

## Job description

**Post title and level:** Assistant High Commissioner for Protection 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 Protection at a significant time when the organization is working in a protection environment shaped by prolonged displacement, restricted access to asylum and rights, and limited pathways to solutions, requiring a sharper focus on protection outcomes, responsibility-sharing, and political engagement.

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 under conditions of volatility, political sensitivity, and resource constraint. This requires a disciplined approach to prioritization, delivery, and policy guidance.

In practice, the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection provides strategic leadership to ensure that UNHCR's protection mandate is effectively upheld across operations, guiding the organization's approach to safeguarding rights, maintaining protection space, and advancing durable solutions in complex and protracted displacement contexts. The role requires aligning protection policy, operational practice, and partnerships to respond to evolving risks, strengthen accountability to affected populations, and sustain UNHCR's credibility with States and partners as the global protection environment becomes more constrained.

This is a role for a leader who has:

- High-level expertise in refugee, human rights and humanitarian law;
- Expert knowledge of asylum policy and practice at the national, regional and global levels;
- Proven ability to lead the development of pragmatic solutions while safeguarding protection principles, legal standards, and asylum space;
- In-depth knowledge of the protection dimensions of humanitarian operations, including with regard to addressing protection challenges and solutions at the field level;
- Knowledge of contemporary migration issues and their relationship to asylum and refugees;
- Knowledge of the humanitarian and development reform process and its impact on protection and solutions;
- Credibility with Member States, governing bodies, and donors, with a track record of principled advocacy and diplomatic engagement on asylum and protection policy.

### Work relationships

The AHC for Protection reports directly to the High Commissioner and is a member of the Senior Executive Team and of the Senior Management Committee. S/he directly supervises the Director of the Division of International Protection and Solutions (DIPS), and the Global Refugee Forum coordinating team.

## **Responsibilities**

Under the overall guidance of the High Commissioner, the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection plays a central role in shaping and delivering UNHCR's mandate and strategic direction on protection and solutions, providing oversight responsibility for UNHCR's global activities on protection policy, doctrine, and practice, for forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

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

### Strategic leadership and advice

- Provide strategic advice to, and support the High Commissioner on, global refugee protection policy, international refugee law, asylum systems, statelessness, and solutions, ensuring that UNHCR's protection mandate, legal standards, and normative frameworks remain central to organizational decision-making.
- Lead the development, articulation, and implementation of UNHCR's global protection strategy, including the safeguarding of asylum space and the strengthening of national asylum and protection systems in increasingly restrictive political and legal environments.
- Contribute, as a member of the Senior Executive Team, to corporate deliberations on UNHCR's overall policies, priorities, and activities, ensuring that protection principles, legal obligations, and field realities are fully integrated into institutional transformation and operational planning.
- Provide leadership and direction on the evolution of protection policy and practice, translating international legal and normative standards into operationally relevant guidance for regional bureaux and country operations.
- Ensure the strategic preparation, coordination, and effective delivery of all processes and events related to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, including in particular the Global Refugee Forum, ensuring coherence of policy, messaging, stakeholder engagement, and organizational readiness.

### External representation, advocacy and partnerships

- Represent the High Commissioner in high-level bilateral and multilateral engagements on protection, asylum, and displacement, including with Governments, regional bodies, the United Nations system, international and non-governmental organizations, and other strategic partners.
- Lead and support principled advocacy and diplomatic engagement with States and other stakeholders on sensitive protection and asylum issues, including access to territory, non-refoulement, responsibility-sharing, and solutions.
- Lead collaboration across the UN system on aspects linked to protection, in particular with other UN entities with related or complementary mandates.
- Represent the High Commissioner at meetings of the Executive Committee and Standing Committee, presenting senior management positions on protection policy, legal standards, and asylum-related governance matters.
- Undertake high-level missions on behalf of the High Commissioner to advance protection objectives, reinforce UNHCR's normative leadership, and support strategic partnerships.

## Executive management and performance

- Provide strategic leadership and oversight of Divisions and Services under the AHC for Protection's purview, maintaining regular dialogue with Directors and senior managers and reviewing performance against agreed objectives.
- Ensure coherence and consistency of protection policy and practice across headquarters, Regional Bureaux, and country operations, including through effective coordination and communication.
- Guide the integration of protection analysis, legal expertise, and evidence into decision-making, risk management, and operational prioritization, strengthening UNHCR's ability to deliver protection outcomes in complex environments.

## Protection delivery, risk and accountability

- Oversee the quality, integrity, and consistency of UNHCR's protection delivery globally, ensuring that operations uphold international legal standards while balancing protection imperatives, operational risk, and resource constraints.
- Provide leadership on protection-related risk management, including in contexts where asylum systems are under pressure, and advise the High Commissioner on emerging protection risks and trends.
- Ensure that protection policies, guidance, and accountability mechanisms are effectively implemented and monitored, and that lessons learned from operations inform policy development.

## Governance, people and culture

- Foster a strong protection culture across the organization, promoting professionalism, legal rigor, ethical conduct, and respect for affected populations.
- Contribute to senior leadership talent management in the protection domain, including succession planning, leadership development, and the deployment of protection expertise to priority contexts.
- Promote inclusive leadership, collaboration, and accountability, holding managers to clear standards on protection leadership, staff engagement, and consistent application of policies.

## **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, or a related field.

## **Experience:**

The position requires a minimum 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 in the area of international protection;
- Strong understanding of refugee protection and broader forced displacement dynamics, including the humanitarian, political and operational dimensions of displacement;
- Proven experience in protection-related advocacy, responsibility-sharing, and strategic engagement with States, donors, and partners, including effective communication on sensitive asylum, legal, and protection issues in politically charged environments;
- Demonstrated ability to drive institutional and policy change in refugee protection, delivering measurable protection outcomes and safeguarding asylum space in complex, high-pressure, and increasingly restrictive political and operational contexts;
- Proven experience in coordinating activities and policies across multiple actors and functions, both internally and externally, within a multilateral setting.

## **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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