

Meeting of the Standing Committee

8-9 September 2026

Agenda item 2(c)

Oral update on integrity in UNHCR

Reinforcing integrity in UNHCR

Safeguarding integrity is essential for UNHCR to deliver on its mandate. Accountability and ethical conduct are equally important to maintain the trust of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, donors and partners. The current operating environment, characterized by protracted displacement situation, growing humanitarian needs, resource constraints, and organizational change presents heightened risk and can increase exposure to fraud, corruption, misconduct, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, and weaknesses in control.

These circumstances underscore the importance of continued investment in prevention, oversight, accountability, and a culture that enables concerns to be raised and addressed. To reinforce the organization's integrity framework in this challenging context, the High Commissioner launched an internal Integrity Action Plan in early 2026. The Plan provides an overarching framework for strengthening accountability, ethical conduct, and trust across the organization.

This update focuses on four complementary components of the UNHCR integrity architecture: 1) Enterprise Risk Management, 2) protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, 3) ethics, and 4) ombuds-related work and mediation. Together these components contribute to preventing and managing integrity risks, supporting ethical decision-making, promoting safe and respectful workplaces, and strengthening organizational learning and accountability. Consistent with their respective mandates, the Ethics Office and the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator have provided independent updates. The updates on Enterprise Risk Management and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment are presented as part of the management update.

Enterprise Risk Management

Enterprise Risk Management continues to strengthen UNHCR's ability to anticipate, manage and mitigate risks. The 2026 risk review assessed 1,280 risks and opportunities across the organization and identified heightened integrity risks associated with resource constraints, staffing gaps and reduced monitoring capacity and organizational change. Supported for the first time by AI-enabled workflows and guidance tools, the risk review is informing management action, resource prioritization and stronger oversight.

Fraud prevention remained a key focus. Nearly 1,000 colleagues participated in the International Fraud Awareness Week, while targeted engagements in high-risk operations such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan and the Sahel strengthened awareness of fraud risks and preventive controls. Building on recommendations from the audit conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, Enterprise Risk Management will undertake a global fraud risk assessment to further strengthen fraud risk management.

Enterprise Risk Management also advanced risk management capability across UNHCR, its partners, and the wider United Nations system, including through its role as co-chair of the Risk Management Forum, a United Nations system-wide forum, established by the High-Level Committee on

Management. Implementation of the UNHCR Risk Management Strategy through 2027 will support continued progress in strengthening risk maturity and fostering a more risk-aware organizational culture.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

UNHCR continued efforts to prevent and respond to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, with a focus on strengthening capacity at the field level and enhancing community engagement, victim support, and system-wide accountability. UNHCR prioritized support to its global network of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse focal points. A dedicated online training programme and accompanying webinars reached more than 460 personnel serving in these roles and highlighted good practices from 11 country operations, strengthening expertise, peer learning, and consistent implementation of policies and procedures across the organization.

UNHCR also invested in locally driven prevention efforts. Refugee-led and women-led organizations in 13 countries were supported through the Community Outreach and Communication Fund to develop context-specific awareness materials on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. This was done in partnership with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

A victim-centred approach remained at the core of UNHCR's response. The Victim Care Team continued to provide direct support to victims, issue guidance for managers on addressing sexual harassment, and advance inter-agency efforts to incorporate the perspectives of victims into policy and practice. UNHCR also marked the third anniversary of NotOnlyMe, a confidential online platform for survivors of sexual harassment, which has supported more than 300 registered users since its launch. In addition, UNHCR worked with United Nations partners to advance implementation of the United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, including through capacity-building in Bangladesh and South Sudan.

Looking ahead, addressing sexual misconduct will remain a priority for UNHCR. Building on the findings and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system, UNHCR will continue to play a leading role in system-wide efforts to advance accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse, while advocating for more coherent personnel vetting and screening, timely victim assistance, data collection and analysis, and improved reporting across the United Nations system.

Independent update provided by the Ethics Office

The Ethics Office continued to provide independent and confidential advice and guidance to personnel across UNHCR on ethical standards, conflicts of interest, outside activities, protection against retaliation and ethical decision-making. During a period of significant organizational change, it remained actively engaged in supporting personnel and managers in navigating complex ethical issues while helping to reinforce integrity, accountability and trust across the organization.

The Ethics Office identified several trends warranting continued attention. An increasing proportion of retaliation-related concerns arose in the context of restructuring and workforce adjustment measures, underscoring the importance of transparency, fairness and effective communication throughout organizational change processes. It also observed that a growing proportion of concerns progressed to formal review, suggesting increasing complexity and sensitivity in the matters being raised.

These observations are discussed in greater detail in the [Ethics Office annual report](#)¹, which identifies a number of emerging risk indicators relevant to organizational integrity, confidence in reporting mechanisms and institutional trust.

These trends reinforce the importance of maintaining personnel confidence in reporting mechanisms and fostering a workplace culture in which concerns can be raised safely and addressed fairly. A strong organizational integrity system depends not only on accessible reporting channels but also on clear governance, effective safeguards, timely follow-up and effective coordination across the functions responsible for prevention, advice, investigation and accountability.

Looking ahead, the Ethics Office will continue to support the strengthening of UNHCR's integrity framework, including through the review of the Protection against Retaliation framework, enhanced ethics learning and outreach, increased capacity of managers on ethical leadership, and continued efforts to promote a culture of integrity, accountability and speak-up across the organization.

Independent update provided by the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator

The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator continued to provide confidential, independent, impartial, and informal assistance to personnel across UNHCR. During a period marked by funding reductions, organizational restructuring and workforce adjustments, it supported colleagues and leadership through confidential consultations, conflict resolution services, facilitated dialogue and organizational learning initiatives. Through its work at the individual, team, and organizational levels, the Office also provided upward feedback on emerging concerns and systemic issues affecting the workforce. Demand for its services increased significantly, reflecting the important role of informal resolution mechanisms in helping personnel navigate uncertainty and workplace challenges. In 2025, the Office recorded a 72 per cent increase in visitors seeking conflict resolution (1,806 visitors), a 33 per cent increase in mediation services (316 cases), and a 135 per cent increase in outreach activities, reaching almost 12,300 participants.²

The work of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator provided a unique vantage point on the human impact of organizational change. Concerns frequently related to workforce adjustments, uncertainty regarding future employment, workplace relationships, organizational decision-making, and perceptions of procedural fairness. The Office also observed concerns related to medical-related processes, including sick leave and return-to-work support mechanisms. At the same time, support and recourse functions across the organization faced increasing demand while operating with reduced capacity, while the Office itself experienced a substantial increase in requests for assistance. These observations highlight the importance of adequately resourced support mechanisms, early intervention, and trusted spaces for dialogue. At a time of heightened demand and constrained resources, the Office ensured access to its services by engaging in virtual missions, leveraging pro bono mediation support, and collaborating with other UN ombuds offices. These measures enabled the Office to sustain critical conflict resolution and dialogue services across the organization.

Alongside casework, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator organized Ubuntu Cafés across regions and languages to support colleagues. These facilitated dialogues enabled personnel to exchange experiences, provide mutual support and reflect on emerging challenges. Feedback consistently highlighted the importance of safe spaces for dialogue and peer connection during periods of uncertainty. The Office also provided regular feedback to management based on recurring case trends,

¹ [UNHCR Ethics Office annual report 2025 | UNHCR](#)

² [UNHCR Ombudsman and Mediator's Year in Review 2025](#)

visitor concerns and mediation outcomes. This work culminated in the publication of the Ombudsman Special Report on the 2025 Downsizing and Restructuring³, which identified key patterns, workplace dynamics and opportunities for organizational learning.

These observations highlighted the critical role of trust, communication, psychological safety and accessible support mechanisms in organizational resilience. As UNHCR adapts to a changing operational environment, maintaining effective, independent and adequately resourced support functions will remain essential. The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator will continue to support personnel and management through informal resolution processes, identify systemic themes while safeguarding confidentiality, and promote constructive dialogue and organizational learning across the organization.

Conclusion

The efforts outlined above demonstrate the continued commitment of UNHCR to strengthening integrity, reinforcing accountability, and fostering a culture of ethical conduct, trust and respect across the organization. In a period of significant operational, financial and organizational change, strong integrity systems remain essential to managing risk, safeguarding resources, supporting personnel and ensuring accountability to forcibly displaced and stateless people, host countries and donors, and partners. UNHCR will continue to strengthen prevention, oversight, learning and accountability as core elements of effective and principled humanitarian action.

³ [UNHCR Ombudsman and Mediator's Year in Review 2025 Annex 1](#)