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**Human resources, including staff welfare**

*Summary*

This paper highlights developments in the area of human resources and staff welfare in UNHCR since the last update presented at the Standing Committee in September 2022 (EC/73/SC/CRP.22). It outlines achievements made as part of the transformation towards a more effective, people-centric and modern human resources function at UNHCR, and reports on the support provided to the workforce amidst growing humanitarian needs.

## I. Introduction

1. The ongoing increase in global displacement, brought on by emerging and protracted crises, continued to intensify the demand for a robust and adaptive UNHCR workforce. Against this background, the human resources function in UNHCR made significant progress by becoming more efficient, modern and people-centric, while supporting the workforce that was serving in multiple crises. Through innovative technology, simplification, dedicated support for the health and well-being of the workforce and strategic management and leadership guidance, the Division of Human Resources has become a driver of change in UNHCR and the United Nations system. This report provides an overview of how this transformation has evolved, with a significant impact on people, partnerships and technology for the workforce and on the way that the organization is able to protect and assist forcibly displaced and stateless people.

## II. People at the heart of UNHCR

2. By June 2023, the total workforce of UNHCR amounted to over 20,500 people, including more than 15,500 staff members and nearly 5,000 affiliate colleagues working in 139 countries. The largest presence was in sub-Saharan Africa with 39 per cent (22 per cent in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, 11 per cent in the West and Central Africa region and 6 per cent in Southern Africa), followed by 16 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa, 13 per cent in Europe, 12 per cent in the Asia and the Pacific region and 10 per cent in the Americas. Ninety per cent of the workforce was based outside of the UNHCR headquarters (Budapest, Copenhagen and Geneva), and 38 per cent worked in hardship duty stations, often far away from their families and social networks, and working under challenging circumstances, including security threats.

3. The commitment and resilience of the UNHCR workforce were severely tested by several highly impactful situations and security incidents during the reporting period, alongside the many ongoing crises. In February 2023, the earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye greatly affected UNHCR personnel and their families in Gaziantep, Antakya (Hatay) and Sanliurfa, resulting in the loss of three colleagues and one person working with UNHCR through a partner organization. In April 2023, de-facto authorities in Afghanistan imposed a ban on all working activities by female workforce members in the country. UNHCR responded by implementing flexible work modalities such as teleworking for the operation's 51 female colleagues, enabling the operation to continue fulfilling its humanitarian mandate. During the renewed conflict in the Sudan in April 2023, a rapidly declining security situation, targeted attacks against foreign nationals and the looting of humanitarian compounds forced UNHCR to evacuate most international staff members in the country. In collaboration with multiple United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Department for Safety and Security, the World Food Programme and the United Nations country team, humanitarian convoys evacuated 70 colleagues and many family members to Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan.

4. UNHCR, in coordination with the United Nations Field Group and Human Resource Network, provided logistical and financial support to affected staff and affiliates in these situations. The safety, health and well-being of the UNHCR workforce remained a priority, while keeping the ability to carry out its mandate firmly embedded in the decision-making process. In response to specific psychosocial risks in the affected operations, context-tailored support was provided to the workforce. Trauma-focused psychotherapy sessions were delivered after the earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye and following the Sudan situation. Group support for female staff in Afghanistan, provided virtually, has been added to the existing psychosocial support programme. Affected colleagues in the Sudan situation, as well as those affected by the earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, were able to access salary advances and other financial emergency support to help compensate for significant financial losses and meet material needs.

5. UNHCR recognizes that its work is carried out more effectively with a geographically diverse workforce. Equity, inclusion and belonging remain key priorities for the organization so that personnel feel included and supported by the organization in all stages of their career.

During the reporting period, UNHCR made significant strides in implementing its race, equality and equity action plan. The action plan provides a robust framework for developing a more equitable and inclusive working environment across the regions covered by its seven bureaux. With the introduction of a revised recruitment and assignments policy, UNHCR is making progress towards improving geographical representation and reaching gender parity in the appointment process. An ongoing offering of workshops, tools and resources promotes discussions around anti-racism throughout the organization. UNHCR also made notable progress in its five-year action plan on disability inclusion and has taken a strong stand on disability inclusion with the launch of the administrative instruction on fitness to work in October 2022. Since its launch, 186 colleagues have availed themselves of this mechanism. Digital accessibility continues to be improved on online platforms, including disability-focused career fairs, sign language and closed captions in enhanced digital tools, events and training.

6. Currently, 44 per cent of the total workforce is female, of which women in the international category represent 48 per cent. The number of women in leadership roles further increased over the past year to 46 per cent in 2023. Over the past five years, UNHCR has redoubled its efforts to achieve gender parity by hiring equal numbers of men and women in the international professional category and placing a stronger focus on women in the conversion from national staff to international careers. During the reporting period, UNHCR strengthened the women's leadership development portfolio through bespoke initiatives. Most notably, the UNHCR-Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires (INSEAD) Women in Management programme helped 50 mid-level national and international managers strengthen their skills, influence and impact within the organization. A delegation of 35 women leaders at the senior and national and international officer levels joined the Women in Global Leadership Development Forum, connecting women from across the global development sector to exchange ideas, tools and perspectives.

7. The workforce is UNHCR's greatest asset, and their health and overall well-being are key to the successful implementation of its mandate. The culture, duty of care and an enabling working environment in the organization are, therefore, a central element to its transformation. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis amplified the focus on employee well-being, leading to new policies for an inclusive, supportive work environment, fostering agility and resilience. In line with these organizational priorities, a new parental leave policy was issued in June 2023, featuring broader definitions of parenthood and providing expanded leave entitlements for various parenting scenarios, aligning with revised United Nations General Assembly Staff Regulations and Rules.

### **III. People, partnership, and technology – transformation at UNHCR**

8. As the scope of work continued to grow along with an increasing number of forcibly displaced people, fully utilizing existing resources and optimizing human resource processes was crucial for organizational efficiency. The human resources transformation has been a significant driver in reshaping how colleagues work together as a more digital, operations-driven and people-centric organization.

9. The introduction of Workday@UNHCR, a new cloud-based digital human resources solution, in October 2022 represented a major milestone in the human resources transformation for UNHCR, leveraging technology as a catalyst for modernizing, streamlining, and simplifying human resources processes and procedures. As part of UNHCR's broader work on modernizing its systems through the Business Transformation Programme, Workday represents a crucial step in transforming the organization's human resources function from a transactional to a strategic partnership model. The system centralizes all personnel functions in one place and introduces several new features, such as career profiles, dynamic performance management and strategic workforce planning. Workday provides the opportunity to link learning, performance management, mobility and career management to support colleagues' professional development more efficiently. It also allows UNHCR to disaggregate its workforce data, leveraging global best practices in human resources to achieve our strategic goals, including those on diversity and inclusion. By June

2023, UNHCR had successfully conducted over 2.8 million personnel transactions within Workday. While this change has been substantial for the organization, it will bring long-term simplicity and efficiency and has already contributed to making UNHCR a more innovative and effective organization.

10. The roll-out of Workday has been instrumental in introducing global human resources best practices at UNHCR and optimizing processes for efficiency and effectiveness. It has entailed the enhancement of over 200 processes and changed 16 human resources policies, making them more attuned to current working modalities and operational requirements. The revisions have fostered improved communication between management and staff, leading to greater transparency, inclusivity, and shared responsibility in personnel decisions.

11. The human resources transformation, powered by technology and coupled with the adoption of best practices, significantly scaled up the organization's ability to process large numbers of applications and better ensure the availability of talent at short notice. Between July 2022 and June 2023, 904 international positions were filled, of which 120 were positions filled using fast track, an accelerated vacancy management process that UNHCR uses where rapid deployment is necessary. Fast-track positions were filled to respond to emergency situations in Afghanistan, Mozambique, Myanmar and Ukraine.

#### **IV. Empowered Workforce**

12. During the reporting period, UNHCR has made significant progress toward making people management an organizational priority and facilitating an environment where people thrive, grow and achieve exceptional results. A central enabler in facilitating good management practices has been the integration of Evolve, a new performance management model in Workday. The implementation, based on simplified processes, continuous learning and coaching, frequent check-ins, trust and collaboration, places a greater focus on team achievements and results-based impact and facilitates the operationalization of strategic directions at all levels. Evolve also has a new accountability and feedback mechanism, fostering a more transparent and meaningful, timely feedback.

13. To further embed good people management in leadership practices across UNHCR, the organization is introducing a new UNHCR People Management Framework, outlining the behaviours, mindsets, skills and enablers that people managers need in the organization – now and in the future. Recognizing the criticality of the relationship between manager and employee, the purpose is to foster an inclusive and enabling work environment as outlined in the Strategic Directions 2022 – 2026, and provide common principles to build accountability, trust, psychological safety and to achieve results. The proposed People Management Framework is anchored in the UNHCR values and the Senior Leadership Commitments for the Future of Work in the United Nations System.

14. By significantly expanding executive coaching and mentoring programmes, UNHCR was able to better support managers and to encourage the development of critical skills at an earlier stage. Moreover, coaching has been mainstreamed in all leadership and learning programmes as part of core people management skills. As the demands on UNHCR managers and leaders increase – with changing operational demands and expectations of the workforce – and as the organization and the world of work comes to terms with new hybrid work models, UNHCR will continue to expand these dynamic development programmes.

15. UNHCR has implemented multiple new resources to support people managers and give leaders the skills, tools and support to lead their teams, such as the new role of Senior Advisor on Management Support. Embedded in the Division of Human Resources, the Senior Advisor provides hands-on guidance to managers on how to pro-actively address challenging situations in the work environment, working in partnership with the senior regional human resources partners, the office of the Ombudsperson and the Ethics office. To ensure that operations are supported with talent solutions and workforce planning tailored to their specific needs, six regional talent management advisors were deployed to regional bureaux in November 2022 on a pilot basis. These advisors collaborate closely with senior

human resources partners to support the development of national colleagues and facilitate integrated personnel solutions for operations.

16. Opportunities for development and growth are central to a positive employee experience. UNHCR is, therefore, implementing a new approach to learning across the organization, transitioning from traditional training to performance-boosting learning experiences. This included a shift from the Learn and Connect platform to the integrated and dynamic Workday Learning, providing colleagues with a more modern, responsive platform for their learning needs and availing facilitators with expanded options for tailored solutions such as personalized learning paths and training sessions. The shift from in-person training programmes to a growing library of on-demand online offerings ensured that learning was accessible to all colleagues, regardless of their hierarchical position or geographical location. To empower colleagues in steering and diversifying their career paths, the Learn@UNHCR event offered workshops to 5,200 colleagues over the course of two days in November 2022, allowing people to dive deeper into the themes and topics of interest to them. In May 2023, a two-day Careers@UNHCR event, with the participation of over 5,700 colleagues, provided career advice and networking opportunities.

17. To meet growing demands in a competitive employment market, the human resources function in UNHCR significantly improved organizational outreach to prospective employees. By the end of 2022, 196 “talent outreach champions” were trained via virtual workshops and digital resources to enhance their online professional presence. UNHCR’s Webinar Outreach programme attracted over 26,000 registrations throughout the year, and the organization attended 20 career fairs targeting specific regions and demographics, including professional women and individuals with disabilities. To further streamline external recruitment, UNHCR talent pools, renamed Evergreens, launched in February 2023 to create a talent pipeline for temporary appointments in the international professional category. Over 23,000 applications have been received for the 25 Evergreen categories.

18. UNHCR’s Junior Professional Officer programme remains a highly valuable mechanism for the organization to avail itself of young talented colleagues, while providing a pathway for external candidates to gain meaningful working experience in the United Nations system. By June 2023, 61 junior professional officers originating from 17 countries were working for UNHCR, made possible by the generous support of Member States. The Netherlands (Kingdom of) consistently opened half of their earmarked junior professional officer positions to candidates from developing countries; at the moment, UNHCR, therefore, has one junior professional officer from a developing country sponsored by the Netherlands (Kingdom of). UNHCR also greatly benefitted from the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) modalities and in June 2023 hosted 661 United Nations volunteers. Having successfully piloted in several countries, in June 2023, 41 refugee United Nations volunteers worked for UNHCR in Africa, the Middle East and North Africa region, and the Americas. The UNV refugee programme enabled refugees to become agents of change in their communities, strengthen their economic position and reduce their dependence on humanitarian assistance.

19. UNHCR continued to lead at the inter-agency level, at the United Nations High-Level Committee on Management and as co-chair of the Human Resources Network of the United Nations system Chief Executives Board. The engagements resulted in severable key deliverables on diversity, equity and inclusion, a repository on occupational health and safety and continued work towards instilling an organizational culture conducive to zero tolerance for inaction in cases of sexual harassment. These deliverables will enable the United Nations to better address these common challenges.

## V. Conclusion

20. Amid rising global challenges, UNHCR has embraced a people-centric approach, leveraging technology, fostering inclusivity, promoting workforce development and adapting quickly to emergent needs. The biggest shift for the organization was one from compliance and control to trusted partnership, allowing leaders to better understand the workforce needs, reinforcing the strategic human resources capacity at regional and operational levels and

embracing opportunities to partner better through innovation. This strategic transformation has enabled the organization to better implement its mandate, providing a more resilient response to the global displacement crisis.

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