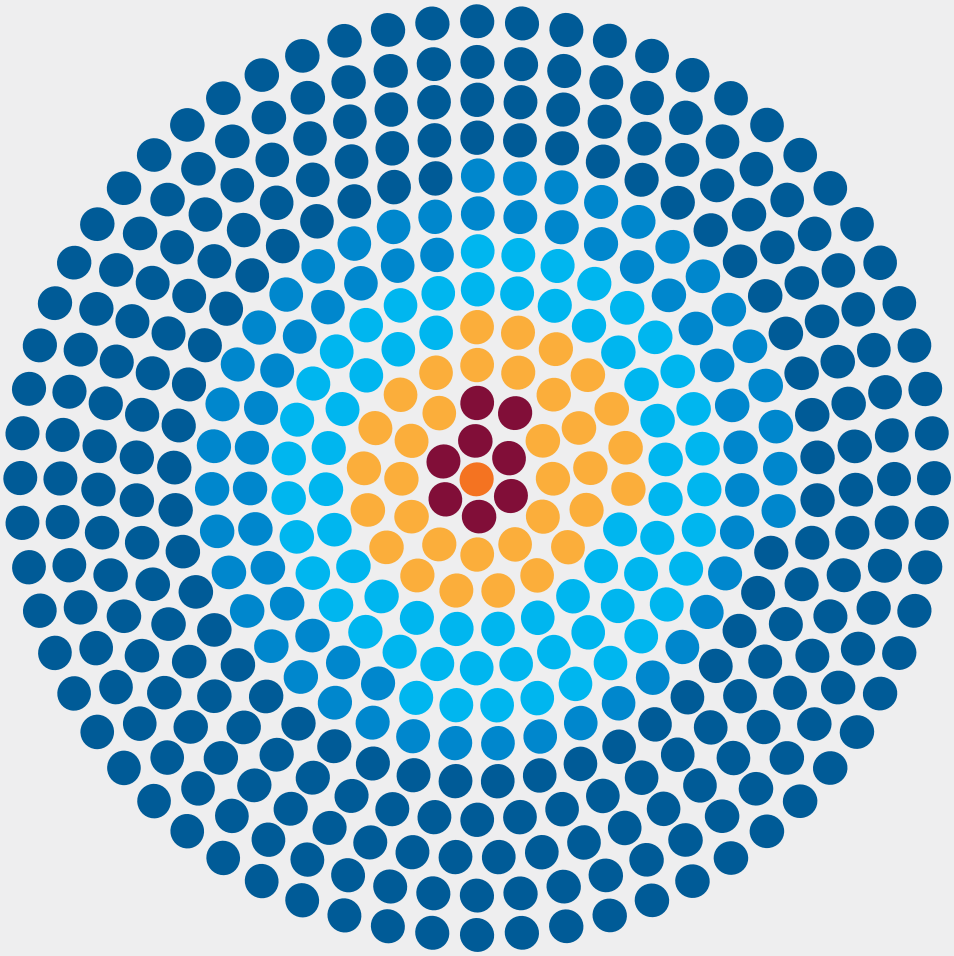


Inquiry opened

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



Results of inquiries closed by the European Ombudsman in 2024



261 (61.1%) Settled by the institution, solutions achieved, solution partly achieved

67 (15.7%) No further inquiries justified

66 (15.5%) No maladministration

34 (8.0%) Maladministration found

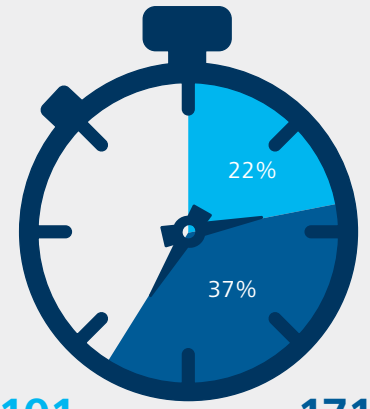
8 (1.9%) Dealt with by a Court (Art. 2.7)

1 (0.2%) Dropped by the complainant

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

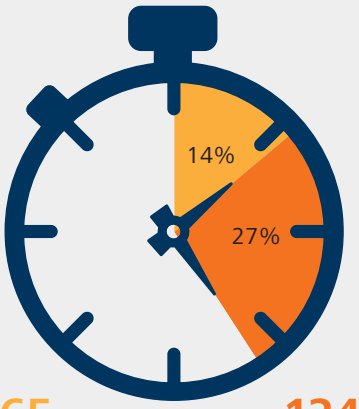
Length of inquiries closed by the European Ombudsman

in 2013 (13 months on average)



101
Cases closed within
3 months

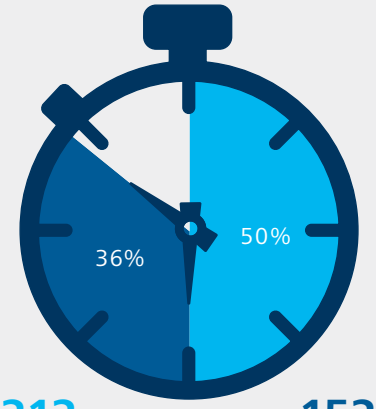
171
Cases closed within
3 to 12 months



65
Cases closed within
12 to 18 months

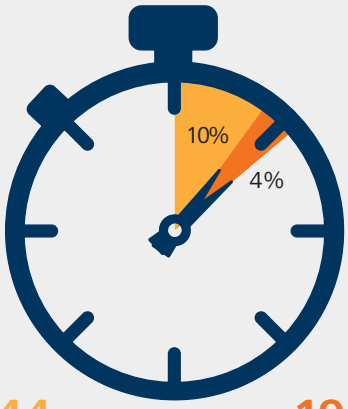
124
Cases closed after
more than 18 months[1]

in 2024 (less than 6 months on average)



212
Cases closed within
3 months

152
Cases closed within
3 to 12 months



44
Cases closed within
12 to 18 months

19
Cases closed after
more than 18 months[1]

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

4.5. 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. In addition, the Ombudsman may prompt an institution to settle a matter even before a formal solution proposal or recommendation is made.

4.5.1. 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 2024 covers cases closed in 2023.

In 2023, the EU institutions cooperated satisfactorily with the Ombudsman in 82% of instances. Of the 92 proposals the Ombudsman made to correct or improve their administrative practices, the EU institutions reacted positively to 75 of them.



4.5.2. 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.

For example, the European Commission published dedicated guidelines in 2024 regarding the participation of commissioners in national election campaigns. The publication of the guidelines follows letters from the Ombudsman to the Commission and the European Parliament in 2020 seeking to clarify how the Code of Conduct for Commissioners is applied in the context of national election campaigns. In its reply to the Ombudsman, the Commission said it would draw up guidelines on this issue.

The Commission also provided the Ombudsman with some preliminary information regarding its assessment of the exposure of its departments to lobbying by the tobacco industry. This assessment follows an Ombudsman finding of maladministration in 2023 for the Commission's failure to ensure all its departments proactively publish details of all meetings with tobacco lobbyists as well as its failure to keep minutes of all meetings. The Ombudsman is looking forward to the Commission's conclusions of this exercise as well as information about what further measures it intends to take to deal with the risk of undue influence on EU decision making from the tobacco industry.

In early 2024, the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) informed the Ombudsman that it had issued new guidelines on how staff should handle situations where a change during a Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe project is likely to lead to the termination of the grant agreement. The new guidelines follow an earlier Ombudsman inquiry into how it terminated a grant agreement because the funding recipient had lost its status as a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) after being taken over by another company. In that inquiry, the Ombudsman issued suggestions for improvement after finding that, while EISMEA's decision to terminate the grant was reasonable, delays and communication problems in the termination process itself constituted maladministration.

5

COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION

5.1. Communication

Ensuring visibility is an important element of the Ombudsman's work to reach stakeholders, the EU administration, and civil society. The communication activities of the Ombudsman are not only focused on the office's inquiries, but also generally on the promotion of transparency, ethics, and accountability in the EU administration.

In the course of 2024, key inquiry documents were made more easily accessible through the addition of a dynamic section on the website homepage displaying recent updates. Several improvements to the website navigation were also implemented to make finding content more straightforward.

At the annual press conference held in March, the Ombudsman presented the annual report for 2023 and discussed key inquiries and developments concerning ethics, access to documents, and fundamental rights. An Ombudsman event in April focused on how public administrations can be both resilient and responsive in a volatile and polarised political environment. The event featured a discussion with Lord Kim Darroch, former British Ambassador to the United States, as well as a panel discussion with the Ombudsman, European Commissioner for Budget and Administration Johannes Hahn, and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Professor of Comparative Public Policy at LUISS Guido Carli in Rome.



The event "Guarding the guardians – the survival of independent public administrations in volatile and polarised times", at the European Ombudsman's Office.



Emily O´Reilly during her speech at the Concert Noble.

In September, the Ombudsman held the year's main event for stakeholders, including national and regional ombudsmen, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), civil society, academics, and journalists. The event acknowledged the contribution of stakeholders in strengthening the reach and impact of the Office and included speeches by the Vice-President of the European Parliament Katarina Barley, Commission Executive Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, and Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová.

To promote and celebrate good administration, previous winners of the Ombudsman's Award for Good Administration were the subject of an online web story published by the office. Another web story published during the year highlighted ethics standards in the EU administration. These web stories were supported by social media campaigns.

The Ombudsman attended and gave speeches at several events organised by EU and international institutions, non-governmental organisations, and universities. These included the Institute of International and European Affairs, the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, the International Ombudsman Institute, Maastricht University, as well as the Italian National Anti-Corruption Authority and the European Network for Public Ethics. During a workshop organised on tobacco lobbying by the World Health Organisation, the Norwegian Cancer Society, and the McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer, the Ombudsman gave a speech on the importance of ensuring transparency and preventing undue influence on EU policies.

In terms of press coverage of the Ombudsman's work in 2024, there were around 5 000 media articles mentioning or directly reporting on the Ombudsman's activities, with 66% of all coverage coming from EU countries.

In 2024, the Ombudsman's number of social media followers kept rising, with particularly high growth seen on LinkedIn and Instagram. Increased and more targeted profile activity, as well as a growing number of users looking for EU-related content on these two platforms, were important factors that influenced positive performance. The Ombudsman's Instagram account saw about 33% growth in total followers (4 513 new followers). On LinkedIn, the number of followers increased by nearly 25% (+ 3 659). On X, the number of followers reached 37 200 in December 2024, which represented a 2.8% increase (+ 1 014).

In 2024, the Office opened accounts on Threads and Bluesky to expand its audience and further diversify its social media coverage.

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

5.2. Relations with EU institutions

5.2.1. European Parliament

The European Ombudsman is accountable to the European Parliament, which elects the head of the office every five years. In 2024, following the European elections in June, the Parliament elected a new European Ombudsman in December.

To encourage citizens to vote in the June elections, the Ombudsman collaborated with Parliament's Directorate-General for Communication and also organised a common statement signed by Members of the European Network of Ombudsmen.

The Ombudsman's annual meeting with the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, took place in March, right after the Parliament gave its unanimous support in plenary to the Ombudsman's special report on access to documents. The vote was a testament to the excellent cooperation between both institutions in holding the EU administration to account.

The Ombudsman continued to present the findings in key inquiries to the relevant parliamentary committees such as to the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and to the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI). The Office also participated in hearings linked to the annual budgetary procedures in the Budget (BUDG) and Budgetary Control (CONT) committees. The Ombudsman continued to work with Members of European Parliament (MEPs) from across the political spectrum to ensure smooth cooperation and to make sure newly elected MEPs better understand the role of the Office.



Handover of the Annual Report to President Metsola in Strasbourg.



Vice President Barley during her speech at the Concert Noble.

At the Ombudsman's stakeholder reception in September, Parliament's Vice-President Katarina Barley gave the opening speech.

5.2.2. Committee on Petitions

The Committee on Petitions (PETI) and the European Ombudsman share the common goal of ensuring that the EU institutions uphold citizens' fundamental rights. In 2024, their cooperation continued to make sure people's concerns are considered at EU level, including on matters related to the rights of persons with disabilities.

Following the EU elections, the Ombudsman met with the newly appointed PETI Chair Bogdan Rzońca and the Head of the Committee Secretariat, as well as with the whole PETI Committee in its new configuration. This was particularly important given that PETI was the committee in charge of organising the public hearings ahead of the election of the new European Ombudsman. These meetings showed the interest and commitment of many MEPs to ensuring a fair and transparent Ombudsman election and their recognition of the work of the current Ombudsman.

5.2.3. European Commission

The European Commission is the largest EU institution and its work affects all EU citizens. For this reason, a high percentage of the complaints received by the Ombudsman concern the Commission's work.

The Ombudsman's Office retained a good working relationship with the Commission throughout the year. Commission Executive Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and Vice-President Věra Jourová spoke at the Ombudsman's stakeholder reception in September.



The Ombudsman and members of her Cabinet with Acting Executive Director Url and other members of EFSA´s operational management.

The Ombudsman also met with the Commission's Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General to discuss the institution's challenges concerning access to EU documents. 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.



Commission Executive Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and Ombudsman O'Reilly in Strasbourg.

5.2.4. Other institutions, agencies, and organisations

It is important for the Ombudsman to maintain close relations with other EU institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies. In 2024, the Ombudsman met with a Member of the European Court of Auditors and spoke at a conference on the transparency of EU recovery funds organised by the Court of Auditors.

The Ombudsman also had meetings with the heads and staff of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Training Foundation. In addition, there were meetings with the Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and with the Members of OLAF's Supervisory Committee, as well as with the Members of the European Central Bank's Ethics Committee.

Good relations with different parts of the EU administration are an integral part of the Ombudsman's strategy 'Towards 2024'. Through close cooperation, the Ombudsman can help achieve a long-lasting and positive impact on the EU administration.

5.2.5. 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 was chaired by the European Disability Forum in 2024. As a member of this framework, the Ombudsman pays close attention to the EU administration's implementation of the UN CRPD. The Framework prepared an updated contribution, which included input from the Ombudsman, for the UN CRPD Committee to help ensure the Committee can complete in 2025 its periodic review of the EU's performance in relation to the Convention.

The Ombudsman dealt with a number of inquiries in 2024 related to the rights of persons with disabilities. In two decisions (125/2023/VS and 173/2023/VS), the Ombudsman found issues with how the EU administration provided reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities applying for a job. The Ombudsman underlined that, as a party to the UN CRPD, the EU should lead by example in complying with UN CRPD standards. The Ombudsman emphasised that reasonable accommodation should be considered at every step of selection and recruitment procedures and that EU institutions should have in place safeguards to ensure that reasonable accommodation measures are provided on the day of tests and irrespective of whether they or a contractor is in charge of organising them.

Following the Ombudsman's findings in a 2023 inquiry, the European Commission initiated a process in 2024 for the whole EU administration and revised the applicable rules to ensure a fair individual assessment of all applications for an allowance aimed at assisting staff taking care of children with disabilities.

The Ombudsman's Office also presented its work related to the rights of persons with disabilities at several events throughout the year.

European Ombudsman

EU Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly highlighted our work in ensuring equal rights for people with disabilities at the European Parliament Committee on Petitions annual workshop on the rights of people with disabilities.



EU Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly highlighted our work in ensuring equal rights for people with disabilities at the European Parliament Committee on Petitions annual workshop on the rights of people with disabilities.

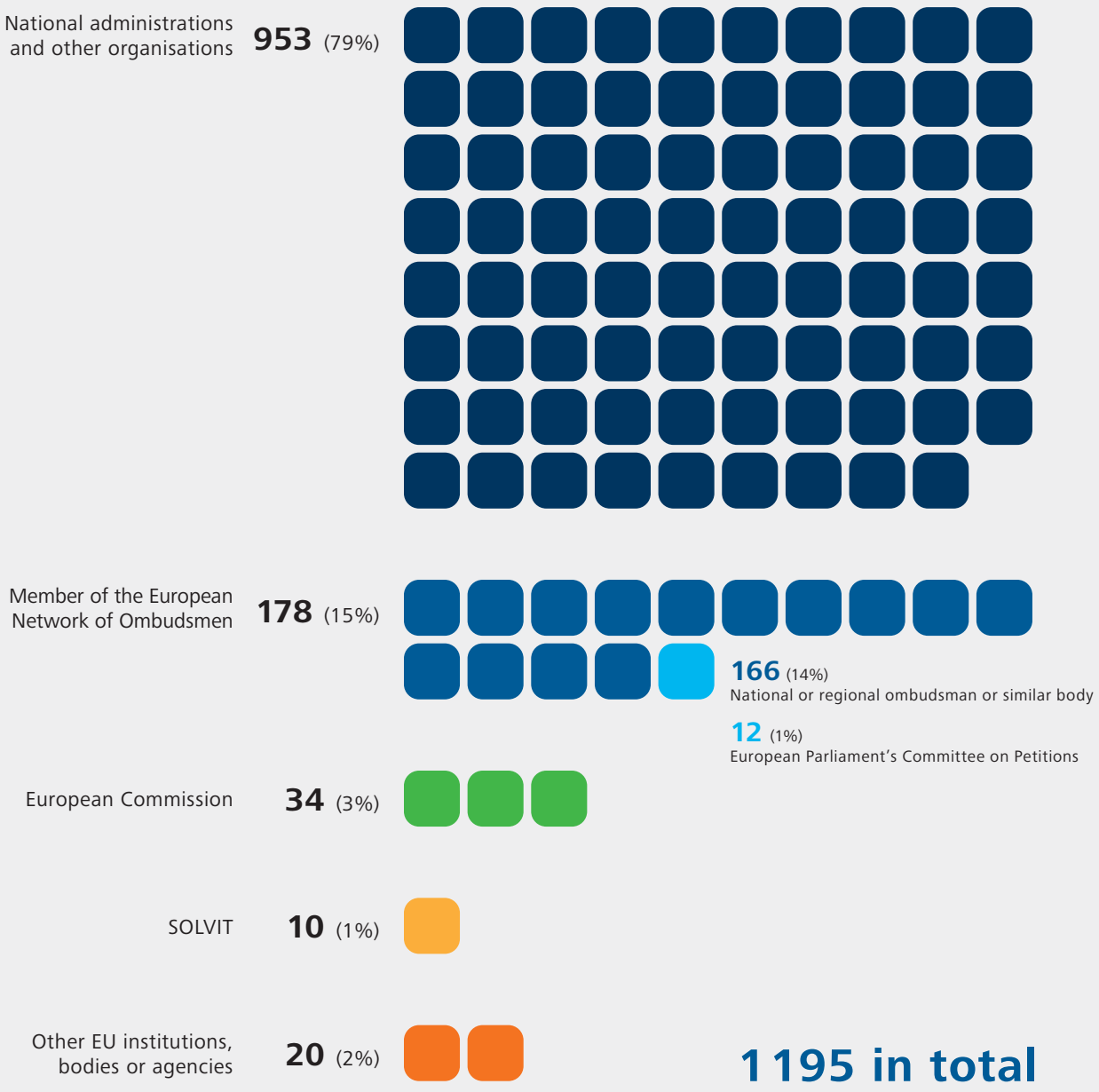
5.3. European Network of Ombudsmen

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

In 2024, the European Ombudsman organised an ENO webinar on two topics: the implementation of the EU Whistleblower Directive and problems linked to free movement. It featured presentations from the Federal Ombudsmen of Belgium and the Deputy Ombudswoman of Croatia, as well as from representatives of the Office of the Austrian Ombudsman Board, of the Czech Ombudsman, and of the Slovak Public Defender of Rights.

An important ENO tool is the queries procedure. Through this 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 dealt with in 2024 concerned the European Health Insurance Card, restrictions to the free movement of people between EU Member States, EU insurance rules, and mutual recognition of judgments in criminal matters.

Complainants advised to contact other institutions and bodies by the European Ombudsman in 2024 and complaints transferred



5.4. Ombudsman's visit to Italy

As part of the regular visits to EU Member States and the offices of EU agencies, the Ombudsman visited Italy in 2024.

During the visit, the European Parliament's local office in Milan hosted a public event to showcase the work of the Ombudsman Office. The Ombudsman gave a speech and took questions from an audience that included representatives from civil society and consumer associations as well as university students and journalists.

At the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in Parma, the Ombudsman held meetings with the agency's acting Executive Director Bernhard Url, the management team, and staff. Topics of discussion included how EFSA works to implement the Ombudsman's proposals, notably on access to documents, and the measures it has in place to deal with potentially problematic moves by its staff to the private sector. EFSA also presented a pilot project that uses artificial intelligence to handle access to documents requests, with the aim of increasing efficiency and ensuring those requesting documents are kept informed of the status of their applications.

During a visit to the European Training Foundation in Turin, the Ombudsman met with the agency's Director Pilvi Torsti and her management team. Director Torsti outlined her plans for reorganisation of the agency and she and the Ombudsman discussed the challenges faced by smaller institutions in efficiently managing their human and financial resources. The Ombudsman also presented the work of the Office to the European Training Foundation's staff.

European Ombudsman

Take a look back at European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly's visit to EU bodies in Italy

- Meeting with Dr. Bernhard Url, Executive Director of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Speech at @pe_italia on ethics and accountability in the EU administration
- Meeting with Pilvi Torsti, Director of @etfeuropa.



Take a look back at European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly's visit to EU bodies in Italy.

- Meeting with Dr. Bernhard Url, Executive Director of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Speech at European Parliament Liaison Office in Italy on ethics and accountability in the EU administration
- Meeting with Pilvi Torsti, Director of the European Training Foundation.

6

RESOURCES

6.1. 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 2024, budgeted appropriations amounted to EUR 13 843 160.

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.

6.2. 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 2024 Annual Management Plan is the fourth 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 2024, there were 75 posts in the Ombudsman's establishment plan, in addition to which, there was an average of 7 contract agents working with the Office. 19 trainees also gained work experience at the Ombudsman's Office over the course of the year.

Detailed information on the structure of the Ombudsman's Office and the tasks of the various units is available on the Ombudsman's website.

7

HOW TO CONTACT THE EUROPEAN OMBUDSMAN


Strasbourg office



Brussels office

By telephone

+33 (0)3 88 17 23 13

By e-mail

eo@ombudsman.europa.eu

Postal address

Médiateur européen
1 avenue du Président Robert Schuman
CS 30403
F-67001 Strasbourg Cedex

Online

ombudsman.europa.eu
bsky.app/profile/ombudsman.europa.eu
instagram.com/euombudsman
linkedin.com/company/272026
threads.net/euombudsman
youtube.com/eotubes

Visitor address

Strasbourg
Bâtiment Václav Havel (HAV)
Allée Spach
F-67000 Strasbourg

Brussels
Bâtiment Froissart (FRS)
Rue Froissart 87
B-1000 Bruxelles

This *Annual Report* is published on the Internet at:

www.ombudsman.europa.eu

© European Union, 2025

All photographs and images © European Union, except the cover (© Eddy Drmwn / Adobe Stock and © HAPIXEL / Adobe Stock).

Reproduction for educational and non-commercial purposes is authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.

Set in FrutigerNext.

Print	ISBN 978-92-9483-400-3	ISSN 1680-3809	doi:10.2869/4939389	QK-01-25-000-EN-C
HTML	ISBN 978-92-9483-398-3	ISSN 1680-3922	doi:10.2869/5212475	QK-01-25-000-EN-Q
PDF	ISBN 978-92-9483-399-0	ISSN 1680-3922	doi:10.2869/4494618	QK-01-25-000-EN-N

QK-01-25-000-EN-N

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

Publications Office
of the European Union