**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Standing Committee
Eighty-ninth meeting

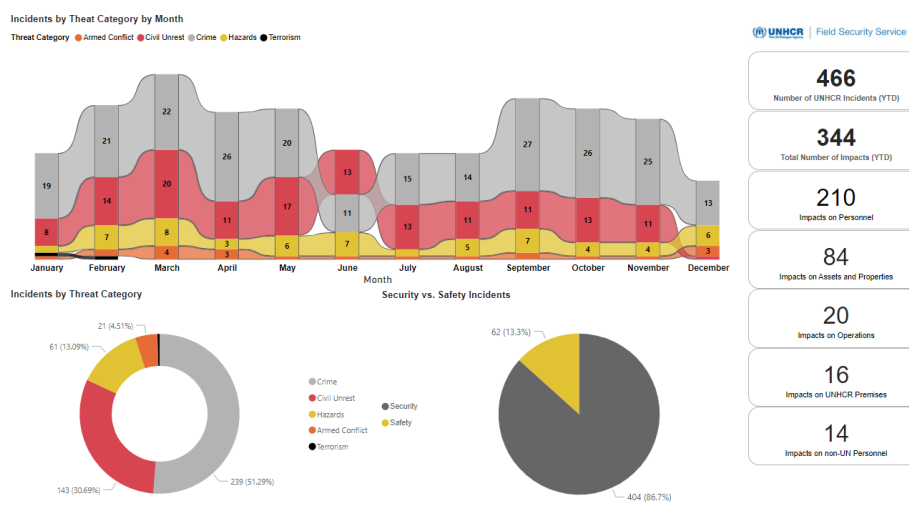# Security of the workforce and operations in UNHCR

Summary

This paper provides an update on the security of UNHCR operations and security risk management since the eighty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2023 (EC/74/SC/CRP.5). The paper examines global security incidents and trends in 2023, identifies a number of risks impacting UNHCR globally, articulates recent security policy developments and operational imperatives from the security risk management standpoint in enabling UNHCR programmes and activities, and underscores workforce safety and security consistent with organizational duty of care.

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I. Introduction

1.   The integrated security risk management strategy of UNHCR serves as an enabler of operational delivery and is central to meeting its organizational goals, as articulated in the Global Compact on Refugees and the Office's strategic directions for 2022 to 2026. UNHCR continues to promote an organization-wide culture of security in order to facilitate the delivery of services to forcibly displaced persons in challenging and complex security environments.

2.   UNHCR remains an active partner within the United Nations Security Management System, providing support in the coordination of security policy, training and security risk management. Organizational due diligence, together with responsibilities for duty of care and accountability to its workforce, are concepts which are actively implemented within the security management policies and practices of UNHCR.

II. Global security situation

3.   The conflation and magnitude of global conflicts and crises has meant a significant increase in threats and resultant risks, creating a need for enhanced support by UNHCR to increased numbers of forcibly displaced persons. Approximately 25 per cent of the UNHCR workforce are based in substantial or high-risk level duty stations, as assessed by the United Nations Security Management System.

4.   As shown above, in 2023 UNHCR reported 466 incidents (a 4.48 per cent increase from the 446 incidents reported in 2022), of which 405 were security incidents and 61 were hazards. A decrease was witnessed in the total number of impacts on personnel, assets, premises and operations, down 11.57 per cent from 389 impacts in 2022 to 344 in 2023. In 2023, of the total number of impacts, 210 were related to personnel, 84 to assets, 20 to operations, 16 to premises, and 14 to non-United Nations personnel. The total number of critical incidents (including deaths, abductions, sexual assaults, arrests and detentions, and serious injuries) decreased by 23 per cent, from 26 incidents in 2022 to 20 in 2023.

5.   Overall, the number of incidents in 2023 increased by 4.48 per cent from 2022. Three UNHCR personnel died in the line of duty as a result of the earthquake in Türkiye.

III. Strategic security governance and oversight

6.   In addition to promoting an organizational culture of security, UNHCR supports oversight mechanisms to protect the accountabilities of the organization. Given the Office's significant presence in high-risk areas, oversight remains a priority. In addition to its involvement in the United Nations Security Management System, UNHCR participates in

numerous steering groups, oversight committees and working groups, including in relation to broader workstreams such as road safety, and occupational health and safety.

7.   As part of a holistic approach to security management, the Field Security Service within the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply supports senior management in the fulfilment of security-related responsibilities, monitors global incidents and trends, provides analysis and briefings, and supports compliance with security policy directives.

8.   The Field Security Service conducts and oversees biannually a global review of compliance with security risk management measures. This is in addition to operational reviews in locations where the security environment has deteriorated, impacting the security of the UNHCR workforce and its operational ability to deliver programmes for persons of concern.

9.   In 2023, security was at the forefront of planning discussions for Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, while an operational review was undertaken for the Sahel. With respect to the Sahel, field missions identified gaps in security staffing, procedures and assets, including in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. A mission to Chad was also conducted to identify gaps and needs. The review included examination of duty of care issues, Staff health and wellbeing and medical protocols.

10.   In April 2023, following the eruption of conflict in the Sudan and a critical deterioration in security, UNHCR took an active part in the system-wide relocation and evacuation process. The operation encountered significant challenges, with many UNHCR international personnel relocated to Port Sudan in April 2023 and with the remainder evacuated to neighbouring countries. National personnel were also supported with relocation from their respective duty stations. A system-wide lessons learned exercise for the Sudan crisis was subsequently conducted, which UNHCR took part in.

11.   UNHCR Senior Field Security Coordinators in the regional bureaux support decision-making at the regional level and provide security support to the respective country operations. UNHCR Headquarters supports these endeavours with a variety of analytical products and policy guidance, also working closely with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security on specific regional issues and situations.

12.   Within UNHCR ongoing collaboration between the Field Security Service and the Staff Health and Wellbeing Service remains strong and continues to be reinforced in a number of areas related to staff wellbeing, including mental health services and psychosocial support, medical evacuation modalities and the identification of medical facilities and infrastructure. The Field Security Service also collaborates closely with the Department of Human Resources, including on victim care related to sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring a people-centred approach.

IV.   Technical support to operations

13.   UNHCR continues to provide technical support to its field operations, including analytical products and blast and engineering expertise. The Senior Field Security Officer for Structural Engineering provided vital support following the earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye in the first quarter of 2023.

14.   In 2023, security support was provided on an ongoing basis to the field and to the regional bureaux, with coordinated deployments to reinforce or support operations in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, the Niger and South Sudan.

15.   UNHCR procures security equipment which is fit for purpose and available for immediate use. Technical specifications for equipment are regularly reviewed and updated. In 2023, flak jackets, one type of personal protective equipment, were specifically reconfigured with a new design for the female workforce. UNHCR also regularly reviews office and accommodation infrastructure to ensure appropriate protection standards.

V.   Security workforce

16.   UNHCR continues to work towards achieving an inclusive and diverse professional security workforce, reflecting its Gender Parity Action Plan 2022-2024. Three recruitment outreach campaigns took place in 2023 with the aim of diversifying and attracting a broader talent pool of candidates in the area of security. Through the women's security network mechanism, established in 2022, UNHCR provided regular career development and mentoring advice specifically in respect of female security personnel. Presently, women represent 7 per cent of the overall security workforce.

VI.   Inter-agency processes

17.   UNHCR remains a strong partner in strengthening the United Nations Security Management System with engagement and collaboration at all levels. Inter-agency collaboration is one of the five core pillars of the Field Security Service Action Plan. The Office also provided support to the United Nations Security Management System in the provision of crisis management training for Designated Officials.

18.   Through active engagement in the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week, UNHCR reinforced its commitment to strengthening security for humanitarian partners, co-leading several webinars and discussions on good security management practices.

VII.   Learning and development

19.   UNHCR provided people-centred approaches to security risk management training in the Americas and in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions in 2023. Moreover, women's security awareness training, in collaboration with the Staff Health and Wellbeing Service, was provided in 17 locations in 8 countries, with a total of 845 women participating.

20.   Two Security Management Learning Programmes for senior managers in high-risk duty stations were organized, in which 43 personnel successfully completed the programme. Support was also provided to six workshops on emergency management.

21.   The Field Security Service organized eight learning webinars on pertinent technical and policy issues, ensuring that the security workforce has the requisite updated knowledge and expertise to support operational delivery in challenging security environments.

VIII.   Conclusion

22.   Continued investments in security risk management remain an imperative for the protection of the UNHCR workforce, persons of concern and assets. Effective security management requires continuous evaluation, organizational commitment and adequate human and financial resources to ensure appropriate implementation of security measures and duty of care for the UNHCR workforce.

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