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High Commissioner's Programme**

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Human resources, including staff welfare

Summary

This paper highlights developments in the area of human resources since the last update provided to the Standing Committee in September 2018 (EC/69/SC/CRP.19). It reports on the transformation process, including decentralization and regionalization, as well as the progress towards the reshaping of human resources in UNHCR. The paper also provides an overview of measures implemented and efficiencies achieved while working towards a more people-centric organization.

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I. Introduction

1. In 2018, the number of persons of concern to UNHCR was higher than ever, with an estimated 74.8 million people reported at the end of the year.¹ As new and ongoing crises continued to increase, the organization's workload also grew, as did the demand for an increasingly vast, flexible and mobile workforce.

2. In order to be able to respond and remain an innovative and agile organization, UNHCR embarked on a new way of working following the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and began an internal transformation process, including decentralization and regionalization. The Division of Human Resources (DHR) worked with the Change Team to support the relocation of the bureaux in the regions, including the establishment of three new regional bureaux in Africa, closer to UNHCR's operations.

3. The human resources (HR) transformation, announced at the 2018 Standing Committee, is aligned with the broader change process. It presents an opportunity for DHR to model its strengthened field-driven approach and support managers and colleagues, to build a better employee experience at UNHCR. The progress on the five strategic priorities driving the HR transformation is reported under Section IV. These five priorities are: (i) DHR as a strategic partner to operations; (ii) robust foundations for human resources delivery; (iii) effective workforce management; (iv) equipped leaders; and (v) an enabling work environment and culture.

II. The people working for UNHCR

4. UNHCR's total workforce amounts to over 16,800 individuals, including 12,400 staff and 4,400 affiliate personnel, working in 131 countries. The largest presence is in Sub-Saharan Africa, at 38 per cent, followed by the Middle East and North Africa at 22 per cent, Europe at 19 per cent, Asia and the Pacific at 12 per cent and the Americas at 9 per cent.

5. Of UNHCR's workforce, 37 per cent is based in hardship duty stations, often away from family and facing security threats, challenging working conditions and isolation. The well-being of all colleagues, and especially those in D and E duty stations, remains of particular concern to UNHCR.

Gender, diversity and inclusion

6. UNHCR strives to have a diverse and gender-balanced workforce, which contributes to the quality of work and generates innovative solutions and dialogue. In line with the Secretary-General's system-wide strategy on gender parity, UNHCR aims to meet the objectives of gender parity by 2023, well before the strategy's deadline of 2026. Currently, out of the total workforce, 43 per cent is female. In the international staff category, women represent 46.5 per cent, which is a 3 per cent increase towards parity over the last five years.

7. Out of 881 vacancies filled during the reporting period through internal assignment or recruitment, 424 were taken up by female candidates (48 per cent). Out of 211 internal assignments at a higher grade, 120 were female (57 per cent). As a result of the special measures to increase parity embedded in the 2017 "Administrative Instruction on Recruitment and Assignments" (UNHCR/AI/2017/7/Rev.1), more women will be taking up assignments at a higher grade in the future, as shown by the progress at P1 to P5 grades (46 per cent at P5 and P4, 45 per cent at P3 and 50 per cent at P2). However, challenges remain at the D1 level, where women currently represent 36 per cent of staff, as well as in hardship duty stations, where 26 per cent of staff are women. While progress on gender parity is ongoing, strengthening other aspects of diversity also remains essential for UNHCR.

¹ UNHCR Global Report 2018, accessible at <http://reporting.unhcr.org/publications>

8. UNHCR's increased efforts on diversity include targeted outreach to attract talent from less represented countries. Managers are provided with data on the geographic diversity profile of their teams at the time of recruitment and assignment and the impact of decisions is monitored and reported. Currently, 35 per cent of the workforce is from Africa, 19 per cent from the MENA region and Europe respectively, 14 per cent from Asia and the Pacific and 10 per cent from the Americas. DHR places particular emphasis on gender and geographic diversity in the assignment process for the new regional bureaux.

III. Human resources support to regionalization and decentralization

9. In line with broader United Nations reforms and to better implement the GCR, UNHCR started a process of transformation at the end of 2018. The aim was to improve the delivery of protection and solutions to displaced and stateless people by (i) placing regional bureaux in their respective regions; (ii) redesigning and enabling bureaux to provide effective support and oversight to country operations; and (iii) simplifying and decentralizing key processes to facilitate the work of those closest to the people UNHCR serves.

10. The HR transformation is one of multiple, complementary pillars of work, each driven by different parts of the organization. The ongoing large-scale process of assignment and reassignments is managed by DHR through a simplified and expedited procedure. By the end of June 2019, most positions in the international professional category had been advertised and the deployment of colleagues assigned to the regional bureaux was on track.

11. Close to 400 staff members had their position discontinued due to structural changes. To support staff during the transformation process, DHR introduced a series of support measures to ensure a smooth transition for the affected colleagues and the workforce at large. Concrete support was offered on how to successfully apply for positions, including to improve interview skills, together with strategies on how to cope with change on an emotional level. These measures included career transition and change management workshops, supported by the international career platform Impactpool.

12. In line with the efforts to be transparent and give guidance to colleagues, DHR introduced communication material and information packages on matters related to decentralization and regionalization. DHR further conducted several support missions to ensure clear communication and engagement with colleagues around the world. Another key aspect of the organizational transformation was the introduction of a voluntary separation programme, which was offered to interested staff meeting the criteria.

IV. Human resources transformation

Strategic partner to operations

13. An essential part of the HR transformation is the increased field presence. This is most evident through the introduction of regional HR staff in each of UNHCR's seven regional bureaux who will work with the various operations in the region. The teams will also support Regional Directors on assignments (up to P4 level), the extension of standard assignment lengths and the extension of temporary appointments, which will be delegated from Headquarters to the regions. A clear indication of expectations and accountabilities will be defined in service-level agreements. The teams will be part of DHR's new way of working, with stronger partnerships with operations, managers and the workforce for an increased focus on people management.

14. In April 2019, DHR took over the organizational design function from the Organizational Development and Management Service that merged with the Change Team. This allowed DHR to conduct structural reviews of entities within UNHCR to reinforce its strategic workforce planning. DHR also strengthened engagement with field-based HR

colleagues through the provision of operation-specific workforce dashboards, webinars and individual coaching sessions.

15. UNHCR's capacity for strategic workforce planning has been strengthened to be able to analyse, determine and forecast current and future HR needs. Through the "knowing our jobs and our people" project, over 2,700 job descriptions were simplified and reduced to just over 100 standard "core" job descriptions to bring more consistency and cohesion and enable faster advertising and reduced administrative burden. The next phase in the project is an updated corporate functional skills catalogue and the introduction of a LinkedIn-style internal online profile for UNHCR's workforce.

A robust foundation for HR delivery

16. DHR has introduced key performance indicators to measure its work and impact and to better track increased efficiencies, as well as the progress of the HR transformation. These indicators allow, for example, UNHCR to better track assignment timelines, completion of performance appraisals, gender parity targets and duty of care. To further professionalize the HR function at UNHCR, progress has been made to simplify processes and make them more efficient. This includes faster processing of vacancies, digitalization, information technology (IT) solutions and better communication on services available.

17. Since January 2019, UNHCR has been piloting the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in recruitment. By introducing the new AI-powered recruitment assistant ARiN, recruitment teams are able to focus on matters that require personal interaction with individual candidates, instead of extensive screening exercises that can be automated.

18. To enhance the management of administrative processes for a smoother employee experience, the project to digitalize personnel data continued in 2018-2019. The development of online self-service tools to support frequently recurring administrative processes, such as e-contracts, travel requests and attendance records, saved an estimated 1,485 workdays for administrative staff and 360 days for employees between July 2018 and July 2019. Around 164,950 pages of paper have also been saved. Further processes are expected to be automated by the end of 2019, including the integration of the HR and medical software for functionalities such as administrative processing of sick leaves.

19. As of 2019, DHR has increased its expertise and capacity for people analytics, through the newly created section, Human Resources Systems, People Analytics (HRSPA). DHR is also closely collaborating with the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications (DIST) and the Division of Financial and Administrative Management (DFAM) to explore future IT solutions in the area of HR as part of the broader IT strategy for UNHCR.

20. To allow employees across duty stations, regions and contract types to access the full range of services offered by DHR, a comprehensive guide to HR services was developed. Meanwhile, discussions have started on more innovative ways to bring information and guidance to colleagues where and when they need it the most.

Effective workforce management

21. In response to changing demands on the workforce and to provide additional support to emergency situations, DHR advertised almost 1,600 positions between July 2018 and July 2019. Of these, over 800 positions were filled by the end of the reporting period. In addition, by 30 June 2019, UNHCR had over 2,200 vetted candidates in its talent pools, 52 per cent of whom were women.

22. As a result of the 2017 "Administrative Instruction on Recruitment and Assignments" (UNHCR/AI/2017/7/Rev.1), the categories of personnel eligible to apply to internally advertised positions were broadened to include UNHCR's national and affiliate workforce, thereby increasing their career opportunities. Close to 50 per cent of all talent recruited into the international professional category in the reporting period were part of these categories.

23. Outreach activities during the year helped UNHCR to position itself better in the global recruitment market. An articulated Employee Value Proposition² supported this, as did a strategy to encourage more people to visit the new UNHCR career site and social media channels.

24. The Global Learning and Development Centre was reconfigured to integrate learning with talent management in line with best practices. Linking performance management with development and career planning enables a cycle of continuous development of the workforce, thus ensuring UNHCR has the necessary skills to deliver against objectives while improving staff engagement. A stronger focus on leadership development and succession planning further aimed to strengthen the management skills of current and future leaders, including through the development of interpersonal skills and resources management.

25. Between July 2018 and July 2019, over 16,000 colleagues, including the affiliate workforce, participated in at least one learning activity. A shift from face-to-face workshops to online modules increased the access of field teams to learning opportunities.

Equipped leaders

26. The complexity of UNHCR operations requires strong leaders who can foster an environment where the workforce can deliver successful results. By integrating succession planning into the Global Learning and Development Centre, the ability to not only develop the skills of current managers, but also to identify and cultivate the next generation of UNHCR leaders is reinforced. Over 500 colleagues have enrolled in management learning programmes for the levels P4 and above in 2018-2019. These programmes will become mandatory for progression to a higher grade.

27. UNHCR is investing more in broadening the experience and perspectives of staff with exposure to other areas of work. For example, the inter-agency coordination learning programme focuses on coordination skills necessary to strengthen UNHCR's ability to engage with partners across the displacement spectrum, and inter-agency mobility continues to be encouraged and supported.

Enabling environment and culture

28. DHR is doing its part in supporting the overall organizational investments to identify new ways of working that drive a more open, transparent, purpose-driven and dialogue-based culture as part of its transformation.

29. UNHCR takes the duty of care to its workforce seriously and several concrete measures to this effect have been taken, including through the "Administrative instruction on measures in support of personnel in high-risk duty stations" (UNHCR/AI/2018/11) issued in 2018. Communication packages have been developed to inform colleagues on the support available in these duty stations. In addition, half of applicants to high-risk duty stations have benefitted from psychosocial preparedness and field security webinars to enable them to make an informed decision on their choice of assignment. In parallel, the assessment of mandatory health support in high-risk and level-three emergency country operations is ongoing.

30. In collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), a humanitarian accommodation booking tool was developed, making nearly all 94 UNHCR guesthouses available for online booking. As a result, colleagues were better informed on their future living conditions. The next phase in the project is to reinforce follow-up on the living conditions in the guesthouses.

31. UNHCR is committed to strengthening integrity and zero tolerance for sexual misconduct, and DHR has processed over 2,600 pre-recruitment clearance requests. The

² The reciprocal expectations between employer and employee in order to attract, retain and motivate the performance of the organization's workforce.

organization is also a founding member of OneHR, the joint United Nations Centre for Human Resources and has been using its services for additional reference checks for international professional positions.

V. Partnership

32. The Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme works with countries to offer talented young professionals an opportunity to gain experience and work for UNHCR. By the end of June 2019, 74 JPOs were working for UNHCR, a 7 per cent increase compared to last year. Moving forward, UNHCR welcomes the continued engagement of traditional donors and invites other countries to join the programme.

33. Since late 2018, UNHCR has collaborated with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, to develop a new volunteer path for refugees. This programme will enable refugees to become UNVs in their host countries, thereby building their self-reliance and empowering them in a safe, sustainable and dignified manner. So far, seven refugee volunteers in four different countries have joined the programme and started working.

VI. Conclusion

34. In 2019, DHR began implementing the HR transformation, building on preparatory steps taken in 2018. The impact of this process will become increasingly visible in the coming years, and by 2021 it is expected that UNHCR will begin to fully experience its benefits. In a rapidly changing world where technology and automation play an increasingly important role, UNHCR looks to a future where the work environment is powered by technology in order to offer a more human experience. The transformation will lead to a more advanced and people-centric HR function that is field-driven and delivers highly efficient HR services in partnership with managers and employees.
