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## UPDATE ON THE POLICY ON ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY IN UNHCR STAFFING

### I. OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS OF THE REPORT

1. This paper looks at the latest measures taken by UNHCR in respect of human resources management policies and practices aimed at achieving gender equity in the organization's staffing, and especially at management level.

### II. CHALLENGES

2. Achieving gender equity in staffing is highlighted in UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives (GSOs). GSO 6 aims to "strengthen UNHCR as an effective, fully engaged, responsive and respected humanitarian agency worthy of public, political and financial support," while GSO 6.4 specifically calls for, "comprehensive reform of UNHCR's human resource policies, in order to ensure maximum operational effectiveness, including enhanced capacity to operate in situations of insecurity, and progress in the achievement of gender equity."

3. UNHCR is not alone in its challenge to improve gender parity in staffing. At the end of 2008, both the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme had percentages of women in the international professional category similar to UNHCR, while three United Nations agencies, namely the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations Population Fund, had better gender balance than UNHCR.

### III. RESPONSES

4. In March 2007, the High Commissioner issued the *Policy on achieving gender equity in UNHCR staffing* (the Gender Policy). In June 2008, implementation measures were issued on one of the provisions of the Gender Policy to consider certain categories of former UNHCR female staff members and female staff from other United Nations agencies as internal candidates for positions in UNHCR.

5. To follow up on the policy, a Senior Gender Task Force was established to take the lead on analysing and making recommendations on gender issues in human resources and in operations. The Task Force is chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner and composed of the two Assistant High Commissioners, the Director of the Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM), the Head of the Community Development Gender Equality and Children Section, and the Staff Council. The Task Force meets on a quarterly basis.

6. A Gender and Diversity Issues Working Group was also established, composed of representatives from the Staff Council and DHRM. Under the leadership of DHRM, it works to promote gender equity in UNHCR by addressing issues affecting both women and men, which impact negatively on their career and retention. To promote a healthy work-life balance for UNHCR staff, the Working Group is currently preparing an intranet-based staff forum, where staff will be able to express their opinions on the issue. An all-staff questionnaire on work-life balance will be included in the forum.

7. An intranet-based tool for gender and diversity statistics, referred to as the “Gender and Diversity Scorecard,” has been developed in collaboration with UNHCR’s Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications, and the launch is planned for the latter half of 2009. The Gender and Diversity Scorecard will provide all staff with access to human resources information including gender balance, reinforcing accountability, and transparency in the context of postings and recruitment.

8. In order to discern the reasons behind the attrition of female staff members and to improve retention measures, an exit questionnaire is currently being pilot-tested on female staff members who leave the organization. The result of the pilot is expected in the latter half of 2009. Many other agencies within the United Nations system are also considering or piloting exit questionnaires, and UNHCR’s version was used as the model for the sample exit questionnaire proposed by the Chief Executive Board (CEB) Human Resources Network.

9. At the inter-agency level, in January 2008, UNHCR became a partner in the United Nations Dual Career and Staff Mobility Programme, led by the CEB Secretariat. This Programme aims to assist globally-mobile families adapt to new duty stations and to help expatriate-spouses and partners find jobs and maintain their professional careers.

10. In January 2009, at the request of the CEB Secretariat, UNHCR took the lead in initiating a working group on work-life balance and staff well-being among the Geneva-based organizations. The working group was tasked with developing United Nations-specific tools for a cost-benefit analysis of work-life balance programmes, and reviewing existing programmes to assess their impact on staff engagement and productivity.

11. Prompted by the results of the 2008 Global Staff Survey and recommendations of the Office for Organizational Development and Management on workforce deployment in UNHCR, DHRM is currently revising the organization’s policies related to flexible working arrangements. The aim is to streamline, simplify and expand the policies on part-time and other flexible working arrangements, such as job-sharing, in order to make the arrangements more easily accessible to managers and staff at large. This is also designed to help attract and retain talented and motivated employees of both genders.

12. At the end of 2008, the High Commissioner introduced UNHCR’s new performance appraisal management system (PAMS) with revised core, managerial and cross-functional competencies, including objectives on gender equity in staffing. One of the competencies listed under “values” in the PAMS is, “respect for diversity,” with the behavioral indicator, “supports gender equality and equal rights for all, including gender equity among staff.” In addition, one of the managerial competencies, “managing resources,” includes as one of the behavioural indicators, “developing and implementing a plan for achieving gender equity in staffing.”

13. UNHCR continues to explore other measures to solve the problem of gender imbalance in staffing, in accordance with the recommendations of the International Civil Service Commission on gender balance in the United Nations common system.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. Staff as a whole

14. As of 1 August 2009, women represented 38 per cent of all UNHCR staff and 41 per cent of all international professional staff. The proportion of women in the international professional category has been slowly increasing by approximately 1 per cent per year since 2007. On 1 August 2008, 40 per cent of all international professional staff were women, while in 2007, 39 per cent of the international professional staff were women.

##### B. Senior staff

15. The percentage of senior female staff members at the P-5 level and above increased significantly by 6 per cent in one year to reach 37 per cent at the end of 2008. The percentage has since dropped slightly by one per cent and stood at 36 per cent as of 1 August 2009.

##### C. Representatives

16. As of 1 August 2009, 28 per cent of UNHCR Representatives in the Field were women, which has remained constant since December 2008. This was a significant increase as compared to the 22 per cent of female Representatives in December 2007.

##### D. Recruitments

17. The trend in the recruitment of women shows a mixed picture. In 2008, 54 per cent of 128 recruitments of international professional staff (including conversions of national staff) were women, which was an increase from 48 per cent in 2007. As of 1 August 2009, women represented 45 per cent of 38 newly recruited international professional staff members, but this was expected to increase by the end of the year. Following the implementation of one of the measures related to the Gender Policy, which considered certain categories of women with United Nations or UNHCR experience as internal candidates, 25 women have been recruited, including six women at the P-4 level and above. Still, according to the Gender Policy, "all recruitment should have a ratio of 3:2 of female to male at all levels until gender parity is achieved," meaning 60 per cent of all recruitments should be women. This level remains UNHCR's target.

##### E. Promotions

18. The achievement of gender balance in promotion sessions has been mixed. While in the 2007 promotion sessions, nearly 50 per cent of staff members promoted were women, for the 2008 promotion sessions, 44 per cent of staff members promoted were women. Fewer women than men were promoted at all levels except at the P-4 level: at the D-1 level, 26 per cent were women; at the P-5 level, 36 per cent were women; at the P-4 level, 60 per cent were women; and at the P-3 level, 34 per cent were women. According to the Gender Policy, "the Appointments, Postings and Promotions Board will ensure that at the grade levels where parity is not achieved,

50/50 per cent of the promotions slots at that level will be awarded to eligible staff with the required competencies." The strict application of the Gender Policy and UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives is a challenge for the future.

#### V. FOLLOW-UP

19. The Senior Gender Task Force agreed that all recommendations for recruitment of men at higher levels, as well as male "underfilling" (i.e. the posting of an individual at a grade higher than their personal grade), would take place with increased scrutiny. With the current recruitment of women at 45 per cent, careful consideration would also be made for recruitments during the remainder of 2009 and beyond.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

20. UNHCR has made some progress in achieving gender equity in staffing. The Office is however still falling short of enforcing some provisions of the Gender Policy and needs to continue to focus efforts in this area in 2009 and beyond. DHRM will keep the Standing Committee informed of its efforts to achieve gender equity in UNHCR staffing and looks forward to the Committee's continued support.

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