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Human resources, including staff welfare

Summary

This paper highlights developments in the area of human resources management since the last update provided to the Standing Committee in September 2017 (EC/68/SC/CRP.26). It reports on the outcomes of the recently completed human resources review and on the progress and challenges in implementing “UNHCR’s People Strategy 2016-2021”. It also provides an update on measures taken to prevent and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

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I. Introduction

1. By the end of 2017, the total population of concern to UNHCR, including stateless persons and returnees, stood at 71.4 million – up from 67.7 million the previous year. This growing number of people under UNHCR’s care, perpetuated by new and ongoing crises in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), placed additional pressure on UNHCR’s human resources capacity.

2. In response, UNHCR’s Division of Human Resources (DHR) strengthened its efforts to swiftly deploy qualified staff to meet the needs of its field operations. During a one-year period, between July 2017 and July 2018, more than 1,100 positions were advertised. Although staff requirements worldwide remained largely in line with those of the previous reporting period, fast track vacancies more than doubled due to a greater number of level-2 and level-3 emergencies, with nearly 250 positions filled between July 2017 and July 2018.

3. In addition to responding to operational needs, DHR undertook an analysis of UNHCR’s workforce, engaged in workforce planning, introduced new policies to improve working conditions and completed a review of human resources in the context of the organization’s broader change management process. This is in line with “UNHCR’s People Strategy 2016-2021”.

II. The people working for UNHCR

4. UNHCR has a total workforce of more than 15,800 individuals, comprising approximately 11,600 staff and 4,200 affiliate personnel.¹ This total represents an increase of 4 per cent when compared to the previous reporting period. Of the total UNHCR staff, some 43 per cent are in sub-Saharan Africa and 21 per cent are in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region – where the largest UNHCR operations are situated. The remaining staff are located at Headquarters² (12 per cent), in the Asia and Pacific region (11 per cent), in Europe (8 per cent) and in the Americas (5 per cent).

5. Overall, 42 per cent of UNHCR staff are located in hardship duty stations,³ where they often face security threats, harsh conditions, isolation, logistical challenges and poor connectivity. With this in mind, UNHCR, together with other United Nations agencies, has intensified efforts to better understand and respond to the needs of colleagues in field operations when elaborating staff rules and regulations, including through advocacy with the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC).

Inclusion, diversity and gender (People Strategy goal 1)

6. In total, 42 per cent of UNHCR’s workforce is female, with a slightly greater percentage (45 per cent) in the international category. For UNHCR staff and affiliate personnel, the percentages of females are 39 per cent and 51 per cent respectively. In line with the Secretary-General’s strategy on gender parity, UNHCR aims to meet the objective of gender parity well before the 2026 deadline, aiming for 2023. In the international category, females represent 51 per cent of staff at both the P2 and D2 levels, 45 per cent at the P5 level, 44 per cent at the P3 and P4 levels, and 40 per cent at the D1 level.

¹ This category includes individuals under arrangements with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), individual consultants, contractors, deployees, interns and other persons with contracts under UNHCR’s affiliate workforce arrangements.

² This includes Geneva, the Global Service Centre in Budapest and the Global Service Centre in Copenhagen.

³ The hardship classification of a duty station is established following an assessment of the overall quality of life, such as conditions of safety and security, health care, housing, isolation, the availability of basic amenities and suitability for families, including education.

7. The ratio of international female staff appointed since the implementation of the new recruitment and assignments policy, which includes special measures to achieve gender parity, increased by 7.5 per cent between October 2017 and end-June 2018. Particularly noteworthy was the percentage of females appointed to fast track positions, which increased from 33 per cent under the previous policy to 62 per cent under the new one. Female staff wishing to pursue senior leadership learning programmes were also prioritized, leading to an increase in participation from 46 per cent in 2016 to 62 per cent in 2017.
8. Women are underrepresented in the national category and in hardship duty stations, where they account for 35 and 23 per cent of staff respectively. The security environment and working conditions in hardship duty stations, together with socio-cultural factors, may discourage female applicants. In addition, some functional areas are heavily male dominated, such as transportation (e.g. male drivers occupy 98 per cent of the nearly 1,000 positions in this functional area). Excluding drivers, female national staff would represent 45 per cent of staff in the national category and 29 per cent in hardship locations.
9. A survey on "working for UNHCR: motivations and experiences" was conducted in April, the results of which will inform human resources strategies and actions to support retention, promote work satisfaction, help create a more inclusive environment and equip managers to better lead their diverse teams.
10. The geographical breakdown of UNHCR staff is as follows: 41 per cent from Africa, 21 per cent from Europe, 17 per cent from the MENA region, 14 per cent from the Asia and Pacific region, and 7 per cent from the Americas.
11. An administrative instruction on parental leave was issued in early 2018 which takes into account the needs of national and international female staff, with the aim of improving recruitment and retention. It also covers maternity and paternity leave for same sex parents.
12. A new administrative instruction on internships encourages greater opportunities to people of diverse backgrounds.

III. Human resources review

13. UNHCR commissioned the first holistic review of its human resources systems, services and tools, which was completed in March 2018. The review was closely aligned with the objectives outlined in the organization's Strategic Directions 2017-2021 and UNHCR's People Strategy.
14. Global outreach, including through field visits and consultations with personnel across the organization played a critical role in informing the review. Interviews were also held with four peer organizations on key human resources topics, with a focus on measures to enhance the current systems. The outcomes of the review were endorsed by the Senior Executive Team and formed the basis of DHR's submission for the 2019 annual programme review (APR).
15. The review affirmed the critical need for a transition from a mainly reactive and transactional human resources division to one which is able to identify and anticipate workforce needs and provide analysis and guidance to managers, as foreseen in the People Strategy. The review contains 46 recommendations and highlights 4 critical success factors: regionalization; strategic workforce planning; information technology (IT) systems and data management; and culture and behaviours.
16. To support this transition, the review called for a divisional structure and modus operandi that is more field driven with: established priorities; enhanced expertise; aligned end-to-end accountabilities for human resources processes; aligned career development and learning; simplified processes that are documented, coordinated and supported by solid IT systems to generate data analysis; and clarity on where to seek guidance. Greater investment in affiliate and national staff, a rich source of talent that constitutes the majority of UNHCR's workforce, was called for through the regionalization of human resources functions.

17. The review also elaborated five interlinked strategic priorities to help drive the transformation: a) DHR as a strategic partner to operations; b) effective workforce management; c) equipped leaders; d) enabling work environment and culture; and e) robust foundations for human resources delivery.

Division of Human Resources as a strategic partner to operations

18. Positioning DHR as a strategic partner began in early 2018 through an enhanced role in the APR process. This allows DHR to provide analysis, forecasting and guidance to senior managers. DHR also engaged field-based human resources colleagues in operational workforce planning by providing specific geographic data for annual planning and workforce management in 13 of the 15 largest operations.

19. This work will be further developed through DHR's engagement in the design of office structures and the benchmarking of functional staffing requirements, as well as through the provision of guidance on workforce configuration. An important part of this transformation is the establishment of regional human resources teams which will place workforce planning, talent identification, career support and duty of care services closer to the operations and their personnel. The regional teams are expected to be introduced as of mid-2019, and their establishment is being closely aligned with the work of the Change Management Team on UNHCR's broader regionalization efforts.

Effective workforce management (People Strategy goals 1, 2 and 3)

20. An analysis of UNHCR's workforce profile and location was undertaken in 2017, and a pamphlet reflecting the findings was disseminated to all colleagues and externally. In September 2017, a project was launched to enhance UNHCR's capacity to better understand and proactively respond to the workforce needs. Through a consultative process involving the divisions, regional bureaux and field operations, the project focuses on streamlining job descriptions, with the aim of reducing the overall number by some 30 per cent. This will allow for a simplified and more rapid advertising of jobs and the introduction of a single UNHCR organizational skills catalogue, as well as improved information about the workforce itself, including affiliate and national staff.

21. By broadening the categories of personnel eligible to apply to internally advertised positions, the new recruitment and assignments policy and related administrative instructions increased career opportunities in the international category for locally recruited staff and affiliates. By August 2018, the revised criteria contained therein and further development of UNHCR's talent pools led to some 1,630 vetted candidates becoming eligible and "ready-to-hire". As a result of these and other external recruitment and outreach initiatives, some 280 individuals were appointed to regular positions, including around 70 from national categories. Of these, 49 per cent were female.

22. Since November 2017, UNHCR has issued career path guidance notes for 10 key functions in the organization. Furthermore, webinars on eight different career skills topics have been rolled out since 2017, benefiting an average of 180 participants per month (80 per cent of whom are national staff and affiliates).

Equipped leaders (People Strategy goal 2)

23. Equally critical is equipping leaders to ensure they are accountable, including with respect to duty of care and performance management, and building inclusive teams. In 2017, DHR strengthened the career path for UNHCR's future leaders, offering management and leadership skills training. The following training programmes are now available: Managing Effectively Programme (P2 and below), Management Learning Programme (P3), Certification Programme for Senior Leadership and Management Positions (P4) and the Strategic Leadership Programme (P5). By the end of July 2018, over 300 colleagues (47 per cent of whom were female) had completed these programmes.

24. To ensure an effective and informed workforce, online mandatory trainings are provided in five critical areas to equip all colleagues with essential basic knowledge and the

skills required to achieve the high standards expected of them. The trainings, provided in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish cover: basic security; the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment and abuse of authority; protection; and IT security. With the exception of the latter, the overall compliance rate at the end of July 2018 was 76 per cent.

25. Following the human resources review, all management and leadership preparation activities were consolidated under one new Leadership Development Section in the Global Learning Centre. UNHCR is building a leadership competency framework, which is aligned with the Secretary-General's reform efforts. This framework will be reflected in all related trainings, including preparation for Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators.

Enabling work environment and culture (People Strategy goals 2 and 4)

26. Strengthening the working environment and culture requires inclusive leadership, reaffirmation of the values and behaviours the organization expects all colleagues to uphold and a common understanding of performance expectations.

27. With 34 per cent of staff working in non-family duty stations,⁴ focusing on hardship duty stations and duty of care is essential. In addition to developing country profiles detailing the working, cultural and living environments, UNHCR ran a number of staff welfare and security webinars which benefited some 300 participants in helping them make informed decisions regarding their applications to high risk duty stations.

28. UNHCR designed a psychological preparedness test to help applicants prepare for working in high stress circumstances. Individual pre-deployment psychological preparation sessions were offered to more than 400 staff, of whom 60 per cent accepted. End of assignment debriefings were also offered to more than 200 staff, of whom 38 per cent accepted.

29. An administrative instruction to strengthen measures in support of personnel serving in high-risk duty stations was issued at the end of August 2018. Developed following a trial implementation in Afghanistan, the administrative instruction represents a critical step in offering improved support measures before, during and post deployment, with specific benefits for both national and international personnel.

30. In 2017, the percentage of completed performance evaluations increased from 94.3 per cent the previous year to 95.6 per cent. Despite high compliance rates, the human resources review suggested that the very behaviours which reflect the organization's culture and strengths (including strong loyalty and team spirit), combined with the rotation system, may hinder honest performance appraisals. A broad consultation will be undertaken to provide a renewed understanding of what behaviours need to be upheld and to create a common starting point for realistic performance evaluations.

Robust foundations for human resources delivery (People Strategy goals 1, 3 and 4)

31. The review recommended the simplification of core processes and modernization of UNHCR systems to boost capacity to respond to immediate staffing needs and support the DHR's strategic workforce planning objective. In this regard, ongoing discussions regarding the organization's IT systems are critical to enable increased efficiencies.

32. UNHCR moved its medical records to a cloud-based system in September 2017. This resulted in faster and more accurate analysis of data, a reduction in manual entries and improved case management, including in the deployment of personnel.

33. In January 2018, the DHR launched a project to digitalize personal data, allowing for quicker processing and approval, reducing paper waste and improving standardization and accessibility for audits. Thus far, the digitalization has allowed some 5,500 contracts to be

⁴ Non-family duty stations are those where family members are not authorized to travel due to security reasons.

processed electronically, and almost 24,000 personnel documents have been uploaded to the system.

IV. Care and support

34. UNHCR continues to coordinate the work of the system-wide High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) Task Force on Duty of Care, which falls under the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). Chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner, this Task Force develops common standards and practices to improve the working and living conditions of United Nations personnel and families, with a focus on high-risk duty stations.

35. Specific measures were taken to improve living conditions in highly challenging environments in six operations in Africa. Together with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR launched an online UN guest house accommodation booking system for UNHCR and WFP guest houses in deep field locations, which streamlines procedures and promotes common services. The new booking system will also improve management and financial accountability.

36. UNHCR vaccinated 300 personnel in Mali, Niger and the United Republic of Tanzania, and provided first aid training to over 200 staff without suitable access to medical facilities in Burundi and Mali, with a view to improving survival chances in a critical incident. Six medical assessment missions took place in high risk areas in the Africa, Asia and Pacific, and Middle East and North Africa regions. The results were shared with sister agencies as part of an inter-agency health risk assessments project.

37. In 2017, staff welfare officers visited some 90 duty stations in 50 countries for regular or emergency support to operations. Psychosocial counselling benefited over 2,000 individuals, or 15 per cent of the workforce, who were deployed in over 100 operations across 340 duty stations; 20 per cent of these individual cases related to high risk environments compared to 17 per cent in 2016. The most common concerns raised were related to working conditions, workplace relationships and critical incidents.

38. After a 2-year pilot, an administrative instruction on medical evacuation and other medical travel was rolled out in 2017, enabling more than 350 individuals with chronic diseases, mainly national staff in Africa and Asia, to receive timely and quality health support. The impact of these interventions is far reaching in terms of quality of life and a reduction of absenteeism.

39. UNHCR does not tolerate any form of retaliation against colleagues who report misconduct. An administrative instruction on protection against retaliation was finalized at the end of August, with the aim of enhancing protection for personnel who report misconduct.

V. Preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment

40. The organization's zero tolerance stance on sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment is unequivocal. Nevertheless, further measures have been taken to strengthen prevention. In March 2018, the High Commissioner appointed a Senior Coordinator to lead UNHCR's work on this issue. The Senior Coordinator reports to the Deputy High Commissioner, who chairs an Emergency Task Force with Director-level membership.

41. In May 2018, UNHCR released a new strategy aimed at reinforcing existing measures and introducing new ones. Cross divisional teams are taking forward a number of initiatives which include an evaluative review of UNHCR's current policies and procedures, the establishment of an independent helpline available to all personnel, the launching of a psychosocial case management system for support to victims and witnesses, strengthened internal and external communications, the issuance of guidelines for managers, the continued strengthening of UNHCR's investigation capacity and disciplinary processes, and reinforced vetting and reference-checking mechanisms.

VI. Working in partnership

42. UNHCR has over 30 human resources partnership and secondment agreements with governmental, non-governmental and academic entities, as well as with foundations, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNVs).

43. Strong donor support allowed for an increase in the number of Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) working for UNHCR, from 54 persons in 2015 to 65 in 2017.

44. UNHCR approached the UNV Office to set up a modality which would enable refugees to become UNVs in their host countries. Field-based pilots are due to commence in the last quarter of 2018.

45. The organization issued an administrative instruction on UNHCR-UNOPS disbursement agreement and financial procedures, aligning financial reporting practices with other United Nations agencies, which addresses audit concerns.

48. Sharing knowledge with partners and cross-fertilization efforts were reinforced in 2017. About 3,500 government and partner staff participated in learning activities organized by UNHCR's Global Learning Centre, a 21 per cent increase compared to 2016.

49. UNHCR remains an active member of inter-agency groups which deal with human resources issues, such as the ICSC, the CEB (including the Human Resources Network) and the Working Group on Duty of Care, which involves standby partners and helps ensure common approaches in improving duty of care for deployees.

VII. Conclusion

50. The strategies and measures outlined above support the vision that the organization is developing to remain fit for the future and to adjust to the needs, aspirations and potential of its personnel and the people it serves. It represent critical steps in fulfilling UNHCR's People Strategy and enhancing care and support to all colleagues, particularly in frontline field operations. The implementation of the review's recommendations will be the focus of DHR over the next three years.
