

**Seventy-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee
5-7 March 2019**

**Agenda item 3 (b)
Oral update on the work of the Inspector General's Office**

Highlights from 2018

- The past year was a challenging one for the Inspector General's Office (IGO) due to an increasing workload, complex and resource intensive investigations, growing demands to provide information on its investigations, including to external entities, and incidents which challenged organizational integrity but also provided important lessons learned. The year was further characterized by strengthened collaboration between the IGO and senior management to address these integrity challenges and to find ways to reduce and prevent their occurrence.
- In 2018, the Investigation Service registered 1186 complaints related to misconduct, almost double the number received in 2017. This may be the result of both internal and external factors. Internally, UNHCR's enhanced risk management approach,¹ together with clear and targeted messaging by senior management on integrity issues, contributed to improved awareness of the need to report misconduct by UNHCR personnel and partners. External factors, such as broader integrity challenges in the humanitarian aid sector, which prompted greater accountability measures to be put in place by UNHCR, and the global movement against sexual harassment and assault, may have further contributed to the increase in complaints. Forty-five per cent of the complaints received in 2018 involved UNHCR personnel, 28 per cent implementing partner personnel and 4 per cent UNHCR contractors. There was a notable decrease in the percentage of complaints concerning UNHCR personnel and an increase in complaints concerning implementing partner personnel. Additionally, there was a significant increase in reporting from implementing partners (up from 4 to 12 per cent). Consistent with 2017, the top three categories of complaints in 2018 were fraud with financial implications, sexual exploitation and abuse, and refugee status determination/resettlement fraud.
- The Investigation Service opened 113 new investigations and concluded investigation reports into 144 individuals. Allegations of misconduct were substantiated in nearly 50 per cent of the cases. The High Commissioner imposed disciplinary measures on 35 UNHCR staff members in 2018, 14 more than in 2017. Twenty-one cases resulted in dismissal or separation, which reflects the organization's commitment to actively address misconduct and is an indication of the robust capacity of the Investigation Service to professionally carry out investigations and produce high quality investigation reports, which stand up to scrutiny in United Nations judicial proceedings.
- Combatting sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment remained a priority for the organization, including the IGO. Throughout 2018 the IGO was actively engaged in a senior-level task force and various work streams to provide expertise and insights into the development of prevention strategies, policies, action plans and awareness-raising campaigns, and also participated in discussion forums. The Investigation Service continued to apply a lower threshold² to opening sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment investigations. Together with the Ethics Office, it designed and delivered a series of trainings to raise awareness and train focal points on this issue in several countries; this work will continue in 2019. The number of sexual exploitation and abuse complaints with an identifiable victim grew from 39 in 2017 to 117 in 2018. This significant increase is the likely result of greater confidence in the organization's actions in this area. Of the 117 complaints, 34 concerned UNHCR personnel and 83 involved personnel from UNHCR's implementing partners. Twenty-one investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse were finalized in 2018, of which four cases were substantiated. Of these four cases, one involved UNHCR personnel³ and three involved implementing partner personnel. The concerned member of UNHCR personnel was dismissed, and the measures related to the three partner personnel are still pending.

¹ In 2018, the IGO supported the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) unit in the conceptualization of the new risk management 2.0 initiative aimed at strengthening risk mitigation across the organization.

² Allegations are assessed on the basis of plausibility, which is a lower threshold than for other types of misconduct.

³ This case originated in 2017.

- Concerning sexual harassment, the IGO received a total of 49 initial complaints in 2018 compared to 15 received in 2017. Fourteen out of the 49 complaints were not pursued by the individuals involved (as compared to 2 out of the 15 cases in 2017). Out of the remaining 35 complaints, 20 concerned UNHCR personnel and 15 implementing partner personnel. The Investigation Service finalized 10 investigations into sexual harassment in 2018, and the allegations were substantiated in five cases, all involving UNHCR personnel. A member of UNHCR personnel was dismissed, another left the organization before the investigation was initiated and three have been referred to the Division of Human Resources for further action, including disciplinary proceedings.
- Internal audit services in UNHCR continued to be provided by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) through its UNHCR Audit Service. The IGO manages the relationship with OIOS for the provision of internal audit services. It collaborated closely with the UNHCR Audit Service before, during and after its audits through information-sharing and the identification of important issues to be brought to management's attention. The UNHCR Audit Service also regularly transmitted details of potential irregularities, complaints and misconduct encountered in the course of its audits to the IGO for review and eventual investigation. The IGO provided administrative support to the UNHCR Audit Service, in accordance with the existing memorandum of understanding between the offices, and collaborated in strengthening the capacity of OIOS to audit protection systems and procedures.
- Through formal meetings and informal discussions, the IGO regularly updated executive management on important trends and emerging issues. Additionally, UNHCR's new Strategic Oversight Service, established in the IGO to perform deeper analysis, opened three inquiries into management areas where recent problems had been identified. Firstly, it reviewed the past and current situation concerning UNHCR's access to refugee registration data in Uganda, with the purpose of identifying lessons learned that could be replicated in other operations. The findings of the report have been shared with senior management for action. Secondly, an inquiry into partnership management is currently being finalized and is expected to inform future policies on implementing partnerships, the regionalization process and adjustments to the internal control framework. Thirdly, based on the findings highlighted in a number of recent reviews and several critical recommendations issued in the past by the UNHCR Audit Service, the Strategic Oversight Service launched a comparative review of seven operations in order to determine how effectively UNHCR is implementing its emergency policy, to analyse identified gaps and to offer lessons learned.

Impact of the 2018 developments and projections for 2019

- The above developments had a significant impact on the work of the IGO, particularly the Investigation Service. The significant increase in misconduct complaints, including the most complex categories of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, as well as other demands placed on the IGO, required continuous re-prioritization of the workload, streamlining of procedures and the development of new and innovative approaches to conducting investigations.
- The IGO projects that misconduct complaints will continue to rise in 2019, primarily due to the sustained focus of executive management on integrity and risk management. The IGO has observed a correlation between the filling of risk management positions in the field and the increase in complaints received from these operations. For example, Uganda and Kenya, both countries with established risk management positions, counted for 35 per cent of all misconduct complaints received in 2018. By the end of 2019, UNHCR expects to have 23 risk management positions in place, as compared to 3 in 2017. Given these trends and the continued emphasis on sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, the Investigation Service requires additional experienced investigators to effectively carry out its work. In the meantime, the Investigation Service will continue to carefully balance its priorities to ensure that the available resources are most appropriately applied. The IGO is now present in four locations: Bangkok, Geneva, Nairobi and Pretoria.
- The Investigation Service is constantly seeking to improve its performance and service delivery. In 2019, three separate reviews are taking place that are expected to lead to improvements in how the Investigation Service carries out its work. The United Nations Development Programme will conduct a peer review, the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System will undertake an inspection of the investigation function (in UNHCR and in other participating organizations) and external consultants will shortly finalize their review of UNHCR's response to sexual exploitation and abuse, including related investigations.

- Strategic Oversight will continue to perform inquiries and maintain a broad overview of oversight activities and findings in the organization. This will allow the IGO to provide the High Commissioner and the Executive Committee with additional independent assurances of the effectiveness of UNHCR's risk management and internal control activities. Strategic Oversight will also continue to facilitate meetings with various oversight bodies in 2019, which will provide regular opportunities to re-assess oversight plans and findings against organizational risks and related risk mitigation plans, and help support the Inspector General in her ability to advise executive management.

UNHCR, 12 February 2019