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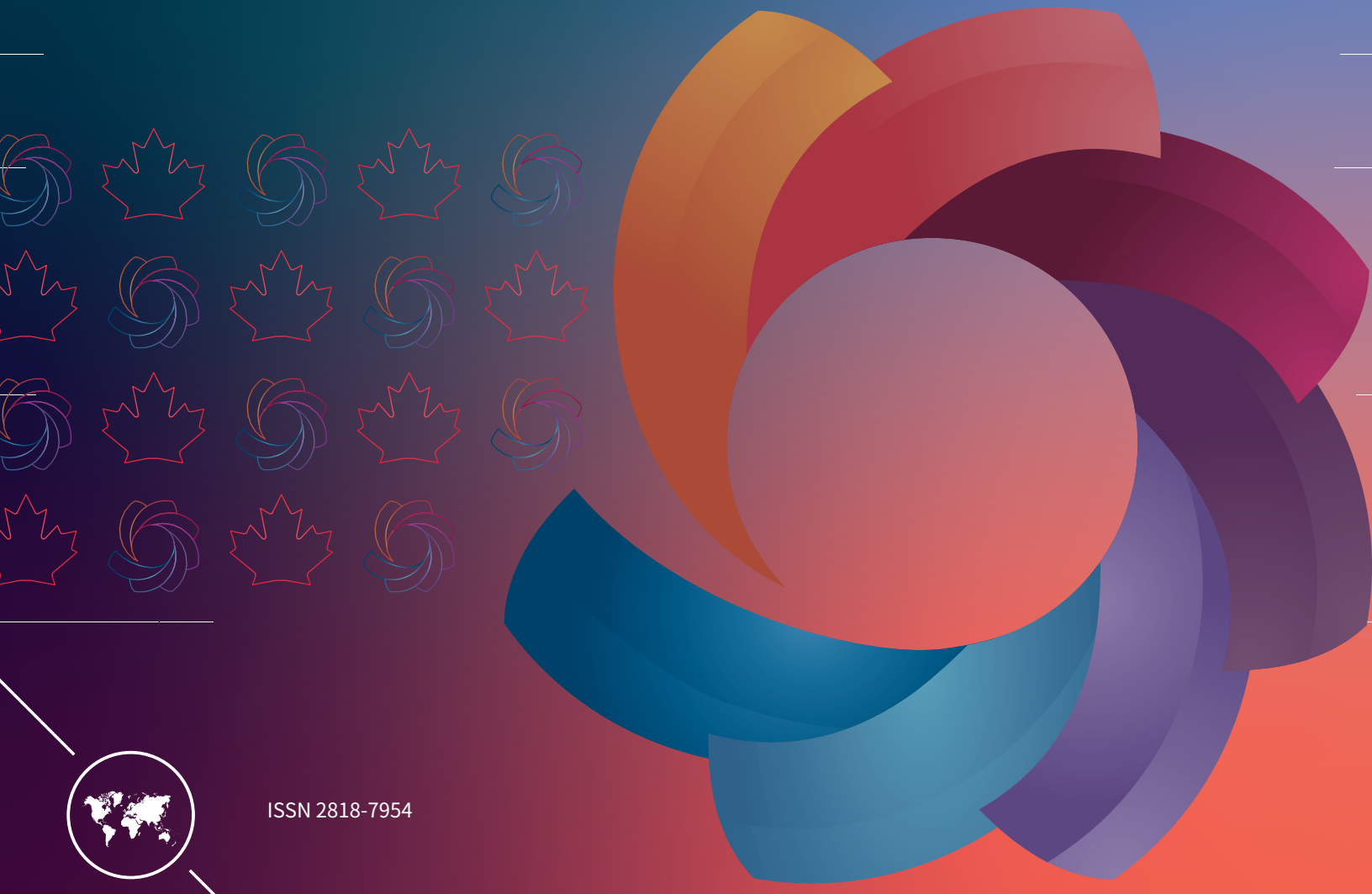
Canada

Annual Ombud Report
2024 to 2025

Office of the Well-being Ombud and Inspector General



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A message from the Ombud

I am sitting down to write this message in July 2025, almost 2 years since becoming Global Affairs Canada's (GAC's) ombud and having had many conversations with many of you. While this report represents what we heard from you over the last fiscal year (April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025), there are clear threads connecting those 12 months to the insights and feedback you've continued to share with us in the weeks since. You have continued to tell us how the pace of change and the uncertainty inherent in things moving so fast continue to affect you. You have spoken to me and all of us at the office about the challenges you face every single day, from geopolitical turbulence to transitions in government at home and abroad to the repercussions of significant internal reorganizations.

Over the last year, you have shared with us that navigating constant change has been hard for you and hard for your teams. You have told us of your struggles with complex internal processes that feel slow and inconsistent. You have said that you want leaders who lead with transparency, clarity and compassion. And you have been clear that you want respectful, safe workplaces where you can ask for help, without fear of stigma, judgement or reprisal, so that you can do your best work for Canada and Canadians.

When our team gathered to speak about this report and what we could helpfully share with you based on what we have heard, we kept coming back to team effectiveness as a central theme. We spoke about how very real difficulties arise when systems become too complex, communication breaks down or expectations seem unclear. Those conversations have led to this report's clear focus on the ways in which your experiences in the workplace put pressure on the health, resilience and effectiveness of your teams.

Strengthening team effectiveness to achieve excellence means creating an environment where everyone can thrive and contribute, where diverse perspectives are welcomed, where accommodations are met with empathy and where psychological safety is a priority.

Besides shining a light on the experiences you have shared with us, this year, we are also including some of our thoughts on what we can do together to address these challenges. These are practical, human-centred strategies that have emerged from our conversations with you and your teams.

I want to emphasize the word "together" because building healthier, more respectful and more effective workplaces is a shared responsibility. Speaking up to address a situation takes courage and so does sitting in the discomfort we feel when we try to understand our role in a difficult situation. I hope that these ideas are invitations to reflection, dialogue and action. I hope that they prompt you to ask questions like: How can we bring more fairness into our conversations? Would more civility in our communications better protect our dignity and that of others? Would this help get us to a more collaborative and constructive place in our working relationships as we continue to strive for excellence? And I know this is a hard one when the demands at work and at home are so heavy—what if slowing down for a moment to reflect, rest and regroup was actually the key to coping with the fast pace of change?

I know that those who reach out to us are generally doing so because they are grappling with something hard. When I reflect on the conversations I have had with many of you, I am struck by the very real challenges you face, but I am also reminded of the possibility to learn and grow. When you reach out to us for support, when you step into difficult conversations, many of you are doing so with the hope, however small, that being heard will help you heal and that positive change for you and for your colleagues is possible. For me, as ombud, that possibility lies in the fact that together we can encourage open discussions, listen without judgement and lead with compassion to create trust, ensure respect and achieve excellence. It takes courage to have these conversations—thank you for trusting me and us.

I started this message writing about change and a big one for all of us is Deputy Ombud Daniel Campeau's retirement. It is hard to capture Daniel's contribution, though this report gives you a small glimpse into the kind of work he has done with so many of you to make things better. Thank you, Daniel, for your counsel, compassion and kindness in supporting us and supporting a healthier GAC.

Ayesha Rekhi (she, her)
Well-being Ombud

About this report

The observations in this report are based on the experiences of people who have used the services of the ombud office. This report is meant to provide a window into some of the situations people working at GAC have experienced, but by no means does it speak to everyone's experience in our organization. The people who have used the services of our office are often facing difficult and challenging situations. The information in this report reflects what they have shared with us. As a result, you may find the tone of this report to be more conversational and informal than what you might expect in a "traditional" annual report.

Our guiding principles

Impartiality: Respect and dignity in action

Impartiality is a foundational principle that guides the work of all ombud offices. It reflects our commitment to fairness in every interaction. This principle is closely tied to neutrality and equity, and it shapes how we listen, communicate and support you.

Impartiality means not taking sides. It involves receiving information with an open mind free from assumptions, judgement and blame. Every time one of our counsellors or practitioners works with you, this principle is actively applied. It ensures that you are heard and treated with respect, regardless of your situation.

But impartiality does not mean indifference. We are deeply committed to the well-being of the individuals and teams who seek our support and to the overall health of our organization. We find that when we try to understand everyone's point of view—even when those views are different or even conflicting—we can build empathy and trust. This way of practicing impartiality can be understood as multipartiality, which is about recognizing and respecting each person's unique experiences and needs. You don't have to agree with someone to show them the respect of feeling heard.

A reminder of our 3 other principles

Our office's work is guided by the core principles and values of the Organizational Ombuds Council of Canada (OOC) and the International Ombuds Association's (IOA's) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, which set out how ombud offices should operate to be trustworthy, fair and effective. These principles help ensure that ombud offices are safe, neutral and supportive spaces for people to bring their concerns without judgement and without fear of reprisal.
We have already shared a bit about **impartiality**.
Here is a reminder of our other guiding principles:

Confidentiality

The ombud office keeps what you say private. We do not share your name or details unless you give us permission to do so and except in very rare cases where someone's safety is at risk.

Independence

At GAC, the office of the ombud is a "special bureau," which means we work separately from other parts of the organization, with a direct line in the organization chart to the deputy ministers. This protects our work with you, allows us to work with anyone across the department and enables the ombud to speak freely about issues without pressure from management. This report, for example, is produced independently by our office and released once approved by the ombud.

Informality

Talking to the ombud office is voluntary and off the record. We do not start official investigations or file complaints. Instead, we help you understand your options. We can help you resolve issues through informal steps like coaching, clarifying policies or talking things through. And if you are thinking about formal recourse options, we can help you navigate those too.

Facing a challenge can be isolating, especially in high-pressure environments. Our goal is to help you reflect on your situation and offer insights if we can so that you can make informed and thoughtful decisions.

Our visual identity

Our main graphic element is a circular design meant to resemble a **blooming flower**, symbolizing unity. The various shapes represent **diversity**, and their overlap creates a feeling of **inclusion**.

The 4 colourful circles symbolize the **4 guiding ombud principles**: informality, independence, impartiality and confidentiality.

The colour palette was carefully chosen to be **vibrant** and **comforting**, aligning with the office's vision.

Collaboration among other governmental departments' ombud offices

The GAC organizational ombud is not alone. Did you know that there are 30 organizational ombuds supporting 54 federal departments and agencies? If you'd like to find out more about other organizational ombuds in the public service, please see Federal Public Service Organizational Ombuds Community.

In our ongoing efforts to ensure that we are providing the best services we can to our people across Canada and around the world, and to our organization, we have worked to build strong connections with other federal ombud offices. We are actively contributing to fostering a stronger community of practice by bringing together those federal government ombuds with staff posted at Canada's missions abroad. This is particularly important for locally engaged staff (LES) who may report directly to another government department but sign their contract with GAC and for Canada-based employees (CBS) from other government departments posted at Canada's missions abroad. These collaborations are key to staying current with best practices and evolving standards in our field, as well as ensuring that our support to individuals, teams and missions is effective. Whether discussing strategies to address systemic concerns, sharing tools for data collection and analysis or exchanging insights on early intervention approaches, these collaborations help us improve the quality and accessibility of the services we provide. A connected ombuds community benefits not only our offices, but also the employees and organizations we serve.

Ombuds “with teeth”

Sometimes, we get asked what’s the point of speaking to the ombud if the ombud “has no teeth,” if it is lacking formal power to spark change? In our experience, the lack of formality in our office’s work is precisely why so many of you reach out to us. Our influence comes from being independent, informal and impartial—not from the formal authority to launch an investigation or decide on disciplinary action.

Formal processes, like investigations and grievance procedures, are essential for accountability, but you have told us that they are not always the best first step for you. As an organizational ombud, we don’t conduct investigations, issue decisions or formally report wrongdoing. Without investigative powers, we offer something different: a safe, confidential space to talk through challenges, explore options and feel heard—without triggering formal action. This approach gives individuals more control and can sometimes lead to faster, more tailored outcomes to help you meet your objectives. Research tells us that informal conflict resolution can reduce resolution times and organizational costs. And when you raise systemic problems or several people come to us, separately or not, with similar concerns, the ombud or deputy ombud raises the issue with senior management while maintaining the anonymity of those who contacted us.

Unlike legislative ombuds, an organizational ombud is purposefully designed to be an internal, informal and confidential first point of contact for employees. Whereas a legislative ombud is a public watchdog that exposes and investigates wrongdoing, an organizational ombud is there to help address issues discreetly and constructively. Our strength, in fact, lies in what we don’t do: we don’t judge, take sides or make decisions. We listen, support and help people navigate challenges. Legislative ombuds are often seen as “having teeth” but organizational ombuds also help with systemic change and in supporting a healthy, respectful and effective workplace.

Impacts of investigations

At GAC, you have access to a variety of formal mechanisms to address workplace concerns. Whether you are dealing with conflict, experiencing harassment or facing other problems, you have options that are in place for accountability, including:

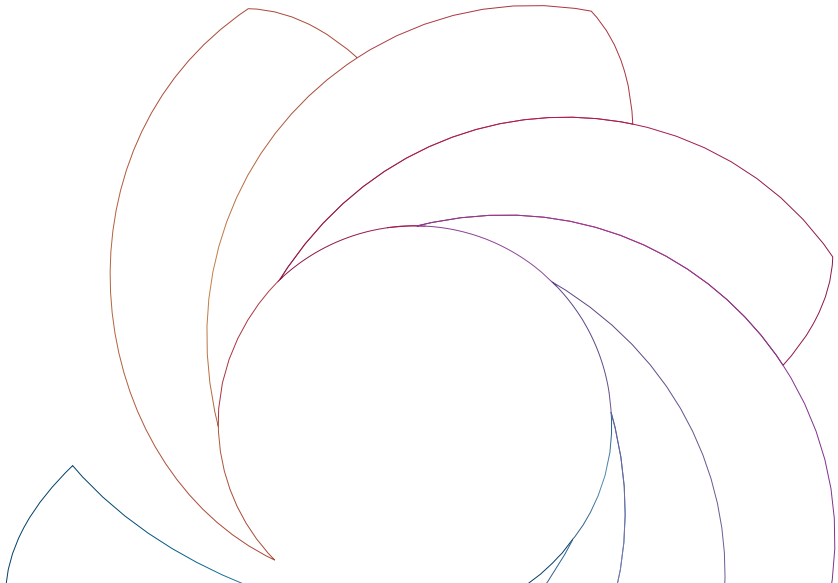
- a grievance through your bargaining agent (if you are a represented CBS) or your head of mission or the Locally Engaged Staff Bureau (if you are a LES)
- a notice of occurrence of harassment and violence in the workplace
- a complaint under the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act*

Many of you have told us that the annual reports on Addressing Misconduct and Wrongdoing at Global Affairs Canada have improved your confidence in our department and are an important step toward building a stronger culture of trust and accountability. At the same time, you have told us that navigating formal processes can sometimes feel overwhelming and confusing. Many of you have asked for a simple tool to clarify these mechanisms. We have produced tables in Annexes C and D of this report which can help. The departmental processes are still complex and so we know the tables may not be as simple as you might like.

Formal investigations are sometimes necessary, especially in cases involving serious allegations, but they can come with unintended consequences. You have shared with us how, as complainants or respondents, you have felt uncomfortable, distressed and sometimes unsafe at work, both during the investigation and in its aftermath. We have heard how formal mechanisms don't always address the root causes of conflict. And we often hear about the disillusionment that follows when you invest in a formal recourse and receive no finding in your favour, sometimes because the mechanism used was not the most appropriate for the situation, sometimes because you do not agree with the outcome of an investigation.

We also hear from managers who are confused or troubled when a formal process is initiated against them, especially in cases involving interpersonal disagreements or communication breakdowns or because of their attempt to address workplace issues such as performance or behaviours in the workplace.

And we hear too often about the impacts of delays. Formal processes that take months, if not more than a year, pull your focus away from your core responsibilities, add to your stress and make it difficult to rebuild trust and productive communication, as well as move forward.



Our services

The ombud office supports team effectiveness, better leadership and your well-being through our services. We work to promote a psychologically healthy workplace at all GAC locations in Canada and around the world. This includes offering services like the Ombud Services (including an LES adviser), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Informal Conflict Management Systems (ICMS), and sharing regular feedback with senior leaders about the common issues and trends we observe.

Our office is here to help you understand your options when facing workplace issues, whether you are based in Canada or abroad, a traditional or rotational employee, LES or CBS, an employee or a manager. We guide you through both informal and formal processes, depending on your needs. In last year's report, we introduced the 3 core services offered by our office. This year, we want to take a closer look at some specific aspects of those services to help you better understand what they offer and, more importantly, what's in it for you.

What to expect when you reach out to us

When you first contact us at ombud@international.gc.ca, your message will be received by our intake officer. They will take a careful look at your request and, depending on the type of support you need, they may be able to answer your question directly or they will refer you to one of our services, whether that's to the ombud or deputy ombud, an LES adviser, an EAP counsellor or an ICMS practitioner.

Once your request is assigned, a specialist will contact you to schedule your first appointment. Most emails are responded to within 48 hours and most appointments are scheduled within a couple of weeks—or sooner, depending on the urgency.

A single, easy email address to access all our services

You can reach us at **ombud@international.gc.ca** to access any of our services, including:

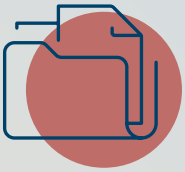
- Ombud Services (including a specialized service for LES)
- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Informal Conflict Management Systems (ICMS)

Please note: The email address **solution@international.gc.ca** is no longer active.

What happens when you contact us?

Receiving the request

Message arrives in the ombud email inbox and is reviewed by the intake officer



Sorting the inquiry

Categorized into ombud or deputy ombud, EAP, ICMS, LES matters or general inquiries

Working with a specialist

Logged and forwarded to the appropriate specialist

Taking action

Support includes one-on-one, group or facilitated discussions

Closing the loop

Case information updated and securely deleted after 30 days

Identifying systemic issues

Trends reviewed and recurring issues shared with senior management

What happens in your first meeting with us?

For the EAP

This is a chance for you and the EAP counsellor to get to know each other, build trust and see if the EAP feels right for you. You'll be invited to share your concerns, goals and preferences, as well as talk about what brought you to the counselling session and what you hope to achieve.

For ombud services and ICMS

Your first session with the ombud, deputy ombud, LES adviser or ICMS practitioner is a mutual discovery process. We will explain our role, the process and our guiding principles and limitations. You will be invited to share your concerns, and if you're comfortable doing so, we'll begin working together on a plan to address your workplace issue. This might involve one-on-one discussions and/or group sessions with you and others.

How long will it take?

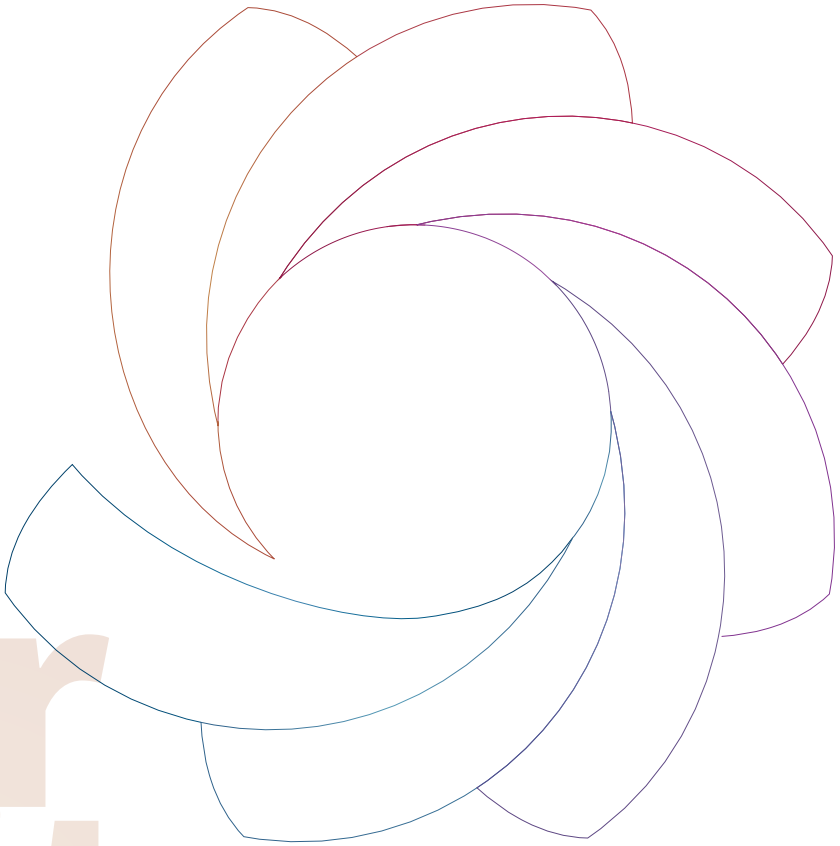
The length of your journey with us depends on the approach you choose. Some matters can be resolved quickly with a single discussion that helps you think through your next steps, while other situations may take multiple sessions. Either way, we're here to support you throughout.

The value of a sounding board

The ombud office is an impartial and confidential sounding board for you. When you're facing a challenge—whether it's a conflict, a concern or just something you're unsure how to handle—you can come to us. We're not here to take sides or report what you say. We're here to listen, help you think things through and support you in finding your own best path forward.

At its core, a sounding board is someone who really listens while you share your thoughts, articulate your concerns or brainstorm ideas. Research tells us that the act of saying something out loud can help to bring clarity of thought. Facing a challenge can be isolating, especially in high-pressure environments. A sounding board provides support simply by reminding you that you're not alone.

Beyond clarity, a sounding board offers perspective. When we're deep in a problem, it's easy to feel stuck. We will try to help you to clarify your situation, identify your options and consider the potential outcomes of each course of action by asking you questions and sometimes challenging your assumptions. Our goal is to help you reflect on your situation and offer insights if we can so that you can make informed and thoughtful decisions. If you're unsure whether your concern is "big enough" to bring to us, we encourage you to reach out anyway. We're here to support you—confidentially, impartially and without judgment.



impar
tiality

Understanding counselling at Global Affairs Canada

Counselling, as offered by GAC's in-house EAP, allows you to discuss work-related or personal difficulties that affect your well-being and effectiveness at work in a safe and confidential environment. Unlike traditional therapy, which might explore your life history and unconscious motivations, short-term counselling concentrates on helping you make meaningful changes in a relatively short period of time. A conversation with our EAP mental health professionals is designed to be time-limited, goal-oriented and focused on specific issues.

Who is short-term counselling for and how can it help?

- Ideal if you have a busy schedule or need quick support because it is designed to produce results in a limited number of sessions
- Helps you stay motivated and track progress more easily because it is focused on specific, achievable goals
- Encourages a forward-looking mindset because it emphasizes finding practical solutions rather than dwelling on the problem
- Builds on your existing strengths and resources by encouraging self-efficacy and confidence in handling future challenges
- Can be tailored to a wide range of issues (for example, anxiety, stress and relationship problems) for individuals, couples and families

In some situations, short-term counselling may not be the best course of action. For example, conditions like complex trauma, personality disorders or severe depression may require a longer-term therapeutic approach. While short-term counselling may not explore deep-rooted, complex psychological issues, you can still contact the EAP, and we will help you determine your best course of action.

We do sometimes get asked why GAC has an in-house employee assistance program. Research shows that organizations with an EAP see direct links with improved morale, reduced absenteeism, better communication skills, improved performance and healthier organizational cultures. It's actually a legal and policy requirement of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat that all government departments have an EAP. Having an internal EAP dedicated to working with GAC employees ensures that all of you can access counselling when you need it, including—importantly—those of you outside of Canada with limited access, at times, to psychological health support.

What is well-being?

Well-being is about our physical, mental and emotional health. It's a holistic concept that involves feeling healthy, functioning well and having a sense of purpose and satisfaction in life, allowing us to have positive relationships and manage stress.

How informal conflict management improves team effectiveness

Strong team dynamics are essential to a positive and productive workplace. When you feel respected, heard and supported, you're more likely to collaborate effectively, enjoy your work and achieve excellence. In our work, we see how challenges within teams, such as miscommunication, unclear roles or unresolved tensions, can lead to conflict and impact overall effectiveness and well-being.

Our ICMS team works directly with your teams to help build stronger, more trusting relationships. Every team is different, so we start by listening to understand your unique situation and goals. From there, we use proven tools and approaches from the field of organizational development to support your team in creating a healthier, more connected and more effective work environment.

What is team effectiveness?

Team effectiveness refers to the capacity of a team to achieve its goals and objectives successfully while maintaining a positive and collaborative working environment. A highly effective team not only delivers strong performance outcomes but also fosters individual growth, mutual respect and sustainable collaboration.

One of the key methods we use is called the action-research model. It's a practical, step-by-step approach to solving problems and making meaningful changes. It's collaborative—everyone has a voice—and it's flexible, which allows for learning and adjustment along the way. The process begins by identifying a challenge your team is facing. This could be anything from low morale to confusion about responsibilities. We then gather information to better understand the root of the issue. This might involve conversations, surveys or other tools that allow us to hear from everyone. Next, we work with your team to develop an action plan with clear steps to address the issue, taking into account input from key team members to ensure it's realistic and supported. We work with you on implementation and check in with you on how things are going and what might need tweaking. Finally, we reflect together on the process, celebrating progress, learning from the experience and identifying next steps.

This cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection helps teams grow stronger over time. It's not about quick fixes: it's about building lasting habits that support a healthier, more effective way of working. We know that in today's fast-changing work environment, teams need to be adaptable and resilient. Whether your team is navigating change, facing conflict or simply looking to strengthen collaboration, this approach offers a supportive and structured path forward, which is rooted in open communication, shared responsibility and a mindset of continuous learning and improvement.

Some of your most frequently asked questions about our office

What information we keep

We don't keep formal records, but we do track our activities and the issues you raise with us. We gather non-identifiable, high-level information such as the nature of your inquiries and concerns (for example, workplace conflict, policy questions and psychological health support) and general demographic data (like region, role type or organizational level); we do not track individual names or contact details. You told us that better data might help our department to better recognize where there are systemic issues and barriers. We have been working on updating our database and hope to have a system in place in the coming year that will help us to deliver better services to you and our organization while protecting your privacy. In short, the data we keep isn't just about numbers. It's a tool to help us listen better, respond more efficiently and deliver services that truly reflect the needs of our visitors, including your confidentiality.

And what about the information you send to us?

Sometimes you send documents or detailed emails to help us understand your situation better. In these cases, we will discuss them with you, but we won't keep them. This allows us to ensure confidentiality and means that when we say that we do not have formal records, we mean it.

How we engage with you

The ombud office is here to support a fair, respectful and healthy workplace for everyone. Our role is to listen to you, learn from your experiences and help the department grow stronger by identifying what's working and what needs attention.

We engage with you in many ways. We meet with you individually and in groups when you request it. We also provide training, facilitate discussions and attend mission and branch retreats and other events to connect with you directly, answer questions and raise awareness about our services. About every quarter, the ombud brings together people from across the department: like bargaining agents, employee network representatives and champions and senior leaders—for informal meetings to share ideas, raise concerns and stay informed. These are all opportunities to shape a healthier, more respectful and more effective workplace.

The ombud also meets regularly with senior managers and other key stakeholders to share what we're hearing and to raise concerns. We produce a Quarterly Dashboard, a report for senior managers that reflects some of the information you will find in this report, including the types of support we provide, the main issues you raise and any patterns we're seeing across the department.

This year, we have looked for opportunities for deeper engagement, understanding and learning. We worked with the Indigenous Peoples' Network and the Transformation Team's Reconciliation Unit to host 2 sharing circles with Indigenous employees at GAC. These were rich and powerful experiences supported and guided by an Indigenous Elder.

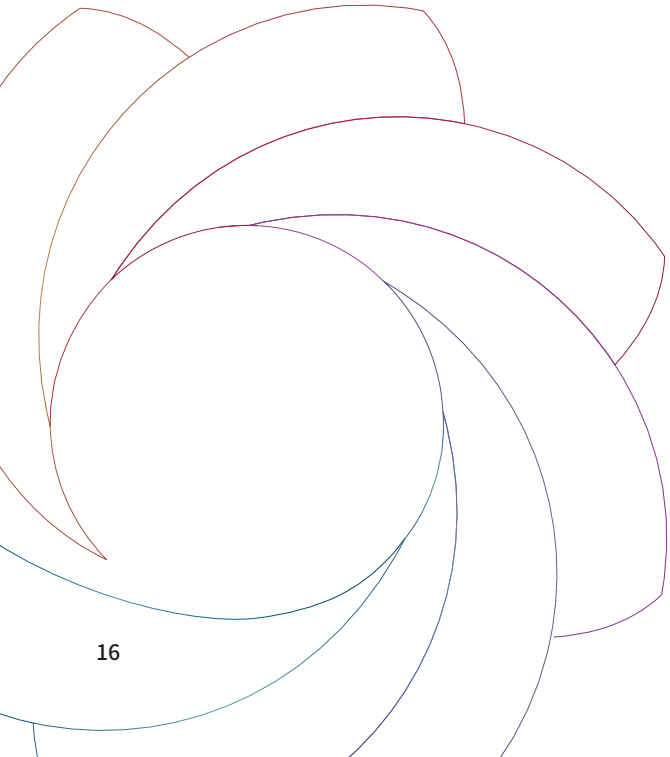
How we address systemic issues

Beyond individual concerns, the ombud office plays a key role in helping to identify and address systemic issues, meaning issues that affect more than just 1 person or could be rooted in policies, procedures or workplace culture. We shine a light on systemic issues, including via this report, to help create a workplace that's fairer and more accountable, caring and inclusive. The ombud also regularly engages with senior management, offering insights and ideas and fostering a feedback loop that maintains your anonymity. These conversations can help ensure that issues are addressed early. And if the issues worsen, we can continue to shine a light on them. In addition, Ayesha Rekhi, the ombud, is an ex officio member of several governance committees, which helps us stay informed about upcoming changes and decisions and allows her to share perspectives from the office too.

Values and ethics, advice and investigation functions

To respect our guiding principles, the ombud office is no longer responsible for the formal functions of values and ethics advice or for any investigations. Those are now addressed by the following divisions:

- Ethical Conduct and Harassment Prevention Division: Values and ethics advice (valuesandethics-valeursetethique@international.gc.ca) and prevention of harassment and violence (HarassmentViolence-Harcelementviolence@international.gc.ca)
- Labour Relations Division: Investigations into breach of the Code of values and ethics allegations, or any other allegations of potential misconduct are initiated via reporting to your management team which will act in consultation with the Labour Relations Centre of Expertise
- Special Investigations and Internal Disclosure: Investigations under the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act* (disclosure-wrongdoing.divulgation-acte-reprehensible@international.gc.ca) and special investigations of financial fraud, malfeasance and losses of money and/or property to the Crown (SpecialInvestigations@international.gc.ca)



Mission inspections: A note from Ayesha as inspector general

I wear 2 hats at GAC: I am GAC's ombud and I am also GAC's inspector general. This report is an ombud report and does not cover mission inspections, but I wanted to address how it works to wear those 2 hats since I often get asked that question. Both roles are very much part of a continuum of support for excellence, effectiveness and well-being at GAC. The roles are distinct but complementary and rooted in a commitment to confidentiality. When I am leading a mission inspection, I set aside ombud-related office hours, but I am clear that those meetings are not part of the mission inspection unless you give your permission.

Inspections are processes that are more formal and focus on leadership, management excellence, management effectiveness and well-being. Mission inspections, which involve virtual, hybrid and onsite interviews, are objective assessments that involve triangulating information from different sources. E-Inspections, which are an annual deep dive survey of missions, are subjective and based on employee perspectives. Whether it be a mission inspection or e-Inspection, we look at what is working well at the mission as well as things that require some attention. Inspections give constructive "snapshot in time" feedback to managers so that our missions and the people who work there can do their best work. While I expect heads of mission to respect privacy and confidentiality, I also expect them to share inspection results with their teams in the interest of transparency and because everyone has a role to play in bringing about meaningful change in the way we work together at our missions. Inspection results are also shared with management at mission and Headquarters (HQ), including deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers.

In fall 2025, our inspections team will take on the additional responsibility for the GAC Check-In survey. The GAC Check-In survey fits well with our mandate to provide safe and confidential channels for reporting to GAC and GAC managers on how things are going.

Finally, I also get asked what happens when you share a serious concern during an inspection. If you are being interviewed by an inspector, they might suggest that you speak to the ombud office for information or support, or they might ask for permission to talk about the situation with others in different parts of the department. If you share concerns through an e-Inspection, it is important to note that we aren't able to follow up with you directly because all comments are anonymous.

confidentiality

Our reach

Each year, the ombud office connects with thousands of you across GAC—in Canada and at missions abroad, individually and in groups. These connections reflect not only the breadth of our services, but also the trust you place in us when navigating challenges, seeking support or simply needing a space to be heard.

This year, we supported 2,235 cases, delivered 5,580 activities and connected with over 10,700 of you. These numbers tell a story of continued engagement and growing awareness of the services we offer. They also reflect GAC's evolving needs, which are shaped by internal and external changes and a shared desire for healthier and more respectful workplaces.

As we enter our third year of operations, we have been reflecting on how we've grown—not just in numbers, but in the depth and diversity of the support we provide.

In our first year, we focused on building awareness, establishing trust and laying the foundation for our services. In our second year, we've seen a notable increase in the number of individuals reaching out, a broader range of services accessed and a more even distribution of visitors across different staff groups. For example, while rotational employees remained our largest visitor group, we saw a significant rise in engagement from LES and a more balanced representation from traditional employees and other groups. This shift suggests that our services are becoming more inclusive and better known across the department.

We also noticed a meaningful shift in the types of support you sought. Preventive services like conflict coaching and management consultations grew in popularity, indicating a proactive approach to well-being and team effectiveness. At the same time, the number of activities and sessions delivered increased, showing that you are not only reaching out, but you're also returning, engaging more deeply and trusting us to assist you in solving complex problems. We've also seen a growing need for a sounding board for those moments when you simply want to share what's going on with you, your team or your work without necessarily seeking a solution or concrete action. These conversations matter deeply. They reflect a desire to be heard, process experiences and feel less alone in navigating the complexities of the workplace.

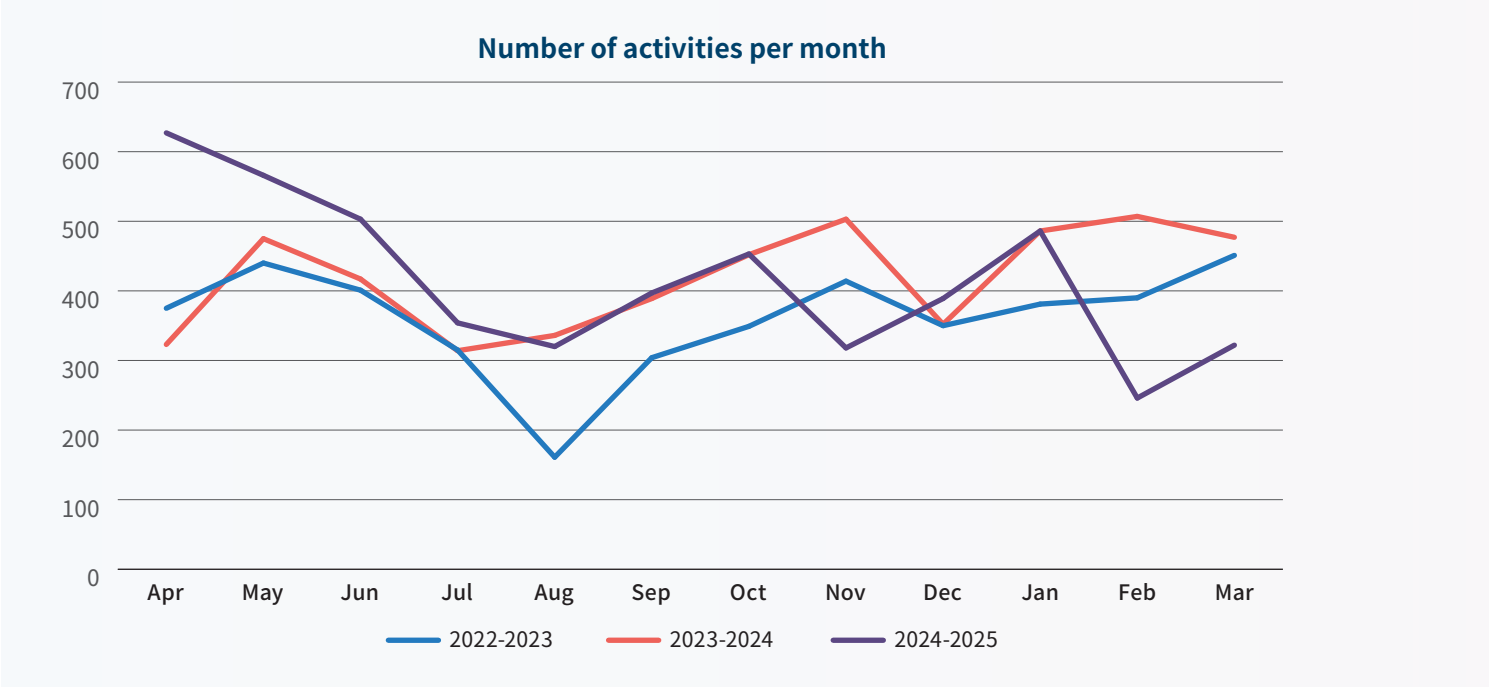
2,235
Total number of cases

10,731
Total number of people we interacted with

5,580
Total number of activities

Demand for our services

Over the past year, our office has recorded a steady volume of activities. By charting the number of activities held each month, the graph below offers a clear view of activity trends, seasonal fluctuations and periods of increased demand. Quieter periods in July and August and late December align with typical leave periods. Tracking activity volume helps us plan and allocate resources as it allows us to anticipate peak demand, adjust scheduling and ensure timely support throughout the year.



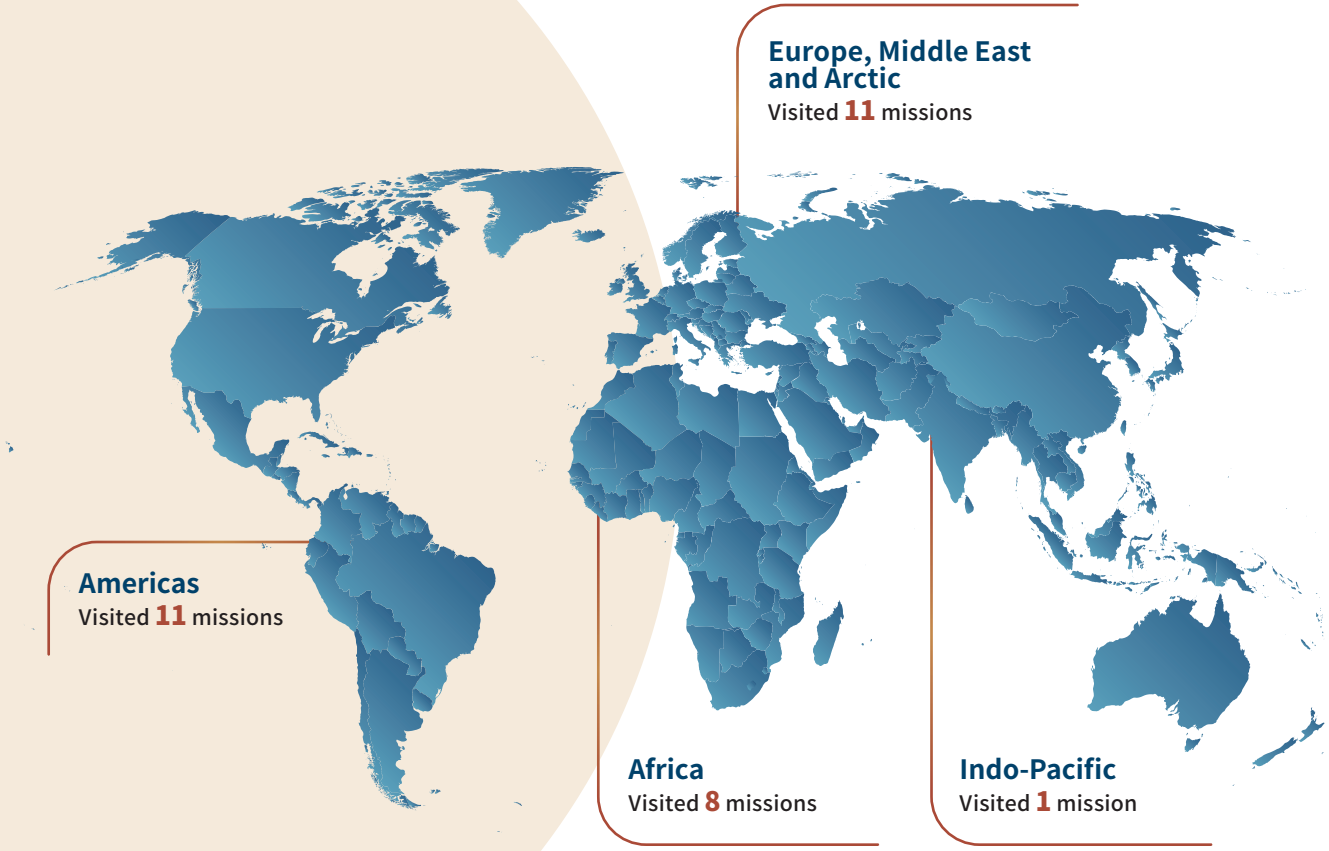
Some terminology

In this report you will see references to “cases” and “activities.” This is how we define these terms. When you reach out to our office on an issue, we count this as a “case”. Each interaction that we have with you on that “case” is counted as an “activity.” So, your situation will have 1 case number, but this case number could have multiple activities. A case is not the same thing as an individual because a case can also have more than 1 visitor, such as in our group sessions or training sessions. Because of confidentiality, we don’t collect names and therefore cannot track whether someone has used our services more than once.

Our visits to missions

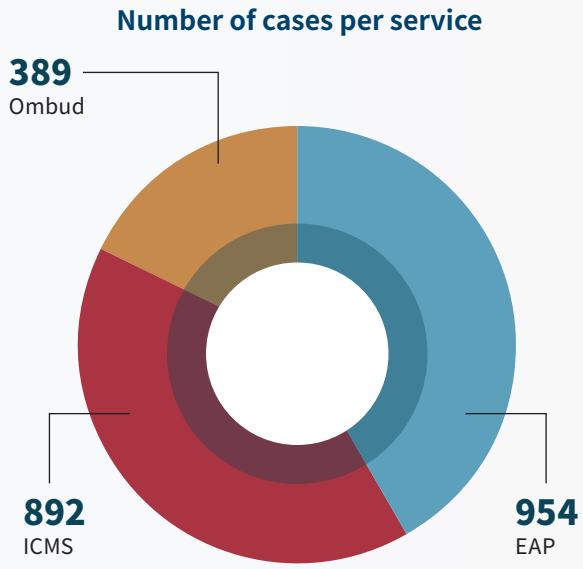
Activities with visitors and teams also take place during visits to our missions. The ombud office only visits a mission when we are invited to do so. During the past fiscal year, our team members made:

- 11 visits to the Americas
- 11 visits to Europe, Middle East and Arctic
- 1 visit to the Indo-Pacific region
- 8 visits to Africa

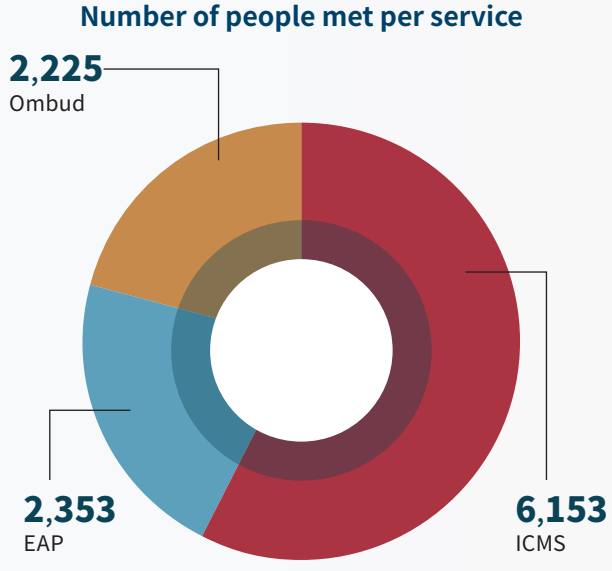


When a visitor contacts our office to raise a specific issue, we record this interaction as a "case." A single case may involve multiple individuals and span several sessions or services, ranging from brief one-hour meetings to extended engagements over days or weeks. Over the past year, our office handled 2,235 cases, distributed across services as follows:

- **EAP**: 954 cases
- **ICMS**: 892 cases
- **Ombud**: 389 cases

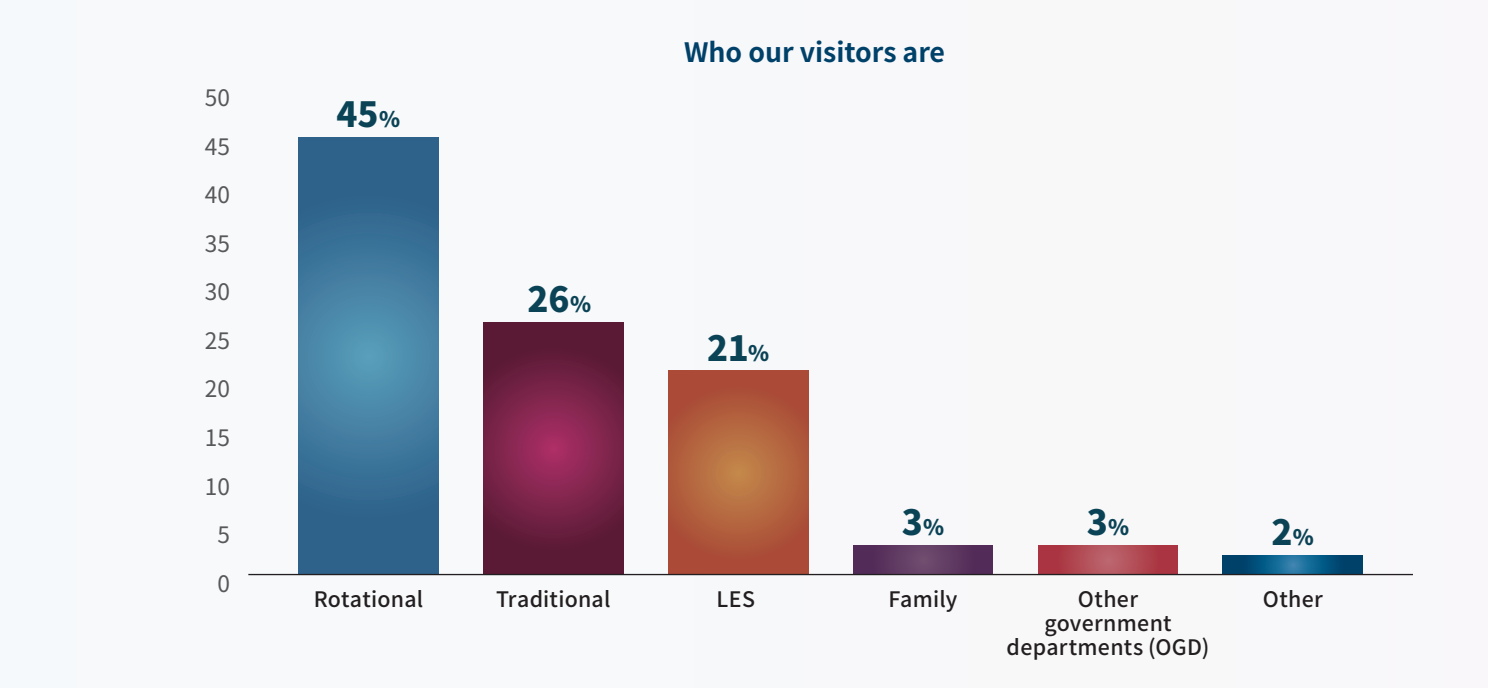


This chart indicates how many people each service met in the year. The variation in the number of individuals met across services reflects the distinct nature of each offering. **EAP**, which primarily consists of individual sessions (excluding training), accounted for **2,353 people**. In contrast, **ICMS** often involves team-based interventions and group facilitation, resulting in a significantly higher reach of **6,153 people**. The **Ombud** and **Deputy Ombud**, while also engaging in individual casework, frequently present the office's work to larger audiences during branch retreats and training activities, contributing to a total of **2,225 people** engaged through their service.



Our visitors: Who they are

The highest percentage of users of our services are rotational employees (45%), followed by traditional employees (26%) and LES (21%). The remaining 3 groups—family members, other government departments and others—each represent a smaller portion of visitors, between 2% and 3%, for a total of 100%.



What our service numbers say about the support we provide to LES

Looking at our engagement numbers for fiscal year 2024 to 2025, we see how LES around the world have made meaningful use of our services. Both the number of cases and the number of individuals supported have increased in our second year of operations. LES now represent 21% of all visitors, up from 13% in the previous reporting period.

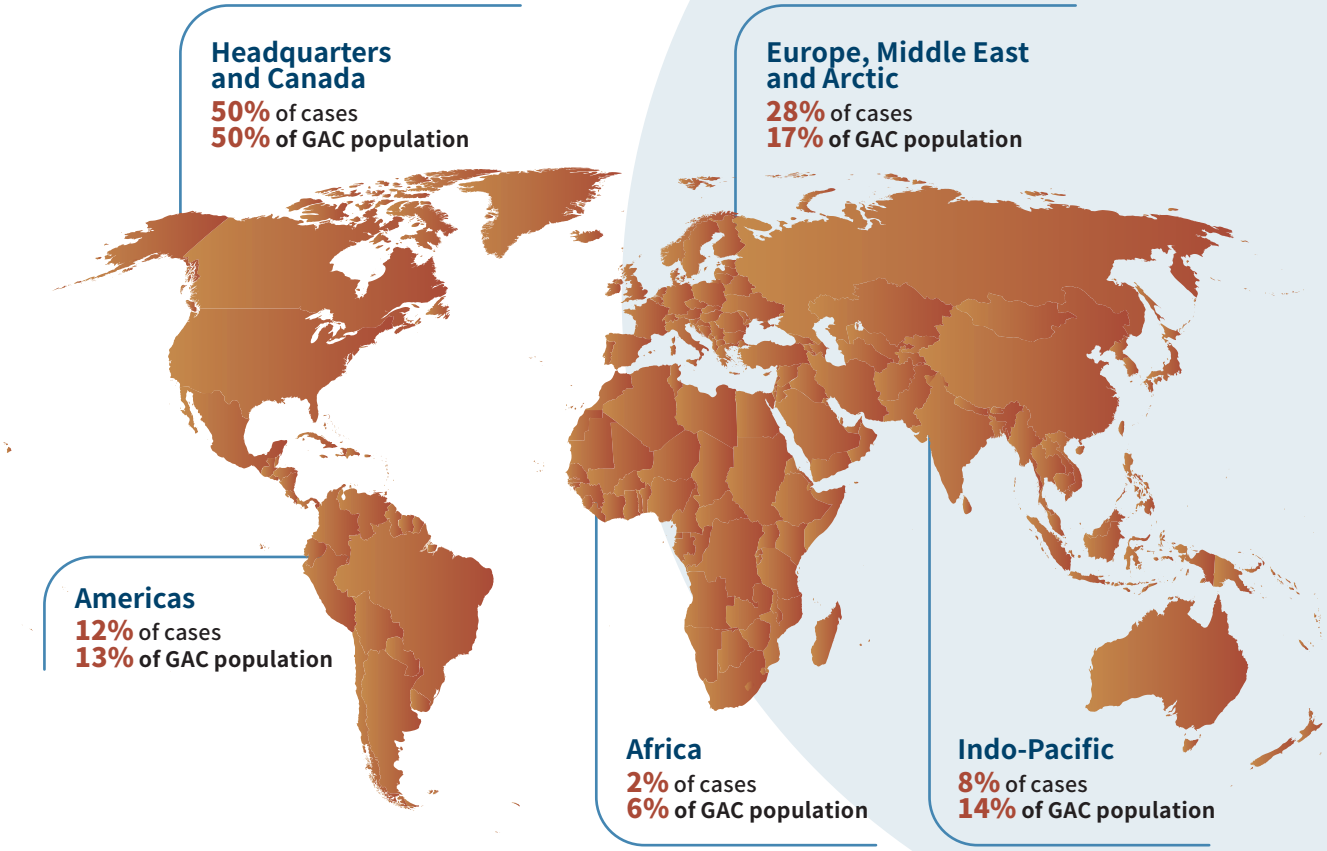
While the specialized services offered by our LES adviser is a key feature of our support model (she met with 183 individuals in the reporting period), LES engage with us via other services too, including conversations with the ombud, the EAP and ICMS. LES can access all of our offerings, and we remain committed to ensuring that our services are accessible, culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique difficulties LES face.

Our visitors: Where they work

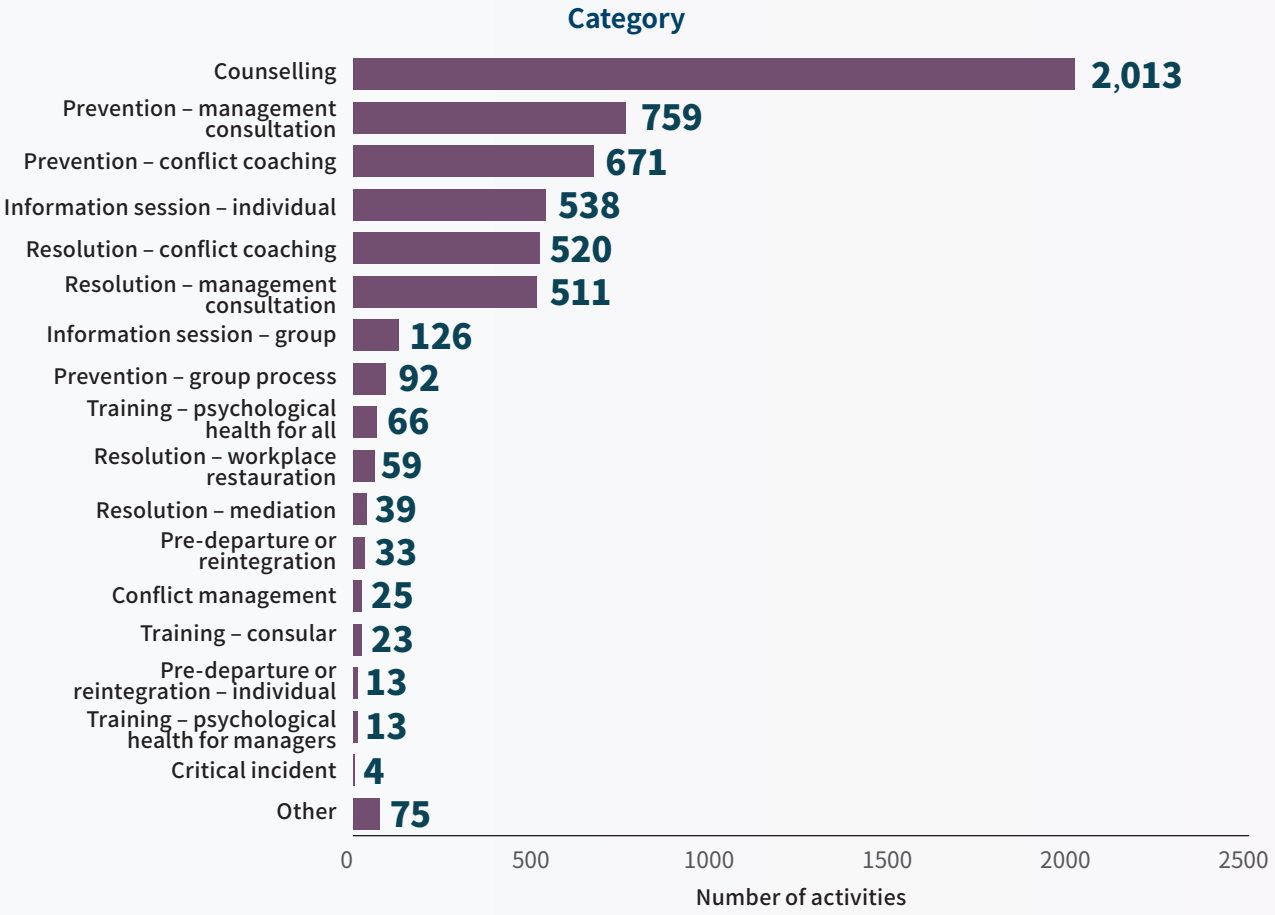
This fiscal year we saw an even split between the percentage of visitors in Canada and the percentage of cases from our missions abroad. These percentages are somewhat aligned with the proportion of staff employed in these regions, based on human resources demographic data on the percentage of GAC employees in each region.

The percentage of cases from HQ and Canada is 50%, and 50% of the GAC population are at HQ and Canada.
The percentage of cases from missions abroad is 50%, and 50% of the GAC population is at a mission abroad.
The percentage breakdown of cases from our missions abroad, as well as their GAC population, is as follows:

- Americas: 12% of cases, 13% of GAC population
- Europe, Middle East and Arctic: 28% of cases, 17% of GAC population
- Africa: 2% of cases, 6% of GAC population
- Indo-Pacific: 8% of cases, 14% of GAC population



Number of activities per category



Your concerns in 2024 to 2025

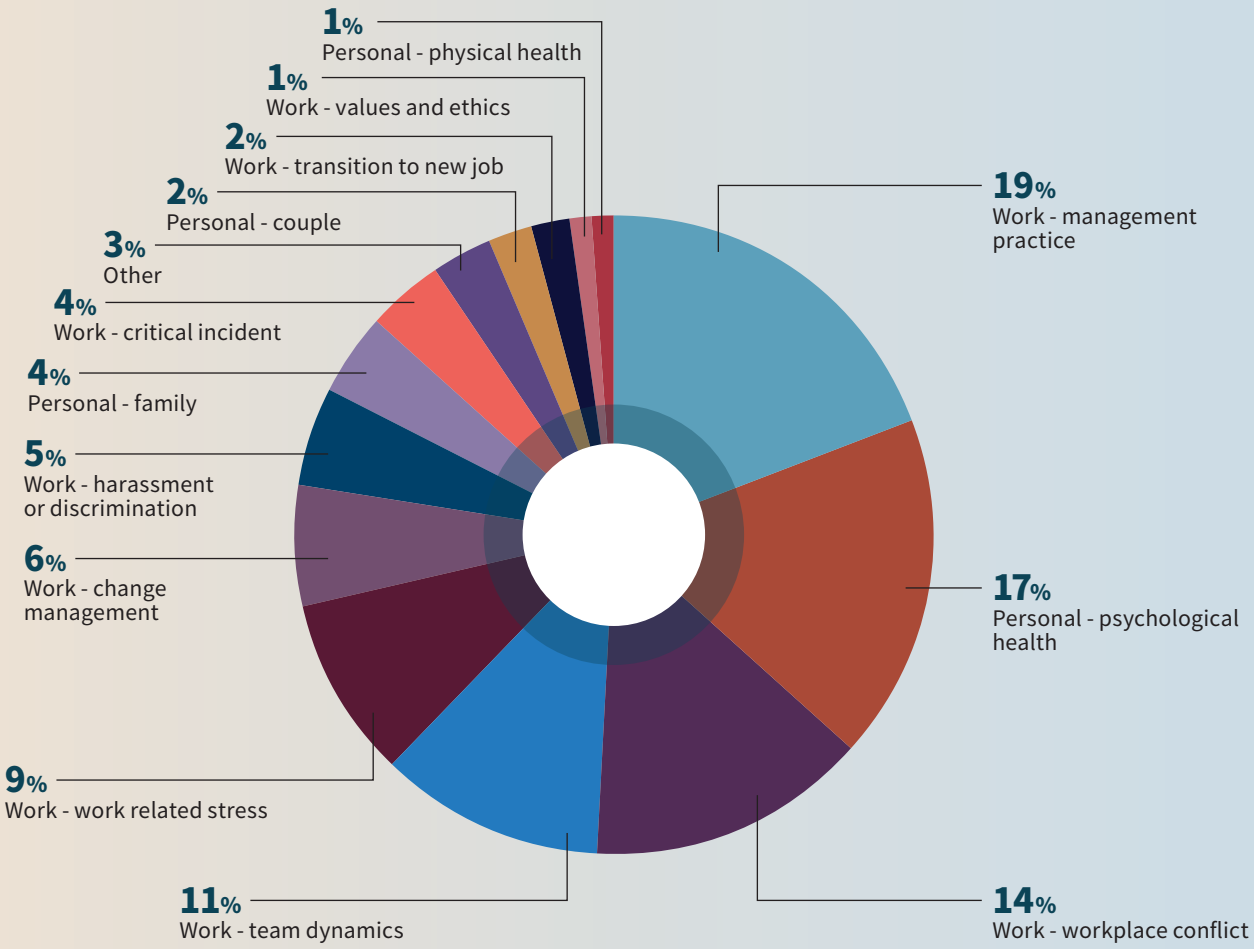
We know that behind every policy, process and organizational change are people—you, and your colleagues, who bring dedication, insight and heart to your work every day. This section reflects what you've shared with us over the past year. It's more than a list of concerns; it's a glimpse into how you've been experiencing the workplace. In this section, we will highlight some of the concerns that you shared with us, as well as some ideas for what we can do together to make things better. We know that some of these may sound familiar and certainly may seem easier said than done. But we hope they give you a starting point for reflection and conversation on steps, big and small, that you and your teams can take.

Below are some of the most common issues you raised with us in the past year.

- **Organizational culture**: You've told us that constant changes at work like restructuring, leadership turnover and return-to-office rules are making it hard to feel grounded, supported and connected to your teams
- **Management and leadership practices**: You've shared that leadership can seem disconnected from your day-to-day concerns and that you want more empathy, clarity and accountability from those guiding your teams
- **Canada and the world**: You've reminded us that global crises and high-pressure assignments are taking a heavy toll and that the physical, mental and emotional demands of your work are very real with long lasting impacts
- **Psychological health**: You've made it clear that psychological health matters and that you need more than just words: you need real and accessible support that helps you feel safe, understood and cared for
- **Team dynamics and workplace conflicts**: You've told us that unresolved conflict, incivility and poor communication are hurting your teams and that you want a workplace where respect and fairness are the norm

We have also continued to hear how **barriers to inclusion at GAC persist**. Many of you have shared that being part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community or that needing accommodations can come with unique obstacles at GAC, especially when your rights, safety or needs aren't respected or fully understood in workplaces in Canada or at missions overseas.

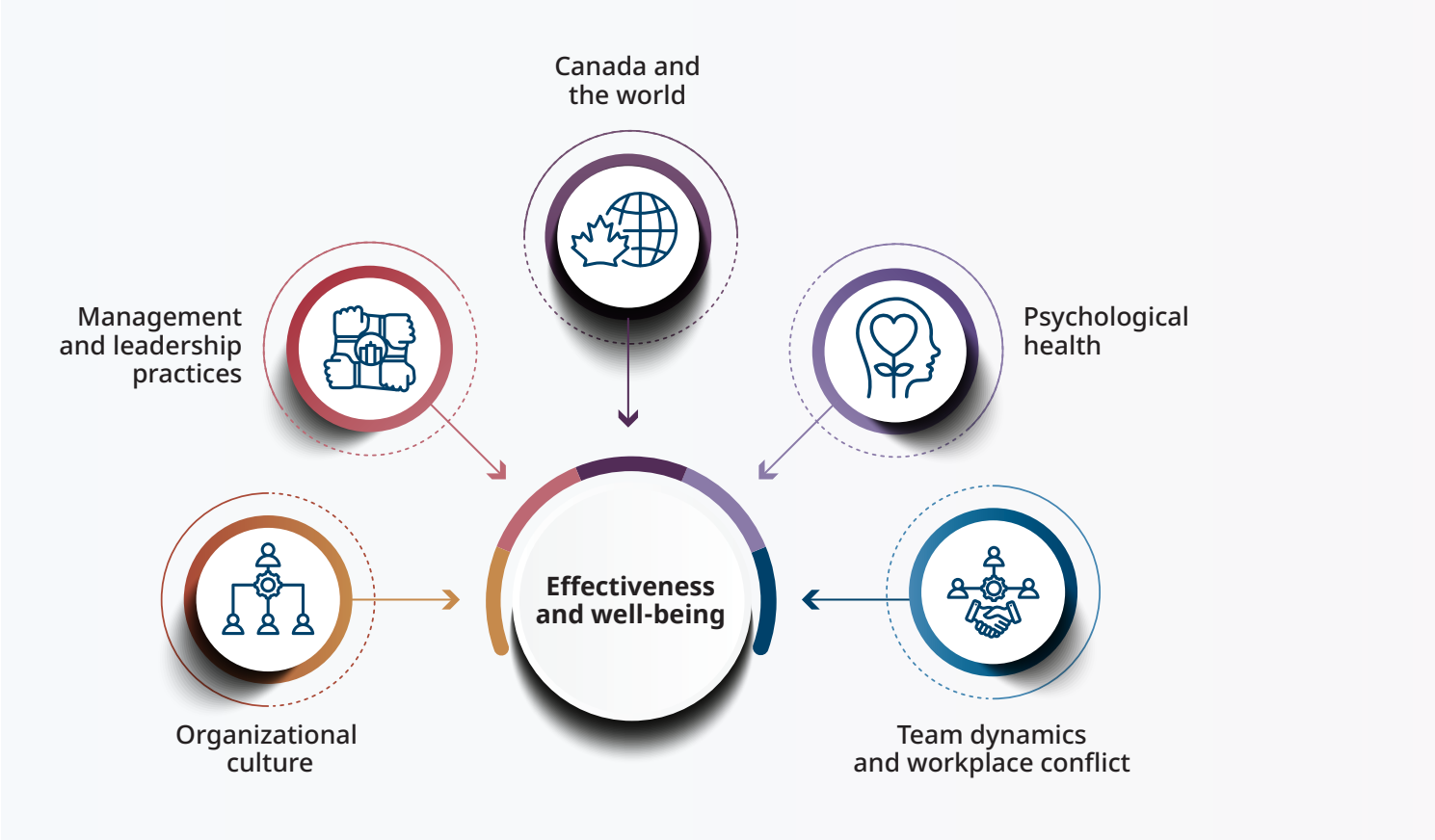
The most common issues raised



What drives effectiveness and well-being: What you told us in 2024 to 2025

The diagram below illustrates how different elements of your work environment influence overall effectiveness and well-being. At the centre of the image is the goal we all share: a workplace where you feel supported, respected and able to do your best work. Surrounding the central goal are 5 key areas that reflect the concerns and experiences you've shared with us in the last year. The areas are a combination of some of the main categories of issues that you've raised, while others are crosscutting issues and represent larger trends that you have consistently raised.

Each arrow points inward because they all contribute to the same outcome: a workplace where people can be effective and well. When areas are out of balance, it puts pressure on your well-being and the effectiveness of the organization.



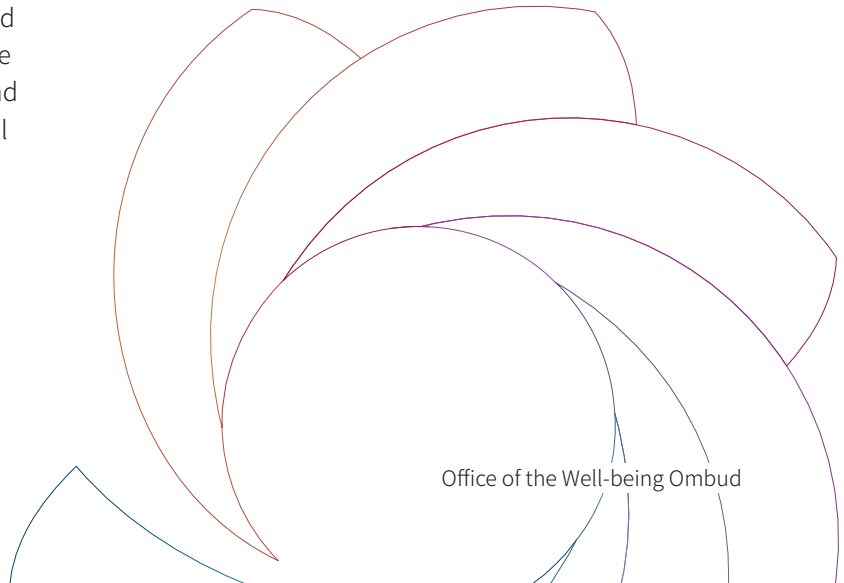
Organizational culture

You have shared that constant changes, including restructuring, leadership turnover, renovations and the return-to-office mandates, have caused stress and confusion, as well as a feeling that the ground is always shifting beneath you. Even those who recognize the need for change still find it hard. You feel increased engagement thanks to GAC's transformation agenda, but some of you feel that you are still not being included or supported. Moreover, you mentioned noticing increased transparency in some communications from senior management, but you also stressed how not being able to participate in decisions that directly affect your work has a negative impact on how you react to change.

What you told us:

- Reorganization disrupted team cohesion and performance for some of you. Leadership transitions during this time of change broke the continuity that teams relied on and made it harder to build trust and maintain momentum amidst uncertainty. You have told us about conflict, especially among staff who feel that they're competing for visibility or recognition in a rapidly changing environment
- Physical changes like renovations have added to feelings of instability. Combined with what you perceive to be inflexible return-to-office policies, these changes can make it harder to collaborate effectively and do your best work. Some of you told us that the return-to-office mandates often feel like they prioritize compliance over your well-being and effectiveness, with little flexibility for your personal circumstances or family needs. You've also told us how telework opportunities have felt inconsistent and that insufficient workstations have made collaboration harder
- Rules and processes in the public service can protect you from arbitrary decisions, help you understand what's expected of you and give you a framework to follow when carrying out complex tasks or assuming complex responsibilities. However, you have told us how these same rules can sometimes feel rigid or overly bureaucratic, slowing down your work or making it harder to adapt to unique situations. You've shared that many of the internal processes at GAC are frustrating because, in your experience, they often seem slow, inconsistent and opaque. This is particularly the case with human resources systems, including those for staffing, accommodations and performance evaluations
- The fear of redundancy or job elimination is another growing concern. Some of you have already experienced this situation first-hand and have said that you feel expendable and often inadequately supported to transition into new roles

When civility and healthy communications aren't prioritized during these types of transitions, the psychological toll on you can be significant. You've asked for a more human-centred approach, one that values clarity, compassion and consistency.



What we can do together

- **Communicate for clarity and with consistency**
  We can all create opportunities for healthy dialogue, including by asking for and sharing timely and transparent updates about changes, roles and expectations so that none of us are left guessing
- **Support people through change**
  We can all prioritize empathy and provide practical tools like coaching, peer support, transition planning and team building to help each of us feel more connected, prepared and included
- **Make processes work for you and your teams**
  We can create a workplace where we each feel valued by listening to your feedback and streamlining internal processes to improve our experiences at work

Management and leadership practices

About 20% of visitors seek ombud support due to management practices that affect well-being, productivity and communication and contribute to conflict in teams. Some of the most common issues raised with us include fear of reprisal, lack of meaningful recognition, heavy workload, unclear roles and responsibilities, unhealthy team dynamics, including LES-CBS dynamics, perceived favouritism and unproductive communications.

In particular, we have heard about the absence of support and recognition, which has led to conflict, stress and strained team dynamics. You've also shared that difficult behaviours seem to go unaddressed eroding trust and that when you are given feedback it isn't always constructive. When roles and responsibilities aren't clear, or when decisions are made without explanation, you have felt demotivated making it harder for you to do your best work.

Challenges for middle management

We are increasingly hearing about the specific challenges faced not only by directors but also by deputy directors and other middle managers and supervisors who feel the push and pull of managing up, managing down and managing change.

We hear about the pressures on middle managers who are implementing directives from senior leadership while also supporting and advocating for their teams. Some of you tell us how your middle managers seem overly focused on delivering on a task at the expense of fostering healthy team dynamics. Middle managers themselves have told us how they have felt squeezed from all sides. They are trying to maintain morale, manage performance and resolve issues while also trying to interpret, explain and implement organizational changes. We hear about similar pressures from executives, many of whom find themselves spending more time performing tasks, sometimes at the expense of supporting their people and sometimes at the expense of their own health and well-being.

What we can do together

- **Build and value self-awareness**

  Effective leaders (whether in a management position or not) understand themselves well. This involves being aware of your strengths and weaknesses, knowing your stressors, managing your emotions and staying focused on goals, including people-oriented ones

- **Create a culture of feedback**

  Feedback, whether giving, receiving, asking for or applying it, is more than a performance tool. It's also a way to build trust and strengthen relationships with employees and colleagues. When done well, feedback helps people grow, improves communication and shapes a healthier, more collaborative workplace culture. When feedback is combined with genuine efforts to recognize and value contributions, it can make a big difference

- **Respond with empathy**

  When employees face stress or other psychological health difficulties, managers need to respond with empathy. Having respectful, supportive and compassionate conversations is key. Training, like mental health first aid or coaching, can help managers feel confident in handling these often-difficult situations with care

Healthy leadership strengthens our workplace culture. Following a discussion with GAC's Management Committee, we prepared a document for managers that highlights the key concerns you have raised about management practices. It also includes recommendations for improvement as part of our ongoing work to support effective management practices across GAC. You can find it in Annex B.

Canada and the world

The world feels particularly heavy right now. Whether you are in Canada or abroad, you are on the front lines of Canada's response to these global crises.

What you told us:

— Many of you told us about the pressures of working on complex and high-profile files. Issues related to the Middle East, Ukraine, the Canada-United States relationship and many other global crises are not only demanding in terms of workload but they can also affect team dynamics and personal well-being. The emotional burden that comes from being on the front lines of these issues is compounded, for some of you, by the physical dangers of working in conflict zones, where threats to personal safety are frequent and unpredictable

— We also heard about how polarization in the world has sometimes spilled over into the workplace. Some of you have told us that it can be difficult to collaborate with colleagues who hold different perspectives from your own or when you or your worldview do not feel respected by others

— You also told us about the long hours many of you are putting in—including evenings and weekends—to respond to global crises. For some, it's been months since you've had a weekend that has truly felt restful. While your dedication and commitment are clear when we speak to you, it is also clear that this pace of work takes a toll on your health, morale and resilience

— Some of you spoke about being exposed to disturbing news or pictures in your work. While we all have inherent resilience, exposure to disturbing material over a long period of time or repeatedly can significantly affect your psychological health

If your role involves helping people in crisis such as providing consular services and supporting emergency responses, your work can involve specific psychological risks. Over time, this can begin to affect how you feel, think and function. You might notice signs like anxiety, low mood, emotional numbness or even symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress. These feelings can make it harder to stay focused at work or feel present in your personal life. It's important to understand that these reactions are a normal and natural response to the emotional demands of your work. A heavy workload, limited time for recovery and a lack of self-care can all make it harder to cope.

What we can do together

- **Training can help**

  Training for managers and employees that focuses on building resilience and recognizing different responses to potentially traumatic events, both in ourselves and others, can help us take care of one another

- **Create a supportive work culture**

  Fostering healthy communication and giving people opportunities to feel safe to talk about their challenges and needs and ask for help when they need it—with their work and their health—can build resilience

- **Self-care**

  We hear and talk a lot about self-care but often it is easier said than done. Making time for self-care is critical to protecting your health and overall well-being

High-risk environment prevention matters

Working and living abroad in high-risk environments can be both rewarding and challenging. Those of you on such postings have told us about the unique pressures you face, such as exposure to conflict, cultural differences and isolation, that can affect your well-being. If you're heading into a high-stress assignment, your psychological health needs to be a top priority—for you, your colleagues and our organization.

Our team offers comprehensive psychological training before, during and after your assignment. This training helps you understand what to expect and gives you some tools to manage stress, regulate emotions and know when and how to seek help. By preparing you for the realities of high-risk environments, we aim to reduce the chances of psychological health issues, as well as help you feel more confident and supported throughout your posting so that you can ask for help when you need it. Unfortunately, we meet some of you only after you've experienced psychological harm, but please know that we are still here to help.

LES have told our team members—on the phone and in person—about their experiences living day in, day out, without relief, in conflict areas or in other challenging circumstances.

For CBS and LES facing these particular difficulties, we want you to know you're not alone, and help is always available.

Psychological health

Stress is a natural part of life and can be especially high in a demanding workplace. But when stress becomes constant or overwhelming, it can take a toll on your health.

What you told us:

- Some of you have shared that high stress levels have led to anxiety, burnout or depression
- At the same time, we continue to hear how the stigma surrounding psychological health remains a barrier to getting help. Many of you worry about being judged or misunderstood. You've expressed fear that being honest about your psychological health could lead to being deemed unfit for an assignment or passed over for certain opportunities
- You have also shared how cultural norms can make it difficult for you to speak openly, seek help or even access stress leave because you don't meet the requirements for a medical note
- And we have heard how in some situations psychological health struggles are mistaken for performance issues

All of this can affect your energy, confidence and ability to take on new challenges, things that are important in a workplace like ours, where things are always evolving.

When you're experiencing chronic high-level stress, you might notice that you:

- feel more irritable or emotional
- have trouble focusing or remembering things
- make more mistakes than usual
- feel disconnected from your team
- struggle to meet deadlines

These are not signs of weakness, they're signs that you might need support.

What we can do together

- **Talk openly about psychological health**

  Together we can keep building a culture where it's safe to speak up, where we feel comfortable sharing our concerns and where we can ask for help, confident that support is available

- **Offer psychological health training**

  Training can help raise awareness of psychological health issues, help each of us manage stress, build resilience and equip us with the tools to recognize when someone needs help. Training can also help reduce stigma and encourage empathy

- **Foster a supportive environment**

  Respect, compassion and teamwork are at the heart of a healthy workplace and effective teams. Practical measures like flexible work options, regular breaks and time to recharge can help make everyone feel included and supported and able to contribute

Team effectiveness

Your role in protecting your psychological health

Each of us plays an important role in taking care of our own well-being. Protecting your psychological health is not just nice to do, it is essential.

- **Practice self-care**: Eat well, stay active, get enough sleep and make time for activities that help you relax
- **Build a support network**: Stay connected with colleagues, join local support groups and keep in touch with friends and family back home
- **Know the signs**: Be aware of symptoms like sadness, hopelessness, changes in sleep or appetite and trouble concentrating; these could be signs of psychological distress

If you notice these signs in yourself, don't wait—reach out to the EAP at ombud@international.gc.ca or to another trusted resource. Getting support early can make a big difference.

In our experience, the lack of formality in our office's work is precisely why so many of you reach out to us. Our influence comes from being independent, informal and impartial—not from the formal authority to launch an investigation or decide on disciplinary action.

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How personal life and work life affect each other

Studies in psychology have shown that our personal lives and work lives are closely connected. What happens at home can affect how you feel and perform at work, and work pressures can impact your mood and personal relationships. When things are going well in both areas, you tend to feel more balanced and psychologically healthy. But when one side becomes too stressful, it can spill over and make the other side harder to manage.

Researchers have found that people do better at work when they feel that their jobs have meaning, when they feel safe to speak up and when they have the emotional energy to focus. These things are influenced not just by the workplace, but also by what's happening in your personal life. For example, if you are dealing with stress at home, you might find it harder to concentrate or stay motivated at work. On the other hand, if work is overwhelming or the workplace is unhealthy, it can lead to burnout and affect how you interact with family and friends.

Our personal and work lives are deeply connected. Taking care of yourself in one area can help you support the other.

Setting effective boundaries between personal and professional life may not be easy, but in the long run, it is essential to maintaining well-being and preventing burnout. Below are some strategies that can help.

- **Create physical and digital separation**

  If you work from home, designate a specific area as a workspace to physically separate your work from your personal life. If you are working on critical files, create rotations with team members that allow you to take turns being on call, allowing you to turn off work notifications outside of work hours for defined periods of time

- **Practice mental transitions**

  Use rituals to shift gears between work and home life (for example, taking a short walk, journaling or changing clothes). Take a moment to reflect on your day to mentally "shut down" work before engaging in personal activities

- **Prioritize self-care**

  Schedule time for rest, hobbies and social activities and treat this time as non-negotiable. Engage in regular physical activity, mindfulness or other stress-reducing practices. Be honest about your limits with both colleagues and family members. Use "I" statements to express your needs without blame (for example, "I need time to recharge after work")

Team dynamics and workplace conflicts

Working in a team means bringing together different personalities, communication styles, work habits and goals. There is a richness in this diversity that drives learning and innovation, but we have also been told about tension or misunderstandings.

What you told us:

— We have heard about personality differences as a common source of conflict and everyday tension. You might enjoy open, energetic discussions, while a teammate prefers quiet reflection. Perhaps you prefer to be direct, while someone else tends to be more reserved and yet another person favours longer explanations and discussions. Without understanding each other's styles, it's easy to misinterpret behaviour or feel frustrated, especially during busy or stressful times

— You've told us how sometimes your goals or priorities do not align with those of your teammates. For example, you might want to finish a project quickly, while someone else is focused on perfecting every detail. Without a shared understanding of the goal and the approach, these differences can create friction

— We've also heard from many of you that external pressures like tight deadlines, organizational changes or high-stakes projects can add to your stress and make it harder to stay connected and collaborative. When things feel uncertain or rushed, even small issues can feel bigger than they are

— We've heard concerns about incivility, unresolved conflict and toxic team dynamics. These situations have left some of you feeling anxious, isolated or unsafe. Some of you have reported that some harassment complaints, either between colleagues or involving managers, remain unaddressed or feel unresolved

— You've also described some managers as dismissive or combative, and shared that in some cases, bullying behaviours have gone unchecked. These are serious concerns, and they affect everyone's ability to do their best work. Conflict is a part of working together, but it should not create harm

What we can do together

- **Create space for open and honest conversations**

  Invest in building a team culture where everyone feels safe to speak up and everyone takes time to listen. When team members get to know each other and understand each other's strengths and experiences, it helps the team feel more cohesive and reduces some of the inferences and assumptions we make about each other that can lead to conflict

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities**

  Together, we can help define clear expectations, so everyone understands their role and how we each contribute to our team's success

- **Strengthen leadership support**

  Ask for help when you need it. If you're a manager, we can work with you to address team challenges, improve communication, and support your leadership goals

Spotlight on 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences at Global Affairs Canada

The acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ represents a diverse community that includes Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual people, as well as many other gender identities with which people may identify.

What is Two-Spirit?

In Canada, the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ begins with "2S" to recognize Two-Spirit people, Indigenous individuals who fulfill unique cultural and spiritual roles that go beyond Western ideas of gender and sexuality. Placing "2S" first is, at its heart, about recognition, respect and reconciliation.

You have told us about the specific challenges that you, as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, face, especially during a time when your rights have been rolled back in many parts of the world. You have shared with us painful experiences of how your very existence has been questioned.

You have also shared the challenges that persist in your personal lives and at work. Discrimination, harassment and exclusion continue to affect your psychological health, job satisfaction and overall well-being.

What you told us:

- Discrimination doesn't always look the same. Sometimes it's being passed over for a promotion or an assignment because of your sexual orientation or gender identity. Sometimes it's transphobic comments and jokes at your expense or repeated misgendering. You have shared how these experiences have led to stress, anxiety and feelings of isolation. You have also told us how they can make it harder to feel safe, valued and respected in your workplace
- You are affected by others' discomfort. When some people experience discomfort around members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, it can lead to a subtle form of exclusion. Being left out—of social events, team discussions or decision making—can be deeply hurtful. It sends a message that some people don't belong. It limits not only individual opportunities for growth and connection but also for growth and innovation in teams. Conversely, healthy and empathic curiosity builds bridges and allows learning
- A lack of understanding from colleagues or supervisors makes it even harder to navigate these challenges. Without tangible support or inclusive policies, it can feel like you're facing everything alone. And for many of you, everyday things like using the right restroom, having your pronouns respected or accessing affirming health care are ongoing challenges with lasting impacts on your physical and psychological health
- Some of you face difficult decisions when considering international assignments with your spouse and partner, balancing your career and your family members' safety, employment opportunities and well-being. At the same time, you've told us that in many of our missions around the world, you have managers and colleagues who support you and have access to spaces where you can feel safe to speak openly
- And for those raising 2SLGBTQIA+ children, we've heard your concerns about protecting their dignity and shielding them from bullying or discrimination. Their future matters deeply to you—and to us

How we can do better together

- **Foster a safe and inclusive environment**

  We each have a role to play in ensuring a safe team environment for our colleagues, which means everyone should feel respected and valued, no matter their identity. It also means zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment

- **Provide meaningful support**

  This includes access to 2SLGBTQIA+-affirming psychological health services, inclusive benefits and employee resource groups that reflect your experiences and support your rights and needs

- **Promote education and awareness**

  Through training, workshops and events, we can help build understanding and empathy across our teams and reduce the stigma that still exists

Spotlight on the duty to accommodate at Global Affairs Canada

The duty to accommodate is one way to ensure that you are treated with dignity and respect and that you can bring your best to your work. At the ombud office, we have heard how policies and guidelines are sometimes applied without care or real understanding, creating real challenges for you and your teams.

GAC's obligation to provide accommodations for employees is based on the prohibited grounds of discrimination listed in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. The 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* are: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

What you told us:

- You have described insufficient knowledge and discomfort at GAC that persists around disabilities that have affected whether you seek accommodations and, when you do, how those accommodations are handled. While medical accommodations are available, they're not one-size-fits-all. Each situation is unique and needs thoughtful attention. Disabilities and functional limitations can be pre-existing or appear suddenly or gradually due to illness, injury or chronic conditions. They are part of the human experience
- We have heard from neurodivergent employees who feel misunderstood and from managers who feel unsure about how to support members of their teams. Human brains work in many different ways.

Neurodiversity is human and it is common. Around 10 to 15% of people have cognitive differences that are simply part of who they are. And yet acknowledging and supporting neurodiversity in the workplace also makes many of us uncomfortable. We need to close this gap through compassion and learning

— Accommodations also include family status. We have heard from some of you that not every manager understands the duty to accommodate rights and obligations for employees who, for example, are responsible for taking care of young children or elderly parents

Many of you have said that the requirements to prove your needs for these and other accommodations sometimes feel like an insurmountable systemic barrier. No matter the cause, when you've reached out to us about accommodations, you've asked for support that respects your dignity. Understanding diverse needs and investing in accommodations is about care and compliance and allows GAC to retain a talented and dedicated workforce.

How we can do better together

- **Simplify and personalize processes**

  Make accommodation procedures more accessible and tailored to individual needs

- **Adapt and invest**

  Stay responsive to evolving needs and allocate resources to support inclusive practices and accommodations

- **Educate continuously**

  Provide training on human rights, neurodiversity and the duty to accommodate to managers, and raise awareness among employees of the processes for accessing accommodations

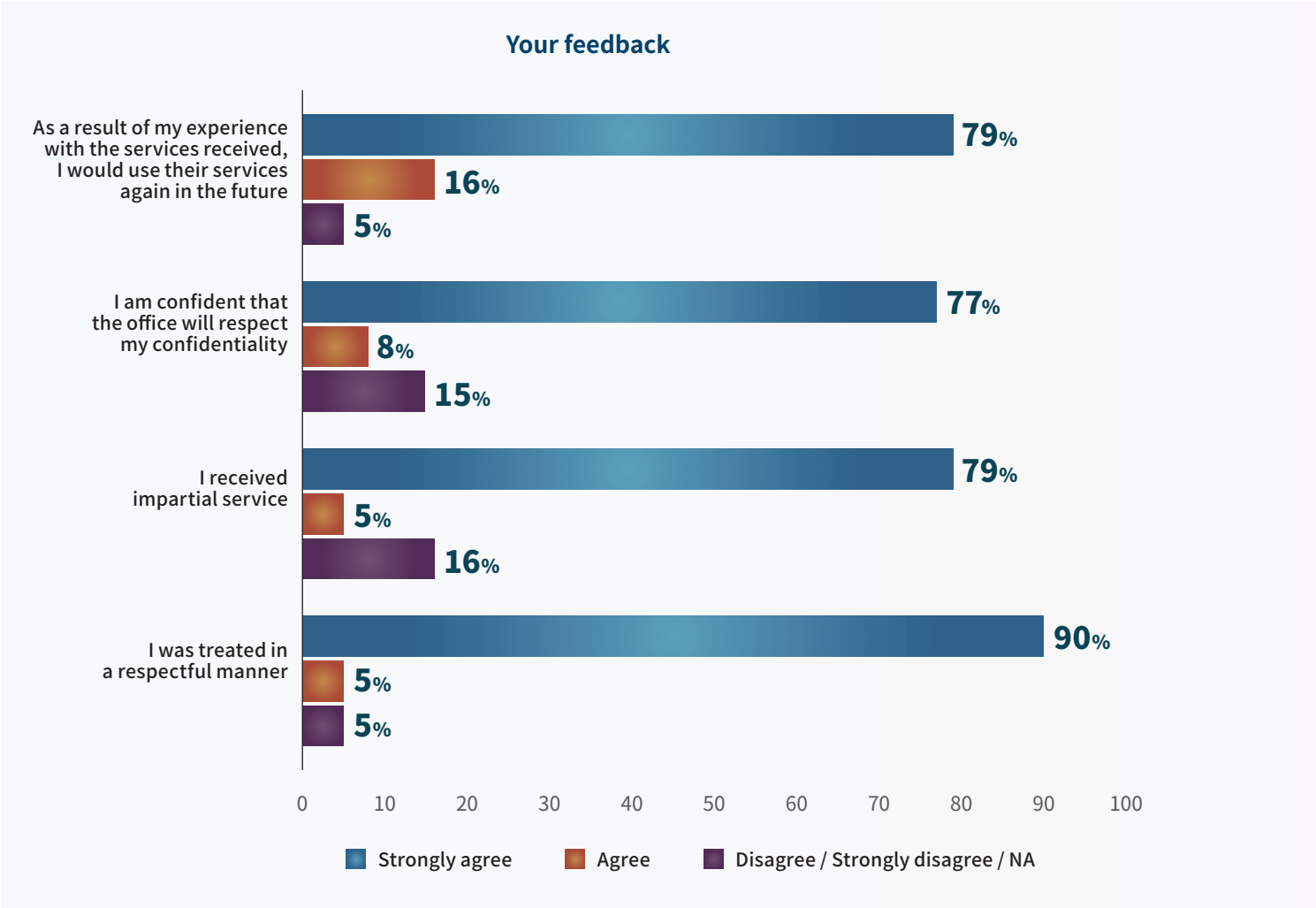
Strengthening team effectiveness means creating an environment where everyone can thrive and contribute, diverse perspectives are welcomed, accommodations are met with empathy and psychological safety is a priority.

Improving how the ombud office works

We want to hear from you...but this time about your experience with our services

If you've used our services in the past few months, you may have received an invitation to fill out a feedback survey. Why are we asking for your feedback? Ultimately, we want to hear how we can better support you. We want to make services easier to access, answers faster to find and policies easier to understand. We want you to feel that when you reach out, you're met with care, competence and respect.

To those who filled out the visitor feedback survey, thank you. We know your time is valuable, and we appreciate the thought and honesty you put into your responses. You've expressed our services have had a meaningful impact on you, made you feel understood and supported and helped you organize your thoughts. Below is a chart with your responses to some of the questions from January 1, 2025, to March 31, 2025.



Looking ahead

On our radar

This is by no means an exhaustive list of what is on our radar but rather reflects some of the ongoing conversations with you from fiscal years 2024 to 2025 to 2025 to 2026.

- Transition and uncertainty at home and abroad related to the Comprehensive Expenditure Review (CER)
- Impacts of geopolitical shifts and global crises
- Indigenous employee experiences and reconciliation
- Experiences of people with disabilities
- GAC's follow up to the Black Executive Community in the Federal Public Service
- Experiences of Canadian LES
- Ongoing impacts of the MSH International health care plan on CBS abroad
- Official languages
- GAC Check-In Results

As we close this year's report and look ahead, we want to take a moment to reflect with honesty and, ultimately, with hope.

Over the past year, many of you have reached out to us in moments of uncertainty, frustration or transition. You've shared your stories, your questions and your hopes for a healthier and more respectful workplace. We've heard from you about the weight of constant change and about how the pace of transformation, the complexity of internal systems and now the uncertainty about the consequences of the CER have affected your teams and well-being.

In response, we continue to offer what we do best: a safe, confidential and impartial space to think things through. Whether you come to us for a sounding board, for support navigating conflict or improving team effectiveness or simply to be heard, we are here for you. And we will continue to be here.

We will continue to provide direct support through our core services, including ombud services, counselling and informal conflict management. These are the day-to-day conversations that help people feel seen, supported and empowered to take the next step. And at the strategic level, we will continue to work to strengthen the culture of our organization, including by offering insight to leadership and identifying systemic issues in the hopes that we can help shape processes to make them more inclusive, more human and, ultimately, more effective as we all continue to strive for excellence in service to Canada and Canadians.

At the core of our work is the principle that when people are stressed, systems are strained, communication breaks down or leadership feels disconnected, the pressure on teams can be immense. That's why we've focused a large part of our work on helping teams build trust, clarify roles and strengthen collaboration. Whether through coaching, facilitated dialogue or tailored group processes, we support teams in creating environments where people feel safe, respected and able to do their best work—together.

As we look ahead, we know that the CER will involve difficult decisions causing uncertainty, concern and difficult transitions for many of you. Change is unsettling, especially when it involves questions about roles, resources or the future. We are here to listen to you, support you and help you navigate this moment with care and dignity so that together, we can face the changes to come with both resilience and compassion.

In these moments, we need to remember that respect and equity are not luxuries; they are our shared responsibility. Times of change can disproportionately affect those who are already more vulnerable. We all need to pause, reflect and ask ourselves:

- Who might be unintentionally harmed by this choice?
- Whose voice is missing from this conversation?
- How can I lead with compassion, even in making and communicating difficult decisions?

In his first message, the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet reminded us that the world is moving fast and that windows of opportunity don't wait for perfect. Perfection has its place, but when it becomes a barrier to progress or well-being, it can erode trust, delay impact and increase stress within teams and across our organization. Responsiveness, on the other hand, invites us to listen actively, adapt thoughtfully and act with care. Responsiveness is not the opposite of excellence—it is how we stay connected to purpose, to each other and to the people we serve.

Even amid this pace of change, together we can build a workplace where respect, clarity and psychological safety are not just ideals but also everyday realities. Thank you for your trust. Thank you for your courage.

Meet our team

Ayesha Rekhi
Well-being Ombud and
Inspector General

Daniel Campeau

Deputy Ombud

Tejumo Ogouma
Deputy Director,
Informal Conflict Management

Ben Gray
Informal Conflict
Management Practitioner

Gayle Desmeules
Informal Conflict
Management Practitioner

Mathieu ChampRoux
Informal Conflict
Management Practitioner

Melanie Brousseau
Informal Conflict
Management Practitioner

Noufoh Nadjombe
Informal Conflict
Management Practitioner

Tanya Prévost
Informal Conflict
Management Practitioner

Joanna Ignaszewska
Acting Deputy Director,
Employee Assistance Program

Ariana Tamas
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Brigitte Cadieux
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Jean-Pierre Malela Kinzonzi
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Kaitlin Edmonds
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Lindsay Godbout
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Lyne Bouffard
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Martine Parent
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Philippe Morin
Employee Assistance
Program Counsellor

Irene Abou Hamad
Adviser (LES)

Pauline Seto
Analyst

Caroline Audet
Senior Adviser

Birgit Copeland
Executive Assistant

Fatimazahra Nadi
Acting Executive Assistant

Claude Lanthier
Administrative Assistant

Annexes

The annexes that follow offer practical tools, reference tables and guidance to help you better understand the resources, support services and recourse mechanisms available to you at GAC. Whether you are navigating a workplace concern, seeking clarity on formal or informal processes, or simply looking for ways to support your team more effectively, these annexes are designed to help. They reflect our commitment to transparency, accessibility and care, and aim to make complex systems easier to understand and use.

The Office of the Well-Being Ombud and Inspector General (ZID) is always available to help you navigate the system and explore your options in a confidential manner.

Annex A

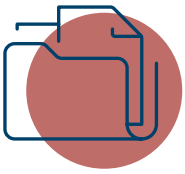
Inquiry handling process: Overview

1

Receiving the request

Your message arrives in the ombud@international.gc.ca email inbox, where it's carefully reviewed by the intake officer

2



Sorting the inquiry by service

Your request is thoughtfully categorized to ensure it reaches the right support stream. It may fall into one of the following areas:

- ombud or deputy ombud
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Informal Conflict Management Services (ICMS)
- LES matters
- General inquiries

3

Working with a specialist

Once your request is sorted and forwarded:

- it's logged in our secure tracking system for transparency and follow-up
- the ombud, the deputy ombud or a specialist from EAP, ICMS or LES matters will reach out to you directly
- if you sent a general inquiry, we may contact you to better understand your needs

4

Taking action

Depending on your situation, support may include either in person or by videoconference:

- One-on-one discussions
- Facilitated conversations with others
- Group sessions involving you and others

5

Closing the loop

To protect your privacy, your case information is updated in our tracking system, and any related emails or documents are securely deleted after 30 days

6

Identifying systemic issues

We regularly review trends in our tracking system. Specialists also share monthly insights based on what they hear. If a recurring issue is identified, the ombud may raise it with senior management to help drive positive change

Annex B

Improving management practices

Each year, about 20% of visitors seeking ombud support do so due to management practices that impact their well-being and effectiveness. What follows are some of the problematic management practices you most commonly bring to us, as well as some ideas on what needs attention and how to improve to be more effective and to achieve excellence.

Feedback and communications

Management is unsure how to have a conversation with an employee who is not performing well and/or may be experiencing psychological health issues. Managers make recurring or inappropriate criticisms, do not foster recognition and provide unclear direction.

- **What to improve**: Managers should develop the skills needed to have healthy conversations in difficult situations and learn about mental health first aid. They should find a balance between feedback for improvement and recognition.
- **How to improve**: Part of supporting managers in conducting healthy conversations in difficult situations includes helping them develop compassionate leadership skills. These can lead them to better understand the circumstances that may be negatively affecting an employee's ability to perform at their best. Supports for managers range from individual coaching to mental health first aid training.

CBS-LES dynamics

LES who have worked successfully under a series of managers may perceive a newly arrived CBS as disregarding their years of experience.

- **What to improve**: Managers should intentionally integrate themselves into the team, understanding its strengths and skills, as well as the local context.
- **How to improve**: Managers can benefit from thoughtful integration into the mission by building trust via one-on-one meetings with team members to explore their sources of pride, aspirations and areas of expertise.

Fear of reprisal and accountability

The sense that there are reprisals from management at HQ and at missions when employees raise issues. A perception of a lack of accountability on the part of management in cases of inappropriate behaviour by supervisors or employees.

- **What to improve**: Managers should create a safe space in which healthy conversations can be conducted to address fear of reprisals and raise awareness of recourse mechanisms. They should lead by example, including by recognizing the courage of those who report inappropriate behaviours.
- **How to improve**: Raising awareness of recourse mechanisms (both formal and informal) among staff as part of a healthy, safe and effective work environment could help shift perceptions and build trust around recourses. Managers' willingness to receive feedback and develop genuine curiosity about the impact of their behaviours on the team can help to create a safe space for conversations about perceptions of reprisals.

Recognition

Lack of recognition by managers of employee's experience and expertise.

- **What to improve**: Managers should foster a culture of regular formal and informal recognition.
- **How to improve**: Managers can foster a culture of recognition through timely acknowledgement (a thank you email or a feedback loop on what senior management thinks or says about completed work) or a formal award. Managers can create opportunities for employees to contribute based on their areas of expertise and interests. Participation and influence are fundamental to psychological health and safety.

Workload and priorities

Management expecting staff to do more work with fewer resources (less staff, less money and more overtime). Employees feel that management doesn't know how to prioritize.

- **What to improve**: Managers should set priorities and shift resources to balance workloads and deadlines to maintain work quality and build resilience.
- **How to improve**: An increase in workload without a recalibration of priorities, timelines and resources can compromise the quality of the work and the health and productivity of a team. In adjusting priorities, managers need to accept that some work will not get done.

Roles, responsibilities and trust

Lack of clarity regarding expectations and roles and responsibilities in teams. There is an imbalance between the micromanagement exhibited by some managers and the mutual trust that is required for employee autonomy.

- **What to improve**: Clear expectations and defined roles are fundamental to achieving optimal performance through up-to-date organizational charts and job descriptions. On the one hand, managers should avoid micromanaging high-performing employees and, on the other hand, should provide appropriate feedback, support, and coaching to those who demonstrate performance issues.
- **How to improve**: Clarifying roles and responsibilities is a shared responsibility between the employee and their manager. A productive dialogue is the best way to create mutual understanding. Clear expectations are fundamental to achieving strong performance. Managers should be aware that micro-managing high performers can reduce initiative, creativity and negatively affect performance. Close monitoring of performance that encourages regular dialogue and feedback can be a healthy way to address performance issues.

Meaningful consultation and team dynamics

The inability of management to consult and listen to employees, handle interactions or conflicts in teams and mobilize team members.

- **What to improve**: Managers should conduct meaningful consultations and create space for team dialogue to adapt effectively to changes.
- **How to improve**: Meaningful consultation requires the ability to listen and to understand issues and different perspectives. In times of change, a manager's ability to consult and create meaningful team dialogue can have a positive impact on the team's adaptability, performance and morale. Managing a conflict often requires well-calibrated participation from management. Managers should be able to help struggling employees find appropriate support services and resources, when necessary.

Culture

Unhealthy workplace culture created by managers.

- **What to improve**: Managers should co-create healthy workplace cultures through participative activities and leading by example.
- **How to improve**: Workplace culture is co-created by every level of the organization. Designing and implementing participative activities can help co-create healthy workplace cultures. A work unit has its own sets of norms, values and, to a certain extent, culture. Awareness of the unique dynamics of a team and clearly defined expectations for managers can help in the creation of healthy workplace cultures. A purposeful approach can lead to the creation of a healthy workplace culture in a context of uncertainty.

Unproductive communications

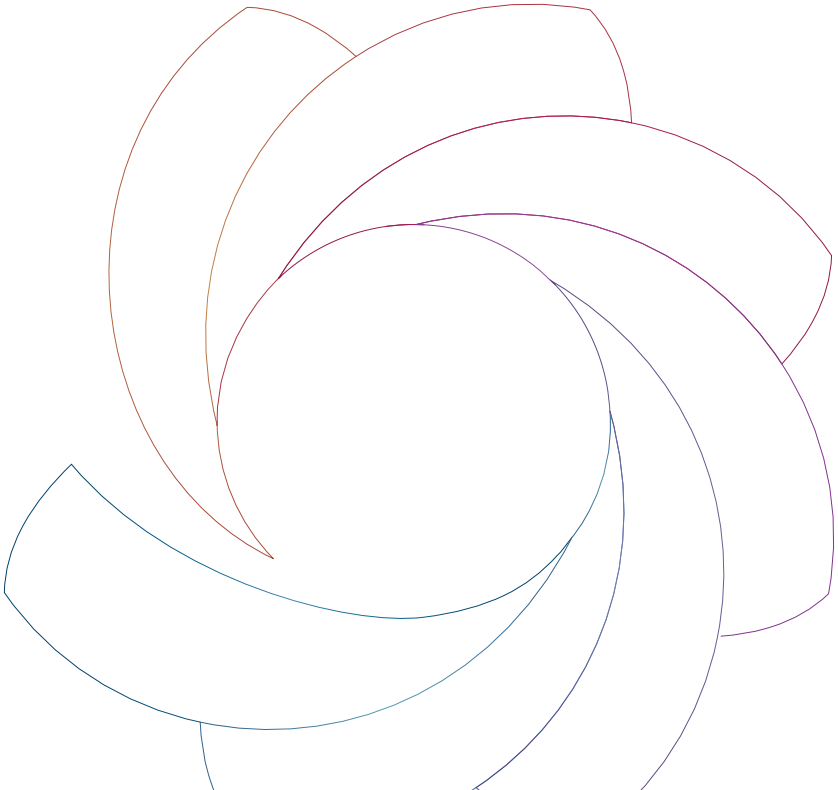
Methods, modes and styles of communication not conducive to dialogue (for example, bi-lateral meetings, team meetings and emails).

- **What to improve**: Managers should use appropriate modes of communication when interacting with staff and establish healthy dialogues.
- **How to improve**: Help managers develop human-centred approaches and teach them to use various tools to establish a healthy dialogue in the team, as well as develop awareness of the impact of their own communication style on others.

Favouritism

Perceptions of favouritism or bias toward individuals or groups.

- **What to improve**: Managers should adopt inclusive management practices to alleviate perceptions of favouritism and increase self-awareness.
- **How to improve**: Favouritism and perceptions of favouritism can significantly affect morale, motivation, dignity and health. Differential treatment is important and may be appropriate in some situations. Feedback from teams on perceptions of favouritism should be taken seriously by managers. Being open to receiving feedback from employees who have those perceptions is a powerful way to increase self-awareness and build team cohesion and effectiveness.



Resources, support services and recourse mechanisms for Canada-based employees

For most issues, your management team should be your first point of contact.

The Office of the Well-Being Ombud and Inspector General (ZID) is also always available to help you navigate the system and explore your options in a confidential manner.

		Collective agreement dispute or work-related issue	Interpersonal dispute or disagreement	Discrimination	Workplace harassment and violence	Conflict of interest	Values and Ethics Code misconduct and other misconduct
Information and guidance					Prevention of Workplace Harassment and Prevention Unit (HWPH)	Values and Ethics Unit (HWPE)	Values and Ethics Unit (HWPE)
		Union representatives					Other advisers (for example, mentor, manager and employee networks)
		Other advisers (for example, mentor, manager and employee networks)					
Formal mechanism or investigation	Mechanism	Grievance or complaint			Investigation	Conflict of interest report	Complaint to management team (Administrative investigation, fact-findings and other mechanisms [with Labour Relations support])
				Discrimination complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission	Notice of occurrence of harassment and violence		
	Contact	Union representatives			HWPH	HWPE	Union representatives
		Management team					Management team (with Labour Relations support)
	Possible outcome	Corrective measures at an individual level	Requested corrective measures or other measures deemed appropriate	Damages and/or disciplinary process, as appropriate	Corrective measures at an organizational level	Measures to mitigate the conflict of interest	Corrective measures at an individual level
		Requested corrective measures or other measures deemed appropriate		Corrective measures at an individual level			

Annex C

For most issues, your management team should be your first point of contact.

The Office of the Well-Being Ombud and Inspector General (ZID) is also always available to help you navigate the system and explore your options in a confidential manner.

Wrongdoing	Financial misconduct	Personnel security	Improper use of the internet	Refusal to work	Internal complaint resolution	Workers' compensation claim
Special Investigations and Internal Disclosure Division (VBZ)		Personnel Security and Contracting Unit (CSCP)	Corporate Information Technology (IT) Security Unit (CSCI)	Corporate Health Programs (HWH) – Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Team	Corporate Health Programs (HWH) – Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Team	Corporate Health Programs (HWH) – Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Team
Other advisers (for example, mentor, manager and employee networks)						
Disclosure of wrongdoing: Investigation	Investigation	Security investigation	Security investigation	Official refusal to work for dangerous work under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*	Official complaint made under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*	Submission of a compensation claim for work-related injuries or illnesses
Senior officer for internal disclosure, VBZ	VBZ	CSCP	CSCI	Management team (with HWH support)	Management team (with HWH support)	Management team (with HWH support)
Public sector integrity commissioner						
Administrative measure and/or disciplinary process, as appropriate		Revocation of reliability status or security clearance	Administrative measure and/or disciplinary process, as appropriate	Immediate investigation by the manager and implementation of corrective actions to protect employees if it is agreed that a danger exits	Collaborative resolution between the manager and the employee to address the issue	Workers' compensation board (WCB) accepts or refuses the claim
Corrective measures at an individual and/or organizational level	Recommendations to management at an organizational level			Continued refusal referred to the workplace occupational health and safety (OHS) committee and/or federal regulator (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC] Labour Program) for their intervention	Unresolved complaint refers to the workplace OHS committee and/or Federal Regulator (ESDC Labour Program) for their intervention	The employee receives allowed benefits if the claim is accepted by the WCB
						Employee or employer proceed to appeals process of the WCB decision

Resources, support services and recourse mechanisms for locally engaged staff

For most issues, your management team should be your first point of contact.

The Office of the Well-Being Ombud and Inspector General (ZID) is also always available to help you navigate the system and explore your options in a confidential manner.

		Terms and conditions of employment or work-related issue	Interpersonal dispute or disagreement	Discrimination	Workplace harassment and violence	Conflict of interest	Breach of the code of conduct misconduct
Information and Guidance					Prevention of Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Unit (HWPH)	Values and Ethics Unit (HWPE)	Values and Ethics Unit (HWPE)
		Local mission and others (for example, mentor, manager, human resources [HR] section, locally engaged staff [LES] committee member, LES private Teams channels, LES WhatsApp groups, employee networks)					Others (for example, mentor, manager, HR section, LES committee member, LES private Teams channels, LES WhatsApp groups, employee networks)
Formal mechanism or investigation	Mechanism	LES grievance	Complaint	Complaint process as per applicable jurisdiction	Notice of occurrence of harassment and violence	Conflict of interest report	Complaint to mission management team (Administrative investigation, fact-findings and other mechanisms)
	Contact	Supervisor/ manager / head of mission / mission consular officer			HWPH	HWPE	Management team
	Possible outcome	Corrective measures at an individual level	Interpersonal or relational change	Damages and/ or disciplinary process, as appropriate	Corrective measures at an organizational level	Measures to mitigate the conflict of interest	Corrective measures at an individual and/or organizational level
		Requested corrective measures or other measures deemed appropriate		Corrective measures at an individual level			

Annex D

For most issues, your management team should be your first point of contact.

The Office of the Well-Being Ombud and Inspector General (ZID) is also always available to help you navigate the system and explore your options in a confidential manner.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Wrongdoing</th><th>Financial misconduct</th><th>Personnel security</th><th>Improper use of the internet</th><th>Refusal to work</th><th>Internal complaint resolution</th><th>Workers' compensation claim</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Special Investigations and Internal Disclosure Division (VBZ)</td><td rowspan="2">Readiness program manager (RPM)
Readiness manager (RM)</td><td rowspan="2">Person at the mission responsible for information technology (IT)</td><td rowspan="2">Corporate Health Programs (HWH) – Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Team as well as local mission HR team</td><td rowspan="2">Corporate Health Programs (HWH) – Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Team</td><td rowspan="2">LES pensions and Insurance (HLDP)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Others (for example, mentor, manager, HR section, LES committee member, LES private Teams channels, LES WhatsApp groups, employee networks)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disclosure of wrongdoing: Investigation</td><td>Investigation</td><td>Report to supervisor, RPM or RM</td><td>Report to person at the mission responsible for IT</td><td>Official Refusal to work for dangerous work under Part II of the Canada Labour Code and other recourses available per applicable jurisdiction</td><td>Official complaint made under Part II of the Canada Labour Code and other recourses available per applicable jurisdiction</td><td>Submission of a worker's compensation claim for work-related injuries or illnesses via local mission</td></tr>
<tr><td>Senior officer for internal disclosure, VBZ</td><td rowspan="2">VBZ</td><td>Management team</td><td rowspan="2">Person at the mission responsible for IT</td><td rowspan="2">Management team (with HWH support)</td><td rowspan="2">Management team (with HWH support)</td><td rowspan="2">Management team (with HLDP)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Public sector integrity commissioner</td><td>RPM
RM</td></tr>
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</table>

Our office is here to help you understand your options when facing workplace issues, whether you are based in Canada or abroad, a traditional or rotational employee, LES or CBS, an employee or a manager. We guide you through both informal and formal processes, depending on your needs.