

Job description

Post title and level: Deputy High Commissioner 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 Deputy High Commissioner 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.

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 institutional governance.

In practice, the Deputy High Commissioner functions as the organization's Chief Operating Officer, responsible for ensuring that UNHCR's systems, workforce, financial resources, and governance structures are aligned to support effective frontline delivery. The role requires balancing operational continuity with the need to drive structural adaptation, strengthen accountability, and enhance organizational credibility with Member States, partners, and affected populations.

The Deputy High Commissioner will play a central role in supporting the High Commissioner to shape and execute a forward-looking operating model that enables UNHCR to remain effective, agile, and sustainable in a constrained and rapidly evolving environment.

This is a role for a leader who has:

- Direct high level experience in **large, complex organizations**
- Driven **transformation and modernization**
- Balanced **mission, risk, resources, and accountability**
- Operated under scrutiny from boards, governments, and external stakeholders

UNHCR welcomes candidates from the private sector whose executive experience is transferable to a mission-driven, global organization.

Work relationships

The Deputy High Commissioner (DHC) is a statutory position, in conformity with the General Assembly Resolution 428 (V) of 17 December 1950. The DHC reports directly to the High Commissioner for Refugees, assists him/her in the discharge of his/her mandate and responsibilities, and is the Officer-in-Charge in his absence.

The DHC is a member of the Senior Executive Team and of the Senior Management Committee. In the High Commissioner's absence, the DHC is the Chairperson of the Committee. The DHC represents the High Commissioner as required under the UN protocol.

The DHC directly supervises the Director of the Division of External Relations, the Controller & Director of the Division of Resource Management, the Director of the Division of People Management, the Chief Information Officer & Head of the Information Technology Service, the Head of the Global Shared Service, the Head of the Legal Affairs Service and the Head

of the Design, Development & Risk Service.

Responsibilities

Under the overall guidance of the High Commissioner, the DHC plays a central role in shaping and delivering UNHCR's strategic direction, supporting the formulation, communication, implementation and evaluation of organizational policies, priorities and activities across the Office.

In this capacity, the Deputy High Commissioner will:

Strategic leadership and advice

- Provide strategic advice and assist the High Commissioner on organizational leadership and management, including human and financial resources, oversight and accountability, risk management, resource mobilization, communications, partnerships, legal affairs, information technology, senior-level assignments, structural reform, performance evaluation and innovation.
- Engage in policy development, particularly in areas under the DHC's direct purview, and contribute as a member of the Senior Executive Team to deliberations on UNHCR policies, programme priorities and activities.
- Lead in support of the High Commissioner the ongoing transformation of UNHCR's operating model, including the rebalancing of the workforce, the effective use of diverse contractual modalities, and the alignment of mobility, deployment, and skills with operational needs.

External representation, advocacy and partnerships

- Represent the High Commissioner in complex and sensitive senior-level bilateral and multilateral engagements with Governments, the United Nations system, international and intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia, and contribute to strengthening UNHCR's strategic partnerships and external relationships.
- Represent the High Commissioner at meetings of the Standing Committee, presenting senior management views and positions on policy and governance matters.
- Undertake high-level missions on behalf of the High Commissioner and support high-level advocacy and fundraising on issues related to forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Executive management and performance

- Maintain a regular dialogue with Directors and Heads of Services under the DHC's purview, providing guidance on priorities and overseeing implementation, and periodically reviewing performance against agreed objectives.
- Facilitate effective coordination and communication across Divisions and Services, and between headquarters, Regional Bureaux and country operations.
- Drive the integration of data, digital systems, and innovation as core enablers of decision-making, operational efficiency, and organizational control, moving towards a more evidence-based and performance-driven organization.

Resources, oversight and accountability

- Drive organizational performance and delivery under constraint, ensuring that resources are aligned with strategic priorities and that operations continue to deliver impact despite a reduced footprint and increasing funding volatility.
- Maintain active oversight of the organization's funding position and expenditure, ensuring alignment with strategic priorities.
- Monitor the effective functioning of oversight and accountability mechanisms, including follow-up on recommendations, and serve as the primary liaison with the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC).

- Oversee the management evaluation and internal justice process relating to contested administrative decisions, in accordance with applicable rules and regulations.

Governance and people management

- Chair the Resource Planning and Management Board, the Transformation and Governance Board (TGB), the Private Sector Partnerships Board, and the Senior Assignments Committee (SAC).
- Foster a high-performing, inclusive and accountable culture by holding managers to clear standards on leadership, staff engagement, collaboration, respect in the workplace and consistent application of policies.
- Advise on senior leadership talent management, including succession planning, leadership development and placement of senior managers in critical roles.

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 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;
- Experience in managing large, complex and geographically dispersed organizations, including executive responsibility for financial resources, human resources, information technology, oversight and risk management within a multilateral, governmental, regulated or similarly complex institutional setting;
- Proven experience in resource mobilization and engagement with external stakeholders, including strategic communication with donors and partners;
- 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.

April 2026