

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

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Summary record*, Monday, 8 September 2025, at 13.00 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Marcelo Vázquez Bermúdez.....(Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 15:07 a.m.

2. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources (resumed)

(a) Finance and oversight (resumed)

(iv) Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (EC/76/SC/CRP.22)

1. The member of the **Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (UNHCR)** presented its annual report for July 2024 to June 2025, noting that UNHCR faced a sharp reduction in funding, which led to downsizing of staff, operations, and partnerships. This had created a period of heightened risk, with impacts on financial management, oversight capacity and internal control systems. The Committee welcomed the unqualified opinion of the United Nations Board of Auditors, encouraged the timely implementation of recommendations, and supported initiatives such as shared services, automated controls, and a fraud risk assessment tool. It also cautioned that cuts to independent oversight entities could undermine their effectiveness.

2. The representative of **Ecuador** welcomed the report as a tool for transparency and accountability, but expressed concern about liquidity risks, oversight capacity and delays in implementing recommendations. She highlighted the need to strengthen audit systems, improve data quality for results-based management and ensure sufficient resources for ethics, investigations and mediation.

3. The representative of the **Russian Federation** thanked the Committee for its work and underlined the importance of consulting it in the restructuring process. He emphasized the risks of radical transformation, called for closer cooperation between internal and external auditors and requested that the next report provide an overview of restructuring impacts, as well as opinions on United Nations reform initiatives and the Staff Benefit Fund.

4. The representative of **Switzerland** said that staff reductions and loss of senior posts at headquarters risked weakening oversight and sending the wrong signal about its importance. He noted staff frustration and rising complaints and stressed that management must fully implement recommendations and raise awareness about risk prevention. He underlined that the revision of risk management guidelines planned for 2026 must be ambitious but realistic, given current constraints.

5. The representative of **Colombia** welcomed the report and recognized the difficult environment of reduced funding and restructuring. She expressed concern about the reduced aid in Colombia, including the loss of support for 17,000 children. She urged more international financial support, stressed the need to preserve oversight capacity and reaffirmed her country's commitment to solidarity and shared responsibility in protecting refugees and migrants.

6. In response, the **Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (UNHCR)** said that the restructuring and funding cuts represent high risks but also created opportunities for efficiency. The Committee would closely monitor the impacts, maintain open dialogue with management and member States, and continue to accompany UNHCR during this crisis.

7. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** thanked the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee for its sustained advice during a period of organization-wide restructuring. She said the process remained dynamic and that the report provided only a snapshot in time. She noted that some decisions may need correction as impacts become clearer and underlined that resource constraints mean no part of the organization can remain as before. She asked delegations to help balance the difficult trade-offs, stressing that the effects extend across more than one hundred operations.

(b) Human resources, including staff welfare (EC/76/SC/CRP.23)

8. The **Director of the Division of Human Resources (UNHCR)** stated that the downsizing had been rapid and wide-ranging, with the workforce reduced to nearly 15,400 by the end of August 2025, and more than 4,400 colleagues having already departed in 2025.

She described measures to support staff, including expanded career and wellbeing services, redeployment prioritization and a contingency policy on placement and reduction in force. She said gender and geographic representation remained under review, announced that the Division will become the Division of People Management on 1 October and highlighted efficiency initiatives such as Workday and the shared-services model. She called for a broader United Nations rethink of workforce models, outlined a shift towards a more agile mix of contracts and skills-based talent management and asked for member State partnership while emphasizing that over 90 per cent of the workforce continues to serve in operations.

9. The representative of **the Sudan**, speaking on behalf of the Africa Group, thanked UNHCR for its efforts during a time of financial constraints and restructuring. She welcomed the focus on transparency, fairness, staff well-being, and the preservation of institutional knowledge, and commended initiatives on career support, mental health, and skills-based management. She requested fuller reporting on geographic representation at senior levels, clearer criteria, and consultation on the discontinuation of posts, as well as safeguards for staff from crisis-affected countries. She expressed concern about the treatment of national staff, noting shorter notice periods and exclusion from the Staff Benefit Fund and urged equitable treatment and protection for their welfare and career development. She also requested updated figures on staff in-between assignments and a clear strategy to reduce both financial impact and operational uncertainty.

10. The representative of **Ethiopia** noted that his country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and thanked UNHCR for the comprehensive update. He commended the efforts to manage workforce reductions with attention to staff welfare but expressed concern about the scale of downsizing and its implications for the delivery of protection and solutions. He asked for clarity on how restructuring aligned with corporate priorities and strategic objectives, underlining that the workforce was the engine that drives results. He urged UNHCR to ensure that it continued to attract and retain skilled personnel, and welcomed initiatives on career development, health, well-being, and the use of digital tools. He reaffirmed his country's commitment to work closely with UNHCR to keep staff welfare and effectiveness at the centre of reform.

11. The representative of the **Russian Federation** called for a more formal approach to human resources discussions, including the adoption of a separate decision by the Executive Committee. He said this would improve transparency and accountability, noting that member States are sometimes confronted with staffing decisions taken without prior consultation. He recalled that external auditors had recommended a staff management strategy, which had yet to be implemented and urged UNHCR to prepare a strategic approach for adoption. He said the current report lacked comprehensive information on restructuring, including its goals, scenarios and financial implications. He also requested details on the proposed use of the Staff Benefit Fund for termination indemnities and argued that retaining some positions might be more cost-effective than large-scale separations.

12. The representative of **Kenya** said that her country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and thanked staff at headquarters and in the field. She said the sharp reduction in aid funding and the downsizing exercise raise serious concerns about the impact on refugees and stateless persons. She asked for regular assessments of the impact of downsizing and called for resourcing and solidarity across humanitarian and development organizations. She stressed the need to prioritize protection in field operations and requested more information on the transition from the Division of Human Resources to the Division of People Management of UNHCR. She honoured staff working in hardship duty stations and those who had lost their lives in service. She commended progress towards gender parity and equal opportunities for women in leadership, but asked for clarification on entitlements for national staff. She urged UNHCR to address staff concerns with empathy, justice and dignity, and welcomed efforts to strengthen occupational health and safety.

13. The representative of **Ecuador** thanked UNHCR for the report and recognized the extraordinary downsizing process. She noted efforts to manage the transition with transparency, equity and support measures for affected staff. She underlined that the strength of UNHCR lay in its staff, with over 90 per cent deployed outside headquarters and many in difficult duty stations. She stressed the importance of ensuring that financial adjustments do

not weaken staff motivation, well-being, or security. She welcomed progress on gender equality and geographic diversity, as well as initiatives on mental health and professional development. She encouraged UNHCR to continue modernizing its people management systems and urged the international community to provide adequate resources so that the organization could maintain a motivated and protected workforce.

14. The representative of **Canada** acknowledged the gravity of the financial constraints and commended the principled approach to downsizing, including transparency and protection of operational capacity. She welcomed the shift to a skills-based workforce model and the use of digital platforms. She highlighted support measures for staff, including counselling, career services and a roster for separated personnel. She said these reflect a values-based approach grounded in fairness and continuity. She welcomed progress on occupational health, psychosocial support and medical coverage for affiliates. She also recognized leadership in inter-agency reforms and progress on gender parity, urging continued investment in mobility, leadership development and fair workforce planning.

15. The representative of **Switzerland** thanked UNHCR for its report during a period of large-scale downsizing. He welcomed measures to mitigate effects and said it was important to preserve the skills of departing staff for possible re-engagement. He asked whether surveys had been conducted on staff well-being and motivation, and requested information on complaints and misconduct in the current context. He underlined the importance of continuing efforts on gender parity and geographic diversity while ensuring that qualifications and performance remain the basis for promotion. He also requested clarity on the implications of the transition to the Division of People Management.

16. The representative of **Mexico** thanked UNHCR for the report and acknowledged the severe impact of downsizing. She welcomed measures on staff welfare, mobility and psychosocial support and urged further strengthening of these initiatives. She praised progress on gender parity and geographic diversity but asked for continued attention to improve staff representation from the Americas. She welcomed the roster for separated staff and requested updates on its use. She encouraged the implementation of feedback mechanisms to better assess the impacts of restructuring and called for regular reporting on the transition towards a skills-based management system. She paid tribute to staff whose work sustains the mandate of protection for displaced persons.

17. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** expressed appreciation for UNHCR staff and honoured those who had lost their lives in service. She commended the focus of UNHCR on staff welfare during restructuring and noted that a high percentage of departing staff would still recommend it as an employer, which reflected the value of transparent communication and support services. She emphasized the continued investment in safety and well-being as essential for resilience and encouraged UNHCR to remain committed to an inclusive workplace where all staff felt valued and empowered.

18. The representative of **Uganda** noted that her country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and thanked UNHCR for the report. She expressed empathy for staff losing their jobs and underlined that host countries like hers bear a heavy impact when services are reduced. She commended progress on gender parity but highlighted serious concerns about geographic representation in senior management. She said most senior posts were held by staff from Europe and North America, while the global South, despite making up most of the workforce, was underrepresented in leadership positions. She urged UNHCR to extend the same intentionality applied to gender parity to geographic parity. She raised concerns about staff in-between assignments and asked for clarity on eligibility, including whether local staff could benefit. She also asked for details on reviews of five-year contract extensions and adjustments to the resource allocation framework.

19. The representative of **Australia** commended UNHCR for achieving gender parity and welcomed the transparency in audit findings. She acknowledged the adversity faced by staff and the difficult decisions required due to funding cuts, and expressed appreciation for their resilience. She expressed concern about the loss of skills resulting from downsizing and inquired about efforts to ensure the right expertise remains. She supported the development

of a fraud risk assessment tool but highlighted declining audit resources. She encouraged continued prioritization of oversight and reporting, including implementation of audit recommendations. She commended measures to strengthen workplace ethics and to relaunch the Speak Up helpline. She urged UNHCR to continue sharing innovations and lessons learned across the United Nations system.

20. The representative of **Chile** thanked UNHCR for the report and for the update on human resources. She welcomed the preservation of gender parity during restructuring and recognized the dedication of staff at headquarters and worldwide. She expressed concern about the scale of downsizing, noting that thousands of posts were already affected and further reductions were anticipated, with consequences for assistance to States and to asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and other persons of concern. She asked three questions: how UNHCR is supporting civil society where localization coincides with office closures and limited handover or training; which specialized areas have been most affected by the loss of expertise; and what the transition from the Division of Human Resources to the Division of People Management will change in terms of functions. She also requested an explanation of the skills-based model and its operational impact at headquarters, in regional bureaux and in field offices.

21. The representative of **the Sudan**, speaking in her national capacity, noted that her country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and raised concerns about the very low number of Sudanese in international professional and senior posts compared to countries with smaller operational burdens. She underlined the vulnerability and operational value of Sudanese staff serving in conflict-affected duty stations while their own families are displaced or at risk. She asked why there was no clear policy or special track for staff from conflict-affected countries, urged benchmarking against other United Nations entities that prioritize and protect such staff and requested concrete measures to ensure career continuity, redeployment opportunities and equitable access to benefits.

22. The representative of **Zambia** noted that her country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and highlighted an omission in the document regarding staff well-being and mental health. She noted that personnel often serve in highly demanding contexts and stated that the paper does not sufficiently address assistance for mental health, prevalence of burnout, or access to psychosocial services during downsizing. She acknowledged initiatives such as Act to Heal and Cultivate Resilience and requested information on whether these programmes will continue and become permanent. She stressed that human resource reporting must place health, safety and effectiveness at the centre.

23. The representative of the **United Republic of Tanzania** noted that her country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and welcomed the human resources report, including progress on gender equality. She expressed concern that the African continent, and especially East Africa and the Horn of Africa, which hosts large refugee populations, is underrepresented in senior management and therefore in policymaking. She requested frequent updates on the impact of downsizing in major and long-standing host countries, specifically requested detailed data on Tanzanian representation at the D2, D1, P5, and P4 levels over the past fifteen years, and encouraged efforts to diversify senior posts. She asked for information on valuing host country contributions, on the use of United Nations Volunteers, Junior Professional Officers and internships to retain skills and on how complaints and appeals from staff who lost jobs are being managed.

24. The representative of **Malawi** noted that her country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and expressed deep concern about geographic representation in decision-making posts. She said an organization capable of delivering gender parity should also deliver geographic parity. She asked what plans exist to achieve equitable geographic representation during the reorganization and whether Malawian nationals have ever held posts beyond P3. She expressed sympathy for colleagues who lost jobs and asked whether consultations were meaningful and whether all departing staff have equal access to benefits and re-engagement

opportunities. She asked why locally recruited staff in Geneva can access staff in-between assignments arrangements while national staff in country offices cannot.

25. The representative of **Zimbabwe** noted that his country aligned with the statement delivered by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group and asked for more information on the criteria for discontinuing posts, the nature of consultations undertaken and the extent of involvement of organized labour in line with International Labour Organization standards. He said the Standing Committee would benefit from hearing from workers' representatives. He requested continued updates on consultative processes during the restructuring and echoed concerns about geographic representation in senior grades, noting the absence of Zimbabwean nationals at the D2, D1, and P5 levels, despite available capacity.

26. The representative of **Colombia** thanked UNHCR for the presentation and recommended that any organizational reform consider workforce consequences and results-based management. She noted that reductions in staff and resources had affected operations in her country, and it was crucial to monitor the field impacts on assistance to migrants and refugees. She called for stronger inter-agency coordination and better alignment of human resources planning with United Nations cooperation frameworks to support national inclusion of refugees and migrants. She noted the underrepresentation of her region in senior positions and affirmed that the region offers experience, solidarity and capacity to support the organization's direction.

27. The **Director of the Division of Human Resources (UNHCR)** thanked delegations for support, said a psychosocial risk management tool was being piloted in fifteen operations to target limited resources and described a standard operating procedure developed with the Division of International Protection for cases of highly vulnerable staff from conflict-affected countries, handled case by case. She provided data points on geographic representation at senior levels, invited delegations to request historical and national breakdowns and clarified the purpose of staff in-between assignments, noting the current pressure on rotation and the potential activation of the staff placement and reduction in force policy if necessary. She stated that there were no plans to use the Staff Benefit Fund beyond after-service health insurance, repatriation grant and accrued annual leave.

28. She further noted that prioritization preserved capacity in protection, emergency response and solutions, while acknowledging imperfections due to the speed of downsizing and emphasized the importance of fair compensation and timely processing for departing staff. She described the close engagement with the Global Staff Council, confirmed that a workforce planning strategy had been drafted for consultation and explained that from 1 October, the Division of People Management will be leaner, will partner more with global shared services for transactional work and will focus on strategic workforce planning, succession and skills-based management. She concluded by recognizing the strain on systems and expressing cautious optimism for 2026.

(c) Management: Oral update on integrity in UNHCR

29. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** said that UNHCR remained committed to integrity despite downsizing. She outlined a risk framework, an organization-wide strategy against sexual misconduct, ethics dialogues and mediation-first approaches. She cautioned that budget cuts threatened some initiatives, mentioning in particular the NotOnlyMe victim support platform, which had assisted 180 users. She noted higher integrity risks during restructuring and described prevention and vigilance measures, including a rapid fraud risk assessment, enterprise controls, protection against retaliation and consolidation of transactions through global shared services in Budapest. She said UNHCR was adjusting its global risk appetite statement and partnering with other United Nations actors, including small grants to local organizations for community work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. She committed to continued briefings and emphasized that integrity underpins trust of persons of concern and member States.

30. The representative of **Uganda** welcomed the focus on integrity and asked that integrity briefings include all preventive functions, not only investigations. She requested

views from the Ombudsman on fairness concerns raised during restructuring, including unequal access to staff in-between assignments.

31. The representative of **Switzerland** thanked UNHCR for the update and cautioned that downsizing must not lower standards for fraud control, misconduct response, or conflict management. He encouraged the use of digital and artificial intelligence tools for complaint handling and trend tracking, and requested details on pooled resources to prevent inefficiency.

32. The representative of **Kenya** commended efforts to uphold integrity and asked how UNHCR would prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence and ensure child protection in field operations with fewer resources. She requested specifics on inter-agency pooling at the field level.

33. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** welcomed the strengthened field capacity in protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the new training for focal points, but inquired about the current field capacity in relation to last year and the presence of dedicated roles in major operations. She sought clarity on whether the victim care team supported non-staff victims and how anti-fraud communications linked to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. She requested trends in 2025 caseloads and resources for oversight, ethics, and ombuds functions, as well as what this meant for timely case handling.

34. The representative of **Malawi** inquired about how UNHCR was protecting staff affected by restructuring from exploitation and coercion associated with job insecurity.

35. The representative of **the Sudan** asked what direct feedback staff provided on accessibility and effectiveness of integrity mechanisms, and how UNHCR ensured fairness for all categories of staff, particularly national colleagues in conflict settings. She called for greater transparency on outcomes of complaints and mediations.

36. The representative of **Mexico** supported continued investment in prevention of exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment and welcomed future briefings featuring ethics and ombuds functions.

37. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** replied that integrity briefs aimed to highlight preventive pathways and link functions that historically operated in silos. She noted that increased reporting can indicate both increased trust and unresolved problems, and stressed the value of safe and sometimes anonymous reporting. She highlighted a support desk that channels non-misconduct grievances and cautioned that resources for this were at risk.

38. The **Director of the Ethics Office (UNHCR)** mentioned recent work that showed rising concerns about fairness in selections, conflicts of interest and fear of retaliation. She noted a 63 per cent increase in protection-against-retaliation requests, largely tied to post discontinuations, with a notable impact on female locally recruited staff. She said reduced resources would force prioritization of core mandates, which would constrain prevention activities that previously reached large numbers of staff.

39. The **Ombudsman and Mediator (UNHCR)** emphasized prevention alongside case resolution. He said the office now had three experts serving a global population, with a ratio of roughly one expert per 5,000 people. He reported that visitors in 2025 had already tripled compared to the prior year, and mediations exceeded last year's totals, with high informal resolution rates. He identified declining trust, fear of reprisals and a "survivor syndrome" among remaining staff as prominent themes and said the office was turning to digital tools to bridge capacity gaps.

40. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** introduced the update on integrity in UNHCR, noting that even in the context of downsizing, the organization's commitment to integrity and accountability remained strong. She emphasized the continued importance of functions such as ethics, ombuds, mediation, protection from sexual misconduct, and risk management. She stressed that downsizing increased vulnerabilities and risks, making these integrity mechanisms even more essential.

41. The **Principal Advisor on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (UNHCR)** reaffirmed that addressing sexual misconduct remained an organizational and operational priority. She explained that reduced aid heightened risks of sexual exploitation, especially for women and children and that downsizing had led to high turnover among focal points at the country level. In response, UNHCR had launched new training programmes, maintained a victim care team and expanded grassroots projects through the Outreach and Communications Fund, which to date had supported 56 initiatives in 27 countries, reaching over two million people. She highlighted inter-agency collaboration, including the joint development of a manager's guide on sexual harassment and inter-agency referral procedures and emphasized the leadership of the organization in adopting the misconduct disclosure scheme to prevent the rehiring of known perpetrators.

42. The **Chief Risk Officer (UNHCR)** reported on the evolving risk landscape shaped by budgetary pressures, changing mandates linked to broader reforms of the United Nations and emerging contextual risks. She noted that these affected protection, emergency responses, staff duty of care and security. She confirmed that UNHCR integrated risk management into its transformation process and is expanding the use of technology and artificial intelligence in preparation for future reviews. She reiterated that despite reductions, risk management remained embedded in operations and was considered a central part of integrity briefings.

43. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** concluded by returning briefly to the previous agenda item on human resources. She provided statistics on senior-level representation, noting that several nationalities, including Colombia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, Türkiye, Uganda and Zimbabwe currently had nationals serving at the P5 level and above. She emphasized that geographic diversity, along with talent, skills and experience, remained key factors in senior appointments and reaffirmed the commitment of UNHCR to ensuring diversity within the executive team.

The meeting rose at 18:02 p.m.
