EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

STANDING COMMITTEE
43rd meeting

UPDATE ON HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

I. INTRODUCTION

1.   This paper is intended to update Executive Committee members and Standing Committee observers on developments and plans for UNHCR's human resource management policies and practices in line with UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives for 2007-2009[1] and efforts to enhance the overall effectiveness of the organization.

2.   The Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM) is responsible for the administration, training, health and welfare, and payrolling of some 6,500 staff members at over 266 locations in 116 countries. Some 85 per cent of UNHCR staff work outside Geneva Headquarters and the Budapest Global Service Centre, and almost half are serving in places considered as hardship duty stations by United Nations common system standards.

3.   As a result of the 2007-2008 outposting exercise, there are now 86 positions, representing about half of DHRM staff, in Budapest in the Personnel Administration and Payroll Section and in the Recruitment and Postings Unit. While a few transitional issues remain to be resolved, these services are now fully operational. In close coordination with the office for Organizational Development and Management, DHRM is examining the benefits of unifying all UNHCR training services, which might result in an outposted structure for the Staff Development Section in early 2009. Moreover, DHRM is examining the best approach to strengthen career management services in UNHCR with a view to ensuring that staff members can better align their career aspirations and preferences with the opportunities available, given the changing environment in which the organization operates.

4.   In accordance with UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives for 2008-2009, DHRM's objectives are:

        a)   To develop and introduce a comprehensive package of human resources policies by reviewing and enhancing:

- the promotions policy;
- the appointments and postings process;
- contracts;

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[1]   Notably Global Strategic Objective 6.4 for 2007: "Undertaking comprehensive reform of UNHCR's human resource policies, in order to ensure maximum operational effectiveness, including enhanced capacity to operate in situations of insecurity, and progress in the achievement of gender equity."

- performance management;
- career development;
- the learning policy, with an emphasis on management development;
- working conditions for staff in the Field; and
- preparations for transition to a new internal justice system.

b) To develop a comprehensive workforce management strategy by:

- reducing the number of staff in between assignments (SIBAs) to an absolute minimum, and then eliminating this category;
- implementing comparative reviews for general service staff and for international professionals, as needed;
- renewing policies and procedures governing the additional workforce, including consultants, contractors, interns, United Nations Volunteers (UNVs); and
- implementing policies to enhance gender equity and diversity.

c) To increase efficiency and the quality of human resource service delivery by:

- continuing to simplify processes, completing the outposting exercise and stabilizing the transition to the PeopleSoft platform;
- expanding training opportunities for human resources staff at Headquarters and in the Field;
- introducing measurable indicators of efficient and quality service delivery;
- strengthening career planning capacity;
- pursuing engagement in inter-agency fora, especially the human resources (HR) network, the International Civil Servant Commission (ICSC) working groups, the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel (IAAP); and
- providing timely and fair action on personnel relations and disciplinary cases, including strengthened collaboration with the Legal Affairs Section, the Office of the Inspector General, the Ethics Office and the Mediator.

II. WORKFORCE SIZE, STRUCTURE AND FLEXIBILITY

5.   Given the nature of UNHCR's work to deliver protection and assistance in a difficult and changing environment, a primary quality of its workforce must be mobility and flexibility.

6.   Fixed-term appointments are issued to newly recruited staff and other measures have been taken to ensure that the workforce responds to new situations and emergencies, including the continued use of the International Professional Roster (IPR). The purpose of the IPR is to ensure that recognized gaps in UNHCR's staffing profile, especially at the P-2 and P-3 levels, are filled properly and in a timely manner. After successfully passing the test in May 2007, 176 new candidates were added to the existing 608 of the previous years. The number of IPR candidates currently stands at 784, comprising 445 women and 339 men. The IPR entry test continues to focus more on analytical skills rather than on knowledge of UNHCR, and includes a psychometric component to test core behaviour aptitudes and competencies that are needed in UNHCR.

7.   With regard to the outposting of functions from Geneva to the Global Service Centre in Budapest, despite a number of steps taken by the High Commissioner to mitigate the impact on individual staff members, in the end it was a difficult process for many.   Several initiatives linked to the reform process, and in particular to the outposting, were supported by DHRM, such as:

- additional flexibility that allowed General Service (GS) staff members to be eligible for professional positions;
- agreements with other United Nations agencies to consider GS staff in Geneva as internal candidates for vacancies within their respective organizations;
- a freeze on external recruitment for GS positions at Headquarters designed to open up additional opportunities within UNHCR;
- provision of a voluntary separation package;
- consideration of GS staff members in Geneva affected by the outposting decision who wished to apply for posts in Budapest to be recruited as local staff in Budapest; and
- measures that allowed GS staff who opted for the voluntary separation package to be considered as internal candidates for GS vacancies for a period of three years.

8.   DHRM managed the Comparative Review process introduced for the GS category in Geneva and supported the work of the Appointments, Promotions and Postings Committee (APPC), which recommended appointments for almost all of the GS staff members whose positions were discontinued. Specialist firms were engaged to provide expert career guidance to staff members affected by the reform and to assist the Office with the major recruitment effort in Budapest.

9.   DHRM was involved, in close cooperation with the Appointments, Promotions and Postings Board (APPB), the Staff Council and the Legal Affairs Section, in the design of an interim methodology on promotions within the International Professional category. This methodology was used during the Annual Promotions Session held in January 2008.

10.   The Fast Track model for the deployment of staff was introduced on a trial basis in January 2003 for the international staffing of the Afghanistan operation. On 9 May 2008, the High Commissioner approved a number of modifications to the Fast Track model, so as to improve its effectiveness and reduce the timeframe of deployments in an emergency operation. The Fast Track model will be used to ensure the speedy deployment of staff members needed for supplementary budget and emergency operations foreseen to last at least 12 months.

III. TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

11.   Over the past year, the Performance Management Unit of DHRM has worked on revising the competency framework, which is key to an enhanced, more reliable performance management system. Revised core, managerial and cross-functional competencies have been levelled and will be introduced in the context of a new, web-based system which incorporates best practices, such as as multi-rater input, a new rating scale, greater reviewing officer involvement; and stronger quality-control mechanisms. Following consultations with the staff and the approval of the High Commissioner, the new policies on performance management and rebuttal will be introduced and a global training and roll-out will start before the end of 2008.

12.   DHRM has also been developing models and tools for assessing UNHCR managers. The assessment process is designed to identify those P-4 middle managers who demonstrate the ability to undertake more senior management positions.   The assessment tools have been tested over the last year and DHRM is now planning a pilot activity for an improved Management Assessment Process (MAP).

13.   The goal of DHRM's Management Learning and Development programme is to help the organization create a pool of managers able to move into more senior management positions, as well as to strengthen an overall culture of management skill and accountability. To achieve this, a four-level learning strategy has been inaugurated that addresses: working within United Nations Country Teams (UNCT); the Strategic Leadership Programme (SLP) for senior managers; the Management Learning Programme (MLP) for middle managers; and the Introduction to Effective Management (ItEM) for first-time managers. Over the last 12 months, an SLP involving 21 Representatives, Deputy Representatives, and Heads of Office in the Asia-Pacific region, was completed, and one for the Middle East and North Africa region was started with 24 senior staff. Similarly, in the MLP, some 136 middle managers are working on the 12 modules required for completion. By the end of 2008, over 108 staff members will have completed the MLP. The ItEM programme is currently in the development stage and will be launched in 2009.   Developmental use of the 360-degree feedback tool continues for new managers at P-5 level and above.

14.   There has also been progress in building an integrated electronic Learning Management System (LMS), which is critical for making learning more accessible to staff members around the world and for providing more accurate and comprehensive reporting data. Launch of the system is scheduled for the last quarter of 2008.

IV. ETHICS

15.   As of 1 September 2008, UNHCR's Ethics Office will be located in the Executive Office and will be responsible for advocacy, advice and training on ethics as well as for ensuring compliance with protection against retaliation and the United Nations financial disclosure requirements.

16.   DHRM has meanwhile continued to support the annual Code of Conduct refresher sessions, as well as Code of Conduct induction training for new staff members. In the last year, DHRM has diversified the types of training materials used, by including ethics and integrity modules from the United Nations Ethics Office in New York, on the subjects of conflicts of interest, whistleblower protection and financial disclosure.

17.   UNHCR also announced a specific theme for 2008 refresher sessions - protection from sexual exploitation and abuse - and distributed the recently-released United Nations inter-agency film, "To Serve with Pride". The Office is the first agency to require all staff members to view and discuss this film. UNHCR has also played an active role in the inter-agency task force on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

18.   In accordance with its institutional commitment to respect diversity, DHRM has developed a policy for UNHCR on the employment of people with disabilities. It is designed to ensure compliance with the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities. UNHCR has also been the lead agency of an inter-agency working group, which, under the auspices of the Human Resources Network, has produced a policy statement requiring all United Nations agencies to have a strong disability employment policy.

V. GENDER PARITY

19. In March 2007, UNHCR issued a new policy for achieving gender equity in staffing. The Senior Gender Task Force, chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner, was established to ensure implementation and monitoring. In addition, the Gender and Diversity Issues Working Group composed of representatives from the Staff Council and DHRM has been activated.

20. An on-line database for gender and diversity statistics will be introduced in early 2009. This mechanism will increase access to information to reinforce accountability in the context of postings and recruitment. As of 1 August 2008, women represent 38 per cent of all UNHCR staff and 40 per cent of all international professional staff. Twenty-nine per cent of UNHCR Representatives in the Field are women

21. UNHCR continues to explore other measures for solving the problem of gender imbalance in staffing, in accordance with the recommendations of the International Civil Service Commission's May 2008 report on gender balance in the United Nations common system. One possibility could be more generous support for childcare costs for women staff members.

VI. HIV and AIDS

22. UNHCR actively supported the launch of "UN Cares" in May 2008 to ensure implementation of the ten minimum standards for HIV in the workplace across the United Nations organizations. In this way, UNHCR is demonstrating its commitment to the policy and also to the "Delivering as One" strategy.

23. UNHCR's principal concerns relate to provision of HIV-related services to staff in remote locations where access to education, information, treatment and care is minimal. To support the efforts of "UN Cares" and to ensure that this vulnerable group of staff is taken care of, UNHCR has decided to extend the services of a professional officer dedicated to HIV in the workplace. Baseline survey results undertaken this past year indicate that a large number of staff still lack knowledge about HIV and AIDS and that stigma remains significant.

24. Some 20 small-scale projects in various operations were supported in 2007 and 2008, related mostly to training activities for staff and their family members. A reporting system was established to share information and best practices among UNHCR focal points in about 50 operations worldwide.

VIII. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

25. The move to replace all old software in the area of Human Resources and Payroll is nearing completion. Following the rollout of the base human resources software containing the human resources database and the entitlements administration function, several layers of additional functionality have now been built, such as the first full United Nations Payroll solution configured on an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP).[2] Also completed on the same

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[2] This is a business support system that maintains in a single database the data needed for a variety of business functions such as Financials, Human Resources and Payroll.

ERP is a custom-built postings functionality to manage UNHCR's frequent rotation system. The piece on performance management is still under construction. The choice of one ERP (PeopleSoft) for accounting, budgeting and human resources has given UNHCR the opportunity to integrate these functions. Once the human resources components of PeopleSoft are fully implemented, administration will be more efficient and reporting quality superior.

26.   DHRM worked in collaboration with the Peoplesoft-MSRP Human Resources and Payroll Project introduced in November 2006, with a view to stabilizing and adjusting this new information technology system for vacancy management procedures. In January 2007, UNHCR introduced the new on-line application process, initially available to international professional staff and national officer categories. The on-line application facility was later made available to GS and Field Service (FS) categories in Geneva to coincide with the advertisement of vacancies in Budapest and was further extended to GS and FS staff in the Field as of August 2008.

IX. STAFF IN BETWEEN ASSIGNMENTS

27.   The work of the Office requires the movement of staff resources from one location to the other depending on the organizational needs. Sometimes, these movements must be undertaken on an urgent basis; in other instances staff members have to vacate their posts before the normal end of their standard assignment. At any given time, there are a number of staff members who have completed their standard assignment in one duty station and are applying to other positions, although they are not yet appointed.

28.   The number of staff in between assignments fluctuates, but remains a major workforce management challenge. As of end July 2008, there were 161 staff members in between assignments, the majority of whom were working on missions or temporary assignments in various field locations. In an attempt to reduce as much as possible the number of staff members in between assignments, and in particular of staff members in between assignments who are not working, the Career Planning Unit (CPU) has contacted these colleagues and provided personalized counselling on postings and temporary assignments. CPU also releases regular messages on external vacancies to inform staff members of placement opportunities in other agencies.

29.   A Career Planning Webpage was launched in January 2008 and is regularly updated with information on ways to enhance skills and competencies, with a view to adapting the UNHCR's workforce to the changing needs of the organization. Similarly, the CPU organizes career support activities, including workshops and dedicated materials, on career planning and transition.

30.   The High Commissioner has placed special emphasis on the posting of staff in between assignments. Management is dedicated to ensuring that rotating and newly recruited staff members are assigned to posts for which they are suitable, mainly at their personal grade level, and that gender and diversity considerations are always taken into account.

X. COST SAVINGS

31.   In the absence of the replacement of the old software suite by a modern, internet-enabled, integrated and reliable HR/Payroll system, the outposting of functions to the Global Service Centre in Budapest would not have been possible. Outposting has yielded cost savings and efficiency gains. The implementation of the payroll functionality on the same ERP as human

resources has reduced duplication of data entry and has eliminated staff positions. Change management initiatives are allowing human resources to take on more service opportunities, such as more active involvement in field staff management issues. A reduced cost base in Budapest allows human resources functions to cope with the volatility of staff administration demands during emergencies.

XI. CONCLUSION

32.   The Office will keep the Standing Committee informed of additional measures taken in the coming months in relation to the management of UNHCR's workforce and looks forward to the Committee's continued support.