

# **Annual Report of the Parliamentary Ombud for 2021**

**(Excerpt translated into English)**

Document 4 (2021–2022)

Parliamentary Ombud's Report for 2021

Submitted to the Norwegian Parliament on 29 March 2022

## Introduction by the Parliamentary Ombud (Preface)

Since 1962, the Parliamentary Ombud has worked to prevent injustice to individuals. We receive around 4,000 public administration complaints every year. Many of these cases have serious implications for the person in question. We deal with complaints in virtually every area of Norwegian public administration, ranging from safe school routes for children, the right to paternity leave and access to public administration documents to incorrect payment claims, long case processing times and inaccurate interpretations of immigration regulations.

## Preventing as much injustice as possible

The Parliamentary Ombud aims to not only right wrongs, but also contribute to proper public administration. Our traditional approach to this has been to handle the complaints we receive from individuals. We receive far more complaints than we are able to handle with the available resources and must therefore prioritise and work according to methods that enable us to prevent as much injustice as possible.

The Parliamentary Ombud is not an ordinary appeal body, which means that we also have the opportunity to choose which cases we pursue. In 2021, we continued to prioritise and investigate the most serious complaints, which are those with significant implications for the public due to public administration errors. Prioritising enables us to free up time for cases we consider important for safeguarding the legal rights of the public. Nevertheless, a dilemma is always created by rejecting cases that individuals expect to be resolved when we are unable to investigate that particular case. We respect this fact and take it into consideration when responding to complainants.

## Several cases are resolved during the process

When we are not able to investigate complaints, the reason is most often that the complaint criteria have not been met. If, for example, we reject a complaint because the complainant did not submit the complaint to the relevant administrative body first, the complainant can still receive help by returning to the administrative body to resolve the issue. We provide considerable guidance to complainants about who to contact about a case.

We have also experienced that administrative bodies recognise that a mistake has been made and sometimes change their perspective after being approached by the Parliamentary Ombud, so that we avoid a reprimand. Around half of all cases that we take on are resolved in this way.

## Systematic investigations

One way that we prevent as much injustice as possible is through the systematic investigations that we initiate, referred to as own-initiative cases. In these cases, our goal is to uncover system errors, which have usually started as complaints. Some investigations are inspired by input from meetings with interest organisations, and media coverage, as well as the administrative body itself. In 2021, for example, we met with the Ombud for Older People, the Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children, all County Governors, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) and KS, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities.

A characteristic feature of our investigations is that we also check whether laws are being followed by municipalities and counties. In this respect, the Parliamentary Ombud differs from the Norwegian Parliament's central regulatory body, the Auditor General.

In 2021, we closed 26 investigations of own-initiative cases, significantly more than in previous years. Our investigations during the past year included prison phone call monitoring practices, the Norwegian National Police Directorate's access practices, long case processing times in municipalities and long waiting times at the enforcement officers for debt settlement cases. In many of the cases, we asked the agencies to report to us in 2022 and we will monitor their further development closely. In order for the Parliamentary Ombud to be effective in safeguarding the legal rights of the public, the administrative body must accept the Ombud's opinions.

### Police custody of children

In 2021, we devoted special attention to the conditions for minors who are arrested and placed in police custody. Children who are deprived of their freedom are particularly vulnerable and therefore have the right to special protection. The Parliamentary Ombud published a report in December following a visit to the Oslo Police District that shows inadequacies in the treatment of minors under arrest.

The report showed a need for rule changes and follow-up on the national level. We have requested clarification from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security about what is being done on the national level to improve conditions for children in police custody.

### Guidance

Many of the complaints sent to the Parliamentary Ombud could have been avoided with better knowledge of the rules. Based on the opinions we issued in 2021, we have prepared a guide on the topic of employment called 'Employment from A to Z' that presents the information in an easily accessible format and includes examples and to-do lists. A similar guide based on our investigation of dispensations in the coastal zone has also been published.

The intention is to help public agencies handle cases in a proper and responsible manner and we have received positive feedback from the target audience. Both our guides and own-initiative cases are examples of how we work proactively and preventively. In this way, we hope to prevent the same administrative errors from reoccurring in the future.

### New Parliamentary Ombud Act

The Act relating to the Parliamentary Ombud for Scrutiny of the Public Administration (the Parliamentary Ombud Act) took effect on 1 July 2021. This resulted in a shorter, simpler and gender-neutral name for the Parliamentary Ombud. In addition to a name change, the new law also ensures that others who may be impacted by the case will have the opportunity to comment. We assumed responsibility for handling complaints against the Norwegian Armed Forces from those with a duty of service in the military. Conscripts and other military personnel may now submit a complaint to the Parliamentary Ombud if they believe they have suffered an injustice on the part of the armed forces.

In preparing the Parliamentary Ombud Act, the Parliamentary Ombud was asked to facilitate to a larger degree the possibility for minors to submit a complaint and thereby safeguard their actual possibility to complain to the Ombud. To achieve this, it is important that the Ombud make the complaint process known and available to minors based on their circumstances and needs. The Parliamentary Ombud is hard at work investigating and determining how this can be implemented. We are aware that this important commitment, as well as the new responsibility for complaints against the Norwegian Armed Forces, will require more resources and shifting priorities from other important areas, such as mental health care, national insurance, public disclosure and access, and correctional services.

The new law also entails changes to the types of access the Parliamentary Ombud can demand when investigating the Norwegian Parliament and government. This in particular has been the focus of considerable attention. The Parliamentary Ombud does not have access to government memorandums or 'documents directly connected to these'. After the new law took effect, we have had two cases of this type in which we are unable to access government memorandums and documents directly connected to these. In order to perform a control function,

it is important that the Parliamentary Ombud have access to all relevant case documents. It is problematic to limit our access to 'government memorandums and documents directly related to these'. What exactly this entails has not been specified. It goes without saying that this will raise questions.

#### Assessment of outlook

High quality is crucial regardless of the methods we use to perform our social function. It is important for public trust and our authority, as well as for public administration, that public administration accepts our opinions. To ensure this, we must make safeguard a high expertise level and have capacity in line with the number of incoming complaints and workload.

For the Parliamentary Ombud, the pandemic resulted in somewhat fewer visits under the prevention mandate and fewer lectures and meetings with external parties. All the same, we have worked to prevent injustice by investigating complaints and through other methods in order to fulfil our mandate. The pandemic has contributed to increased awareness of the rights of individuals. This in turn may lead to more complaints, for example as a result of quick rule changes, more cases related to the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) and a general increased risk of public administration errors. Looking ahead, it will continue to be important to oversee public administration, also when it comes to the long-term consequences of the pandemic for the public.

The Parliamentary Ombud's National Prevention Mechanism (NPM) has turned the spotlight on the conditions of minors in police custody and the situation of the most vulnerable groups in nursing homes. We have also highlighted deficiencies relating to due process for persons with developmental disabilities through our visits to care homes. This work will continue in 2022 and you can read more about it in a separate annual report on our prevention efforts.

Hanne Harlem

Parliamentary Ombud

## Statistics

*For a more detailed presentation of statistics in tables, graphs and charts, see the Norwegian version of the annual report.*

## Main tendencies

The Parliamentary Ombud received 4,032 complaints in 2021. The number of incoming complaints has been stable over the past four years, but increased significantly in the years prior to that. Anyone can submit a complaint to the Parliamentary Ombud, whose work is important in safeguarding due process in Norwegian society.

Most of the cases we handle pertain to welfare, health & family, justice & immigration cases and planning & construction. We continue to prioritise cases related to freedom of information and public disclosure. The public's right to access public administration information is one of the foundations of a functional democracy, freedom of speech and the role of media in holding the government to account. It is also an area in which the Parliamentary Ombud is often essentially the only appeal body in public administration.

In those areas in which we receive large numbers of similar complaints, we have increasingly chosen to initiate our own investigations. This is a deliberate choice in order for our work to achieve a greater effect. In 2021, we both initiated and closed more investigations on our own initiative than in the past. These types of investigations can result in criticism of the administrative body in question. Several of the administrative bodies that were investigated have provided us with feedback on the measures implemented, such as system improvements and more resources to improve their work. Consequently, the investigations will affect numerous complainants.

We are handling slightly fewer individual complaints than before. This is primarily due to the fact that we have chosen to investigate fewer complaints within certain categories in which we previously investigated a large number of complaints. In 2021, we took on fewer cases involving employment and child support. These are two case categories in which we receive numerous complaints and it is not always evident that the cases will result in any changes for the complainant, for example because the complainant had already been hired.

The Parliamentary Ombud receives numerous complaints about long case processing times and the lack of a response from an administrative body. In 2021, we initiated several investigations focusing on long case processing times. These cases often start as individual complaints. In areas in which we suspect system errors that can impact large numbers of people, we have investigated, collected, written and communicated professional advice in guides aimed at public administration. The intention is for these guides to have a preventative effect, so that fewer mistakes are made.

The year 2021 saw an increase in the number of cases that were resolved for the complainant during our processing of them. Especially in those cases involving the lack of a response, we have contacted the administrative bodies by phone. These cases were often resolved following our verbal inquiry. This approach has enabled us to avoid having to obtain a written statement and have saved time for all parties involved.

In 2021, only 17% of the cases we chose to investigate did not give cause for criticism. This shows that we have chosen the right cases to pursue. We have obtained a written statement from administrative bodies in fewer cases than in previous years. The case processing time at the Parliamentary Ombud has declined steadily in recent years. However, the processing time is still longer than desired in a number of cases.

### Cases opened on our own initiative

In addition to handling complaints from the public, the Parliamentary Ombud can also launch both larger and smaller investigations on its own initiative. Own-initiative investigations are an important instrument for the Parliamentary Ombud. One of the main objectives of such investigations is to identify system errors, which are errors that occur repeatedly in public administration. These investigations can lead to changes in case processing times at the administrative body, thereby helping a large percentage of the public all at once. The goal is to also prevent similar public administration errors from occurring in the future.

In 2021, we both initiated and closed more investigations on our own initiative than in the past. In 2021, we initiated 22 investigations of our own. These investigations can last several months. In 2021, 26 own-initiative investigations were concluded.

### Examples of case subject areas

Here we present an overview of selected case subject areas for the Parliamentary Ombud in 2021. Most complaints received by the Parliamentary Ombud concern case processing time and non-response by the administrative body. There are also many complaints concerning building issues, benefit payments and employment issues, and there has been an increase in the number of requests involving access to information and public disclosure.

### Our handling of complaints

The Parliamentary Ombud reviews all complaints before deciding whether or not to investigate. The cases fall under three main categories: cases that are handled on their own merits, cases that we do not pursue for formal reasons and cases that we choose not to pursue (based on the 'nature of the case').

There are quite a few cases that the Parliamentary Ombud cannot handle for purely formal reasons. The most common reason is that the case is still being processed by the administrative body. The Parliamentary Ombud's investigation takes place afterwards, i.e. the case must first be fully investigated by the administrative body. In these cases, we inform the complainants about the proper appeal body and that they can resubmit the complaint to the Parliamentary Ombud once it has been fully investigated by the administrative body.

### Cases handled on their own merits

The vast majority of cases that are considered on their own merits are assessed on the basis of the documents sent and resolved or closed without us finding any grounds to proceed with them. The remaining cases handled on their own merits are submitted to the public administrative body. This means that the Parliamentary Ombud obtains a written statement from the administrative body that is the subject of the complaint. We consider this an investigation of the case.

The number of cases that were resolved for complainants increased further in 2021. At the same time, fewer cases ended with criticism or a recommendation to re-examine the case. The number of cases closed without criticism is somewhat lower because we close more cases in categories in which there was often cause for criticism in the past.

### Cases that we do not pursue

The Parliamentary Ombud can also choose to not pursue a case. The number of cases that we have decided not to pursue in recent years has increased as a result of priorities. In some areas with large numbers of individual complaints, we have increasingly opted for systematic investigations and thematic guides for public administration. It is an important task for the Parliamentary Ombud to work to improve public administration. By raising concrete issues to a higher overall level, we can prevent procedural errors in public administration.

### Municipalities

In 2021, the Parliamentary Ombud handled complaints from 204 out of a total of 356 municipalities. We did not receive any complaints for 152 municipalities.

### Case handling by the Parliamentary Ombud

The case processing time at the Parliamentary Ombud has declined steadily in recent years.



## About us

### Introduction to our activities

#### Role, instruments and priorities

The Parliamentary Ombud for public administration is one of the Norwegian Parliament's external supervisory bodies and its aim is to ensure that individuals are not exposed to injustices in public administration. Parliament establishes instructions for the Ombud's work, but the Ombud otherwise performs its duties on an independent basis and independently of Parliament. The Parliamentary Ombud is based in Oslo and handles cases from all over Norway. The majority of the Parliamentary Ombud's activities relate to the handling of complaints received from citizens. The Ombud takes on some cases on its own initiative, so-called 'own-initiative' cases. These may be based on individual complaints or issues that the Ombud believes should be addressed. Other activities are talks and lectures, as well as meetings with and visits to relevant administrative bodies.

### About the organisation

For the organisational chart and staff lists in tables, see the Norwegian version of the annual report.

#### Key figures for 2021

No. of man-years <sup>1</sup>	63.17
Total allocation (in thousands of NOK) <sup>2</sup>	98,708
Operating expenses (in thousands of NOK) <sup>3</sup>	95,973
Labour costs as percentage of operating expenses <sup>4</sup>	73.5
Labour costs per man-year (in thousands of NOK) <sup>5</sup>	1,117

### Activities and results in 2021

#### Another special year

As for everyone else in society, the year 2021 was a special one for the Parliamentary Ombud. On the whole, activities were generally performed as anticipated, in spite of the fact that some activities had to be carried out differently than usual.

The prevention mandate is only discussed briefly below, but is included in the key figures and staff lists. For a more detailed account of the prevention mandate, see the separate annual report on this.

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<sup>1</sup> Man-years refers to the total number of years, adjusted for various forms of additional work or absence. One man-year is defined as one individual in a full-time position for an entire year.

<sup>2</sup> Appropriation statement Note A.

<sup>3</sup> General ledger statement.

<sup>4</sup> Labour costs, including reimbursements, as a percentage of operating costs.

<sup>5</sup> Labour costs divided by number of man-years.

Unlike in many other organisations, the pandemic had less of a direct impact on the complaint handling work of the Parliamentary Ombud in 2021. Work was performed in part from home offices in 2021 as well. The handling of individual complaints is relatively well suited for flexible working forms like home offices. The emphasis has been on maintaining normal case settlement levels and a fast case processing time. During certain periods of 2021 when more normal activity was possible, physical meetings and visits were organised. The work environment, sense of community and creative processes have obviously been affected by the lack of direct interaction among colleagues. The annual office seminar, an important internal event for building a strong team culture and for professional development, was held physically once the possibility arose.

### Selected goals and initiatives from 2021

The overarching goal of the Parliamentary Ombud's strategic plan in the period 2019–2022 is to prioritise the tasks that have the greatest impact on preventing injustice and torture, to be a central professional body within the scope of the Parliamentary Ombud's work and to be an effective and well-run organisation. The work processes that help us to reach these goals are set out in the annual operational plans. In the operational plan for 2021, the objectives related to further priority, quality and efficiency improvements. The work on goals and initiatives in 2021 is described below.

### Clearer priorities

As part of the goal to prioritise more clearly, in 2021 we examined whether better tools can be used to obtain and analyse complaint handling data to a larger degree than at present. The basic principle is that the Parliamentary Ombud possesses a considerable amount of information and statistics from complaint handling. We have launched an examination of possibilities to establish more sophisticated statistics tools in order to achieve easier access to information for use in management and reporting. Efforts focused on prioritising have been central to complaint handling throughout the year, including the further development of internal routines for cases under investigation. Efforts focused on reducing resource use on cases that are inadequate, with no chance of success or that we are unable to prioritise have been continued.

Cases that the Ombud takes on at its own initiative, referred to as 'own-initiative cases', can be effective in terms of fulfilling the complaint handling mandate. In 2021, efforts were devoted to improving and developing the approach to such cases in terms of access to cases, the decision-making process and implementation. Such cases can often be large and all-encompassing. As a support activity, relevant caseworkers and managers have undergone project management expertise development.

### Central professional body – quality development and recruitment

The Parliamentary Ombud has a continuous focus on quality development. During the year, several projects have been carried out aimed at further improving the quality of the opinions issued.

The Parliamentary Ombud's opinions are an important source for clarifying legal requirements in public administration. We developed and published two guides in 2021 based on our opinions, aimed at caseworkers in the public and municipal sectors. The material is easily understood and includes examples and to-do lists in order to help public agencies handle cases properly and effectively.

### Case handling support and employee development

We upgraded the case and archive system ePhorte to Elements, the newest version. The system core is the same, but the interface to users is different. Much of 2021 was spent on testing and error correction, routine development, training and the group-based rollout in the departments.

Good employee follow-up and motivation and work environment challenges resulting from the pandemic situation were, of course, also addressed in 2021. Both from a pandemic perspective and as a general goal, we are working to ensure a healthy work environment that contributes to reduced absenteeism due to illness. As part of these efforts, we have prepared plans for different working forms and combining working in the office with working from home. However, different welfare initiatives were impacted considerably by the pandemic situation and fewer regular work environment measures were implemented in 2021. Absenteeism declined in 2021 compared to previous years. We have completed a major project involving new routines for sick leave follow-up.

### Communication

A presence in the public sphere is important to ensure that the public is aware of its right to complain and that public administration is aware of the errors identified by the Parliamentary Ombud. Active media work and outreach activities, such as participation in seminars, debates, holding lectures and writing academic papers and features articles, help raise awareness of our work. Media coverage of our opinions, reports, letters and hearings increased slightly in 2021.

One result of being better known is that we receive more complaints. There is therefore a risk that we will receive more complaints that, unfortunately, we are unable to handle or investigate. This is partly because the criteria for complaint handling are not well enough known. We have therefore focused on communicating to the public the feasibility of cases being investigated in order to clarify expectations of the possibilities offered by the Parliamentary Ombud.

We have also focused on generating greater awareness of the guides developed for public administration. The Parliamentary Ombud receives numerous requests to hold lectures and take part in debates. In 2021, we held a large number of lectures on dispensations in the coastal zone at the request of the municipalities.

### Management and monitoring of activities

#### About corporate governance

Goals and priorities beyond what is stated in the Parliamentary Ombud Act are presented to Parliament as part of the budget process. The results are reported to Parliament in the two annual reports and in the budget proposition for the following year. The overarching corporate governance is based on the long-term strategic plan for 2019–2022. Every year, an overall operational plan and departmental plans are prepared based on this plan. The operational plan is implemented in the departments and discussed during joint management reviews of common cases.

#### Risk assessments

Risk assessments for the agency are carried out as part of preparations for the annual operational plan. Overall risk factors are fairly stable and related to, for example, the limited number of complaints that the Ombud can realistically handle with the available resources. To gain trust and get results in public administration requires a high level of professional quality. However, opinions with a solid professional foundation on cases in which we criticise public administration are labour-intensive. This makes it necessary to reject or conclude many complaints after only a preliminary assessment. The larger the number of complaints that are closed without further investigation, the greater the risk that the Parliamentary Ombud will be perceived as having such strict criteria that it has lost relevance.

In 2021, the risk assessments were related to the considerable uncertainties resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. These included a risk of more complaints, for example as a result of quick rule changes, more cases related to the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration and a general

increased risk of public administration errors. In terms of preventive efforts, the choice and use of working methods are affected. Home offices made it more challenging to plan activities and required flexibility in corporate governance throughout the year. Financial reports are presented regularly during internal management meetings.

The agency has internal control and management systems in the areas of privacy, information security, acquisitions and health, safety & the environment (HSE). In 2021, efforts were focused on further developing the management system for preventive safety, the HSE system and the activity duty and duty to issue a statement in accordance with the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act.

#### Personnel policies, expertise and work environment

As part of the overarching goal to be an effective and well-run organisation, the Ombud aims to maintain a good work environment with a community of colleagues, possibilities for development and growth and a strong sense of shared responsibility. Employee representation and co-determination is safeguarded through the frequent handling of cases by the employer organisations and trade unions in accordance with the Basic Agreement. Cases with implications for work situations are discussed during monthly employee representation and co-determination meetings. Employee representatives participate actively in the recruitment process through the Appointment Board. The parties also meet during wage negotiations and other matters pursuant to the Basic Collective Agreement. Both the employer and employees, including the safety representative, are represented in the

Work Environment Committee, which normally meets four times a year. We consider cooperation within the agency to be especially good. In 2021, we also focused on the special challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Parliamentary Ombud has an employee life cycle policy that aims to facilitate employees in working for as long as possible by expanding the number of senior days.

Professional development is carried out through practical work and guidance, as well as courses on relevant topics for each individual employee. In 2021, recruitment efforts focused on activities aimed at law students. The Parliamentary Ombud has participated in career days at universities, had visits from and engaged in dialogue with student organisations, as well as taken part in orientation week at the University of Oslo. We have expanded our cooperation with students with a trainee programme, hire students for part-time positions and several summer temps each year.

#### Assessment of outlook

At the end of 2021, Norwegian society was still facing a number of uncertainties as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our assessment of the situation is that this may still lead to more people submitting a complaint to the Parliamentary Ombud, for example as a result of rule changes, more cases involving the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Agency and a general increased risk of public administration errors.

Another important focal area in the years ahead is to continue working to reduce the use of resources, especially on cases for which it is clear that they will not be pursued. We are developing various measures aimed at improving priority setting.

There is a risk that complaints from minors will become a significant challenge in the years ahead. This raises several dilemmas of both a legal and practical nature. We are aware that this important commitment, as well as the new responsibility for complaints against the Norwegian Armed Forces, will require more resources and may necessitate the shifting of priorities from other important areas.

Another risk factor is that the agency is exposed to competition in the labour market, especially for qualified lawyers. When the 'new normal' becomes more stabilised, hopefully in 2022, we are prepared that it can also impact turnover after a relatively stable period.

## Annual account for the Parliamentary Ombud for 2021

Below are the management remarks and appendices to the Annual Account for the Parliamentary Ombud for 2021, which was prepared in accordance with the applicable provisions and submitted to the Norwegian Parliament according to our own deadlines.

### Management remarks

#### Introduction

In accordance with the adaptations to the Regulations on Financial Management in Central Government that the Parliamentary Presidium determined for the Parliamentary Ombud in 2014, the annual accounts are submitted in line with the requirements stipulated for ministries, cf. Sections 2.3.3 and 3.4 of the Regulations on Financial Management in Central Government. The Parliamentary Ombud reports its activities to Parliament in 2021 in its annual reports, Document no. 4 (2021–2022) and Document no. 4.1 (2021–2022). The Parliamentary Ombud's accounts are prepared in accordance with the cash accounting principle.

#### Purpose

The Parliamentary Ombud is one of the Norwegian Parliament's external supervisory bodies and carries out its activities in line with the Act relating to the Parliamentary Ombudsman for Public Administration (Parliamentary Ombudsman Act) of 18 June 2021. The purpose of the agency is to work to ensure that individual citizens are not unjustly treated by public administration and that senior officials and others who work in public administration do not make mistakes or neglect their duties. The Ombud also visits places where people are deprived of their liberty in order to prevent torture and inhumane or degrading treatment.

#### Confirmation

The annual accounts have been submitted in accordance with the Regulations on Financial Management in Central Government and Ministry of Finance Circular R-115 relating to the preparation and submission of government agencies' annual accounts. The annual accounts provide an accurate picture of the Parliamentary Ombud's available allocations and expenses, income, assets and liabilities.

#### Material issues

The Parliamentary Ombud has total available allocations of approximately NOK 98.7 million in a dedicated budget account. Total allocations in account 43 item 01 comprise original allocations for 2021, transferred reduced costs from 2020 and compensation for wage settlements, cf. the appropriation statement and Note A. In addition, the Parliamentary Ombud has a debit authorisation from the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NIM) for expenses in connection with co-localisation and administrative services, cf. the appropriation statement. Consumption is approximately NOK 95.7 million. Reimbursements of around NOK 2.8 million from NAV are included and mean that the Ombud has an underspend of approximately NOK 3 million in relation to the allocation. The underspend represents three percent of the total allocations for 2021 and is the suggested transfer amount for 2021.

The discrepancy between the reported expenses/income and available allocations in 2021 is mainly due to a generally lower level of activity than usual due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There have been fewer visits and trips than usual. More details are given below.

## Disbursements for labour costs and other operating costs in 2021

### Labour costs

The Ombud's caseworkers are its most important resource for safeguarding both quality and quantity and thereby the Ombud's authority and impact. Our employees are attractive in the job market. In recent years, staff turnover has remained at an acceptable level. In 2021, four permanently employed caseworkers and three student associates left their positions, while three employees took a leave of absence. Turnover has been somewhat higher than in 2020 and can increase further when the job market returns to normal.

Labour costs have increased. Including employer's contribution, etc., adjusted for reimbursements, labour costs amounted to approximately NOK 70 million, compared to NOK 66 million in 2020 (Note 2). The total increase of approximately NOK 4.5 million in relation to the preceding year is mainly due to the fact that we again recruited more staff in 2021 to address the staff turnover and cover sick leave, in addition to part-time students and hourly paid and fee-based workers. We also increased staff numbers in the archive to strengthen its function instead of using temporary employees. The full year effect of the wage settlement in 2020 is also included. We have implemented such measures as raises for employees who are attractive to the competition in order to reduce turnover and attract new, highly qualified applicants. Labour costs alone have increased by NOK 2.7 million. The number of man-years increased by 1.68 from 2020 to 2021. This increase includes the effect of a higher staff level, adjusted for the effect of sick leave and the fact that a number of employees are working a reduced number of hours. Labour costs also include fee-based work and these costs were also relatively high in 2021 due to need for a substitute ombud in cases concerning Oslo municipality. Fee and commission expenses totalled around NOK 0.45 million, the bulk of which is in connection with a substitute ombud.

NAV reimbursements, which reduce the total labour costs, were significantly lower in 2021 than the year before, which is a reflection of the decrease in sick leave in 2021. The total reimbursements decreased by approximately NOK 0.69 million in relation to 2020. Labour costs corresponded to around 73.5 percent of total operating costs.

### Investments

Investment expenditure increased by NOK 0.64 million from 2020 to 2021 and is due to both normal replacement of IT equipment and the procurement of new equipment for remote working in connection with the pandemic. Investments totalled approx. NOK 1.67 million and consisted primarily of IT equipment, the replacement of some equipment in the offices and investments in HSE-related inventory in order to facilitate a return to the workplace after the pandemic.

### Other operating expenses

Other expenses for operations totalled approximately NOK 25.4 million. Overall, this is an increase of NOK 1.5 million compared to 2020. The pricing model for electronic reference works and digital subscriptions has changed, leading to increased costs for us. Otherwise, price increases have been greater than expected. Lease charges are the largest individual expense. Lease charges for

the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NIM) are included in this item. Of the total lease expenses of approximately NOK 12.5 million, the Parliamentary Ombud's own lease expenses amount to NOK 10.6 million. The procurement of consultancy services has increased by around NOK 0.39 million. Consultancy expenses are related to support in implementing the new archive interface Elements and preparations for archive accrual, consultancy support for the statistics and analysis project initiated to improve the use of complaint data in agency management, recruitment support,

as well as support in the development of an archive robot. Other expenses were related to the name change in 2021. Temp expenses were reduced somewhat by replacing the temp with a permanent employee. Other operating expenses increased by around NOK 1 million due to normal variations in operations and general price increases.

#### Debit authorisations

In 2021, the Parliamentary Ombud, in line with the Parliamentary resolution in 2014, has been co-localised with and provided administrative services to the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NIM). In 2020, NIM has more or less taken over its own administrative operation in areas such as financial, payroll and personnel administration, but the Ombud still provides support in, for example, office operations, reception services and administrative advisory services. NIM-related expenses in 2021 that are debited from NIM's allocations are as stated in the Parliamentary Ombud's general ledger accounts report with appurtenant notes. In 2021, the Parliamentary Ombud debited NIM's allocations, account 45 Norwegian National Human Rights Institution, item 01, with just over NOK 2 million in connection with co-localisation. Most of the sum paid by the Parliamentary Ombud relates to the lease of premises, which amounted to approximately NOK 1.8 million.

#### Outstanding accounts with the Treasury

Outstanding accounts with the Treasury amounted to approximately NOK 3 million as of 31 December 2021. The general ledger statement shows which assets and liabilities are included in the claims. In addition to the outstanding accounts, the Parliamentary Ombud had accrued trade creditor liabilities of approximately NOK 4.3 million, which have not been paid and therefore do not appear as an expense in the annual accounts. The amount is attributed to, among other things, processed invoices with a later due date associated with lease and IT expenses. Cf. information concerning settlement with the Treasury in Note 8. The Parliamentary Ombud does not have capital items in the central government capital accounts.

#### Supplementary information

The Office of the Auditor General is the external auditor for the Parliamentary Ombud. The audit of the annual accounts for 2021 has not been completed yet. However, it is assumed that the auditor's report will be available by the end of Q2 2022. The auditor's report for the annual accounts will be published on the Ombud's website when it becomes publicly available. The Parliamentary Ombud does not manage any government funds.

Oslo, 2 February 2022

Hanne Harlem

Parliamentary Ombud