

**Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
91st Standing Committee meeting**

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**Agenda Item: 3 (b) Human resources, including staff welfare (EC/75/SC/CRP.20)
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Madam Chair, Excellencies,

Due to the nature of our work, UNHCR is constantly experiencing change in the context we work in, our funding environment and our workforce composition. So while we are no strangers to change, the scale of this latest exercise – including a 10% discontinuation of posts – has had a significant impact on colleagues worldwide, with implications on their families and loved ones, as well as on teams, who had to regroup, reprioritize, and most importantly keep delivering to minimize the impact on the displaced and stateless people we serve.

I take this opportunity to recognize the amazing resilience and dedication of our workforce, who remains committed, engaged and focused on the work despite constant challenges as you could see in the video.

Throughout this period, Human Resources teams – at HQ and in operations – have been providing support to colleagues, while undergoing similar changes. This included career support, development resources, psychosocial support, and individual and team coaching. The High Commissioner has decided to put in place a temporary external hiring freeze to support colleagues whose position has been cut and prioritize the rich experience that internal colleagues have accumulated over the years with the organization for assignments; allowing us to substantially reduce the number of non-working colleagues in between assignments.

Understandably, these have been times of stress and anxiety for the organization which have put once again our systems to the test. What we have seen however is that the efforts and investments in building a stronger people-centric foundation through the HR transformation over the last years had us better equipped and prepared to respond to these stressors.

As part of the HR transformation and in line with UNHCR's broader regionalization and decentralization efforts, HR regional teams were embedded in 2019 in each of our seven regions to bring strategic people support closer to the point of delivery. In the subsequent years, we reinforced these teams with Regional Talent Advisors to ensure targeted and context-specific talent and career management. These teams were critical during COVID-19 and the multiple emergencies we have had and once again proved to be key partners to managers and the workforce during the staffing rationalization exercise, including through career webinars, skill pathways, and one-one-one clinics with impacted colleagues.

As I mention the partnership with managers, I would like to take a moment to highlight specifically the impact of the investments in people management over the last years and in creating a direct line between managers and HR. We found that these were key to prepare our managers build and maintain teams during times of change and ensure a people-centric

approach to the way we manage the workforce. In 2023 alone, over 700 managers benefitted from coaching services to enhance their people management and leadership skills.

In recognition of their additional responsibilities, specific support was extended to managers, individually and as a target group. One such example was the HR Guide on Workforce Changes, a step-by-step handbook, to assist managers with the difficult task of reductions in a people-centric way..

In April this year, we launched UNHCR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Framework for 2024-2026, also available on our UNHCR website. This is a significant step forward, setting clear strategic directions that will integrate DEI into every aspect of our operations and interactions. The Framework informs how we work together, solve problems, and engage with one another - ensuring an inclusive workplace encompassing all aspects of diversity, that include but are not limited to gender, race, age, ethnicity, nationality, language, disability, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, and family structure, where everyone feels valued and respected.

In that respect, I am pleased to update you that as at the end of August 2024 we have reached gender parity at all grades in the international professional category in line with the UN System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity.

And so, while HR had to reprioritize and pivot to support the rationalization exercise and the impacted workforce, we continued looking ahead to further improvements and innovations under our three pillars of People, Partnership, and Technology, to ensure we remain efficient and adaptable and continue offering the best possible employee experience.

The stabilization of our HR digital tool, after alignment with Cloud ERP and COMPASS, remained a key focus and allowed us to introduce hundreds of simplifications for our workforce and streamline additional processes for HR teams. The availability of data and metrics through the system has been a meaningful change and will continue informing our decisions going forward, allowing us to track impact gains and identify issues, moving away from manual processes that were not trackable in the previous systems. And this will not stop here. As a cloud-based system, our tool continues to evolve with best practices and user needs. I am proud to say that UNHCR has taken the lead in the UN user group to make sure our experiences can be useful for other organizations.

In addition, earlier this week, we launched People Chat in partnership with the Division of Information Systems & Telecommunications (DIST) and the Innovation Service: our new generative AI chatbot for HR questions in UNHCR and are leading the way for the inter-agency project to develop a common HR Gen AI chatbot called Unify HR. We have made this technology available to sister agencies and together are in the process of developing an AI tool to enhance operational efficiency in HR policy administration and allow organizations to compare their respective HR policy frameworks.

We are also founding members of the UN Digital ID, the system-wide identity for staff members, under the umbrella of the High-Level Committee on Management.

I am also pleased to report that we have continued looking at ways to improve the employee experience for all colleagues. We are currently exploring on a pilot basis the centralization of insurance claims for locally recruited colleagues and their families, strengthening confidentiality and privacy of medical information and with an expected improved user experience. We also rolled out a new medical insurance scheme for consultants and contractors. With this plan we are able to provide robust insurance coverage to our colleagues, eliminating the risks and liabilities of self-insurance and reaffirming our duty of care to all colleagues, including those in the affiliate category.

Madam Chair, Excellencies, the case to ensuring that the people function at UNHCR continues to adapt and evolve is clear. In the last few years, we have aimed to become a strategic partner to the organization in recognition of both the volatility of today's world and the centrality of our workforce who make this work possible.

Looking ahead, we have identified additional areas with clear improvement opportunities, this includes the review of our learning and development function, the continued modernization of our transactional services, and the stronger integration of talent management functions to respond to today's needs.

In doing so, the challenges of perennial transformation should not be underestimated for a workforce dealing with change fatigue and having just undergone a significant rationalization exercise.

In times of change, supporting our workforce is our top priority. We are committed to navigating these challenges together by fostering open communication, providing the resources needed for success, and ensuring a supportive environment where everyone feels valued. Together, we will continue embracing change, adapt, and emerge stronger.