

**Eighty-third meeting of the Standing Committee  
8-10 March 2022**

**Agenda item 4 (c)**

**Oral update on the work of the Inspector General's Office**

**Introduction** – In 2021, guided by UNHCR's [policy on independent oversight](#) and the internal administrative instruction on conducting investigations, the Inspector General's Office (IGO) ensured coherence and coordination of independent oversight activities; the [provision of an independent investigations function](#); and the delivery of assurance, strategic analysis, insight, follow-up and identification of significant risks.

**IGO strategy 2021-2026** – Despite the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on working modalities, the IGO continued to make steady progress on implementing its five-year strategy as set out by the Inspector General at previous meetings of the Executive Committee and the Standing Committee. The overall strategic objective is to ensure that UNHCR has an effective independent oversight system and maintains the confidence of its stakeholders in terms of UNHCR's efficiency, economy and effectiveness. The IGO comprises the Strategic Oversight Service and the Investigation Service, and supported by the Inspector General's front office.

**Strategic oversight** – Independent oversight workplans and oversight recommendations have been consolidated on two online platforms respectively. These provide management with an overview of oversight plans and results at the organizational level, as well as analysis for specific follow-up. In 2021, [independent oversight providers](#) engaged in meaningful dialogue with a view to developing a coherent workplan for 2022. They also agreed on an oversight plan for the business transformation programme, expressing support for measures to modernize UNHCR. The Strategic Oversight Service sought to develop its capacity to analyse oversight findings and to be able to contribute insights in its own right. During 2021, the Strategic Oversight Service undertook various ad hoc analyses, both country-specific and thematic. It reviewed second line management oversight within the context of UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization efforts. It also continued to facilitate and support the work of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) and act as UNHCR's focal point for the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). In 2022, the process of renewing the memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) provides an opportunity for the IGO to further enhance the oversight and integrity system by supporting OIOS in modernizing UNHCR's internal audit service.

**Investigations** – There was an increase of 27 per cent in complaints received in 2021, from some 1,140 in 2020 to 1,450 in 2021. Over 1,600 complaints were assessed<sup>1</sup> in 2021, of which 44 per cent were closed on intake, 38 per cent were referred, 8 per cent were investigated by the IGO, 7 per cent were referred to implementing partners for investigation and 3 per cent were unfounded. In 2021, 150 complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse were received with identified or identifiable victims (in comparison with 160 in 2020), 83 per cent of which implicated implementing partner staff. The IGO received 52 complaints of sexual harassment (in comparison with 48 in 2020), of which 44 per cent implicated implementing partner staff. These led to 20 investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse, and 10 investigations of sexual harassment by the IGO. Nearly 160 investigations were finalized, an increase of 22 per cent compared to 2020, with a substantiation rate of 50 per cent (55 per cent in 2020). To ensure lessons were learned, the IGO issued 40 management implication reports for consideration and action by UNHCR management (compared with 40 in 2020). Balancing a victim-centred approach with witness protection and due process rights remains a key challenge. From 2022, the IGO will undertake a new function in assisting the Ethics Office to gather facts during the preliminary review stage of assessing retaliation complaints. The policy and operational changes to reflect the IGO's new role are near final. The IGO has also been working with other entities at headquarters to support improved handling of workplace challenges that do not amount to misconduct.

**Capacity enhancement** – A staff development programme was undertaken by the IGO in 2021, including the provision of specialist open-source training for investigators and qualitative data analysis training for the oversight team. In addition, the IGO implemented enhanced remote data gathering tools to support investigations, which reduced reliance on field missions and field information technology staff, and increased the speed and integrity of investigations.

**Resources** – The IGO has taken a range of steps to improve its efficiency and effectiveness to handle the increasing numbers of complaints it receives, including streamlining its intake process. In November

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<sup>1</sup> The assessment in 2021 included pending complaints from 2020.

2021, measures were taken to address the increasing backlog of complaints, and over 570 intake assessments were completed. Additional resources to support the change in the protection against retaliation remit and to support the investigations team, have been granted as of 2022. A zero-based two-year budget proposal will be prepared for 2023-2024 under UNHCR's new planning, budgeting and monitoring system, COMPASS.

**Conclusion** – The year 2021 saw strengthened consultation and positive engagement, both among independent oversight providers and with UNHCR management, on the identification, assessment and addressing of key issues and challenges facing the organization. In general, independent oversight findings throughout the year confirmed that UNHCR has maintained satisfactory management oversight of operations, despite the challenges raised by a record number of emergency declarations as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. The IGO is working hand-in-hand with management to ensure UNHCR's independent oversight and integrity system is efficient, economic and effective.

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*UNHCR, 18 February 2022*