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**Security of the workforce and operations in UNHCR**

*Summary*

This paper provides an update on global security management in UNHCR since the last update was presented to the eighty-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2022 (EC/73/SC/CRP.12). It addresses the latest developments in security policies, operations and workforce to manage security risks facing UNHCR globally and progress made in the implementation of the organization's plan of action for security 2021-2023.

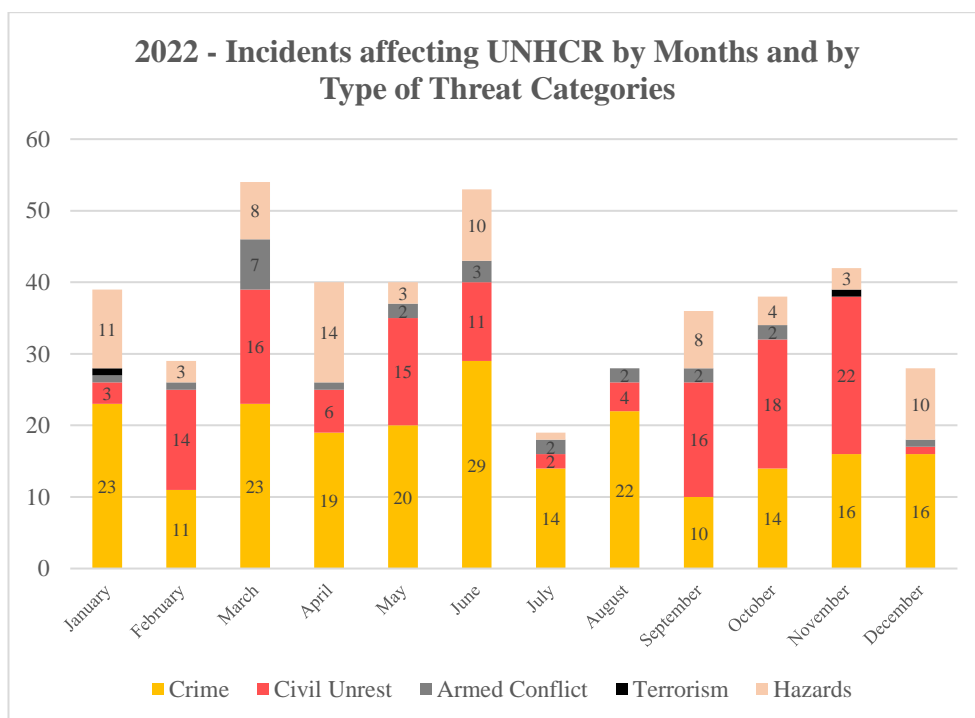
## I. Introduction

1. The ability of UNHCR to carry out its mandate is linked to the security environment in the areas where it operates and the effective management of security risks to enable operations within acceptable levels of risk. Rapidly evolving operational environments and deteriorating conditions in numerous operational contexts remain significant challenges. The UNHCR Field Security Service continuously and proactively responds to operational, policy and workforce needs, ensuring security management that focuses on enabling programme delivery to persons forced to flee.

2. UNHCR also continues to deliver substantive training and education to field personnel and is a strong partner within the United Nations Security Management System. Through its policies, procedures, and specialist subject-matter guidance, UNHCR demonstrates duty of care towards its workforce and promotes a culture of security awareness, identifying and mitigating security risks.

## II. Security situation for UNHCR

3. Nearly a quarter of the workforce (over 4,000 people) live and work in locations with overall threat levels assessed by the United Nations Security Management System as substantial or high. In these areas, a variety of threats such as armed conflict, political violence and crime coexist, frequently overlapping to create volatile environments. The highest risk operational settings are characterized by armed conflict, in which UNHCR is called upon to assist people on the move.



4. In 2022, UNHCR reported 446 incidents of which 371 were security incidents and 75 were hazards, compared to over 300 incidents in 2021. In 2022, 26 of the recorded security incidents were considered critical. Two UNHCR personnel were seriously injured in acts of a criminal nature, requiring hospitalization and prolonged medical care. In early 2023, a UNHCR locally recruited staff member was killed in an incident which appears to not be related to his affiliation with UNHCR or the United Nations.

5. Overall, the number of incidents from 2021 to 2022 has increased by 30 per cent. The increase is based on enhanced reporting and an increase in reported demonstrations against UNHCR at various offices around the world by persons forced to flee who are seeking

support from UNHCR, particularly in resettlement to third countries. While the number of incidents increased, they did not result in fatalities or serious incidents to the workforce.

### **III. Strategic security governance and oversight**

6. UNHCR applies a systematic and strategic approach to ensure robust security management. The plan of action: “Field Security Service 2021-2023 A Culture of Security” prioritizes the strengthening of a global culture of security by making sure that security is factored into operational planning and identification of resources, defining accountability at all levels of management and ensuring active participation in the United Nations Security Management System. The plan also strives to cultivate a well-trained, diverse and motivated security workforce.

7. The Field Security Service assists senior management to fulfil its security-related responsibilities through analyses and briefings with respect to developing situations, preparedness and deployment as well as collaboration with other services to maintain consistent approaches. This includes developing practical tools with the Enterprise Risk Management team and providing guidance to operations and offices on business continuity and providing support on using the tool in 2022 for this purpose.

8. The Field Security Service undertakes and conducts an annual review of compliance with security risk management measures Working with the Division of Information and Technology, the tools used are being reviewed to ensure that they are user-friendly, time-efficient and enable better data analysis. UNHCR strives to disseminate appropriate security information both in briefings by senior management and in communications with the workforce.

9. Similarly, senior field security coordinators are actively engaged in decision-making at the regional bureau level and provide advice and support to country operations, informed by analyses provided by the Field Security Service, the United Nations Department for Safety and Security on the regional situation.

10. In 2022, security was at the forefront of many operational planning discussions, particularly in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and the Ukraine situation.

11. UNHCR provided critical support to its workforce through regular collaboration between the Field Security Service and the Staff Health and Wellbeing Service to reinforce end-to-end assistance, including the provision of mental health services and psychosocial support as appropriate. This collaboration included the review of health and medical facilities, infrastructure and capacity to medically evacuate personnel at the outset of an emergency situation. The Field Security Service works closely with the Senior Coordinator on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment to provide security assistance and advice that is victim centred. It also actively participates in the working group for the prevention of sexual harassment, and contributes to numerous webinars, panels and working groups on person-centred approaches to security risk management.

12. The integration of security management in UNHCR policies and administrative instructions and compliance with United Nations security management policies are a priority for UNHCR. The Field Security Service remains an active member of organizational steering groups, oversight committees and working groups with respect to other workstreams including road safety, occupational health and safety.

### **IV. Security support to operations**

13. In addition to coordinating security compliance and oversight activities with the regional bureaux, the Field Security Service assists operations in the field through the provision of specialized technical expertise in areas such as global analysis, security engineering, security technology and equipment, specific threat profiles.

14. In 2022, support was provided remotely to the field and regional bureaux, expertise was deployed to reinforce operations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon, the Republic of Moldova, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Ukraine. The Field Security Service also participated in planning workshops and security training organized by the regional bureaux.

15. The Field Security Service safeguards the availability of security equipment for immediate use where required. Technical specifications for equipment are reviewed and updated to ensure that the equipment is fit for purpose and can mitigate against diverse threats. The Senior Field Security Officer, with expertise in blast mitigation, reviews and designs office and accommodation structures to confirm appropriate protection standards.

16. UNHCR aims to prepare staff members who apply for positions in higher-risk locations for elevated risk environments and challenges. To this end, UNHCR conducts sensitization webinars, security briefings and training to meet these preparedness challenges, particularly in the 36 high-risk duty stations worldwide.

## **V. Security workforce**

17. The Field Security Service established a dashboard to monitor the effective oversight of the implementation of the UNHCR Gender Parity Action Plan 2022-2024 at regional and country levels and achieve a workforce suited to organizational needs in terms of quality, quantity and diversity.

18. UNHCR is actively developing and implementing recruitment, retention, outreach and career development initiatives to achieve a diverse workforce. The Field Security Service provides regular career development and mentoring advice to all female security personnel and in 2022 created a women's security network mechanism.

19. The Field Security Service delivered person-centred security risk management training to security personnel and led a trainer certification course on women's security awareness, resulting in an additional 24 certified trainers within the United Nations Security Management System, benefiting UNHCR field personnel. Moreover, the Field Security Service led a series of 17 policy and person-centred webinars for field security advisors to broaden the knowledge, understanding and skills of the UNHCR security workforce. In 2022, UNHCR recruited seven additional security advisors (two women, five men) of which four were conversions from locally recruited to international professional positions, including from under-represented countries.

20. The Global Development Learning Centre of UNHCR and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security hosted a training for security personnel in hostage incident management, with more than 20 United Nations Security Management System personnel successfully completing the course.

## **VI. Inter-agency processes**

21. UNHCR remains committed to strengthening the United Nations Security Management System through extensive engagement, coordination, and collaboration at all levels. Inter-agency collaboration and partnerships remain one of the five core pillars of the Field Security Service plan of action for 2021-2023. UNHCR participated in over 22 inter-agency policy groups in 2022 resulting in the successful development of over 13 individual security policy and guidance documents, which contributed to the alignment of common practices and systems to the particular security needs of a field-based agency such as UNHCR.

22. UNHCR has also supported United Nations Department for Safety and Security in the facilitation of crisis management training to designated officials, focusing on preparedness and response among people who have accountability for security while also enabling programme delivery.

23. UNHCR strengthens security for humanitarian partners through involvement in the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Weeks, a platform for inter-network collaboration aimed at improving humanitarian preparedness and response. In 2023, UNHCR will co-lead on several topics showcasing good security management practices in its operations.

## **VII. Learning and development**

24. 30 security officers from 15 countries participated in “a person-centred approach in security management” training developed and delivered by the Field Security Service; this programme addresses the risk that individuals’ profiles face and demonstrates ways to address this in security management, in addition to implementing a victim-centred approach. The Women’s Security Awareness Training was delivered in 20 countries reaching 835 women from UNHCR workforce and partners. 45 managers participated in the Security Management Learning Programme. The Field Security Service, regional and country security advisors continue to deliver security training to the workforce including to personnel who will be deployed to emergencies as part of the Workshop for Emergency Management.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

25. UNHCR has experienced an increase in security incidents. Investment in security risk management measures - physical security, training and learning, as well as reviewing the security environment and adapting to evolving situations, will continue to be needed to protect personnel and assets. In this context, the implementation of the plan of action for 2021-2023 remains a priority for UNHCR. Effective security management requires continuous evaluation, organizational commitment, adequate human and financial resources to ensure appropriate implementation of security measures and duty of care for the UNHCR workforce, in order for the organization to provide lifesaving assistance and protection to others.

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