

# 年度回顾

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监察员与调解员办公室

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## 致谢

本办公室谨向过去一年中与我们接触、并支持我们履行职责的同事、员工代表、管理人员和高级领导表示诚挚感谢。我们感谢大家对本办公室的信任，也感谢大家在调解服务、外联与学习活动以及 Community Cafés 等全球监察员活动中的建设性参与。

我们特别感谢高级专员、高级执行团队、全球员工理事会、各区域局局长及其管理团队，以及曾与本办公室开展合作的各业务行动和办事处的领导与同事。与领导层保持建设性互动，对于确保同事们在保密环境中提出的个人经历能够转化为组织层面的理解和改进，始终至关重要。

本办公室重视与员工支持和问责职能部门的密切合作，包括全球员工理事会和员工协会、同伴顾问、法律事务处、人力资源司、监察长办公室、道德操守办公室、员工福利服务，以及内部传播和各区域的同事。这些关系有助于促进对话、加强协调和推动共同学习，尤其是在机构承受压力的时期更显重要。

我们也感谢本办公室的外部合作伙伴，包括瑞士 SYNI 项目、国际监察员协会、联合国行政首长协调会监察员与调解员网络，以及多边组织监察员与调解员网络。他们的合作加强了本办公室的专业实践能力，也提升了我们为世界各地同事服务的能力。

联系我们

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## 监察员兼调解员的致辞

亲爱的同事们：

过去一年，对于联合国难民署而言，是一个深刻转型的时期。资金限制、结构调整以及快速的组织变革，不仅重塑了机构架构和岗位设置，也切实影响了各区域、各职能部门和各层级同事的日常工作与个人处境。

作为监察员兼调解员，我有幸聆听了许多同事在这段不确定时期中的经历。我不断听到的，并不仅仅是冲突本身，而是一种对保密、公正空间的需要：一个可以停下来理解变化、梳理困难经历，并在不稳定之中重新找到立足点的地方。2025 年，我们办公室收到的服务需求显著增加。同事们前来寻求个人咨询、调解、引导式对话以及以社区为基础的反思空间。对我而言，这一增长并不只是说明人际矛盾有所增加。它更提醒我们，当组织必须在压力下快速作出决定，而沟通和对话机会有限时，张力往往会逐渐累积。为回应这一需求，我和团队调整了服务方式，扩大了外联范围，努力让更多同事能够获得非正式、中立和可信赖的支持。

这种需求上升，并不是监察员兼调解员办公室单独面对的情况。其他员工支持和监督职能部门，也在资源和能力缩减的同时，处理着越来越复杂的工作需求。综合来看，这些压力再次说明，明确各项职能的角色定位、加强不同职能之间的协调，并持续关注支持同事度过转型期的系统和机制，至关重要。

过去一年，同事们与我们分享的经历也让我深刻感受到，过程本身会留下长远影响。许多人谈到，信任以及与组织之间的心理契约受到了冲击。这种影响不仅来自危机本身，也来自变化是如何被沟通、如何被经历、又如何在日常工作中持续显现的。这些反复出现的情况，为我们办公室 2025 年 12 月发布的特别报告提供了重要依据，也为高级专员 2026 年诚信行动计划提供了参考。它们提醒我们，保密谈话虽然始于个人经历，但当我们从整体上审视时，其意义往往超越单个个案。展望未来，我们将继续把重点放在支持恢复工作上。我们将协助团队在新结构中重新建立稳定感，加强早期和非正式解决渠道的可及性，并继续提供安全、建设性的空间，让同事们能够提出关切、开展对话。2026 年，Ubuntu Community Cafés 2.0 等举措仍将是这一努力的重要组成部分，为对话、反思和向上反馈提供结构化机会。

我谨向监察员团队表达深切感谢。在充满挑战的一年中，团队展现出的专业精神、关怀与沉稳尤为可贵。我也真诚感谢每一位信任我们、愿意向我们讲述自己经历的同事。能够陪伴大家走过变化时刻，是我和团队的荣幸；我们也将继续以谦逊、谨慎和关怀承担这份责任。

感谢大家继续相信对话的力量，

**“受之愈多，责之愈重。” —— 非洲谚语**

*Yousoupha Niang*

Dr. Yousoupha Niang

# 当您联系本办公室时会发生什么



在所有路径中: 识别匿名化趋势和系统性问题, 并通过组织渠道加以反映。

**公正中立**  
重点是公平程序

**独立运作**  
本办公室独立运作, 不受组织内其他部门的干预或控制

## 我们遵循的原则

**保密**  
除非存在严重伤害的紧迫风险, 否则所有互动均严格保密

**非正式空间**  
一个安全、灵活的空间, 可及早探讨关切并寻求解决方案

# 同处风暴之中：转型下的两种处境

以下叙述为综合性案例，反映我们办团队在 2025 年反复观察到的模式。它们并不描述任何单一个人，而是展示在持续不确定时期，组织变革如何从不同的机构位置显现。

## 管理者视角

当结构调整公告开始发布时，“Sara”是一名 P3 级办事处主任。她在受影响同事收到通知前不久得知自己的团队将被缩减。她所掌握的预先信息有限，也没有参与影响其办公室的决策制定，却立即成为同事提出质疑时的焦点，而这些问题她无法回答。

### 一位管理者的视角（“Sara”）



在问责与有限权限之间挣扎，在维持信任与绩效的同时，在不断变化的指导下调整方向，努力维持信任与绩效。



支持团队在边界与指引之间前行；在不作出过度承诺的情况下，清晰沟通，并在不断变化的决策中引领方向。

随后几周，指导意见不断变化。时间表被修订，数据被调整，预期也逐步得到澄清。Sara 既要维持绩效和信任，又不确定自己的权限与酌情空间的边界在哪里。她努力判断如何在不猜疑、也不替其他层级作出的决定承担责任的情况下进行透明沟通。

Sara 联系了监察员办公室，希望获得一个保密、公正的空间来思考自己的领导角色。讨论聚焦在理清角色。监察员帮助她区分作为管理者仍保有的权限，以及由其他层级施加的限制，支持她识别自己可以进行判断以及不能这样做的地方。

谈话也涉及如何守住边界：如何在承认不确定性的同时识别关切来源，如何组织谈话使关切能够被建设

性地听见，以及如何避免在不稳定环境中被过高期待。此次讨论并未改变影响该办公室的决定，而是帮助 Sara 以更清晰、更稳定的方式履行领导职责。

## 团队成员视角

当结构调整影响到他的团队时，“Omar”收到通知，被告知其岗位将被取消。通知中关于时间表、过渡安排或联系人信息十分有限。寻求澄清的尝试只得到片面回应，使 Omar 不确定流程将如何展开，也不知道如何在不开升级事态的情况下参与其中。

随着不确定性持续存在，Omar 发现自己处于等待与行动之间两难的困境。他不愿诉诸正式渠道，却越来越不清楚如何获得可靠信息或以建设性的方式表达关切。他的管理者同样面临信息缺失的问题，也被困住了。

### 团队成员的视角 (“Omar”)



#### 断联后的阶段：

收到通知，但时间线有限，过渡信息不足，或联系方式不明确。



#### 流程不透明：

碎片化的回复导致困惑。不确定如何参与。抗拒通过正式渠道沟通。导致疏离的因素。



Omar 联系监察员办公室，并非要求改变决定本身，而是希望就围绕该流程的条件获得协助。在讨论中，监察员帮助他识别出，导致其疏离感和挫败感的主要原因是流程不透明，而不只是结果本身。

除个人咨询外，监察员还在系统性稳定层面进行了介入。在不透露 Omar 姓名的情况下，本办公室向相关利益攸关方反馈了匿名、实时信息，涉及岗位取消过程中信息不一致、联系人不清以及缺乏沟通等问题。该介入的目的不是为了重新审视决定，而是打破一种在多个案例中造成困惑的模式。

当沟通方式得到澄清后，Omar 感到流程更加结构化，也更容易理解。虽然其岗位结果没有改变，但这一介入帮助恢复了可运作的沟通渠道，使他能够在艰难转型中以更高的可预见性做好下一步的计划和安排。

综合来看，这些案例反映了 2025 年观察到的一种模式：当角色或流程的模糊性加剧了不确定性时，监察员的介入会在不同层面发挥作用，一方面支持管理者守住边界，另一方面让组织流程被参与和理解得更加稳定。

# 2025 年数据说明了什么

## 2025年数据概览

1,806人参与个案管理  
2025年共19,051次接触

316  
次调解

12,949  
人次触达\*

366 场宣讲与  
外展活动

在组织危机的一年里，本办公室的来访人数增长了**72%**，并将外展范围扩大到数以万计的更多人员，反映出本组织对**中立指导和建设性支持**的需求显增加。

### 系统性观察



#### 感受到的不公平

员工感到，留任与选拔更多是由与管理层的亲近关系和偏袒所驱动，而非客观标准。



#### “生存模式”主导

危机应对引发了普遍的组织性退缩；员工将个人安全置于首位，导致倦怠，并削弱了与领导层之间的“心理契约”。



#### 支持系统承压

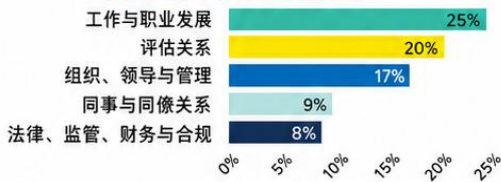
尽管需求激增，关键职能（伦理、申诉专员、PWS、职工理事会）仍因资源减少而被削弱。



#### 被文化放大

长期存在的动态，如层级控制、回避冲突以及对高层权力的维护，加剧了危机的影响。

### 提出的五大主要关切



#### 单向沟通

尽管做出了初步努力，员工仍越来越认为沟通缺乏透明度、前后矛盾，且缺乏决策清晰度。

### 一览



**316次调解**  
(含穿梭外交式调解)



**45%的案例**  
接受了冲突辅导



**633宗案例：**  
内部个案处理



**1,033人次**  
培训/入职引导



**1,000多人**  
参加了Ubuntu Café活动



**6,939次**  
外展触达/浏览  
(含特别报告)

### 来访者画像



### 按地区划分的案例百分比



\* 该图反映的是各类互动方式的加权平均值

\* 截至2025年10月1日，南部非洲区域已撤销，并划分至西部/中部非洲和东部大湖区。

2025 年的数据所讲述的故事，远远超过数据本身。虽然我们办公室服务需求显著增加，但更具意义的变化在于同事们提出问题的。关切往往层层叠加、相互关联，出现在确定性有限、信任承压的背景下。此处呈现的数据反映了这种压力如何在整个组织中显现。

年内，五类关切占据了个案工作的主要部分：工作与职业、评估性关系、组织领导与管理、同伴和同事关系，以及法律与合规事务。这些关切很少鼓励出现。同事们通常描述的是这样一些情形：围绕角色或合同的不确定性，与紧张的上下级关系、沟通鸿沟，有时会有一种“影响自己的决定是在缺乏足够透明度的情况下作出”的感受同时出现。前三类关切的集中，反映出结构调整不仅影响了组织结构，也影响了维系团队的关系与信任。

寻求支持的同事来自所有员工类别、合同类型、区域和层级。这种广泛分布说明，2025 年的压力并非局限于特定职能或地点，而是在整个机构范围内都被感知到。在广泛的案例之中，有一些模式尤为明显。

女性同事占本办公室来访者的多数，这与往年趋势一致。定期任用制同事在个案工作中占比最大，凸显了组织变革时期就业不稳定所带来的特殊脆弱性。

我们观察到，各区域对我们办公室服务的获取相对相似。大多数个案与缩编流程有关。

在个案工作中，冲突辅导是最常用的服务方式，约占个案的百分之四十五。这反映了本办公室对早期和非正式参与的重视。通过这些谈话，同事们获得支持，得以澄清自己处境中正在发生的事情，反思自身利益，并在关切固化的争议或升级为正式流程之前，考虑具有建设性的选项。在许多情况下，一次时机恰当的谈话就足以改变一种长期累积的状态。

综上，这些模式说明了 2025 年的压力如何转化为具体的职场关切。它们也强调了早期、非正式解决在帮助同事应对复杂局面方面的作用，尤其是在组织条件使清晰度和对话变得特别困难之时。

## 从僵局到对话：调解实践

### 穿梭外交



**穿梭外交：**调解员作为保密的中间人，在双方不直接面对面会谈的情况下，分别私下传达各自的提议。适用于直接会面不具成效或不安全时。

### 促进式对话



**促进式对话：**一种有结构但较少正式性的对话方式，由调解员支持直接沟通，以澄清关切、增进理解，并在不主导结果的情况下解决较低程度的冲突。

### 双方调解



**双方调解：**经典的结构化流程，由调解员帮助两位当事人（例如同事，或主管/员工）直接协商，识别解决方案，并达成自愿协议。

### 团队调解



**团队调解：**处理影响整个团队或部门的冲突，涉及所有成员。重点关注群体关系、澄清团队规范，并改善集体工作环境。

当沟通已经破裂，或双方之间的信任受损到个人冲突辅导无法处理的程度时，调解提供了一条更有结构的参与路径。在报告期内，本办公室推动了 316 个调解流程，包括通过穿梭调解进行的个案，这些情形已经无法仅通过单方咨询来处理。

大多数调解涉及同事之间，或工作人员与主管之间的争议。这些个案通常是在长期未解决的分歧、持续的工作量压力，或围绕角色和合同的长期不确定性损害工作关系后出现的。通过在中立第三方支持下进行的保密、自愿流程，调解创造了原本不存在的直接接触条件，使各方能够澄清关切、检验假设，并在可能的情况下确定解决路径。

在所有调解个案中，及时获得中立引导有助于更具建设性的参与，并帮助防止工作关系进一步恶化。调解中出现的主题，包括不确定性的影响、评估性关系中的压力，以及个人期待与组织流程之间的不匹配，与个案工作中观

察到的主题持续相互呼应。整体来看，这些个案不仅提供了对具体争议的洞见，也揭示了冲突根植其中的组织性条件，下一节将对此作更深入分析。

## 系统性观察：值得关注的新兴议题

2025 年 12 月，本办公室发布了一份特别报告，整合了在结构调整和缩编过程中通过数千次接触观察到的系统性动态。以下概述基于该报告，以及在年底前更加突出显现的模式。完整报告见附件 A。

2025 年的核心主题，是同事与机构之间信任和心理契约的破裂。许多工作人员表示，他们感到与影响其团队和工作的决策脱节。这不仅因为财务危机本身，也因为流程展开的方式。快速公告、有限协商以及不平等沟通削弱了同事们对保留和选拔流程公平性的信心。同事们反复强调，造成不确定、恐惧和疏离的最主要原因是流程的体验，包括其速度、排序以及缺乏对话。危机是地震，流程则成为余震。

随着结构调整推进，许多同事进入他们所称的“寻求存活的状态”，表现为警觉性提高、协作减少，以及对被感知到的不公平更加敏感。这些压力导致误解、关系紧张和团队凝聚力下降。沟通缺乏与对 WhatsApp 群组等非正式渠道的广泛依赖共同作用，进一步放大了不确定性，并加大了对决定、角色和期待的认知差距。

随着年份推进，以下主题变得更加明显：

## 塑造 2025 年工作场所冲突与信任的系统性条件



### 减少安全表达空间的条件

长期的不稳定性缩小了员工提出关切时感受到的安全空间。



### 导致冲突回避并过度依赖正式机制的条件

不确定性减少了早期对话，导致冲突升级，并更频繁地使用正式流程。



### 影响申诉机制独立性与效能的条件

独立申诉职能的能力下降与结构性变化，限制了在组织需求上升时获得公正支持的机会。



### 影响招聘流程透明度与员工信任的条件

招聘流程普遍被认为不透明和不明确。



### 影响医疗相关决策程序公平性的条件

透明度与审查有限，削弱了对医疗决策公平性的信心。



### 限制员工有意义代表性与对话的条件

有限的咨询削弱了员工在重大影响决策中的代表性。



### 导致对女性员工更具攻击性的关系和更高脆弱性的条件

压力与安全感下降加剧了攻击性行为，且对女性员工的影响不成比例。



### 因持续工作压力与疲劳影响员工能力的条件

人员配备减少和持续施压削弱了个人与团队能力。

## 安全发声空间为何受限

在持续不稳定的背景下，本办公室观察到，同事们越来越不愿提出关切或公开谈论职场问题。许多人表示选择沉默，并不是因为没有关切，而是因为他们不再确信这样做是安全的或有意义的。对组织方向的持续不确定，加上近期经历的干扰和损失，似乎压缩了提出问题、表达不同意见或开启深度谈话的感知空间。

安全发声空间的压缩带来了实质性的后果。原本可能更早浮现并得到处理的问题，同事们可能会保持沉默，使沮丧和不信任随着时间累积。本办公室观察到，在这一背景下，心理安全的侵蚀并非突然而至，而是对长期不稳定的一种渐进式反应；同事们重新校准自己的参与方式，以尽量降低感知风险。这些动态凸显了如果想要让早期介入和非正式解决仍然可行，就必须恢复可预见且安全的对话渠道。

## 冲突回避与对正式机制的过度依赖

结构调整压力放大了组织中长期存在的冲突回避倾向。本办公室观察到，报告期内提出的许多关切原本有可能更早在团队或主管层面得到处理，然而最终却保持沉默或未获解决。同事们对直接接触的犹豫，通常与害怕被报复、

不确定如何开启需要谨慎开展的谈话，或倾向于等待组织不稳定状态结束有关。因此，问题更可能累积并升级，限制了早期、非正式解决的机会。

与此同时，我们办公室观察到，同事们对包括管理评估复核（MER）在内的正式协助机制的依赖不断增加，而此前往往没有先探求非正式路径。这种动态导致更多原本可能受益于早期对话的个案进入正式流程，也使注意力从那些及时中立支持本可帮助防止进一步升级的情形中转移。

在整个时期，管理者和内部支持结构都承受着巨大压力。许多主管称，他们对影响其团队的决策信息掌握不足，不确定自己的权限范围。此外他们在应对自身职业不确定性的同时，难以提供指导。经历反复结构变化的团队经常出现凝聚力下降，并表达了对结构化空间的需要，以便他们提出关切、重新校准期待，并重建共同工作规范。

在少数特别敏感的情况下，这些动态超越了个人工作关系，直接将组织作为一方纳入其中。在本报告期内，我们办公室在管理评估请求之后，推动了五个工作人员与管理层之间的调解流程。这些个案被视为例外情况，需要谨慎关注权力动态，并清楚说明流程的自愿性质。虽然调解不能取代正式问责机制，但这些有限个案显示，结构化、公正的对话可以通过促进更清晰地理解选项、支持有尊严的过渡，并帮助组织和受影响同事在不进一步升级的情况下继续推进，来补充现有流程。MER 之后有限的调解数量也凸显了在通过 MER 对行政决定提出异议的情况下，管理层需要更多使用调解。

## 救济机制的独立性与有效性面临压力

在组织压力加剧时期，我们办公室观察到机构内独立支持和求助机制所承受的压力不断增加。人力资源、法律事务、员工福利服务、监察员兼调解员办公室以及道德操守办公室等职能部门，在自身能力、人员配置或代表性被削减的同时，需求显著上升。总体而言，这些职能是员工寻求指导、澄清或支持的早期入口。其可及性和覆盖范围受到限制，在对独立、公正服务依赖尤其高的时刻造成了可见的鸿沟。

正如 [JIU/REP/2025/5](#) 所反映的，监察员和调解员职能的有效性取决于其独立性以及充足的人力和财务资源。类似原则也适用于其他独立监督和支持职能。我们办公室观察到，影响这些机制的削减或结构变化限制了组织以非正式和积极主动的方式来回应新兴关切的能力。行政调整，包括影响公正办公室资历或定位的变化，也可能传递出机构对独立性重视程度下降的信号。综合来看，这些动态降低了员工对救济机制的信心，也限制了组织以具有韧性方式管理冲突和组织压力的整体能力。

## 招聘和甄选流程的透明度与员工信心

结构调整使招聘和选拔流程受到更高层次的审视。在各类接触中，我们办公室观察到，工作人员持续关切招聘决定如何作出和沟通时的透明度与公平性。虽然本办公室不评估个别决定的实质优劣，但同事们经常提出有关选拔流程在实践中如何适用的问题，特别是涉及管理者酌情和处理范围以及所用标准一致性的问题。

报告中的关切包括：(a) 招聘流程后的反馈较为笼统，未能有意义地解释选拔结果依据；(b) 优先考虑名单上的同事疑惑为什么他们符合要求的岗位却没有被选中；(c) 在若干个案中，我们办公室还注意到，当结构调整中被取消的职位随后重新发布招聘令有些同事产生困惑。无论其背后的理由为何，这都加剧了同事们对流程可预见性和完整性的怀疑。

综合来看，这些经历反映出一个明显的问题：招聘流程在设计和实际执行之间，与员工在组织变动期间的真实体验存在差距。要弥合这一差距，需要做到沟通清晰透明，提供有针对性、与岗位相关的反馈，并始终如一地执行招聘标准。只有这样，才能让员工持续相信选拔和招聘过程是公平的。

## 医疗相关决策中的程序公平性

我们办公室还观察到一类与联合国难民署病假和医疗许可框架适用有关的关切模式。这些关切涉及医疗决定的及时性和透明度、有关影响病假状态决定的沟通一致性，以及在对这些决定提出异议时独立复核机制的可及性。本办公室观察到，对于个案所适用标准存在不确定性，且与流程进行有意义互动的空间有限。

综合来看，这些观察指向有关医疗酌处权如何行使、沟通和复核的结构性问题，也涉及现行框架是否为工作人员提供了足够清晰和可获得的公平程序等问题。本办公室已与相关方分享这些关切，并将继续关注该领域的发展。

## 员工代表与对话空间仍需加强

在报告期内，我们办公室观察到，对于对员工产生深远影响的决策流程中，员工代表和对话空间有限的关切不断增加。同事和员工代表描述了一些情形：协商感觉受到限制或流于形式，在决定作出前，独立意见表达的机会有限。在持续不稳定的背景下，这缩小了员工代表角色被感知的范围，并削弱了员工观点能够有意义影响结果的信心。

与此同时，员工代表向我们办公室表示他们在履行代表职能时所感到的脆弱性在不断增强。许多人过去以及现在仍在高度紧张、利害关系重大、个人暴露感增加的环境中工作。他们自身也处于高度等级化的官僚体系中（业务行动、事务局等）。这限制了他们有力地提出关切，或在员工与管理层之间作为有效对话者发挥作用的能力。我们办公室还观察到，当代表自身感到保护不足或没有被听见时，建设性对话空间会进一步收缩；增加关切得不到处理或只能通过升级渠道浮现等风险。

## 关系摩擦及女性工作人员脆弱性加剧

在全年过程中，本办公室观察到，涉及粗暴或紧张工作关系的关切有所增加，尤其是在持续压力和对挑战容忍度降低的环境中。虽然这些动态影响不同角色和层级的同事，但女性工作人员在此类互动中似乎面临更高脆弱性。

同事们描述了轻视性沟通、过度审视或管理层回应突然强硬等模式。持续不稳定的背景下，这些情况更难被公开处理。

这些动态与本年度观察到的心理安全空间更广泛的收缩密切相关。我们办公室注意到，在发声空间变窄的环境中，粗暴行为更可能不受挑战并随时间持续存在。不少女性工作人员表示其在提出关切或明确边界时犹豫不决，原因是在本已不确定的职业环境中担心负面后果。综合来看，这些观察凸显了长期不稳定会放大伤害，并在权力动态与性别交织之处对员工造成不均衡的影响，进一步导致沉默并限制早期介入。

## 持续工作量压力与疲劳对员工能力的影响

我们办公室还观察到一种与持续工作量压力和团队能力下降有关的普遍性疲劳。人员缩减后，许多同事描述自己在资源减少的情况下承担更广泛的职责，并持续了较长时间。需求增加与能力减少的共同作用导致疲惫和韧性下降，也限制了及早处理新问题的精力。

我们办公室认为，这里的“疲惫”并不只是个人身心状态的问题，而是一种影响整体运作的系统性状况。它已经开始影响团队协作、决策方式以及冲突处理。不少同事和管理者都提到，大家用于思考和反省的空间变少了，沟通更偏向临时应对，对不确定性和不同意见的容忍度也在下降。在这样的情况下，误解更容易被放大，问题更容易升级。一些本应认真讨论、深入处理的关切，往往被一拖再拖，或者直接走向形式化流程，甚至最终无人跟进。

综合来看，上述观察反映了组织条件如何深刻塑造同事在 2025 年对冲突的感知。它们构成了我们办公室 2026 年优先事项的基础。

## 展望未来：我们对 2026 年的承诺

2025 年的事件对同事们的信任、安全感以及对机构的信心留下了持久印记。随着联合国难民署进入相对稳定时期，我们办公室在 2026 年的优先事项旨在满足同事们在各类接触中持续强调的需要：更清晰的沟通、更早的支持，以及能够在不担心报复的情况下提出关切的空间。以下承诺建立在本办公室通过数千次保密互动所观察到的内容，以及仍未解决的系统性问题基础之上。

### 重建信任，并支持团队恢复

许多同事强调，更清晰的沟通、提出问题的空间，以及体现公平和问责的领导行为非常重要。随着新结构逐步形成，团队将需要机会重新建立共同规范、重建凝聚力，并在长期不确定之后重新连接。本办公室将继续提供个人和团体空间，支持反思、对话以及对机构流程的信心，尤其是在团队仍在应对快速变化后续影响的情况下。

2026 年，本办公室将开展新一轮 Ubuntu Community Cafés 2026，作为结构化、保密的对话和向上反馈的渠道。这些活动将为围绕共同价值观进行集体反思和参与提供机会，包括高级专员廉正行动计划中所阐述的价值观。通过创造可预见且公正的对话空间，本办公室旨在支持信任随时间重建，并加强团队中的心理安全。

### 深化早期介入和非正式解决路径

2025 年最清晰的教训之一就是等待的代价。原本可能通过一次直接谈话解决的关切，却因为早期对话条件缺失而升级。2026 年，本办公室将继续在管理层回应职场申诉时推动“非正式优先”方法。在其他领域，也将通过冲突辅导、困难谈话培训，以及为处理早期问题的管理者提供定制支持，来推动非正式优先方法。提升全体员工的冲突能力是一项长期投资，将带来更健康的团队氛围、更少的升级，并使组织更有能力应对下一阶段变化。

### 确保各区域均可获得监察员服务

非正式解决服务的可及性仍然不均衡，而 2025 年使这一差距更加明显。本办公室通过曼谷枢纽加强了在亚洲及太平洋区域的存在，同时财务压力要求减少在内罗毕和比勒陀利亚的存在。上述区域的同事继续通过活跃枢纽和远程方式获得支持，但公平可及仍是一项尚未完成的承诺。本办公室将继续加强外联，并在资源允许的情况下努力实现更一致的覆盖。

## 加强救济机制的独立性和可持续性

2026 年的一项重点工作，是推动形成有利的制度环境，让各类独立办公室能够有效运作。正如 JIU/REP/2025/5 所指出，申诉专员和调解职能的有效性——以及伦理办公室等监督机构的作用——在很大程度上取决于其独立性，以及是否具备充足的人力和经费支持。

未来一年，办公室将与管理层保持沟通，确保行政或结构调整不会在无意中削弱对独立性和高级别地位的重视。保障这些“前端入口”的覆盖范围和工作能力，不只是合规要求，更是组织应对压力、保持韧性的基础。如果缺乏有力、清晰且资源充足的申诉与救济机制，员工对制度公平性的信心可能持续下降，组织也难以及时发现和处理问题，最终可能演变为更大的风险。

## 新兴关切：附属劳动力安排中的同事

随着组织逐步扩大关联用工安排，同时减少固定期限合同，办公室注意到，不少同事对适用的管理规则、福利待遇、绩效管理流程以及提出关切的渠道感到不够清楚。这反映出一个逐渐扩大的差距：一方面是非正式问题解决服务的覆盖范围，另一方面是用工形式的多样化。未来，办公室将与相关方合作，推动信息更加清晰透明，帮助不同合同类型的同事都能了解并使用非正式解决问题的渠道。

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总体来看，这些重点工作体现了申诉专员办公室的角色：在保护保密的前提下，汇集个人经验，帮助组织更好地理解整体情况。本报告中的观察，来自信任办公室的同事，旨在为组织持续反思提供参考：员工真正需要什么，制度环境还能如何改进。未来一年，需要持续关注仍在消化组织变动影响的同事，支持正在适应新情况的团队，并创造条件，让问题能够尽早提出和处理，而不是累积升级为危机。

办公室将继续陪伴同事和管理者推进这项工作，支持难民署营造一个内部环境，让员工在组织内部也能感到同样的被保护和被尊重，就像组织对外服务对象所提供的那样。

附件 I

# Ombuds Special Report: Systemic Observations on UNHCR's 2025 Downsizing and Restructuring Process

December 2025

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**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN  
AND MEDIATOR**



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## Executive Summary

The 2025 funding freeze by the United States, combined with additional donor reductions, constituted an unprecedented shock to UNHCR's operations, financial stability, and workforce. Following this turn, the organization undertook a rapid coping response with restructuring and downsizing process ("the process") to preserve operational viability, resulting in approximately 5,400 staff departures and widespread office reductions or closures between late 2024 and September 2025. Staff who engaged with the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator consistently acknowledged the scale and immediacy of the crisis and understood that leadership had to take urgent, painful decisions to safeguard the organization. Many colleagues expressed appreciation for early communication efforts, town halls, videos and visible engagement from several senior leaders including the Global Staff Council, which contributed to initial feelings of solidarity and shared purpose.

As the crisis evolved, however, staff repeatedly reported that this early goodwill was difficult to sustain. Across categories and levels, colleagues described perceptions of very limited transparency, unclear decision-making criteria and opacity, and restricted opportunities to engage in collective problem-solving. Managers and Representatives—who themselves felt insufficiently informed—reported difficulty supporting their teams. These perceptions were shaped not only by the crisis itself and its management, but also by long-standing cultural patterns of hierarchical decision-making, conflict avoidance, and guarded power at senior levels, with decision-making largely centralized and fewer opportunities for dialogue and social negotiation that are typically needed in large-scale crisis management and transitions.

A consistent theme in staff feedback was the emergence of a pervasive "survival mode" or "survival state." Staff described withdrawing from organizational processes, focusing on personal security, and experiencing heightened anxiety and fatigue as restructuring and downsizing expanded from initially affected groups to the broader workforce without seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Messages intended to convey fairness—such as "no one will be immune" or "we are all in the same boat"—were often experienced as increasing uncertainty and fueling competition among staff categories. Colleagues expressed that this survival dynamic had tangible impacts on morale, psychological safety, collaboration, productivity, and organizational functioning, and contributed to what many experienced as a rupture in the "psychological contract": the unwritten mutual expectations that support trust and engagement.

Staff repeatedly noted that while the funding cuts were an undeniable and unavoidable shock, the way the crisis was managed created an internal crisis – much like an earthquake and its aftershocks. This led to a prolonged survival state with consequential impact on UNHCR's short-, medium-, and long-term resilience, effectiveness, and reputation. Many expressed concern that the absence of a sustained crisis management mechanism and participatory engagement after the initial shock contributed to a loss of direction, diminished belonging, and weakened cohesion across the organization.

This Special Report, authored by the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, does not evaluate or review the decisions made by leadership. Rather, it consolidates the themes, perceptions, and systemic patterns consistently raised by colleagues through the Office's confidential channels and through its broader engagement, including case work, dialogues, stakeholders' engagements, workshops, surveys, ethnographic

observations and Ubuntu Community Cafés. These individual and collective (teams) realities have real impacts on organizational functioning and are offered for leadership reflection.

In keeping with the Ombudsman’s mandate as an independent, neutral, and informal resource within the UN internal justice system, this report is to support organizational health without prescribing binding solutions or attributing responsibility. Additionally, the report identifies critical areas for reflection to help the organization transition from survival to recovery. It presents options for consideration—such as the potential establishment of a standing cross-functional crisis response mechanism and the safeguarding of independent and oversight bodies—to strengthen communication, rebuild trust, foster inclusion, and support the organization’s recovery and renewed collective purpose.

I seize this opportunity to extend my profound gratitude to the UNHCR leadership and managers; the Global Staff Council and Staff Association; our dedicated colleagues around the world; our key stakeholders; and the invaluable Ombudsman and Mediation team.

With appreciation,



Dr Youssoupha Niang

Ombudsman and Mediator

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## Mandate and Purpose of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator

The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator (the Office) is a confidential, neutral, independent, and informal resource available to all UNHCR personnel. As part of the United Nations internal justice system, its mandate is to support the resolution of workplace concerns, enable constructive dialogue, and surface systemic insights that may help strengthen organizational health.

The Office provides a safe and impartial avenue for staff and managers to explore concerns, clarify issues, consider options, and reflect on challenges occurring at individual, team, or organizational levels. Engagement with the Office is voluntary and informal; it is not a channel for formal investigations or determinations of wrongdoing. However, the Office uses informal fact findings to triangulate information.

Through its work at these different levels, ranging from individual case work to operational support, the Office has access to multiple perspectives on how organizational dynamics are experienced across the institution. Supporting staff globally, facilitating dialogue, engaging line managers, observing systemic patterns, and reviewing organizational dynamics gives the Office a unique vantage point on how policies, decisions, and internal processes are experienced by the workforce. These experiences are important indicators of organizational health.

When widespread, recurring issues emerge, the Ombuds function may consolidate those observations into a Special Report, with the aim of assisting leadership in understanding the human and organizational dynamics at stake. This Special Report is issued in that spirit. It does not assign blame or judge decisions made during a moment of extraordinary constraint. Rather, it documents how the restructuring and downsizing process was experienced by staff across grades, contract types, and duty stations, and what these experiences reveal about the organization's culture, governance, and resilience.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide senior leadership with an integrated, organization-wide view of systemic dynamics observed since the onset of the 2025 funding crisis.
- Highlight factors that contributed to staff perceptions, reactions, and challenges.
- Support informed reflection during the current transition and recovery phase; and
- Offer non-prescriptive options for strengthening organizational trust, cohesion, and resilience.

The Office remains committed to supporting both staff and leadership in navigating this challenging period and supporting a healthier, more sustainable organizational future

## Methodology, Scope and Limitations

The observations presented in this report are derived from aggregated and anonymized insights from:

- Ombudsman and Mediator consultations and case trends
- Facilitated dialogues
- Stakeholders' engagements
- Staff feedback, notably the Design and Development Service (DDS) survey at the outset of the process, Pigeonhole inputs, and the Global Staff Council (GSC) survey on workplace well-being and dignity
- Internal communications, including town halls, official notices, HR communications, policy updates, and video messages
- Review of administrative information, including data from Workday and Power BI
- Global and regional workshops delivered by the Office, including delivering difficult news and supporting organizational transformation
- Ubuntu Community Cafés facilitated by the Office
- Informal fact finding and triangulation to validate recurring themes
- Upward feedback and systemic conversations with managers, teams, and oversight and integrity entities

The findings are qualitative and reflect the experiences of more than 4,000 colleagues across all regions and operations who engaged directly or indirectly with the Office during the period from February to November 2025. Inputs include perspectives from both separated and remaining staff, collected with full respect for confidentiality, and span headquarters, regional bureaus, and operations. This report aims to complement other internal reviews, evaluations, and audits covering the same period and should be read as a reflection of how the restructuring and downsizing were experienced across the organization.

Several limitations should be noted, including that travel constraints during the reporting period limited the extent of direct, in-person field engagement by the Office, as well as the participation in dialogues, surveys, and other inputs was voluntary and self-selecting rather than randomized, which may introduce memory, and information biases, thereby preventing the statistical analysis of the findings.

The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator was itself affected by the downsizing and restructuring processes, which influenced its capacity to fully implement all aspects of its mandate during this period. Other departments were also undergoing changes, which may have affected their ability to respond to requests for information and to engage with the Office in a timely and comprehensive manner.

## Context: Organizational Crisis and Funding Cuts

The organizational crisis that unfolded in 2025 did not emerge in isolation. The period leading into 2025 was shaped by significant global and internal pressures.

### Pre-existing Financial Strain (2023–2024) and transformation fatigue

The 2025 crisis was not an isolated event but a culmination of pre-existing pressures. For the two years preceding the shock (2023–2024), UNHCR was already navigating a period of significant financial strain, driven by global dynamics such as inflationary shocks, economic contraction, and the redirection of donor priorities toward other contexts. These continuous budget shortfalls had already necessitated progressive reductions in available funding, leading to early post cuts, persistent calls for efficiency measures, and internal discussions on reshaping the organization's viability. This context of uncertainty, combined with the consequences of long-running transformation processes, had already begun to strain staff morale and contribute to widespread fatigue, prompting colleagues to question the organizational model. This established a foundation of anxiety and disillusionment, encapsulated by the recurring sentiment, "I don't recognize my organization anymore," long before the deeper rupture of the "psychological contract" in 2025.

### Shock of the 2025 US Funding Freeze

The freeze of US funding in late January/early February 2025 triggered an unprecedented crisis. Funding that had already been approved for the fiscal year was suddenly withdrawn or frozen, creating a seismic financial shock. While some degree of reduction had been anticipated due to the political context, the immediacy, scale, and retroactive nature of the freeze, affecting already-approved allocations, were not foreseen.

The impact was further compounded by additional cuts from other major donors, particularly from the European Union and the United Kingdom, creating a sudden and severe liquidity shock. Within days, the organization was forced to take measures previously unimaginable in timeframe or scope. Many staff described the situation as “seismic,” “destabilizing,” or “unprecedented,” both in terms of financial magnitude and the speed with which the organization had to react.

This event fundamentally altered the organization's operational and financial viability and accelerated restructuring and downsizing measures. At the time of writing, elements of this organizational change are still ongoing, and structures, roles, and workloads continue to evolve in many parts of the organization.

As colleagues brought their experiences of this prolonged period of financial strain, restructuring, and downsizing to the Office, recurring patterns and systemic themes began to emerge. This Special Report was prepared in that context to consolidate those observations, situate them within a broader organizational perspective, and contribute to learning and preparedness for current and future periods of crisis and transition.

## Culture as an Amplifier of Crisis

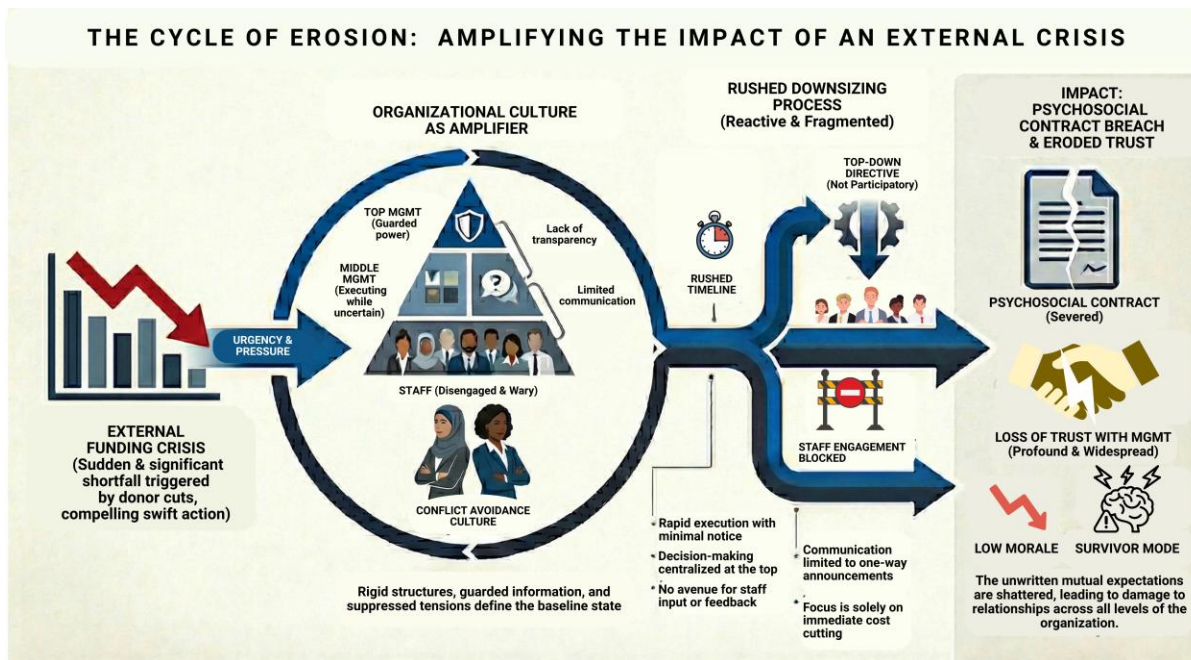


Figure 1. The cycle of erosion; how pre-existing cultural dynamics in UNHCR amplified the impact of the external funding crisis.

Prior to and during the 2025 crisis, several pre-existing cultural patterns within the organization acted as amplifiers of the crisis rather than buffers against it. These dynamics were consistently visible in both staff cases brought to the Office and in broader organizational processes.

Colleagues frequently described a long-standing tendency towards conflict avoidance and guarded power at senior levels, coupled with an extremely hierarchical organizational structure and significant opacity in its functioning. This culture severely limited open dialogue on difficult issues, resulting in decision-making that felt highly centralized. Staff reported few opportunities for either genuine consultation or social negotiation, both of which are essential during major organizational changes. In a time of crisis, these patterns led people to experience decision making processes as solely top-down, which naturally increased feelings of disempowerment, frustration, and a weakening of trust.

The crisis also acutely surfaced signs of what many described as “friction” in the organizational culture: energy was diverted away from core mandate implementation towards internal, survival-oriented behaviors. Even before the restructuring began, many colleagues expressed reluctance and fear to raise concerns openly, signaling limited psychological safety. As the restructuring and downsizing unfolded, this led to staff spending more time and effort navigating internal dynamics, protecting positions, and competing for posts and resources rather than focusing primarily on operational delivery.

This sustained pressure contributed to what many staff referred to as a “survival state”: a climate in which competition and self-protection overshadowed collaboration. Messages intended to convey fairness—such as “no one will be immune,” “we are all in the same boat,” or “it is not you, it is the post”—were often experienced as inconsistent with the uneven impacts on different groups and levels, eroding confidence in organizational fairness and illustrating a deeper culture of conflict avoidance.

Taken together, these cultural dynamics—conflict avoidance, guarded decision-making, fear-based, and survival-oriented competition—created the very conditions in which the external funding crisis and internal restructuring were experienced as significantly more destabilizing than they might have been in a more open, dialogic, and trust-rich environment.

Finally, it is essential to note that other elements also shaped the context: a strong commitment to the mandate and an expectation of organizational growth comparable to mandate needs. However, the organizational culture was defined by staff vulnerability and rigid hierarchy that precipitated the formal escalation of workplace grievances. Notably, while leadership was perceived as benefitting from a sense of ‘esprit de corps’, the wider staff body remained deeply fractured.

## The Institutional Response

In response to the financial shock and associated budgetary constraints described above, UNHCR leadership implemented wide-ranging emergency measures to ensure operational viability, continuity of protection and assistance, and compliance with financial responsibilities. The primary purpose of these measures was to slow expenditure quickly and enable the organization to meet its financial obligations in the face of a severe liquidity shock.

Many staff who contacted the Office indicated that they understood these early decisions as necessary, given the severity and immediacy of the situation. Several described the initial phase as one of solidarity and collective resolve, despite shock, fear, and sadness.

Early actions focused on rapid cost containment and structural adjustment. These included freezing non-essential travel, implementing operation-level budget reductions (OL), increasing energy efficiencies in UNHCR facilities, adjusting cleaning, maintenance and local expenditure arrangements, revising parking arrangements, and initiating wider post reductions. In parallel, the organization accelerated restructuring efforts that had already been under discussion, including adjustments to contractual arrangements, suspension or non-renewal of certain temporary assignments and other non-staff contracts, and, over time, the reconfiguration, downsizing, or closure of some field offices.

Leadership and DHR (now DPM) also activated a series of measures to communicate with staff and create spaces for interaction. These included three global town halls convened by the High Commissioner, targeted HR webinars (including PWS) tailored to different contract types, meetings between the High Commissioner and Representatives, regional briefings, Ubuntu Community Cafés facilitated by the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Rapid-Response Line managed by the Global Staff Council and increased written communication

through official notices and intranet updates. These efforts were generally appreciated and well attended, particularly in the early stages, and contributed to a sense of shared concern for the organization’s future.

Over time, however, many colleagues reported that these engagements were experienced more as one-way information-sharing than as opportunities for dialogue, influence, or joint problem-solving. Staff frequently described uncertainty regarding the broader strategy, the timeline, and how various decisions and measures were connected. From the perspective of those who contacted the Office, the overall response increasingly appeared fragmented, opaque and reactive rather than part of a clearly articulated, coordinated crisis-management approach.

Staff accounts also indicate that the scope, pace, and perceived timing of downsizing and restructuring measures varied considerably across operations, regions, and headquarters. Some operations received earlier, clearer direction while others reported receiving rapidly shifting or contradictory instructions. In several incidences, managers themselves learned about changes only at the point of implementation, which limited their ability to support their teams and to contextualize decisions locally. These variations shaped how staff interpreted the fairness, coherence, and rationale of the overall process.

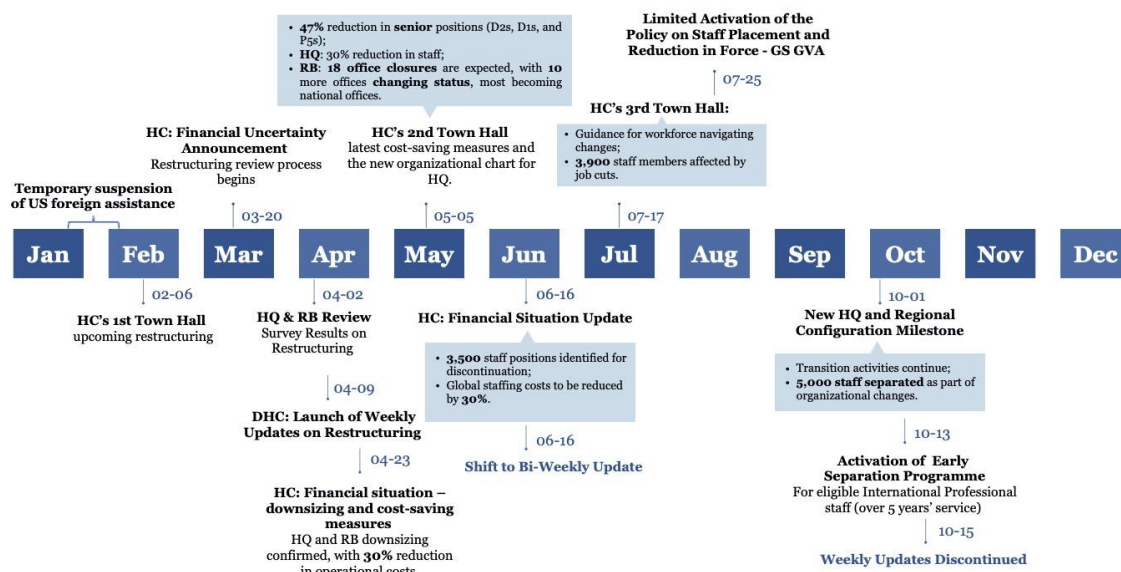


Figure 2. Timeline of the 2025 Funding Crisis and Restructuring Milestones in UNHCR.

This figure illustrates the institutional response to the funding crisis. It highlights also two different moments of institutional communication, before August and after August where the institution became quite silent in terms of communication.

A more detailed timeline with key dates and events is provided in Annex.

## The Community Reaction

In the early stages of the crisis response, staff demonstrated a strong awareness of the external nature of the shock and expressed solidarity and empathy with one another. Many mobilized informal support structures such as peer networks, ad hoc check-ins, and other channels of care, —reflecting both resilience and a shared commitment to the organization’s mandate.

As the situation evolved, and as uncertainty and perception of fairness and transparency over the restructuring and downsizing measures persisted over time, this initial cohesion and solidarity devolved into feelings of fatigue, anxiety, disillusion and disengagement. Prolonged exposure to uncertainty, perceived lack of direction in addressing the crisis and concerns about the organization’s future direction as well as the ability of its workplace grievance mechanisms to fully operate contributed to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and powerlessness of personnel about how the restructuring and downsizing process were being carried out.

Many colleagues described a growing mistrust in both the decision-making process and in those perceived as key decision-makers. For some managers and teams, this was experienced as disempowerment and disengagement. These dynamics were further reflected in heightened interpersonal and organizational conflicts brought to the attention of the Office, indicating that the strain was being felt not only at structural levels but also in day-to-day working relationships.

From the perspective of staff who contacted the Office, the crisis response did not always appear to be guided by a clear, centralized crisis-management structure. Many decisions were perceived as having been made and implemented in silos, and communication gaps were reported to have widened over time. From an Ombuds perspective, the absence of a visible, holistic response mechanism that could integrate perspectives from the administration, the Ethics office, the Global Staff Council, Medical Services, the Inspector General’s Office, and the Ombudsman and Mediator’s Office, and others, may have limited the extent to which the transition could be experienced as coherent, empathetic, and well-coordinated. In the same vein, process design and coordination from inside the organization introduced several biases (status quo bias, in-group bias, procedural bias, implicit bias, parochial empathy), and thereby suspicion of the outcomes and recommendations.

## Systemic observations on the Process

The process unfolded under extraordinary circumstances. Faced with a sudden and significant funding shortfall, the organization was compelled to act swiftly to preserve operational viability. This urgency shaped a response that many staff experienced as reactive, fragmented, and at times lacking overall coherence.

### Perception gaps

From the accounts brought to the Office, three main perception gaps emerged in how the process was understood:

- **Rationale and objectives.** Staff reported receiving differing messages as to whether the process was driven by a pre-existing three-year plan or by the financial crisis only.
- **Geneva G staff with indefinite contract and staff in between assignments:** Similar to the rationale gap, deeply held assumptions prevailed that these two specific groups of staff were the perceived target to “get rid of” during the restructuring. These perceptions were not only circulating informally but were, in some instances, validated by their own managers or reinforced by the significant and valid questions raised about the fairness of the selection processes in which they were compelled to participate. This dynamic amplified their anxiety and fueled the sense that the process was driven by hidden agendas rather than objective, needs-based criteria, further contributing to the fundamental shift in the psychological and social contract between personnel and the institution.
- **Retention and selection processes:** In many instances, colleagues consistently reported a perception that the decision to retain post/personnel or to be selected for a new position was solely driven by the proximity with the manager rather than by objective, clear criteria aligned with the mandate needs. This perceived manipulation of the selection system severely undermined confidence in organizational fairness, amplifying anxiety and fueling the sense that decisions were based on favoritism rather than merit, further corroding institutional trust and the psychological contract.
- **Differences across locations and levels:** Experiences varied significantly between field offices, regional bureaus, and Headquarters, as well as across personnel categories. For many, these disparities appeared to contradict institutional values of unity, raising serious questions regarding leadership accountability.
- **Unspoken assumptions and perceived parallel agendas:** Colleagues described assumptions about anticipated leadership changes or a return to 2017 staffing levels, which influenced how they interpreted the process.

Taken together, these perception gaps contributed to a sense, among many staff that the organization’s engagement in the change process was not always clearly articulated or consistently understood, and that responses were sometimes experienced as piecemeal. This, in turn, generated additional uncertainty, mistrust in the process and fundamental shift in the psychological and social contract between personnel and the institution.

## Lack of pause and reflect

Staff repeatedly noted that decisions were made and implemented at a rapid, non-negotiable pace, leaving virtually limited space to process the seismic situation and its short- and long-term implications, to consult and negotiate, or to engage in adaptation and inclusive planning. The predominantly top-down nature of the organization and its crisis response severely disrupted the kind of social negotiation that is often necessary for a large-scale transition, thereby increasing feelings of imposition and powerlessness.

Managers and frontline entities, including the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Ethics Office, Psychosocial Wellbeing Service and other integrity and accountability offices, were frequently disempowered despite their critical relevance to organizational resilience and integrity. They were nonetheless expected to provide critical support to staff while they themselves were learning in real-time about decisions affecting personnel and operations. This created a dynamic that strained their capacity and undermined their effectiveness as frontline responders.

Any potential for a "pause and reflect" period was severely limited by the DDS questionnaire, which was experienced as creating significant disturbances, fueling competition rather than collaboration and the facilitation of thoughtful input. Critically, while this exercise was underway, the downsizing process continued apace in several operations, further eliminating any true space for reflection. This unrelenting urgency mirrors a response dynamic where a crisis pushes organizations and communities into fight-fright-freeze response modalities expressed as rapid, reactive decisions, increasingly with narrow focus, and resulting in emotional overload. This prevents the necessary cognitive reset that is fundamental in order to shift from short-term reactivity towards a purposeful and more sustainable recovery strategy.

## Limited two-way communication and dialogue

The organization's bureaucratic and hierarchical structure reinforced the top-down approach. Initiatives designed to promote two-way communication, such as the Ubuntu Cafés, Psychosocial Wellbeing hosted webinars could not be sustained due to operational and staffing reductions. Town halls from the High Commissioner, while appreciated, were infrequent and tended to function more as one-way information sharing than as a dialogue in which staff could ask questions and receive answers to diffuse or cope with anxiety.

In operations and in many teams at headquarters, staff reported being notified of decisions affecting them or their teams with limited room for discussion. In many instances, the way notifications were done was perceived as impersonal and not dignifying. There were, however, some exceptions where managers, HR staff, and PWS met individually with staff members to communicate decisions in a more personal and respectful way. Unfortunately, colleagues also reported instances where they were notified of abolishment of the post they encumbered during all staff meetings, or they discovered that their position was discontinued from Workday.

## Communication inconsistencies

Communication during the process was at times experienced as inconsistent or contradictory. Staff reported receiving conflicting messages from headquarters and field leadership—sometimes within hours—undermining confidence in the process and in those tasked with implementing it. For example, the head of an office was instructed to reduce their team by a certain number. Thirty minutes after informing the staff, they were told that the reduction had almost tripled. As formal communication faltered or silenced, individuals increasingly relied on informal channels, including organizational gossip, to fill information gaps.

In parallel, some policies were introduced without broad communication and socialization, and HR, administrative services, and senior leadership were often perceived as inaccessible or unresponsive during critical moments, particularly when individuals were in distress about their personal situation and unable to receive a definitive answer on how the policies affected them. Internal information, such as organigrams or staff appointments, was at times reported to have been leaked before meetings had concluded, creating confusion and further eroding trust.

## Perceived gaps in holistic crisis management

The Design and Delivery Structure (DDS), while intended to guide the reorganization, was experienced by many as focusing primarily on structural design and not providing the holistic crisis management coordination needed to accompany the process with the anticipation and the readjustments needed as the organization navigated the crisis. From an Ombuds perspective, the absence of a visible cross-functional crisis response team—one that could have integrated perspectives from HR, the “Integrity Family”, the Staff Council, regional bureaus, and operations—limited the extent to which the process could be experienced as empathetic, transparent, accountable, and collaborative.

## Fragmentation and weakening of services and support mechanisms

DHR, PWS, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Staff Council and Staff Associations, the Peer Advisors, and the Ethics Office faced increased demand for services and support at the same time as their own resources and representation were reduced. This occurred at a time when their support was most needed. These functions serve as an early warning system for the organization, as frontline responders for colleagues seeking support and help reinforce engagement between the institution and staff. With lessened support from these entities, staff described this as leaving gaps in support at a time of heightened need.

## Workload and needs-based analysis

Many colleagues reported difficulties in understanding and accepting structural decisions in the absence of a clear workload and needs-based analysis on which restructuring decisions were explicitly based. From their perspective, the lack of visible criteria or explanation for how workloads and needs were assessed made it more difficult to see the overall logic of the new structures and to trust that the changes were aligned with operational realities.

## Systemic observations on Process Impact:

### Impact on the Organization

The restructuring process reshaped the organizational fabric in profound ways. One of the most visible consequences, as described by many colleagues, has been a rupture in the psychological and social contract between the institution and its personnel. This unwritten set of mutual expectations and obligations underpins trust, engagement, and a sense of reciprocity. Research on psychological contracts indicates that when staff perceive organizational promises as broken, job satisfaction, commitment, and trust tend to decline, while intentions to leave and resentment increase; breach is often followed by an emotional “violation” phase,

marked by anger, frustration, and a sense of betrayal, particularly in periods of organizational change.<sup>1</sup> These patterns are consistent with what the Office observed during this period: when people experience a rupture in the psychological contract, morale and engagement erode over time.

Within this rupture, a fundamental component was weakened: trust in the institution and in its leadership. Many colleagues reported losing confidence that leadership would act consistently, advocate for the mandate, and apply principles of fairness when decisions were made and implemented.

The crisis and its management also aggravated pre-existing schisms within the organization. Antagonisms were reported between different groups and levels: leadership and staff; operations and headquarters; national and international staff; colleagues from the global North and global South; and between staff on different types of contracts. Lines of division that existed before the crisis were perceived to have widened and, in some areas, hardened.

As the restructuring unfolded, many colleagues described entering a “survival mode” in which they felt compelled to focus on preserving their own positions and immediate interests. Externally, this was reflected in patterns such as increased LinkedIn activity, and intensified competition for increasingly limited posts and recruitment processes. Internally, the tone in forums like Ubuntu Cafés shifted over time—from initial denial or cautious optimism to anxiety, fatigue, and, in some instances, resignation. Other symptoms such as presenteeism, survival guilt, decreased moral and engagement, and the Office observed an increase in gossip and the spreading of rumors.

The combination of resource scarcity, conflict avoidance, and declining trust in the fairness and consistency of decisions contributed to a broader survival state. In such an environment, collaboration tends to give way to competition. Research on social interdependence suggests that when goals are experienced as competitive rather than cooperative, information sharing and joint problem-solving deteriorate while friction increases.<sup>2</sup> Under these conditions, staff are more likely to withhold or ration information, and knowledge-hiding becomes more common.<sup>3</sup> Studies also associate such competitive climates with higher levels of relationship conflict<sup>4</sup>

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### <sup>1</sup> Psychological contract breach, violation, and change

- Zhao, H., Wayne, S. J., Glibkowski, B. C., & Bravo, J. (2007). *The impact of psychological contract breach on work-related outcomes: A meta-analysis*. *Personnel Psychology*, 60(3), 647–680.
- Cassar, V., & Briner, R. B. (2011). *The relationship between psychological contract breach and organizational commitment: Exchange imbalance as a moderator of the mediating role of violation*. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(2), 283–289.
- Topa, G., Aranda-Carmena, M., & de-Maria, B. (2022). *Psychological contract breach and outcomes: A systematic review of reviews*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(13), 8080.

### <sup>2</sup> Competition vs. cooperation and information sharing

- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). *An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning*. *Educational Psychologist*, 44(1), 15–29.

### <sup>3</sup> Knowledge hiding in competitive climates

and “office politics”, including subtle forms of sabotage and rivalry.<sup>5</sup> These findings align with patterns described to the Office during this period.

The perceived lack of transparency is a significant contributor to the decline in collaboration and trust. According to the Global Staff Council survey, out of more than 2,500 respondents, only 3 per cent indicated that they believed the process was transparent.<sup>6</sup> This finding echoes the observations brought to the Ombudsman and Mediator’s Office. Multiple policy changes, reduced access to information and decision-makers, limited two-way communication, and the perceived weakening of oversight and integrity mechanisms all reinforced a sense of opacity.

The erosion of collaboration had a cascading effect. As departments and units began to operate more in isolation, the organization’s ability to function as a cohesive whole diminished. The restructuring disrupted established workflows, severed interdependent relationships, and weakened informal networks that typically sustain institutional resilience. Research on intra-organizational networks suggests that when inter-unit competition increases and lateral ties are not deliberately maintained, cross-unit knowledge sharing falls and “siloeing” deepens,<sup>7</sup> as observed in many of the situations brought to the Office.

As uncertainty and distrust rose, psychological safety fell. Staff reported becoming more cautious about speaking up, particularly on sensitive issues related to the restructuring and its implementation. This was reflected both in cases brought to the Office and in the GSC survey, where 31 per cent of respondents reported being afraid to speak up.<sup>6</sup> Many described an environment they perceived as toxic or fear driven. Research on psychological safety and organizational silence shows that, in such climates, people are more likely to withhold

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- Černe, M., Nerstad, C. G. L., Dysvik, A., & Škerlavaj, M. (2014). *What goes around comes around: Knowledge hiding, perceived motivational climate, and creativity*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(1), 172–192.

#### <sup>4</sup> Relationship conflict and performance

- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). *Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(4), 741–749.

#### <sup>5</sup> Internal competition, sabotage, and office politics

- Carpenter, J., Matthews, P. H., & Schirm, J. (2010). *Tournaments and office politics: Evidence from a real effort experiment*. *American Economic Review (Papers & Proceedings)*, 100(2), 504–507.
- Harbring, C., & Irlenbusch, B. (2011). *Sabotage in tournaments: Evidence from a laboratory experiment*. *Management Science*, 57(4), 611–627.

#### <sup>6</sup> Internal staff perceptions of transparency, fear of speaking up, anger, and discrimination

- UNHCR Global Staff Council. (2025). *Survey on workplace issues affecting staff wellbeing and dignity*. Internal UNHCR survey report.

#### <sup>7</sup> Siloeing, inter-unit competition, and knowledge sharing

- Tsai, W. (2002). *Social structure of “coopetition” within a multiunit organization: Coordination, competition, and intraorganizational knowledge sharing*. *Organization Science*, 13(2), 179–190.

concerns, ideas, and feedback, undermining learning, adaptation, and collective problem-solving.<sup>8</sup> Over time, this contributes to disengagement and an erosion of collective trust. In the organization, the result was a reported breakdown in synergy: departments that once complemented one another became more siloed, defensive, and, in some areas, disengaged. While limited “coopetition” can sometimes be productive, the evidence suggests that this requires strong lateral ties and shared governance. Absent these, competitive pressures tend to overwhelm collaboration.<sup>7</sup>

Disengagement and capacity constraints were particularly acute among support services and administrative entities. Administrative services dealing with workplace concerns were frequently cited to the Office as unresponsive, absent, or insufficient during critical phases of the restructuring. Most of them were overwhelmed. This created a perceived vacuum in which staff were left without guidance, reassurance, or procedural clarity at moments of high personal and professional stress. Other services, similarly, exposed and under-resourced, struggled to maintain their functions. In some cases, they were perceived as unable to fully perform their roles—not due to lack of will, but due to lack of resources and support.

Accountability and oversight functions were also affected. A spike in workplace grievances, coupled with reduction of resources, placed additional strain and resulted in weakened internal controls, and the capacity to detect emerging risks. Errors and omissions from staff also increase and can affect the organization’s reputation if not addressed in a timely and coherent manner. These concerning dynamics were brought to the attention of the Office from a range of colleagues.

Managers were in a particularly difficult position. Evidence from organizational research suggests that managers account for a substantial share of staff engagement.<sup>9</sup> During this crisis, many reported feeling disempowered in the decision-making process and struggled to act as drivers of engagement for their teams and operations. They were asked to implement decisions in which they had not been meaningfully consulted, and that, in some instances, affected them personally. This limited their ability to provide clear direction, reassurance, and a sense of fairness to their teams. When they were in position to make decisions (selection per instance or retention), they were perceived to manipulate the process in favor of their candidate.

The crisis and how it was managed simultaneously affected the organization at both individual and structural levels. This meant there were few, if any, pockets of normalcy to maintain routine and predictability, which are critical for resilience and recovery. On a structural level, successive waves of restructuring created a loss of continuity and normalcy. Service lines were reconfigured, then reconfigured again, producing breakdowns in

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#### <sup>8</sup> Psychological safety and organizational silence

- Edmondson, A. (1999). *Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams*. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.
- Morrison, E. W., & Milliken, F. J. (2000). *Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world*. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 706–725.

#### <sup>9</sup> Managers’ influence on staff engagement

- Gallup, Inc. (2015). *State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders*. Gallup.

service continuity and institutional memory. The combined impact on individuals and structures added “a crisis within the crisis”: staff were coping not only with the external funding shock and its consequences, but also with an internal environment marked by instability and fragmentation.

The long-term impact is still unfolding. Early signs point to weakened institutional memory and talent, fractured internal relationships, and diminished trust in organizational processes. The restructuring did not only change structures; it altered how the organization sees itself, how it communicates, and how it responds to crises. Without deliberate efforts to rebuild collaboration, restore functionality, and re-establish trust, these impacts may persist well beyond the immediate transition period.

## Impact on People

The human impact of the 2025 restructuring was profound and complex and was felt across all levels of the organization. While the process was framed as affecting everyone equally, the lived experience was perceived as far more uneven.

An approach rooted in conflict avoidance created conditions in which confusion and resentment could grow. Unanswered questions and limited explanations invited rumor and conjecture,<sup>10</sup> while the absence of transparent, respectful process cues was experienced as procedurally unfair—an established driver of anger toward decision-makers.<sup>11</sup>

Anger was a salient reaction for many staff members in cases brought to the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator. The GSC survey found that 36 per cent of the remaining staff reported feeling angry.<sup>12</sup> Over time,

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### <sup>10</sup> Rumour and conjecture in low-transparency contexts

- DiFonzo, N., & Bordia, P. (2006). *Rumor psychology: Social and organizational approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

### <sup>11</sup> Procedural justice and anger toward decision-makers

- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). *On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 386–400.
- Bobocel, D. R. (2013). *Coping with unfair events constructively or destructively: The effects of overall justice and self–other orientation*. In S. W. Gilliland, D. D. Steiner, & D. P. Skarlicki (Eds.), *Social justice in organizations* (pp. 149–170). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

### <sup>12</sup> Misconduct, discrimination, and under-reporting

- UNHCR Global Staff Council. (2025). *Survey on workplace issues affecting staff wellbeing and dignity*. Internal UNHCR survey report.

colleagues described that leaving disparities unaddressed did not dissipate tensions but hardened them, which is consistent with evidence that conflict avoidance tends to escalate rather than resolve conflict.<sup>13</sup>

This erosion of perceived procedural fairness was particularly visible in key management processes, including decisions on post reductions and selections for vacant positions. During this period, the downsizing methodology and selection system were, in several instances, perceived as unfair and open to manipulation, allowing managers to remove or retain staff based on preference rather than clear, consistently applied criteria. Whether accurate or not, the perception that selection depended on proximity to a manager rather than on performance had a corrosive effect on trust. Research on procedural and distributive justice indicates that perceived manipulation of performance and selection systems is a strong predictor of cynicism and disengagement.<sup>14</sup> For many staff, what should have been a feedback and development process became, in effect, a proxy for selection, amplifying anxiety and reinforcing the belief that fairness was contingent on personal relationships.

Competition for survival became a dominant theme in many accounts. Instead of fostering collaboration or merging roles in a spirit of shared purpose, staff often found themselves competing for rebranded posts. This dynamic not only created interpersonal tensions but also undermined team cohesion and trust. As attention shifted toward internal competition, energy was diverted from mandate delivery to political navigation and protection of positions. Colleagues described higher perceptions of organizational politics, knowledge hiding, and weakening lateral ties—patterns that research associates with reduced trust, diminished cohesion, and lower performance.<sup>15</sup>

Managers and other stakeholders were frequently left with limited clarity or authority to support their teams. The absence of adequate emotional, procedural, and structural support was felt acutely by those on the frontlines. Many staff reported feeling abandoned, unheard, and unprotected. The organization's perceived silence in the

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### <sup>13</sup> Conflict avoidance and escalation

- Pruitt, D. G., & Kim, S. H. (2004). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Glasl, F. (2000). *Conflict escalation model*. In G. B. J. Bomers & R. B. Peterson (Eds.), *Conflict management and industrial relations* (reprinted discussions of the nine-stage model).

### <sup>14</sup> Procedural and distributive justice, manipulation, and cynicism

- Greenberg, J. (1990). *Employee theft as a reaction to underpayment inequity: The hidden cost of pay cuts*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(5), 561–568.
- Cropanzano, R., & Folger, R. (1989). *Referent cognitions and task decision autonomy: Beyond equity theory*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(2), 293–299.

### <sup>15</sup> Organizational politics, knowledge hiding, and performance

- Bedi, A., & Schat, A. C. H. (2013). *Perceptions of organizational politics: A meta-analysis of its attitudinal, health, and behavioural consequences*. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 54(4), 246–259.
- Černe, M., Nerstad, C. G. L., Dysvik, A., & Škerlavaj, M. (2014). *What goes around comes around: Knowledge hiding, perceived motivational climate, and creativity*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(1), 172–192.

face of distress, coupled with perceptions of inaccessible leadership, contributed to widespread disengagement.

The conflict-avoidance mantra “nobody is immune” became emblematic of the process. While intended to signal fairness, it was perceived as inconsistent when some leadership roles appeared insulated from the sacrifices being asked of others. Some examples include perceived extensions of posts for some and not others, maintaining position levels for some positions, or maintaining travel privileges. This happened during a period of limited validation of staff experiences and a vacuum of visible gestures of solidarity. This perceived double standard further eroded trust and deepened cynicism.

The restructuring also exacerbated existing divides and highlighted concerns related to discrimination, echoing the organizational impacts described earlier. Differences in separation arrangements and perceived disparities between groups (for instance, between G and P staff) further entrenched a sense of inequality. Many staff perceived that decisions about who left and who was selected for open positions were influenced by favoritism rather than merit.

The GSC survey found that around one third of respondents reported having witnessed or experienced discrimination, with the most frequently reported grounds including nationality, grade, contract type, and gender identity.<sup>12</sup> In a context of heightened fear, more than half of those who experienced misconduct did not report it, citing fear of retaliation, lack of confidence that action would be taken, fear of losing their job, and distrust in internal mechanisms.

Disillusion and disengagement spread not only among staff but also among managers. Many reported losing faith in the organization’s values and leadership. The psychological toll was significant: staff described feeling deflated, exhausted, and emotionally drained.

The Office observed an increase in fear and a sense of futility about speaking up through existing escalation mechanisms. Mental health concerns—including anticipated burnout, anxiety, stress, and depressive moods—were brought to the Office from the early stages of the process, including during Ubuntu Cafés, and appeared to gain momentum over time.

Survivors are now facing heavier workloads with fewer resources, often without adequate acknowledgment or support. The Office has observed that this consequence falls particularly on G-staff, who are being asked to assume tasks previously handled by P-staff.

From April onwards, the Office observed clearer signs of “survivor syndrome,” a pattern described in the literature on organizational downsizing. Survivors frequently report guilt, anxiety, and uncertainty alongside lower morale, fatigue, trust, and commitment.<sup>16</sup> These reactions are shaped by whether the downsizing is seen as procedurally fair and by whether leadership signals trustworthiness and care. Where these cues are weak, survivors’ engagement, citizenship behavior, and retention tend to decline.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> **Survivor syndrome and downsizing**

The perceived optics of the restructuring also mattered. Changes that appeared to weaken independent oversight were reported as eroding fairness and institutional legitimacy; research on procedural justice shows that such signals are central to cooperation and confidence in authorities.<sup>17</sup> Governance research similarly underscores that oversight capacity is a pillar of accountability and that reducing it can undermine confidence in decision-making even when the underlying intent is benign.

Taken together, both the evidence and our observations support the description of survivor-era emotions of guilt, anxiety, isolation, and their downstream consequences, including disengagement, lower morale, and increased turnover intention. At the same time, research points to factors associated with more constructive survivor responses: transparent procedures, respectful treatment, clear communication about criteria, and visible protection of oversight, Ethics and internal justice functions.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

Based on our observations, survivor syndrome remains pronounced among many of the remaining staff and is associated with exhaustion, disengagement, burnout, anxiety, and loss of motivation. It is therefore important to rebuild trust and psychological safety, to communicate clearly and transparently about decisions and future directions, and to validate staff experiences to better support them. Finally, it is crucial that the organization explains how processes and goals are being adapted to match the reduced workforce.

## Options for the Way Forward

In keeping with the methodology of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, this report does not offer prescriptive recommendations. Instead, it presents a series of options generated through systemic reflection and grounded in staff experience that may support the organization's recovery and future resilience.

These options are intended to provoke dialogue, invite innovation, and encourage inclusive decision-making. They are not exhaustive nor definitive; rather, they reflect themes and patterns observed during this period of crisis and transition.

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- Brockner, J. (1992). *Managing the effects of layoffs on survivors*. California Management Review, 34(2), 9–28.
  - van Dick, R., Ullrich, J., & Tissington, P. A. (2016). *Working under a black cloud: How to sustain organizational identification after downsizing*. British Journal of Management, 27(1), 5–20.
  - Mishra, A. K., & Spreitzer, G. M. (1998). *Explaining how survivors respond to downsizing: The roles of trust, empowerment, justice, and work redesign*. Academy of Management Review, 23(3), 567–588.

### <sup>17</sup> Procedural justice, legitimacy, and cooperation

- Tyler, T. R., & Blader, S. L. (2003). *The group engagement model: Procedural justice, social identity, and cooperative behavior*. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 7(4), 349–361.

### <sup>18</sup> Oversight, accountability, and governance capacity

- Drolc, C. A., & Keiser, L. R. (2021). *The importance of oversight and agency capacity in enhancing performance in public service delivery*. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 31(4), 773–789.

## 1. Establish a Standing Crisis Response Mechanism

A critical option for future resilience is to establish a Standing Crisis Response Mechanism. This involves the creation of a cross-functional team in a designated crisis management model that can be rapidly and formally convened at the onset of any significant organizational crisis. Such a group is vital to overcome the "perceived gaps in holistic crisis management" observed during the 2025 financial shock. It should be structured to ensure an integrated and inclusive coordination of all responses, comprising high-level representatives from DPM-relevant stakeholders, the Internal Justice and Ethics offices, the oversight offices, the Staff Council, Regional bureaus, and operational representatives. The mechanism's primary role would be to ensure that all strategic and operational decisions are informed by multiple perspectives, fully inclusive of all constituent groups, and demonstrably sustainable, thereby preventing the reactive, fragmented, and siloed approach that contributed to the internal crisis and weakened institutional trust.

## 2. Ensure Transparent and Inclusive Communication

Rebuilding trust will require a sustained commitment to dialogue, transparency, and authentic two-way communication to counter the perceptions of "very limited transparency, unclear decision-making criteria and opacity" reported during the crisis. Communication protocols must be urgently reformed to prioritize clarity, consistency, and timeliness, moving beyond one-way information sharing. Crucially, this involves explicitly sharing the rationale behind decisions in addition to the decisions themselves, as providing a clear justification is essential for staff to "buy into the decision" and restore confidence in organizational fairness. Mechanisms for genuine feedback and dialogue—including structured Q&A opportunities, regular, consistent updates, and safe channels for staff "voice"—could be fully integrated into every stage of organizational change to ensure communication is not merely top-down, but truly responsive, inclusive, and capable of preventing the spread of rumor and conjecture that eroded trust.

## 3. Protect Independent Offices

Safeguarding and strengthening the integrity and operational independence of internal justice and oversight bodies—specifically the offices of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Ethics Office, and the Inspector General—is a non-negotiable step for maintaining trust, restoring accountability, and reinforcing institutional legitimacy, particularly during and after periods of significant upheaval. The report noted that the crisis resulted in the "Fragmentation and weakening of services and support mechanisms" which undermined staff confidence. Therefore, ensuring that these entities have sufficient access, visibility, and resources is critical. This investment will not only support the early detection of emerging risks and a spike in workplace grievances but, most importantly, it will provide staff with credible, impartial avenues for support and redress, serving as a vital confidence-builder and a necessary check against the erosion of perceived fairness and the "survival state" in the organization.

## 4. Rebuild Trust Through Behavioral Consistency

Rebuilding trust through behavioral consistency is fundamentally dependent on visible alignment between leadership's words and their actions to overcome the pervasive cynicism and erosion of confidence reported in the process. Leadership must actively work to model the values the organization espouses through demonstrably transparent communication, inclusive decision-making, and meaningful, sustained engagement with those most affected by change, directly addressing the perceived inconsistencies and "double standards" that severely weakened the "psychological contract".

To embed this consistency, options must include strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure leaders are visibly and consistently held responsible for any misconduct or misaligned behavior that undermines fairness. This must be complemented by equipping all staff and managers with essential tools for constructive conflict resolution and building healthy team dynamics, directly challenging the organization's long-standing pattern of conflict avoidance and the perceived "guarded power at senior levels." Existing training programs could be significantly strengthened and complemented through joint, holistic initiatives creating a unified front to restore a trust-rich environment.

## 5. Support Survivors

After a year dominated by heavy, process-driven restructuring and a pervasive "survival state," the organization's next phase must pivot from structural imperatives to a resolute focus on its people. Recovery will have to concentrate far more on human capital—re-establishing trust, repairing the ruptured "psychological contract," and rebuilding psychological safety. Ultimately, it is the dedicated staff who will drive the transition from crisis-induced fragmentation to renewed cohesion and resilience, thereby securing the organization's long-term effectiveness and collective purpose.

Strengthening psychological and peer support mechanisms is paramount to ensuring staff have access to comprehensive care, not just during a crisis, but also throughout the prolonged recovery phase, as the psychological impact and "survivor syndrome" persist well beyond the formal transition. Support structures must evolve to reflect this extended duration of need. Beyond technical mental health expertise, a core element of recovery requires the wide infusion of empathy throughout the organization, positioning managers as "chief empathy officers" to actively rebuild psychological safety, restore the "psychological contract," and foster the trust essential for renewed organizational cohesion.

Supporting survivors will also require a deliberate, multi-faceted approach. This includes immediately addressing the acute workload imbalances that are disproportionately burdening the remaining workforce, particularly G-staff. Furthermore, leaders must consciously and proactively tackle the various schisms and internal divisions in teams, including those stemming from the perceived unfair or unequal distribution of managerial attention and support, to move beyond the current competitive, "survival state." Finally, and critically, achieving organizational and individual emotional closure necessitates acknowledging the profound emotional toll of the restructuring and downsizing process, and visibly honoring those who departed from the

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teams as an essential step in rebuilding trust and restoring the organization's sense of shared humanity (ubuntu) and protection of dignity.

## 6. Document Lessons Learned

Creating a deliberate and sustained space for reflection and institutional learning is essential to ensure the profound and disruptive experience of the 2025 crisis actively informs future planning, directly countering the initial "lack of pause and reflect" that contributed to the crisis's internal escalation. This imperative involves systematically capturing, analyzing, and consolidating staff experiences, both what worked (initial solidarity) and, more critically, what did not (fragmented response, communication inconsistencies). Integrating these systemic insights into core policies and crisis procedures is essential. A genuine culture of learning could be cultivated, where managerial and organizational mistakes are examined constructively rather than being hidden or fueling fear. This shift will strengthen long-term resilience, help the organization move beyond the reactive "fight-fright-freeze response modalities", support individual closure and significantly reduce the risk of repeating similar patterns of cultural dynamics, such as conflict avoidance and guarded decision-making, in future periods of upheaval.

## 7. Reaffirm Human-Centered Values and Dignity

Reaffirming human-centered values and the UN Charter to protect human dignity is a fundamental imperative, as the crisis caused a perceived rupture in the "psychological contract" and a sense of powerlessness among staff. Ensuring that all future decisions reflect UNHCR's humanitarian ethos internally as well as externally is central to restoring confidence and overcoming the current cynicism. Staff must be consistently and visibly seen and treated as people, not merely as abstract "positions or budget lines", to counter the transactional, fear-driven atmosphere that dominated the restructuring.

This human-centered principle must be deliberately embedded across policy, practice, and leadership culture to rebuild trust. Concrete actions could include establishing people-centered decision criteria, clearly defining leadership expectations that prioritize staff well-being, and fundamentally overhauling how difficult news is communicated and followed up to ensure it is both respectful and dignifying. The path forward demands courage, humility, and a willingness to listen at all levels to transition from the "survival state" to recovery, a journey which the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator remains committed to supporting with its confidential avenues for dialogue and systemic insight.

## Conclusion

This Special Report has sought to capture the systemic dynamics, organizational impacts, and human consequences of UNHCR's 2025 restructuring and downsizing process. Through the lens of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, it documents not only what occurred, but how it was perceived and experienced by

colleagues across grades, contract types, and duty stations, and what these experiences reveal about the organization’s culture, governance, and resilience.

The observations presented here are not intended to assign blame or to evaluate specific decisions. They reflect patterns and themes raised through confidential channels and other informal engagements, offered as upward feedback to support reflection and learning. The crisis was unprecedented in scale and speed, and the response—while imperfect—was shaped by urgency, pressure, and extraordinary constraints. At the same time, staff accounts show that the ways in which decisions were communicated, implemented, and experienced have lasting effects on trust, cohesion, and wellbeing.

Recovery will require more than structural adjustments. It will call for a renewed commitment to transparency, empathy, and integrity; for leadership that listens and engages and models the values it espouses; and for systems to adapt in ways that are inclusive and fair. It will also require sustained attention to the needs of those who remain, and to the conditions that enable them to feel safe, respected, and able to contribute.

The options outlined in this report are offered in a constructive spirit, as possible avenues to rebuild trust, restore collaboration, and strengthen organizational resilience. The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator remain committed to supporting both staff and leadership in navigating this period and contributing to a healthier, more sustainable organizational future, one in which people are valued not only for the roles they occupy, but as individuals with dignity, voice, and purpose.

The path to recovery lies in bridging the distance between decisions and those impacted by them. In the words of the Secretary-General, we must strive to *'move from fear of each other, to trust in each other'*, a trust grounded in transparency, empathy, and the values that bind this organization together.

## Annex

### Detailed Timeline of Communication

Date	Event	Impact
2025-Jan ~ 2025-Feb	<a href="#">Temporary Suspension of US Foreign Assistance</a>	Immediate cost-containment measures and scenario planning initiated.
2025-02-06	<a href="#">HC’s 1st Town Hall</a>	Funding freeze due to US contributions, impact on operations, and announcement of upcoming restructuring.
2025-03-20	<a href="#">HC’s Message: Financial Uncertainty Announcement</a>	HC addresses funding shortfall due to US freeze. Restructuring review process begins.
2025-04-02	<a href="#">Headquarters and</a>	1,200 colleagues provide feedback, guiding the

	<a href="#">Regional Bureaus review</a>	restructuring process.
2025-04-09	<a href="#">Launch of Weekly Updates</a>	Regular updates on restructuring, shared services model, and operational footprint review.
2025-04-23	<a href="#">Financial situation – downsizing and cost-saving measures</a>	HQ and RB downsizing confirmed, with <b>30%</b> reduction in operational costs.
2025-05-05	<a href="#">HC’s 2nd Global Town Hall</a>	Announcement of latest cost-saving measures and the new organizational chart for HQ.
2025-06-16	<a href="#">HC’s Message – Financial Situation Update</a>	3,500 staff positions identified for discontinuation. Global staffing costs to be reduced by 30%.
2025-06-16 ~ 2025-07-17	<b>Shift to Bi-Weekly Update</b>	After a brief pause in June 2025, the updates are back on a bi-weekly basis.
2025-07-17	<a href="#">HC’s 3rd Town Hall</a>	Guidance for workforce navigating changes. 3,900 staff members affected by job cuts.
2025-07-25	<a href="#">Limited Activation of the Policy on Staff Placement and Reduction in Force - GS GVA</a>	Policy activated for GS Staff in Geneva.
2025-10-01	<a href="#">New HQ and Regional Configuration Milestone</a>	Transition activities continue; 5,000 staff separated as part of organizational changes.
2025-10-13	<a href="#">Activation of the Early Separation Programme</a>	Launch of a voluntary Early Separation Programme for eligible <b>International</b> Professional staff (over five years’ service) to help mitigate the impact of organizational realignment.
Since 2025-10-15	<b>Weekly Updates discontinued</b>	Regular Weekly Updates on restructuring and the financial situation ends.

