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**Human resources, including staff welfare**

*Summary*

This paper highlights developments in the area of human resources and staff welfare in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees since the last update presented at the Standing Committee in September 2023 (EC/73/SC/CRP.20). It reports on support provided to the workforce during the realignment process and outlines achievements made as part of the transformation towards a more effective, people-centric and modern human resources function at UNHCR.

## I. Introduction

1. To respond to global displacement challenges effectively, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) relies on a diverse, talented and high-performing workforce that is deployed in a flexible and timely manner, and is well-supported by the organization. Nevertheless, the unprecedented number of displaced and stateless persons, along with funding constraints, presented significant challenges to UNHCR in the past year. Focusing on partnership and the premise that a well-supported workforce is better able to care for others, UNHCR sought to foster a positive employee experience, especially during times of transition. The Division of Human Resources has been instrumental in driving changes within UNHCR and the broader United Nations system through strategic workforce planning; talent development; support for health and well-being; the use of innovative technology; and the simplification of processes. This report outlines changes that ultimately enable UNHCR to better protect and assist displaced and stateless individuals.

## II. The workforce

2. By 30 June 2024, the total workforce of UNHCR amounted to nearly 19,800 colleagues, including 15,400 staff members and 4,400 affiliate colleagues working in 136 countries and territories, with offices in 588 locations. UNHCR is committed to reaching gender parity, and the current workforce is 45.6 per cent female and 53.4 per cent male. Internationally-deployed colleagues are 49.3 per cent female and 50 per cent male. UNHCR has reached gender parity at P2, P3, P5 and D2 levels, with efforts ongoing at P4 and D1 levels.

3. The largest proportion of the workforce in UNHCR comes from Europe (20 per cent), followed by the Eastern Horn and Great Lakes region (18.3 per cent), the Middle East and North Africa region (16 per cent), the Americas (15.3 per cent), the Asia and the Pacific (14.7 per cent), West and Central Africa (9.7 per cent) and Southern Africa (4 per cent), representing a total of 166 nationalities.

4. The UNHCR operational presence in sub-Saharan Africa was 33.4 per cent (18.7 per cent in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, 9.7 per cent in West and Central Africa, and 5 per cent in Southern Africa), followed by 17.3 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa, 14.4 per cent in the Americas, 13.6 per cent in the Asia and the Pacific, and 12 per cent in Europe. Ninety-one per cent of colleagues were based outside of the UNHCR Headquarters in Budapest, Copenhagen and Geneva, and 37 per cent worked in hardship duty stations.

## III. Workforce changes and support measures

5. Workforce changes are a recurring aspect of humanitarian work that responds to emergent crises. The realignment process, including its workforce reductions initiated in 2023, had a large-scale impact on UNHCR. To assist colleagues affected by a 10 per cent discontinuation of posts, the Division of Human Resources offered a range of support measures including career counselling, job application resources and coaching for career transition. In addition, staff counsellors and peer support were available for personalized assistance. The discontinuation of posts also had a notable impact on the workforce who had to regroup, reprioritize and ensure the continuity of operations.

6. Managers received dedicated assistance, including a human resources guide on workforce changes, as well as information sessions and coaching to help them navigate the complexities of downsizing while realizing the organization's strategic objectives.

7. Support for staff members was delivered in collaboration with country operations and human resources teams, led by senior regional Human Resources Partners and Talent Advisers based in each of the regional bureaux. To maintain robust, transparent and effective engagement with the workforce, regular meetings were held with the Global Staff Council, focusing on fostering collaboration and addressing concerns. Multiple internal

communication channels were used to reach a wide audience and ensure that colleagues were well-informed and supported.

8. To further mitigate the impact of the changes on staff and drawing on the organization's rich internal talent, UNHCR temporarily froze all external recruitment in December 2023. Only internal candidates and those with UNHCR experience, including Junior Professional Officers and United Nations Volunteers, were considered for regular appointments and assignments, with priority given to staff in between assignments. During the reporting period, some 280 eligible colleagues opted to participate in a voluntary separation programme.

## **IV. People, partnerships and technology**

9. The human resources function in UNHCR has been transforming since 2019 to become more modern and people-centric by focusing on operational efficiency and partnerships, as well as by embracing technology to simplify human resources tasks, in line with broader UNHCR reforms. While the realignment exercise was ongoing, the Division of Human Resources continued providing dedicated support within the core framework of people, partnerships and technology.

### **A. People**

10. Attracting, growing and retaining diverse talent through a positive employee experience, enabled by good people management, remained a priority for UNHCR. The Office strengthened its focus on risk management by reinforcing the vetting of candidates, in cooperation with the Office of the Principal Adviser on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, regional Human Resources Partners and country operations. Over 10,000 integrity clearance reviews were completed for various appointments. To tackle sexual misconduct and mitigate the risk of hiring possible perpetrators previously hired by non-governmental organizations, the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme was rolled out across numerous country operations as a pilot programme, as a complement to the United Nations screening database "ClearCheck", a highly secure online platform. "ClearCheck", which has been operational since 2018, permits information-sharing among United Nations entities on individuals who have established allegations related to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, with the aim of preventing their re-employment within the United Nations system.

11. UNHCR continued its talent outreach and brand visibility in recruitment efforts, while considering the current constraints on external recruitment. A webinar outreach programme attracted over 26,000 registrations throughout the year, and UNHCR was represented in 20 career fairs targeting specific regions and demographics. In November 2023, UNHCR received the Career Development Roundtable Award in recognition of innovative initiatives, such as the refugee United Nations Volunteers modality, a flagship initiative for UNHCR and the United Nations Volunteer programme. UNHCR plays a pioneering role in the meaningful engagement of refugees, and the refugee United Nations Volunteers initiative, which began in 2018, allows refugees and asylum-seekers to utilize their skills in their host countries, while strengthening their resilience. As of 2024, a total of 100 refugee volunteers had been deployed as part of this modality. According to surveys conducted by Impactpool, the global career platform, UNHCR is currently considered the most desired employer among its subscribers.

12. UNHCR continued to prioritize people management to foster an environment where employees thrive and work towards the achievement of results. Managers were supported through expanded executive coaching and mentoring programmes, designed for the development of critical skills at an earlier stage of their careers. The pilot programme of Regional Talent Advisers, which also included a talent outreach programme for national colleagues, proved successful and significantly enhanced talent management in the regions.

13. Recognizing the interrelationship between workplace productivity, performance and health, UNHCR launched its new strategy for workplace mental health and psychosocial

well-being, on the occasion of World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2023. The strategy consolidates the different actions taken towards safeguarding and improving the mental health and psychosocial well-being of colleagues within UNHCR, and aligns with the mental health and well-being strategy of the United Nations system. As part of a longer-term and integrated approach, a dedicated forum was established with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders across the organization, including psychosocial teams, whose work directly or indirectly impacts the mental health and well-being of the workforce. Around 3,500 colleagues in 120 country operations benefited from individual interventions, and over 21,000 participated in group support events. In early October 2023, Wellbeing@UNHCR, a unique online event, connected thousands of colleagues around the world through sessions with internal and external speakers, in various time zones and different languages. The event focused on topics such as well-being in the workplace, burnout, self-care practices and effective teamwork.

14. UNHCR continued to commit to creating a safe and healthy workplace through a preventative approach to risk management, in line with the 2021 policy on occupational health and safety. By June 2024, over 300 focal points for occupational health and safety were outposted, providing support to colleagues worldwide. Over 1,200 colleagues have received training on internal hazard identification and risk assessment, which will improve transparency for the reporting and management of incidents in UNHCR. Furthermore, committees on occupational health and safety were set up in all regions by the end of 2023. Access to essential health care in the field continued to be monitored with a view to ensuring health support to staff members, including medical evacuation.

15. Underscoring the rich diversity within UNHCR, efforts continued to build an inclusive, respectful and equitable organization, where all colleagues feel a sense of belonging. Following an organization-wide, consultative process, in April 2024, UNHCR launched its first [strategic framework for diversity, equity and inclusion](#) for the period from 2024 to 2026. The framework targets four main areas: culture and belonging; capacity-building; recruitment, retention and progression; and accountability measures. In the second half of 2023, an advisory group on inclusion and diversity was formed, composed of UNHCR senior managers and representatives of the Global Staff Council and employee resources groups. The advisory group makes recommendations for the strategic framework on diversity, equity and inclusion and ensures that goals are not only set but also achieved.

## **B. Partnerships**

16. The Division of Human Resources emphasized collaboration and client-centred approaches to enhance organizational efficiency as well as strategic engagement with UNHCR country operations. In parallel, collaboration with other divisions and entities, as well as inter-agency efforts, strengthened service delivery. Emphasizing a field-first approach and partnership mindset, the Division of Human Resources increased interactions through the Strategic Human Resources Dialogues series, a dynamic platform for information exchange with the organization's human resources community, and through monthly meetings with regional Human Resources Partners.

17. Following significant inputs received from across the organization, the UNHCR Workforce Planning Handbook was released in July 2023. The handbook assists managers, human resources and others involved in the planning process, and aims to improve the way UNHCR aligns outcomes and staffing with the organization's strategic objectives.

18. To recruit effectively, UNHCR actively supported staff mobility, and leveraged government secondments of staff as well as the Junior Professional Officer programme. The Junior Professional Officer programme remained a highly valuable mechanism for UNHCR to gain access to young, talented professionals, while providing a pathway for external candidates to gain experience in the United Nations system. By June 2024, 61 Junior Professional Officers sponsored by Member States and from 18 countries were working for UNHCR. To enhance further long-term career opportunities, a development programme was implemented in 2023 allowing Junior Professional Officers to delve into field operations. The programme aims to broaden knowledge, enhance skills and foster networking

opportunities for Junior Professional Officers to become effective leaders in the humanitarian field. UNHCR also greatly benefited from the United Nations Volunteer Programme, and as of June 2024, has employed 634 United Nations volunteers.

18. External partnerships supporting good people management and workforce engagement continued through McKinsey & Co. on the Connected Leadership Academy, the United Nations Foundation for Peace on Purpose, and Lululemon for Wellbeing@UNHCR. In 2023, 50 female staff members participated in the Women in Management Programme at the *Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires* (also known as INSEAD).

## C. Technology

19. UNHCR strategically leads on human resources issues in inter-agency forums and continues to co-chair the human resources network of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination. UNHCR is also a founding member alongside five other organizations which established the United Nations digital identification programme, an initiative sponsored by the High-Level Committee on Management. This flagship inter-agency initiative aims to provide the United Nations workforce with a universal, system-wide digital identity solution to facilitate mobility, and the administration of pensions, benefits and entitlements.

20. Following the implementation in 2022 of Workday, the digital human resources tool, UNHCR prioritized the stabilization of business processes and the alignment with other new tools introduced by the business transformation programme. During the transition to business as usual, continuity within the organization was ensured in collaboration with other divisions as part of the business transformation programme, focusing on practice-sharing and interoperability as systems evolved. Workday has significantly improved data flow and the document management process, integrating with the results-based management system COMPASS, the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, the new cloud enterprise resource planning system, the occupational health solution Cority and other systems, streamlining data flow and processing, and improving efficiency. In addition, the learning platform itself underwent significant modernization and migrated to Workday Learning.

21. Workday has radically improved the user experience for all colleagues and allows enhanced monitoring and management of personal data, recruitment and staffing activity. All actions in the system are auditable and trackable. The improved engagement and communication through Workday has enabled efficiency gains, such as a reduction in the average time required to fill a vacancy for international positions, and the resolution in Workday of around 20,000 personnel administration cases during the reporting period.

22. As part of the realignment of Workday with the cloud enterprise resource planning system, a Workday module on statutory travel was developed to include eligibility and approval rules. New integrations with Workday and the cloud enterprise resource planning system have improved the end-to-end user experience through an easy and interactive interface, with greater automation of processes, including those related to reassignment travel requests.

## V. Conclusion

24. UNHCR continues to build upon its human resources function, embracing technology and improving the way the organization aligns outcomes, talent recruitment and management with its strategic objectives. In the context of limited resources, the enhancement and optimization of human resources processes were critical. Despite the challenges due to the realignment process, a multitude of new emergencies and shortages in humanitarian funding, UNHCR was able to adapt to evolving organizational needs, and enhanced operational efficiency and effectiveness in order to foster a work environment where colleagues can thrive and make an impact for the most vulnerable.