

**Eightieth meeting of the Standing Committee
23-25 March 2021**

Agenda item 4

**Oral update on
the work of the Inspector General's Office***

Introduction – In 2020, the Inspector General's Office (IGO) was presented with a unique set of challenges related to the global COVID-19 pandemic. It continued to deliver on its mandate and sought to implement UNHCR's [policy on independent oversight](#) throughout, by adapting its work and, to the extent possible, using remote methods of operation. At the same time, lockdowns and restrictions on travel presented limitations across the independent oversight community in terms of the quality of oversight, assurance and investigations that could be delivered by the independent oversight providers.

Independent oversight coordination – The IGO coordinates independent oversight for UNHCR, ensuring coherence among the various oversight entities, and conducts meta-analysis of the oversight findings. The Strategic Oversight Service of the IGO carries out these responsibilities through the coordination of activities of the oversight providers; management and analysis of oversight reports; provision of Secretariat support to the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC); liaison support to the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System (JIU); and support to UNHCR's internal audit service, provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

Internal audit – The IGO serves as the interface between UNHCR and the UNHCR Audit Service of OIOS. It facilitates coordination of the Audit Service with UNHCR management and operations. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Audit Service implemented the majority of its plan through remote means. The number of audit assignments was, however, reduced from the initially planned 26 to 18.

IGO assurance – During the reporting period, the Inspector General commissioned two proactive risk and assurance reviews in relation to the COVID-19 response: a review of UNHCR's operational expenditure and a review of implementing partner expenditure. This work is continuing into 2021. The IGO continues to issue management implication reports (MIRs) arising from its investigations. The number of MIRs issued increased from 8 in 2016 to 17 in both 2018 and 2019; in 2020, the number increased by more than two-fold, to 40. MIRs are addressed to executive and senior management on areas of systemic weaknesses and gaps identified in the course of investigations. Of the 40 issued in 2020, fewer than half (16) related to fraud with financial implications, followed by breaches of rules and regulations or weaknesses in processes (8), human resources (7), sexual harassment (4), sexual exploitation and abuse (2), and others (3).

Complaints – In the past five years, misconduct complaints grew from 399 in 2016 to 664 in 2017, 1,186 in 2018 and 1,226 in 2019. In 2020, the reporting of misconduct complaints was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a decline of 7 per cent to 1,146. For 2021, based on increasing numbers of complaints at the end of 2020, the IGO predicts between 1,200 and 1,400 misconduct complaints for 2021. Consistent with 2019, the top three categories of complaints relating to misconduct in 2020 were: (1) fraud with financial implications, (2) sexual exploitation and abuse,¹ and (3) refugee status determination and resettlement fraud. Of the 1,146 complaints in 2020, 44 per cent implicated UNHCR personnel, 32 per cent implementing partner personnel, and 24 per cent others – recording similar proportions compared to those recorded in 2019.²

Investigations – During the reporting period, the Investigation Service opened investigations implicating 142 individuals³ and finalized 130 investigation reports,⁴ of which 55 per cent (71 out of 130) were substantiated.

* This oral update has been revised as of 9 March to reflect corrections to dates specified under the complaints and investigations sections.

¹ This category includes complaints with and without identifiable or identified victims. Approximately 80 per cent of allegations of sexual exploitation with identified or identifiable victims implicate implementing partner personnel.

² The "others" category includes contractors, national authorities and vendor personnel.

³ Of the 142 individuals, 120 implicate UNHCR personnel, 9 implicate implementing partner personnel and 5 implicate other personnel.

⁴ Of the 130 reports, 120 implicate UNHCR personnel, seven implicate implementing partner personnel and three implicate other personnel.

The same substantiation rate was recorded in 2019 (90 out of 164). The number of investigation reports relating to UNHCR personnel which were transmitted by the IGO to the Division of Human Resources for possible disciplinary or administrative action increased from 31 in 2016 to 61 in 2017, 64 in 2018 and 85 in 2019. In 2020, the number of reports was 68 (54 involved staff members and 14 concerned members of the UNHCR affiliate workforce).

IGO policy work – In the context of UNHCR’s transformation, the IGO will facilitate realignment of the activities of the independent oversight providers and work with the newly decentralized regional bureaux to develop their role in oversight. The IGO provided ongoing advice and support to executive management on the reform of the integrity response in UNHCR. Subject to the recalibration of resources prior to implementation, the IGO will undertake a greater role in the protection from retaliation process, as well as in relation to the Speak Up Helpline.

IGO enhancement – The IGO continues to invest in measures to enhance its functions. In 2020, the Investigation Service of the IGO finalized internal standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to its intake assessment process, as well as SOPs for applying a victim-centred approach in the context of its investigations work. The latter is aligned with the “[Policy on the victim-centred approach in UNHCR’s response to sexual misconduct](#)”. The Investigation Service has also implemented the majority of recommendations stemming from the 2019 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Investigation Service’s peer review, however those with significant resource implications remain pending. The IGO also enhanced its digital investigations tools, including a full upgrade of its complaints management software, i-Sight, and improved its digital forensic capability.

IGO resources – In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on funding, the IGO, alongside other oversight functions, accommodated a 5 per cent reduction in its resources for 2021. This resulted, among other things, in changes in staffing structure, particularly impacting the Strategic Oversight Service. The recruitment of the Head of Service, a position which has been vacant since November 2020, is currently being finalized. Subject to the availability of resources in the future, the IGO will strengthen its presence in the field, especially the Investigation Service, with the aim of responding to allegations in a more efficient and timely manner.

Awareness-raising and training – During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Investigation Service of the IGO explored alternative ways to raise awareness and train UNHCR and implementing partner personnel. The Service provided six virtual presentations for UNHCR personnel, covering six regions. In addition, the Service invested resources in the development of a training package for partners on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, which is scheduled to be finalized by the end of the first quarter of 2021. This is part of UNHCR’s commitment in the context of the role of the High Commissioner as IASC Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in 2020. The Investigation Service also held a series of investigations-related training for its staff.

UNHCR, 9 March 2021