Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

**Standing Committee
52nd meeting**

Strategic directions for human resources management in UNHCR including staff safety

Contents

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I. Introduction

1.   UNHCR is a highly mobile, field-oriented organization which must be prepared to manage new and rapidly evolving, complex emergency situations, through a professional and flexible workforce. The Office is distinguished from many of its sister agencies by its extensive presence in deep field locations, which are often highly insecure, and thus it must also have in place an effective security management plan.

2.   In the coming biennium, there will be continued focus on consolidating human resources management reforms to ensure: the timely recruitment and deployment of the most qualified staff; career development through learning; quality performance and accountability; and effective administration alongside reduced bureaucracy. UNHCR will build its leadership capacity to ensure that management practices support professionalism, integrity, and respect for diversity. These standards must permeate the daily work of staff members, in their interactions with persons of concern, partners, government authorities, and colleagues.

3.   This paper outlines the Office's proactive approach to human resources management, as well as staff security, which will help UNHCR meet its Global Strategic Priority of developing a motivated workforce to meet the operational and organizational demands of today and tomorrow.

II. Issues and challenges

A. Responding to changing operational requirements

4.   UNHCR's systems for local and international recruitment and postings must be sufficiently competitive to guarantee a highly qualified workforce; meanwhile, the internal procedures for position management and assignment must be flexible enough to respond to unanticipated needs and to multiple emergency situations.

5.   UNHCR places a high premium on training for emergency management and maintains a pool of staff members ready for rapid deployment on emergency response teams. In the Horn of Africa, UNHCR is piloting a new model whereby staff on temporary assignment take over from the emergency response teams for a period of six months, as required. During this period, the office structures are consolidated and staff on temporary assignment, whose services are still required, are assigned with a one-year contract, through fast track procedures.

B. Maintaining a professional and diverse workforce

6.   A major challenge for the Office is to ensure broad access to learning opportunities for staff, with synergies to career development including promotion, through the proper recording and valuing of learning achievements and work experience. This is a priority for UNHCR's Global Learning Center (GLC), which is the central repository for learning expertise and the lead agent for broadening access learning in key areas directly relevant to improving organizational performance.

7.   In 2010, its first full year of operation, the GLC continued to administer 33 long-established programmes, revised and updated 11 of them, and launched 42 new ones. It also offered a large selection of new, commercially produced, generic computer-based courses and started to tailor these to specific organizational needs. More than 5,700 individual users registered for 510 learning activities organized or coordinated by the GLC. As some users registered for more than one course, some 16,000 applications were received, demonstrating an interest and commitment to learning on the part of staff members. While the majority of the learning activities were relatively short online courses, a total of 1,023 learners participated in substantive programmes with a mixed delivery

methodology, lasting between 3 and 12 months, and 3,336 participated in stand-alone workshops. It is worth noting that there has been very positive engagement in these learning programmes among staff members in the National Professional and General Service categories.

8.   UNHCR strives to achieve gender equity and to ensure diversity in the composition of its global workforce. Gender equity remains an organizational target: 44% of international staff are women, compared to 39% in 2000; and the percentage of women at the P4 level and above has increased from around 25% to almost 40% during the same time frame. Although the geographical distribution of UNHCR's international staff follows very closely that of the UN common system, there is room for broader representation at the D1 level in particular. There is also scope for more cross-fertilization among the Regional Bureaux and within the Divisions at Headquarters. Even though one-third of all UNHCR country representatives have an African nationality, the vast majority are actually serving on their own continent. About half of the UNHCR representatives in European countries are nationals of non-European countries.

9.   A key element of UNHCR's human resource capacity, and a source of diversity and expertise, is its affiliate workforce – comprised of volunteers, consultants, contractors and interns – who provide essential support to the Office. About 1,000 national and international United Nations Volunteers are working alongside UNHCR staff, primarily in the domain of protection services, in the Field.

C.   Ensuring quality performance and accountability

10.   Another challenge for the Office is to reinforce the effective use of performance management to maximize the quality and efficiency of UNHCR's delivery on its mandate. As a step to better performance management, job descriptions are being revised to indicate what is expected of incumbents in terms of accountabilities and responsibilities. UNHCR's internet-based performance appraisal and management system (PAMS) was introduced in mid-2009. While there is high compliance and improved calibration of ratings, the credibility and usability of PAMS for career development purposes needs to be enhanced.

D.   Building a respectful workplace environment

11.   Managers need to be better equipped to lead teams, address and resolve conflicts, and build confidence among staff by adhering to good practices in human resources management. In this regard, respect for diversity is key. This means being reasonably flexible in accommodating the needs of staff members – for example, in terms of rotation and flexible work arrangements. The Office must also ensure proper physical access and facilities for disabled staff members. Action planning to improve internal communications and staff engagement in helping to build a positive workplace will continue with the next global staff survey, which is being launched in September 2011. The Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM) will continue to cooperate closely with the independent offices of the Ombudsperson, the Director of the Ethics Office, the Office of the Inspector General, and the Staff Council to promote respect and integrity among all staff members and to ensure fairness and efficiency in the use of formal and informal administration of justice mechanisms.

III.   DHRM budget priorities

12.   The effective management of human resources is an organizational responsibility. DHRM emphasizes open internal communications, extensive delegation of authority, and reinforced accountability. While the Division's structures are centrally located in Geneva

and Budapest, DHRM works with a global network of trained international and national human resources officers.

13.   The largest component of DHRM's current operating budget (43%) is dedicated to learning, including areas related to protection, programme management, resource management, and emergency preparedness and response, and to ensuring the GLC's capacity to broaden access to learning.

14.   The second largest component of DHRM's current operating budget (23%) is dedicated to career planning, performance management, and recruitment and postings. The new policies relating to international assignments and recruitment involve a fundamental reworking of the responsibilities of the Division, including a staff intensive and proactive approach to career management.

15.   The third largest component of DHRM's budget (13%) is dedicated to managing the contractual relations with staff. UNHCR's personnel administration and payroll section has gone through a significant change process in its outposting from Geneva to Budapest, with a renewed emphasis on client-oriented service delivery as well as on training and monitoring in order to permit further delegation and decentralization.

16.   Providing medical care and staff welfare services to UNHCR staff, their dependants, and other employees, in order to ensure their physical and emotional well-being during and upon completion of their period of work with UNHCR, makes up 9% of DHRM's budget.

17.   The remaining 12% of DHRM's budget is spent on the implementation of United Nations common system endeavours (for example, salary surveys and the HIV/AIDS in the workplace policy), the cost-sharing of inter-agency activities, and contributing to the common system human resources policy infrastructure through the HR Network and the International Civil Service Commission.

IV.   Strategic orientations in human resources management

18.   While overall staffing levels will not change significantly in the near future, there will continue to be short-term fluctuations to meet emergency requirements and also to respond to reduced levels of activity. The overarching goal is to deploy as many staff as possible closer to the populations the Office works to protect and assist. In addition, inter-agency exchange opportunities are encouraged as an important means of career development and broadening staff knowledge to help meet organizational objectives.

19.   UNHCR is professionalizing its workforce, not only by engaging staff members to pursue continuous learning but also by increasing opportunities for national professional careers; retaining Junior Professional Officers and UNVs; and by recruiting at all grade levels. There is a rich and diverse pool of qualified persons, including locally-recruited staff members, who have great potential to pursue an international career in UNHCR.

20.   UNHCR has traditionally offered opportunities for locally recruited staff members to gain international experience through missions and Field Service assignments and to move to the professional categories. Over the last five years, 31 per cent of all recruits to the international professional category were converted from the national categories, with a notable real increase in the level of conversion from 28 staff in 2006 to 41 in 2010. During the same period, 65 per cent of newly recruited National Professional Officers were selected from the ranks of the General Service category, with an increase in the number of conversions from 17 in 2006 to 41 in 2010.

21.   Of UNHCR's 7,650 staff members, 87 per cent are located outside of Headquarters (including both Geneva and the Global Service Center in Budapest). Almost half of all staff members and exactly one-third of UNHCR's international staff are serving in the most difficult hardship duty stations (categorized as "D" or "E" by the International Civil Service

Commission). It is therefore necessary that the Office monitor the implementation of the new system for the harmonization of conditions of service in non-family duty stations to address any unanticipated consequences that might limit UNHCR's ability to recruit and retain qualified international staff for such duty stations.

V.   Staff safety

22.   Recent political instability and civil unrest in the Middle East and North Africa region have reaffirmed the need for a proactive and prepared approach to security management. UNHCRs Field Safety Section (FSS) continues to spearhead efforts in this direction, based on its Security Management Plan of Action and Strategy for Implementation developed in 2010, while simultaneously supporting the large volume of emerging needs arising from security events in the Field. Above all, it continues efforts to strengthen an organizational culture of security, based on sound risk management practices, allowing UNHCR to find ways to continue operating within boundaries of acceptable risk, even in places where residual dangers remain.

23.   FSS at Headquarters and UNHCR Field Safety Advisers (FSAs) in the Field continue to assist operations by providing security risk assessments, technical advice, training, and input for inter-agency coordination on security. In addition, FSS helps manage critical incidents, providing support to both managers at Headquarters and in the Field.

24.   The ability of UNHCR to meet the wide range of security challenges facing its operations in the Field, and to shape a culture of security within the organization, depends on the quality of its FSA workforce. Standards for recruiting security staff remain high, including demonstrated technical proficiency, experience in humanitarian operations, and language skills.

25.   UNHCR FSAs must also be prepared to contribute ensuring the safety of persons of concern; this is a point that distinguishes them from their counterparts in other organizations. For example, UNHCR is nearing completion of a manual designed to provide guidance for agency and partner staff on how to respond to recurring security threats among persons of concern. Based on good practices and practical advice from the field, the manual will reinforce a mutidisciplinary approach to resolving problems and reinforce existing guidelines. FSS devotes considerable effort to identifying the right candidates for its FSA positions and developing the required skills, as the need to respond to both staff and beneficiary safety calls for a special profile.

26.   As of August 2011, FSS had a total of 57 FSA posts. This number represents an increase of eight posts in 2011 due to the creation of fast-track positions in response to emergencies in North and West Africa. The duration of this increase will depend largely upon developments in those regions.

27.   Safety and security training aimed at making staff aware of threats in their environment and more able to manage risk effectively, remains a critical component in efforts to influence UNHCR's culture of security. In addition to the Security Management Learning Programme (SMLP), which presents risk management tools to field managers, UNHCR piloted the Security Management Exercise (SMX) in 2011. The SMX allows staff in a given field operation to exercise risk management tools and processes within their own country context. To date, staff in Ecuador, Kenya, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Turkey have benefited from this training; an additional eight countries will undergo the training in the latter half of the year. Currently, there is no UN system-wide training that addresses this need.

28.   Recent changes in policy and operating modalities within the United Nations Security Management System have generally strengthened the ability of UN operations on

the ground to manage risk effectively. These include the introduction of the new Security Level System (SLS); the updating of the Framework for Accountability for Security Management within the UN; the field testing of a Programme Criticality methodology; and above all, attempts to realize a more responsive approach to risk management based on a "finding ways to stay" approach. The developments mentioned above require continued engagement in inter-agency processes, ensuring that policies are fully harmonized and that they reflect the specific realities of UNHCR's mandate and operating environment.

29. UNHCR continues to review operations through its internal Security Steering Committee, which evaluates the impact of potential changes in security environments and adjusts operating modalities or enhances mitigation measures where appropriate. The Office also continues to review MOSS compliance biannually, to ensure that required measures are implemented, and works to ensure that security needs are budgeted for during the annual programme review process.

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