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**Human resources, including staff welfare***Summary*

This paper highlights major developments in the area of human resources management since the last update provided to the Standing Committee on “Human resources issues, including staff security” in September 2015 (EC/66/SC/CRP.23). It reports on progress made regarding the various commitments in “UNHCR’s people strategy 2016-2021”. An update on Staff safety and security is being presented concurrently to the Standing Committee (EC/67/SC/CRP.24).

## Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	1-4	3
II. Preparedness and diversity .....	5-12	4
III. Performance and competence.....	13-19	5
IV. Flexibility and timeliness .....	20-24	6
V. Care and support .....	25-31	7
VI. Working in partnership.....	32	8
VII. Conclusion .....	33	8

## I. Introduction

1. The past year has been characterized by a record-high number of persons of concern to UNHCR. With more than 65 million forcibly displaced worldwide, this represents a significant increase from 59 million in 2014. New or reignited conflicts, as well as older ones, continued to demand UNHCR's attention and resources, presenting particular challenges in the area of human resources management. In 2015, the organization was present in 464 locations, across 129 countries. In Europe, as a result of the crisis in the Mediterranean, staff were mobilized to 20 different locations. Eight fast track assignment procedures were put in place to respond to staffing needs for emergencies related to the situations in Burundi, Nigeria, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen, as well as for the crisis in Europe.

2. Globally, the number of UNHCR staff reached 10,380 individuals by the end of June 2016, of whom 87 per cent work in the field and nearly half are in the most difficult and isolated duty stations (classified as category D and E). In addition, as of end December 2015, about 5,000 non-staff personnel worked with UNHCR through flexible operating arrangements with partners, representing about 34 per cent of the global UNHCR workforce. These individuals include contractors under arrangements with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), directly hired contractors, United Nations Volunteers, employees and interns.

3. Supporting all of these people, serving in continuously changing and often difficult contexts, comes with a number of inherent challenges. UNHCR has to balance organizational needs with those of individual staff members, including their career aspirations and personal situation. The Office also has to be prepared to respond to emergencies through a range of swift and responsive deployment mechanisms, while maintaining a strategic focus on planning in relation to future workforce needs. This requires a high degree of flexibility that has to be achieved, while ensuring respect for the different categories of workforce, as well as equal access to learning, access to career opportunities, and fair remuneration and recognition. UNHCR must deliver critical protection and assistance to those in need, while safeguarding the health, safety and well-being of the people who are carrying out this important work. A significant share of the workforce find themselves working and living in isolated or dangerous conditions, in duty stations deemed too unsafe or otherwise unsuitable for their families, and with limited access to adequate medical facilities, accommodation and nutrition. Compounded by prolonged exposure to human suffering, these working conditions pose serious risks of vicarious trauma, burnout, depression and other long-term health conditions, taking an inevitable toll on talented and dedicated people.

4. As introduced at the sixty-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee (see EC/66/SC/CRP.23), "UNHCR's people strategy 2016-2021"<sup>1</sup> was launched in December 2015 and was designed in full acknowledgement of the need to manage these challenges. The strategy articulates UNHCR's vision along four main goals: preparedness and diversity; performance and competence; flexibility and timeliness; and, care and support. A multi-year implementation plan was prepared, and this report provides a first update on key achievements and challenges in this regard.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/55f97a9f9.pdf>.

## II. Preparedness and diversity

5. UNHCR has made progress in its efforts to better anticipate future human resources requirements, recruit qualified people and manage an appropriately skilled and diverse workforce.

6. The establishment of a Strategic and Transformative Human Resources Service in the Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM) has prioritized workforce planning, which is the cornerstone of UNHCR's response to the risk of workforce misalignment. Enhanced business intelligence technology and analytical tools help support informed decision-making. Examples include a single-source human resources tool that provides centralized, real-time data on UNHCR's workforce; interactive dashboards arranged along specific themes, such as retirement projections, career management and gender and diversity in staffing; and a new self-service human resources reporting system launched in July 2016. Consultations between DHRM and other divisions and regional bureaux contribute to building and maintaining a shared understanding of the organization's evolving workforce needs and to developing joint approaches to close capacity and skills gaps.

7. In this regard, UNHCR's external recruitment programmes remain essential. The capacity-building initiative concluded in 2015 resulted in the filling of 60 new positions, predominantly by mid-career professionals who brought necessary expertise to the organization in critical areas such as project control, child protection, statelessness, prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence, cash-based interventions, and information and communications technologies.

8. In the second round of UNHCR's Entry-level Humanitarian Programme (EHP), around 5,500 applications were received. Following a highly competitive process, 75 young professionals, representing 47 nationalities, were selected for the EHP programme. Thirty-four women and men were assigned to positions in the field. In May 2016, the third EHP was launched and more than 7,000 applications were received.

9. In addition, applications for 11 "talent pools" were opened in April 2016, with the aim of constituting a reserve for recruitment of people in areas where skills gaps have been identified, such as protection, programme, administration/finance, camp coordination and management, shelter, registration and field safety.

10. The organization also continued to seek opportunities for national staff to develop their careers, including the creation of mechanisms which allow them to obtain international experience and exposure to new situations. Recognizing that some national staff were only proficient in one United Nations language, UNHCR introduced in December 2015 new flexibility in terms of language requirements to join the international category. This allows national staff to be converted to international positions on the condition that they provide certification in a second United Nations language within a period of three years. This year's EHP was launched with an age limit of 45 (increased from 40), to expand the pool of potential applicants among national staff. Furthermore, with respect to the talent pools, priority is given to national staff for functional areas such as programme and supply, where analysis shows that the gaps are best filled with internal capacity.

11. In line with the wide diversity of populations with whom UNHCR works, the organization is committed to achieving the highest level of diversity in its workforce. This is also considered a key contributor to effective organizational performance. As of June 2016, UNHCR staff came from 153 countries and spoke over 458 languages. Female representation in UNHCR was 39 per cent, 2 per cent more than in 2014. Last year, UNHCR commissioned a review of "inclusion, diversity and gender equity" in the organization's

workforce, which led to a comprehensive report entitled “Framework for the future”<sup>2</sup>. While recognizing the high level of diversity of UNHCR’s workforce, the report highlighted that reaching diversity targets and gender balance in different categories and grades continued to remain a challenge.

12. Concrete steps are being taken to implement the recommendations of the report, tackling the five areas that emerged as hampering progress. These relate to: i) leadership on gender equity, diversity and inclusion; ii) the role of beliefs and bias in decision-making; iii) the availability of flexible working opportunities; iv) the approaches taken to talent management and development; and v) governance, responsibility, accountability and reporting on policy implementation. A sub-group of the Senior Management Committee (SMC) on gender equity, diversity and inclusion in UNHCR staffing, chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner, is spearheading the project and members of the SMC are leading three out of the five work-streams identified. A Senior Advisor (Inclusion, Diversity and Gender) has been appointed to support the Deputy High Commissioner in this task and to define how best to engage, equip and empower leaders and managers towards greater diversity and inclusion in UNHCR.

### III. Performance and competence

13. UNHCR continued to promote excellence and high performance at all levels of its workforce, including through improved career management and enhanced learning opportunities.

14. The Career Management Section (CMS) in DHRM, which was relocated to Budapest at the end of 2015, launched a new approach to supporting and advising the workforce. Enquiries are channelled through a recently established Career Help Desk which is available to all staff, including national staff. As needed, career information, advice and guidance are also provided in individual career counselling sessions. With a view to balancing staff aspirations with immediate and projected organizational needs, this counselling is directly linked to the outcomes of workforce planning and analysis exercises.

15. In 2015, the Global Learning Centre observed a substantial increase in demand for training, particularly in the context of emergencies, by personnel and partners. Some 37,000 courses were completed. General Service staff, who represent about 65 per cent of the total UNHCR staff, enrolled in 67 per cent and completed 62 per cent of the courses. Training of partners also continued to increase, with over 3,600 partner staff completing about 2,300 courses, which included learning activities related to coordination and leadership through the global protection cluster.

16. Human resources support for emergencies was included in specific contingency plans. Learning programmes were developed in junction with the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply, and in some instances delivered jointly. A total of 161 UNHCR staff, non-staff personnel and partners participated in UNHCR’s workshop on emergency management in 2015, and were ready to be deployed in emergencies. In addition, the new emergency human resources standby capacity established in 2015 was successfully activated, with two human resources staff deployed to support operations in Greece.

17. Certification programmes also progressed significantly, as an innovative and comprehensive way to select and prepare pools of diverse candidates, strong in key functional areas, for assignment. The certification programme for human resources staff is well

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<sup>2</sup> Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/standcom/576ba8057/framework-future-gender-equity-diversity-inclusion-staffing-unhcr.html>.

underway; a first group of human resources staff is expected to complete the programme by early 2017. Certification programmes in the areas of supply chain, programme management and protection are either ongoing or under development.

18. Furthermore, following the successful pilot initiative launched in 2015, an enhanced certification programme for Representatives, Deputy Representatives and Heads of Sub-offices, from the P-5 to the D-1 levels, started in 2016. This programme is one of several initiatives aimed at developing the future senior leadership of the organization. It is an essential project designed in response to identified leadership and succession planning challenges. Other concrete steps were taken, such as the activation of a Senior Workforce Planning Committee to oversee leadership-related initiatives and the conclusion of a current assessment and detailed analysis of upcoming leadership needs.

19. UNHCR's performance management system was also further developed. An administrative instruction introducing procedures on performance management was issued in June 2015 and included, in particular, guidance on establishing performance improvement plans and calibrating overall staff performance ratings within a same operation or office. Specific training was designed for supervisors to make optimal use of these new tools and to support them in the provision of constructive and timely feedback to their supervisees.

#### **IV. Flexibility and timeliness**

20. In 2015, 11 emergency situations affecting operations in 30 countries required the mobilization of staffing and resources. All of these situations required an extraordinary and swift response, which was achieved through a high level of flexibility from the staff and from the organization, through a variety of deployment arrangements.

21. UNHCR staff has increased by 32 per cent since 2011, with a rise in international staff of 51 per cent. Managing the necessary rotation of this group remained a very complex and resource-intensive process. In 2015, UNHCR advertised more than 1,000 job vacancies, both in its regular biannual compendia and in emergency fast-track exercises. During the year, UNHCR filled a total of 919 positions: 786 regular international positions and 133 fast-track positions.

22. In response to developments on the ground, UNHCR meets new needs and bolsters existing operations' capacity with the emergency deployment of additional personnel on a temporary basis. This results in a workforce of staff and non-staff personnel, with varying legal, financial, practical and human considerations. In this regard, an analysis of flexible workforce arrangements in UNHCR was carried out under the leadership of the Deputy High Commissioner, and a report on the findings was submitted to senior management for review in July 2016. The report recommends a new approach to managing non-staff personnel and identifies several areas for improvement relating to, inter alia, accessibility to learning, career opportunities, performance management and harmonized administrative and management procedures.

23. In December 2015, UNHCR promulgated an updated policy on the administration of fixed-term appointments, introducing the possibility of fixed-term appointments of a longer duration of up to three years. This is expected to benefit a large number of deserving UNHCR staff members.

24. Finally, enhancements to the human resources modules of UNHCR's enterprise resource planning system continued according to plan. Cutting-edge human resources management tools are being gradually introduced to improve a number of processes, primarily in support of external recruitment and the rotation of international professionals.

This includes tools to manage staff and job profiling, eligibility and suitability screening. Throughout 2015, preparations took place for the migration to the new human resources modules, the first phase of which was implemented in May 2016.

## V. Care and support

25. With the vast majority of UNHCR's workforce based in the field, often in volatile and unpredictable situations, there is increasing empirical evidence concerning the physical and mental health challenges related to working and living in these circumstances.

26. The results of a staff health risk appraisal survey (2014) and a staff well-being and mental health survey (2016)<sup>3</sup>, a collaborative research initiative between UNHCR and the Psychology Department of Webster University in Geneva, indicated that more preventive and protective approaches were required to ensure an appropriate level of care and support for UNHCR's workforce. Priorities were established to improve access to psychosocial support for staff and their families, provide adequate and suitable office space and staff accommodation, address substance abuse and dependency, and design a policy and framework for occupational health and safety in UNHCR.

27. In 2015, UNHCR's 10 Staff Welfare Officers – mostly based in the field – provided psychosocial support in over 5,700 individual interactions with staff based in 105 countries. This demonstrated a good level of access to staff welfare services. Staff Welfare Officers also undertook missions to 54 operations and facilitated 300 group activities involving over 6,600 participants.

28. Psychological preparation and end-of-assignment debriefings are now systematically offered to all international staff when assigned and upon completion of their assignment in category D and E duty stations. This is generating increased interest and positive feedback: 70 per cent of the preparation sessions and 34 per cent of the debriefings offered were accepted, totalling close to 500 sessions with staff.

29. In 2016, UNHCR designed a pilot framework for the provision of psychosocial support to staff exposed to vicarious trauma, in particular staff engaged in refugee status determination and resettlement activities. In collaboration with the Division of International Protection, the framework will be rolled out in eight operations, starting with Indonesia and Jordan.

30. The demands on UNHCR's Medical Service continue to be significant, with more than 10,000 medical clearances processed and some 450 medical evacuations undertaken in 2015. In March this year, the organization also became responsible for the medical evacuation of international non-staff personnel contracted through UNOPS. Meanwhile, regional medical staff focused on health promotion activities, primarily for national staff.

31. In remote and difficult settings, global staff accommodation remains a critical challenge. In 2015, nearly US\$ 1 million was earmarked for five countries where improvements in staff accommodation and offices were essential. New environmentally-friendly and cost-effective technologies, such as solar power lights and water filters, are being promoted. Currently, UNHCR's standby "all-inclusive base camp" – consisting of an emergency office and staff accommodation – is being deployed to the Central African Republic, in support of the South Sudan operation. Many deep field operations, particularly in Africa, are still in dire need of new or refurbished office buildings and guest houses, which cannot be funded from reduced and already stretched administrative budgets. Poor

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<sup>3</sup> Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/health/56e2dfa09/staff-well-being-mental-health-unhcr-survey-report-2016.html?query=staff%20health>.

accommodation can lead to various problems, including overcrowding or hygiene issues, which in turn result in significant workplace stress and tensions. For UNHCR to remain on the front lines of emergencies, the organization must find solutions to provide basic, yet safe and adequate, office and living space for its workforce.

## **VI. Working in partnership**

32. UNHCR remains fully engaged in several United Nations inter-agency working groups and various human resources management fora. The Director of DHRM co-chaired the human resources network of the Secretary-General's Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), as well as the High-Level Committee on Management "Strategic working group on reconciling duty of care for United Nations personnel, while operating in high-risk environments."

## **VII. Conclusion**

33. In the year ahead, the Office will continue to be guided by "UNHCR's people strategy 2016-2021" and will work to ensure that we recruit, retain and support talented and diverse people from all over the world with the strength and motivation required to work in complex environments and difficult places in order to help those in need. DHRM will thus also continue to improve the security and safety of the workforce, with a focus on protecting their physical health and mental well-being.