

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

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Eighty-fifth meeting
19-20 September 2022

Held at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), Geneva
Summary record*, Tuesday, 20 September 2022, at 1 p.m.

First Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Kadra Ahmed Hassan.....(Djibouti)

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* Summary records, prepared by external service providers, summarize the discussions and record decisions taken. Though extensive, they do not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings. Corrections to a summary record should concern only errors made regarding, for example, the name of a speaker, an official title, and a statistic or a statement reflected from the discussion. A correction does not allow for any additions or for changes to be made of a political character. Any proposed substantive corrections will be checked against the sound recording of the meeting before any change can be made. Requests for corrections should be sent to the ExCom Secretariat: excom@unhcr.org, and any corrected records will be reissued with a new date. Feedback on the summary records may also be sent to the ExCom Secretariat for consideration in the preparation of future summaries.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources (*continued*)

c. Management

1. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner), providing an oral update on integrity in UNHCR, said that the recent Global Representatives Meeting had provided a rare opportunity for teambuilding and for talking about the opportunities and challenges facing the Office. In that Meeting, the High Commissioner had drawn attention to the importance of integrity throughout UNHCR, based on a whole-of-organization approach, which required leadership at every level. The Meeting had provided a rare opportunity not only to share experiences and look back on the lessons learned from COVID-19 and on the impact of the Global Compact on Refugees, but also to look ahead, inter alia at how UNHCR could better serve those it was mandated to assist and at what leadership meant in an organization working in complex humanitarian settings.

2. Leadership was key to the good functioning of UNHCR. Good leadership recognized that while taking risks was inherent to the Office's work, leaders would be judged by their ability to live up to the highest standards of integrity, provide a healthy working environment and ensure its programmes were designed and implemented in a risk-informed manner. The organization's proactive approach to reinforcing its culture of integrity had been outlined in recent years through the Standing Committee's oral update on integrity. There had been a convergence of efforts and of systems to strengthen the identification and prevention of all forms of misconduct, fraud and corruption. While UNHCR recognized that risk could never be fully eliminated, it continued to invest in risk-mitigating measures, including the fostering of a positive and healthy workplace culture and mechanisms to report misconduct when the line of integrity was crossed.

3. Senior colleagues from the various departments involved in the efforts to reinforce UNHCR's culture of integrity would present a snapshot of their work to the Standing Committee, illustrating the Office's linked-up approach. Those efforts in turn complemented the efforts of others across the organization, including risk focal points, the Division of Human Resources, the Legal Affairs Service and the Inspector General.

4. Highlighting key points from the background paper entitled "Oral update on integrity in UNHCR", she said that, first, stepped-up communication on support to personnel on workplace concerns and the creation of the Support Desk were part of a significant effort to provide a unified point of entry for colleagues and support them in identifying options available to address grievances, which was critical for colleagues based in remote duty stations. Second, the deployment of dedicated capacity to prevent and respond to sexual abuse and exploitation at the onset of the Ukraine emergency response efforts offered a blueprint for future operations. That was perhaps not required in all circumstances, but when risks related to sexual abuse and exploitation were high, as in the initial days of the exodus from Ukraine, dedicated focus on prevention and response would help mitigate those risks for displaced people. Third, fostering and maintaining a culture of dialogue also required further investment in informal conflict resolution mechanisms, since formal processes were only truly needed in the most extreme cases, many day-to-day disagreements and conflicts being able to be resolved through dialogue and open communication.

5. **Ms. Rasmussen** (Denmark) commended UNHCR for its ongoing efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, particularly for its leading role in strengthening interagency capacity on such matters. Given that UNHCR staff worked in notorious risk-prone environments, it was of utmost importance to have solid mechanisms in place for preventing, mitigating and responding to misconduct. She also appreciated UNHCR's work to ensure inclusivity and diversity in its workforce.

6. Referring to the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, she was pleased to learn that UNHCR would undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the regionalization and decentralization reform process. The evaluation should address the implications of the reforms for UNHCR's implementing partners.

7. **Ms. Bennett** (United States of America) welcomed many of UNHCR's integrity actions, including the development of the "Risk Management 2025" strategy and the efforts of the Enterprise Risk Management Service to mitigate unconscious bias, gender discrimination, and abusive power dynamics in the workplace. Overall, UNHCR had made great strides toward addressing misconduct and establishing safe spaces where those affected could speak up, be heard, and report abuse.

8. Staff morale, accountability, and integrity were critical to any humanitarian response. As such, it was commendable to see that Code of Conduct sessions had been deployed and adapted to local insights. Providing local context and ownership of risk management, including at the leadership level, was an important step toward workplace integrity.

9. She recognized the need to allocate sufficient capacity and resources to addressing ethics issues throughout the organization, including through ongoing results-based and risk management initiatives. Adding two new positions focused on mediation and investing in the Ombudsman and Mediator offices were therefore welcome developments.

10. She was encouraged by the decision to move the Speak Up helpline to the Inspector General's Office. Other welcome developments included the growth of the Support Desk to ensure referrals were managed collaboratively and the creation of online information resources that promoted confidentiality.

11. She applauded UNHCR's continued investment in promoting an accessible, survivor-centred and trauma-informed approach in its work, especially on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. UNHCR management must continue harmonizing protection against sexual exploitation and abuse policies with anti-harassment policies across the whole Organization, particularly at the operational level.

12. She thanked the senior management for its continued commitment to fostering a stronger risk management culture across operations. UNHCR must promote inclusion and full buy-in from staff at every level and continue evaluating implementing partners so that risk management systems were consistently used across every UNHCR operation.

13. The fight against sexual misconduct was a collective responsibility and endeavour. She commended UNHCR for integrating risk assessments, referral pathways, and reporting systems into the Ukraine response and urged them to apply the same approach worldwide. UNHCR was leading by example by pursuing ever-stronger risk mitigation mechanisms despite global uncertainty.

14. **Mr. Widmer** (Switzerland) said that integrity was important for UNHCR given its large size and extensive exposure to risk. The implementation of the "Risk Management 2025" strategy was an important step forward on integrity. However, for progress to be tangible and measurable, a table should be made available showing how key figures had evolved over time. Figures could include the number of cases reported, processed and sanctioned or the number of visits to webpages dedicated to integrity, amongst others.

15. **Mr. Karhu** (Finland) commended UNHCR for the transparent and systematic manner in which it was addressing the issue of integrity. A robust policy on integrity was needed given that UNHCR operated in high-risk environments.

16. He commended UNHCR for its efforts to strengthen a healthy workplace culture. To do so, it was important to understand underlying factors such as power differentials, gender inequalities and different kinds of biases. The involvement of UNHCR's senior leadership in efforts to promote a culture of dialogue was key. Equally, middle managers and country office managers must be provided with adequate tools and resources to address misconduct.

17. He appreciated the victim-centred approach adopted in cases of sexual misconduct. It was an approach that should be mainstreamed across the whole organization. The work being done to develop a system-wide definition of "a victim-centred approach" was a particularly important undertaking that would serve many other agencies.

18. UNHCR should continue its capacity-building activities with partners with a view to eliminating sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in its operations. He requested further information on the ways in which UNHCR monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of its cooperation with partners.

19. **Mr. Kadmiri** (Morocco) commended UNHCR for taking account of the Strategic Directions 2022-2026 when drawing up its budget and objectives for 2023. He welcomed the implementation of the “Risk Management 2025” strategy which was a critical tool for combatting fraud and other misconduct. Integrity was essential to strengthening the legitimacy of UNHCR activities. It was therefore important to bolster the functions of the Ethics Office, its Ombudsman and Mediator given their contribution to the culture of integrity and transparency within the Organization. In particular, they must have the necessary mandate to serve decentralized workforce. Decentralization was an ideal opportunity to bring the work of UNHCR closer to the field. The main advisers should be tasked with evaluating the risk management process within the regions to guide national operations. He requested an update on the main developments that had taken place within the reference period.

20. **Mr. Banzet** (Canada) said that protection from sexual exploitation and abuse remained a key concern for Canada. He encouraged UNHCR to continue to strengthen and consistently implement safeguarding policies, improved hiring practices, prevention and whistleblowing protections. New system level mechanisms were also needed where possible and practical. He noted with appreciation UNHCR's focus and efforts to prevent and respond to abuse, discrimination, exploitation, and harassment.

21. UNHCR's leadership on integrity within the United Nations system deserved recognition. The leadership demonstrated by UNHCR from the top down, at the middle and from the bottom up was key to making progress and to leading the cultural changes needed for lasting prevention.

22. He was pleased to see that the point of entry into UNHCR for the Speak Up helpline had been transferred from the Ethics Office to the Inspector General's Office, ensuring that complaints were managed confidentially prior to any onward submission to management. His Government also appreciated the measures taken to enhance the organizational and workplace culture so that adequate protection was available for persons of concern to the organization and personnel alike.

23. Despite progress made, vigilance must be maintained against integrity risks and more remained to be done to tackle abuse, exploitation and misconduct. The task was a collective responsibility and endeavour. Efforts must be continued towards interagency progress in that respect.

24. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner) said that she welcomed the support expressed for UNHCR's efforts to reinforce its culture of integrity. The Office would continue and extend that work. Replying to the question on the presentation of data, she said that consideration would be given as to how best to improve the way data were used in the report. One possibility was the inclusion of trend lines to show the decisions taken by the Deputy Commissioner on disciplinary measures. It was hoped that the 2023 report would reflect those changes and provide a more comprehensive overview. With regard to the questions on UNHCR's work on integrity in the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, she said that inter-agency cooperation was important, since a problem in one agency affected the reputations of, and trust enjoyed by, others. To that end, UNHCR worked hard within the inter-agency system, sharing its experience but also learning from others and bringing back best practices to the Office. One example of that was an investigators' manual on sexual harassment investigations that had been recently prepared by UNHCR and shared not just with other United Nations agencies but also with partners.

Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources

c) Management (*continued*)

25. **Ms Encontre** (Director of the Ethics Office, UNHCR) said that working as a team was the only way for UNHCR to succeed. Ethics was no longer preached as if from a pulpit, instead, it was an integral part of daily interactions, not only with partners but also with those whom they served.

Combining their efforts made them much stronger and more meaningful and had an impact on staff. In the past, there would be a one-day refresher course on the code of ethics every year. However, promoting constant dialogue among managers at all levels, led by the good example of the Deputy High Commissioner, was a much more effective approach. All efforts were focused on promoting dialogue and a 'speak-up' culture to ensure not only that staff were not suffering from misconduct, abuse or sexual violence but that they were able to report when something was wrong. The risk register was used to identify and mitigate risks in all outreach activities in working to deliver the best humanitarian assistance more credibly and efficiently for the Organization. The Ethics Office also managed the financial disclosure programme and gave advice on avoiding conflicts of interest, the perception of conflicts of interest, and on managing resources and declaring assets transparently. All those efforts worked for the benefit of the Organization's credibility.

Any other business

26. **The Vice-Chairperson** noted that summary records of the proceedings would be made available on the Standing Committee website in due course, together with all documentation and presentations from the meeting. A procedural report, listing any decisions taken, would also be prepared and circulated for adoption by 28 September, allowing one week for the Committee's review. Member States could submit any amendments to the Secretariat by 5 October.

27. **The Secretary** made a number of administrative announcements regarding the upcoming 73rd Session of the Executive Committee, which would be held in room XIX at the Palais des Nations. Member States would be allocated two seats at the table and two behind, while observer States and other observers would be allocated one seat at the table and one behind. Seating would follow the General Assembly protocol: Belize had been selected by the drawing of lots to occupy the first seat at the General Assembly. However, as Belize was not a member of the Executive Committee, Benin would instead occupy the first seat, followed by other Committee members and then observer States and other observers. A seating plan and an organizational note would be posted on the Executive Committee's website. Delegations were requested to register for the meeting as soon as possible, in order to help finalize arrangements. The deadline to register for the list of speakers was 4 October and a provisional list of speakers would be made available by 6 October.

28. The global laureate and regional winners of the 2022 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award were due to be announced on 29 September 2022. The ceremony and reception would be held on the evening of 10 October, after the first day of the 73rd Session of the Executive Committee. All delegations had been invited to attend, although due to limited seating, a rule of two tickets per delegation would be applied. The ceremony would also be live-streamed.

Closure of the meeting

Following an exchange of courtesies, **the Vice-Chairperson** declared closed the eighty-fifth meeting of the Standing Committee.

The meeting rose at 3.51 p.m.