

Job description

Post title and level: Assistant High Commissioner for Operations in the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General (ASG)

Duty station: Geneva, Switzerland

Organization: Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Context

UNHCR is seeking an exceptional leader to serve as the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations at a time of significant organizational transition. Following a period of substantial financial contraction and operational realignment, the organization is adapting to a reduced resource base, evolving funding patterns, and increasing expectations from Member States for efficiency, accountability, and demonstrable impact. The work of UNHCR global operations are affected significantly in this evolving environment.

Operating in over 130 countries with a global workforce of approximately 13,000 personnel across diverse contractual modalities, UNHCR must continue to deliver protection and solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless people, requiring a disciplined approach to prioritization, delivery, and operational effectiveness.

In practice, the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations is responsible for overseeing and ensuring that the operational strategies and priorities as defined by Divisions and Bureaux are in line with the vision of the High Commissioner, with a particular focus on solutions and effective partnering with development actors. S/he will play a central role in supporting the High Commissioner to shape and execute a forward-looking strategy which positively supports effective responsibility sharing and search for solutions.

This is a role for a leader who has:

- Direct high-level experience in large, complex organizations
- Proven experience, including in the field, in management of humanitarian operations
- Extensive experience working with development actors in partnership for solutions
- Expert knowledge of humanitarian inter-agency questions
- Demonstrated a strong personal commitment to UNHCR's mandate and to improving protection and solutions for refugees and stateless people

Work relationships

The Assistant High Commissioner for Operations reports directly to the High Commissioner for Refugees, and is a member of the Senior Executive Team and of the Senior Management Committee. S/he directly supervises the Directors of the six Regional Bureaux, the Division of Emergency & Programme Support (DEPS), the Special Advisor on Climate Action, the Sustainable Responses Service (SRS) and the Senior Liaison Officers for the Regional Bureaux. The AHC-O exercises oversight for the work of the Regional Bureaux, DEPS, Special Advisor on Climate Action and SRS, covering all operations including emergencies and the full range of refugee and internal displacement operations, as well as operational support for supply, and staff safety and security. In addition, s/he engages with development actors in order to mobilize their engagement in displacement settings, to advance protection and solutions.

Responsibilities

Under the overall guidance of the High Commissioner, the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations plays a central role in shaping and delivering UNHCR's strategic direction as regards to operational delivery and impact, supporting the formulation, communication,

implementation and evaluation of activities globally. The Assistant High Commissioner for Operations also decides upon, declares and coordinates, or delegates the coordination of refugee emergencies on behalf of the High Commissioner.

In this capacity, the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations will:

Strategic leadership and advice

- Provide strategic advice and assist the High Commissioner on global operational leadership, including oversight of country operations, emergency preparedness and response, programme delivery, security and safety, supply and logistics, climate-related operational impacts, and engagement with development actors to advance protection and solutions.
- Engage in policy development and strategic direction in areas under the AHC-O's purview, and contribute as a member of the Senior Executive Team to deliberations on UNHCR's overall policies, operational priorities, risk posture, and programme delivery across diverse and complex contexts.
- In support of the High Commissioner, lead the strategy on engagement with development actors and strengthen UNHCR's catalytic role towards solutions.

External representation, advocacy and partnerships

- Represent the High Commissioner in senior-level bilateral and multilateral engagements with Governments, the United Nations system, international and intergovernmental organizations, development actors, and other partners on operational, emergency, and solutions-oriented matters.
- Promote effective humanitarian–development–peace engagement in displacement contexts, strengthening partnerships that support sustainable responses, inclusion, and responsibility-sharing.
- Undertake high-level missions on behalf of the High Commissioner to support major operations, emergencies, and politically sensitive situations, and to reinforce UNHCR's operational credibility and partnerships on the ground.

Executive management and performance

- Provide strategic leadership and oversight to the Regional Bureaux and global services under the AHC-O's purview, maintaining regular dialogue with Directors and senior managers, setting priorities, and reviewing performance against agreed objectives.
- Ensure effective coordination between headquarters, Regional Bureaux, and country operations, including during emergencies and large-scale operational transitions.
- Drive operational effectiveness and learning by strengthening planning, performance monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making across operations, including through improved use of data, analysis, and operational tools.

Operations delivery, risk and accountability

- Oversee the effective delivery of UNHCR's operations globally, ensuring timely and principled responses in emergencies, sustained performance in protracted situations, and continuity of operations under volatile and high-risk conditions.
- Provide leadership on operational risk management, including security, access, duty of care, and supply chain risks, advising the High Commissioner on emerging operational challenges and mitigation strategies.
- Ensure that operational policies, standards, and guidance are consistently applied, and that lessons from the field inform continuous improvement in programme delivery and emergency response.

Governance and people leadership

- Foster a field-centred, accountable, and inclusive operational culture, holding managers to high standards of leadership, coordination, staff welfare, security, and respect in the

workplace.

- Support senior leadership talent management within the operational pillar, including the deployment of experienced leaders to priority operations and emergencies.
- Promote collaboration across operational, protection, and corporate pillars to ensure coherent delivery of UNHCR's mandate.

Competencies

- **Professionalism:** Political awareness and diplomatic skills. Ability to operate effectively in high-pressure and politically sensitive environments;
- **Leadership:** Strong leadership, team building and management abilities. Demonstrated capacity to empower teams, foster collaboration, and drive organizational change and improvement;
- **Strategic Vision:** Provides clear strategic direction by identifying critical issues, opportunities and risks, and translating them into coherent policies, priorities and organizational choices.
- **Judgement and Decision-making:** Exercises sound, independent judgement and decisive leadership, including the ability to take difficult decisions under pressure and navigate complex political, institutional and operational environments.
- **Performance and Results Leadership:** Sets clear priorities, allocates resources strategically, and holds leaders accountable for delivery, while fostering a culture of performance, learning and continuous improvement.
- **Integrity and Ethical Leadership:** Upholds and models the highest standards of integrity, independence and professionalism, including the ability to withstand undue pressure and address misconduct decisively and fairly.
- **Accountability:** Assumes full responsibility for outcomes, delivers results aligned with organizational objectives, and reinforces accountability across functions, teams and governance structures.
- **Strategic Communication and Influence:** Demonstrates exceptional communication, negotiation and diplomatic skills, with the ability to influence at the most senior levels and represent the organization credibly in high-stakes and crisis contexts.

Qualifications

Education: advanced university degree (Master's degree or equivalent) in law, international relations, public administration, political or social sciences, humanitarian affairs or a related field.

Experience:

The position requires a minimum of 20 years of progressively responsible experience, including extensive senior executive leadership experience in large and complex international organizations, including:

- Demonstrated experience in high-level negotiation, communication and partnership-building, with the ability to build consensus and work effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, international organizations and partners;
- Strong understanding of refugee protection and broader forced displacement dynamics, including the humanitarian, political and operational dimensions of displacement;

- Demonstrated ability to navigate complex and constrained funding situations and steer engagement to advise the High Commissioner on the evolution operational priorities and needs, contingencies for emergencies, and staff security and safety;
- Demonstrated ability to drive institutional change and deliver measurable results in complex, high-pressure contexts, and politically sensitive environments;
- Proven experience in coordinating activities and policies across multiple actors and functions, both internally and externally, within a multilateral setting;
- Direct experience in engaging with development actors in order to mobilize engagement in displacement settings, and to help secure common strategies towards solutions, also in line with the delivering as One UN objectives;
- In-depth knowledge of internal UN policies and procedures, inter-agency collaboration and the UNHCR governance structure;
- Demonstrated commitment to the values and guiding principles of the United Nations, including humanitarian principles, integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity.

Languages

English and French are the working languages of the United Nations. For this position, fluency in English, with excellent drafting and public speaking skills is required. A working knowledge of another United Nations official language will be an advantage.

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