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Human resources issues, including staff security

Summary

This paper reports on major developments in the area of human resources management, including staff safety and security, since the last paper provided in August 2012. It also discusses key priorities for the upcoming biennium, including strengthening policies and procedures to deploy UNHCR staff and affiliate workforce to emergency operations; improving the performance management policy and simplifying the performance management and appraisal system; enhancing outreach for international professional recruitment at the junior and mid-levels; strengthening support to the field on health and accommodation matters; and investing significantly in psychosocial support to staff.

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I. Introduction

1. UNHCR's mandate to deliver international protection and seek solutions for refugees and people of concern around the world can only be achieved because it has a dedicated staff who are willing to work in some of the most difficult and dangerous situations, often separated from their families for extended periods of time. UNHCR faces unique challenges in recruiting, training, retaining and, most importantly, protecting and supporting the people willing to take on this work. For the coming biennium, UNHCR, through the Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM) and the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS), has set clear human resource management objectives to ensure that it has talented, highly-motivated and professional staff at all levels of the organization.

2. At the highest-level, these objectives include improving talent outreach and acquisition; maintaining high levels of staff motivation; ensuring the workforce is empowered with appropriate skills and knowledge through training, coaching and mentoring; and institutionalizing a culture of security such that the well-being, safety and security of all colleagues are an integral part of all policies, procedures and operations.

II. Human resources

3. During the reporting period, UNHCR continued to implement a series of reforms initiated in 2009 to professionalize its human resources management function. These structural and procedural changes aim to ensure that the organization meets its Global Strategic Priority of developing and maintaining a motivated workforce able to meet operational and organizational demands. Key achievements to date include: creation of the Global Learning Centre; adoption of the new policy on international assignments; establishment of the Career Management and Support Section; introduction of a new performance management and appraisal system; adoption of the new United Nations procedures for contracts and for the administration of justice; and introduction of the new policy and procedures for the assignment of locally recruited staff members.

4. In the coming biennium, UNHCR will leverage existing tools, increase efficiency and integrate services in order to ensure that the needs of both staff and the organization are met. DHRM's main focus for 2014-2015 will be on the following:

- Strengthening policies and procedures to deploy UNHCR staff and affiliate workforce to emergency operations;
- Improving the performance management policy and simplifying the performance management and appraisal system (PAMS);
- Revising policies on contracts and promotions;
- Enhancing outreach for international professional recruitment at junior and mid-levels through the entry-level humanitarian professional programme and the capacity-building initiative;
- Further streamlining and simplification of the policy and procedures on assignments for international professional staff;
- Strengthening support to the field on health and accommodation matters and investing significantly in psychosocial support to staff; and
- Following up on the key findings of the 2011 Global Staff Survey.

A. Responding to rapidly changing operational requirements

5. Operating in 124 countries with some 441 offices worldwide, UNHCR is a flexible and field-oriented organization that must be prepared to manage rapidly evolving and complex emergency situations. The convergence of the Mali situation and Syria crisis, as well as emergencies in the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan and Uganda, has presented serious human resource challenges. The need to urgently deploy skilled staff while not depleting critical operations has tested the organization's capacity and has necessitated the use of emergency deployments, short and longer-term missions and temporary assignments, as well as recruitment, drawdown against standby agreements, loans of personnel, and use of affiliate workforce arrangements such as United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Strengthening emergency response capabilities to better support operational needs remains one of UNHCR's key priorities.

6. During the period from 1 August 2012 to 31 July 2013, DHRM filled 626 regular positions and attended to 949 requests for temporary staffing needs. In the regular postings process, DHRM reviewed the eligibility of over 22,750 applications and carried out more than 16,600 suitability assessments of fully eligible applicants. In the same period, fast track procedures were used to fill a further 199 positions in emergency operations in periods as short as 26 days from date of vacancy announcement to date of decision.

7. Key achievements in 2013 include automation of the posting and assignments process, clarification of roles and reduced bureaucracy. A comprehensive review of the posting process is underway and is expected to provide more procedural flexibility as well as a reduction in reassignment time. New policies were issued earlier this year clarifying responsibilities of staff and the organization with regard to staff-in-between-assignment (SIBAs). A policy was issued on temporary assignments to improve flexibility and create more opportunities for local staff to go on temporary international deployment. Additionally, UNHCR is strengthening its in-house capacity to meet human resource needs. By fostering greater synergy between career management function and the Global Learning Centre, skills training, career development and postings will be better aligned.

B. Caring for staff and ensuring a respectful workplace

8. As of 1 August 2013, UNHCR had 8,395 staff including Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) working worldwide, of whom 7,718 were working in the field and 677 at headquarters. Some 50 per cent of field staff (all categories) are working in difficult and dangerous duty stations (categories D and E), and 42 per cent are working in non-family duty stations. Some 38 per cent of international professional staff are serving in D and E duty stations, and 33 per cent are based in non-family duty stations.

9. Accommodation for staff working in remote and difficult locations has been improved. The 2009 global assessment of staff living conditions identified the lack of an appropriate budgetary mechanism for staff accommodation and insufficient technical capacity for construction and maintenance as the predominant obstacles to meeting the minimum standards. Following broad internal consultation, UNHCR appointed in 2012 a Staff Accommodation Coordinator, with a dedicated budget for supporting field offices to refurbish and maintain staff housing in remote locations. During 2012, funds were disbursed to the Central African Republic (\$82,000), Ethiopia (\$78,550), Somalia (\$103,719) and Uganda (\$86,450) for water systems, housing units, electrical cabling, furniture, fixtures/fittings and recreational equipment. The Staff Accommodation Coordinator advised 27 country offices on issues relating to accommodation standards; rental agreements and the level of contributions required by staff when the minimum standards cannot be met; contractual arrangements for property rental; emergency housing construction in deep field locations; and budgeting for improvements to existing housing in field locations.

10. A significant proportion of UNHCR's staff witness wide-scale human suffering and many live in difficult and isolating duty stations, apart from family and other support structures. The Office recently undertook an evaluation of the agency's mental health and psychosocial support to staff (<http://www.unhcr.org/51f67bdc9.html>.) This global review is based on the feedback of more than 1,500 staff members who participated in an all-staff online survey, focus groups and individual interviews. The findings of the evaluation provide a more complete perspective on the stressors and coping mechanisms of UNHCR's workforce. Through consultations with other humanitarian agencies and mental health providers, the review has also provided UNHCR with new options and approaches to staff support.

11. Psychosocial support to staff includes proactive, preventative, and reactive support. A programme of psychological preparation for staff assigned to hardship locations was introduced in October 2012 and offered on a voluntary basis to all staff assigned to D and E duty stations. As the Syria crisis has developed, the Office has made particular efforts to integrate psychosocial support into the operations in Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic, with emphasis on prevention of trauma and burn-out. A Senior Regional Staff Welfare Officer was recently assigned to Jordan to support the staff in six countries in the Syria operation and to work with local counsellors in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

12. In Eastern Congo, the Central African Republic and Somalia, violence and insecurity prompted the evacuation of international staff. Rapid deployments of Staff Welfare Officers ensured timely support to the evacuated staff. National staff were supported locally through the peer support network and by Staff Welfare Officers by phone, Skype and email.

13. The high mobility of UNHCR staff also affects family members. The Staff Welfare Section published in 2012 the results of research on the impact of mobility on family members and will implement key resulting recommendations in the coming biennium.

14. Recognizing the interconnectedness of health and welfare, UNHCR merged the Medical Service and the Staff Welfare Section in early 2013 to form the Staff Welfare and Health Service. A medical information management system, Medgate, is expected to be operational by the end of the year, allowing for better monitoring of health and increased efficiency in the provision of medical services. Activities for the next biennium will include: (1) the drafting of an occupational health and safety policy in line with recommendations from the Joint Investigation Unit report on medical services in the United Nations (2011), and (2) strengthening medical support, primarily to local staff, through the establishment of Senior Regional Medical Officer positions in Nairobi, Bangkok and Dakar.

15. Recognizing that work-life balance affects the retention of staff and their long-term health and performance, UNHCR is monitoring indicators related to stress, sick leave and long work hours. The Office is working to ensure compliance with rest and recuperation policies and has introduced flexible working arrangements, such as compressed work schedules and flexible working hours.

16. In order to include staff members in human resource policy decision-making processes, DHRM has introduced the practice of posting draft policies on its internal social platform Yammer, on the intranet and by email distribution, inviting staff to provide their comments. DHRM conducts regular staff satisfaction surveys seeking feedback; keeps staff members informed of their responsibilities and entitlements through its intranet pages, blogs, publications, video talks and emails; provides various platforms to answer staff questions, including through the intranet feature, "Ask DHRM"; and has played a key role in the creation of an internal communications unit (iComs). The iComs unit has developed a prototype for an employee magazine and has begun implementing an internal communications strategy to respond to issues raised in the 2011 Global Staff Survey.

17. Regular meetings among DHRM, the Ombudsman, the Director of the Ethics Office, the Staff Council and the Inspector General are held to discuss organizational issues and individual cases, with a view to finding solutions. Informal dispute resolution processes and formal conflict resolution processes are available to staff. The majority of the cases are related to non-promotion, non-selection to a position, and disciplinary measures.

C. Maintaining a mobile and diverse workforce

18. UNHCR seeks to recruit and retain highly qualified staff through multiple entry points. In January 2013, the High Commissioner promulgated two new initiatives to enable external and internal candidates, through recruitment and conversion respectively, to compete and enter the organization at the international professional level.

19. The entry-level humanitarian professional programme (EHP) was launched in July of this year as a point of entry for young professionals with diverse backgrounds to join the organization soon after completion of their first-level university studies. The initiative is supported by a comprehensive outreach strategy, marketing a humanitarian career with the organization as an employer of choice. This strategy involves the use of social media platforms, capitalizing on the amplification effect of hundreds of thousands of people already following the work of the institution. Contacts have been established with universities, international and bilateral organizations and specialized professional networks. At the time of writing, UNHCR had received some 3,000 applications. About 20 entry level humanitarian professionals will be expected to join the organization in early 2014. UNHCR plans to conduct this programme on a bi-annual basis.

20. In parallel, UNHCR is implementing the capacity-building initiative (CBI), which is a recruitment and conversion exercise geared to attract seasoned professionals, at the mid-career level, with expertise and experience in specific functional areas where the organization needs to strengthen its capacity. As a first step, UNHCR is in the process of identifying those critical skills that need reinforcement to support the Office's operational needs now and in the future.

21. For both programmes, UNHCR has designed a rigorous selection process involving best practices used by top institutions in the humanitarian and international fields. Selected candidates will be part of a cohort system and will be deployed to the field following successful completion of a comprehensive orientation program. To ensure effective integration of selected candidates to the organization, UNHCR will provide mentoring support and targeted training before and during their field assignment.

22. A new section, Talent Outreach and Acquisition, will be created in Budapest as of 1 January 2014 to oversee the implementation of these and other outreach programs. UNHCR has also established, as of 1 January 2013, an affiliate workforce unit in Budapest with responsibility to manage and coordinate the following programs: JPO, UNV, UNOPs, consultancies and internships. UNHCR continues to depend on the support of an affiliate workforce. Currently there are 629 UNVs, 1,738 UNOPS and 68 JPOs working alongside UNHCR staff. As a result of the Syria emergency, UNHCR and UNV Bonn have agreed to provide more flexibility and speed in the hiring of UNVs for all emergencies.

23. UNHCR Representative positions require strong managerial, interpersonal and diplomatic skills, as well as leadership qualities, in order to successfully work with other agencies and partners and establish and maintain relations with donors and governments. Given that a number of senior staff will be retiring from the organization within the next few years, UNHCR will institute a succession plan and talent management strategy with tools to support the selection and posting of Representatives and Heads of Office. In the coming biennium, UNHCR intends to prepare staff for these roles and build a pipeline of strong managers for the organization through its selection and development programs.

24. Efforts are being made to ensure that staff have the guidance and information they need to make informed career management decisions related to their development, postings

and training opportunities. Career Management Officers have received professional training and certification in career counselling, and efforts are underway with the Global Learning Centre to ensure that staff are aware of the resources and options available to them.

D. Interagency collaboration

25. DHRM remains fully engaged in the Human Resources Network of the United Nations Common System. Several important initiatives are ongoing, the most important of which is the comprehensive review of the compensation package that aims to foster the nurturing of a highly motivated, mobile workforce; that is adaptable, flexible in character and simple to administer; and that addresses gender, hardship and security concerns.

III. Ensuring high quality performance and accountability

A. Performance Management

26. UNHCR is conducting a comprehensive lessons learnt exercise in respect of performance management, aiming not to only simplify processes, but also to ensure an organizational standard in assessing performance. Outstanding performance will be more selectively granted and recognized, while a mechanism to address sub-standard performance, as measured against established norms, will also be established.

27. UNHCR's intranet-based performance appraisal and management system (PAMS) was launched mid-2009. The compliance rate for the 2012 performance cycle was 83.9 per cent. After four years of implementation, some simplification is required. Modifications are under discussion and will be implemented in the coming biennium, taking opportunity to enhance the system where possible through the PeopleSoft upgrade.

B. Contracts and Promotions

28. Following revision of the performance management policy, priority will be given to ensuring more explicit criteria for contract renewal. The promotions policy, as envisaged, will draw on demonstrated good performance to ensure the meritorious are recognized for promotion to higher grades and responsibilities, in addition to accounting for strategic organizational factors, such as knowledge of other UN languages; functional diversity, balanced with the need for specialization; mobility; and service at hardship locations.

C. Global Learning Centre

29. In November 2012, the Global Learning Centre (GLC) issued the *UNHCR Learning Policy and Guidelines*. The GLC continues to strengthen its portfolio of training opportunities in protection, programme management, resource management, security, emergency preparedness and response, as well as in leadership, coordination and communication capabilities. Through investment in e-learning and the leveraging of opportunities provided through the Learning Management System, enrolments in the GLC's portfolio of activities have increased from 15,000 in 2010 to almost 60,000 in 2012. In line with the mandate of the GLC, a growing number of staff of all grades, including those in deep field locations, have access to well-designed and cost-effective learning opportunities.

30. The GLC is also catering to a growing number of requests from staff of NGOs, governments and academic partners. While most events with partners continue to be undertaken at field level, the GLC has also made available its distance learning courses, either through direct access to its Learning Management System or USB flash drives. In the

preceding 12 months, some 5,500 enrollments by approximately 918 partners, and 13,300 enrollments by 1,938 UNVs and UNOPS employees, have been recorded. The GLC also supports the San Remo refugee law programme for governments and NGO partners.

31. A particular challenge for training in general, and especially in an organization with a rotational workforce, is documenting the impact of learning initiatives. There are strong indications that training does have an impact on personal and organizational performance, and efforts will continue to enhance impact measurement against the Global Strategic Priorities.

32. For the coming biennium, the GLC has identified three priority areas. The first is internal certification for managers and for selected functional areas. Modular courses with external assessment are being developed to prepare new Representatives and Heads of Office, and senior programme, supply, finance and project control officers for further functions. Other functional areas, such as protection, will be addressed subsequently.

33. The second priority area is support for emergency response. In addition to the three annual workshops for emergency management (WEM), which prepare 120 participants for emergency deployment, and other established preparedness programmes, the GLC will assist operations to identify and address training needs in emergencies, taking into account that emergency deployments (supported by the WEM) are only a part of the overall response. A number of staff members who are deployed for an emergency do not go through the WEM, and the capacity of local offices, often experiencing sudden growth, needs to be reinforced. To this end, the GLC is developing a suite of focused products (job aids, checklists, and ready-to-go modules) aimed at providing staff with essential skills and knowledge in a range of functional areas. The Office is also providing training material to support local trainers, as well as providing trainers from the GLC or from established rosters when necessary.

34. The third priority area is cluster and partner support. The GLC is already engaged in cluster-related training for partners and will expand its activities in the coming biennium.

35. Protection-specific training will continue to be provided through a number of well-established and successful programmes and through new initiatives on age, gender and diversity and child protection.

IV. Staff safety and security

36. A paper on staff safety and security issues, including refugee security was presented at the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2013. Please refer to EC/64/SC/CRP15 for more details. As staff security is an integral element of human resource management at UNHCR, an overview of the Office's work is provided here.

37. In February 2013, UNHCR issued the strategy document, "Strengthening a Culture of Security 2013-2015: A Plan of Action," outlining the global roadmap for the organization's staff safety measures and building on previous plans. The plan is based on sound risk management practices to better enable UNHCR to deliver programmes safely and effectively in high risk environments, and aims to ensure that:

- security and safety are integrated as regular functions in UNHCR operations and activities;
- security is incorporated in planning from the early stages of programme design and emergency response;
- the organization cultivates a professional and diverse team of Field Security Advisors to support operations with their expertise in analysis and mitigation of risk;
- managers have responsibility and accountability for security and conduct operations from a risk management perspective;

- UNHCR is an active participant of the common United Nations security management system;
- resources are sufficient to allow the organization to carry out operations without compromising the safety of staff; and
- staff understand and accept the risks inherent in the work of UNHCR, undertake their responsibilities, and comply with procedures established at the global level and specific to their place of assignment.

38. UNHCR is working to ensure that these goals are achieved through field support and analysis, development of a cadre of security professionals, oversight and interagency processes, and continuing training of staff. These efforts take on increasing importance as serious security incidents continue to pose daunting challenges to deliver humanitarian programmes. Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan have all recently experienced attacks that targeted or seriously jeopardized UN staff and facilities. Other countries continue to face conflict and unrest, requiring constant analysis of the situation and adaptation of security measures and procedures.
