

**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Standing Committee**

**Eighty-fifth meeting  
19-20 September 2022**

Held at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), Geneva  
**Summary record\*, Tuesday, 20 September 2022, at 10 a.m.**

*Chairperson: Ms. Katharina Stasch .....(Germany)*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources** (*continued*)

**a. Finance and oversight** (*continued*)

**(iii) Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on internal audit in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** ([A/AC.96/1225](#))

1. **Ms. Ndiaye** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services), introducing the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on internal audit in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/1225), said that it covered the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. OIOS provided recommendations aimed at improving operational governance, risk management and control processes in UNHCR. The OIOS risk-based work planning process was guided by the UNHCR corporate risk register. OIOS had identified six audit activities which collectively contributed to the achievement of the organization's strategic objectives: fair protection and documentation; security from violence and exploitation; basic needs and services; community empowerment and self reliance; durable solutions; and favourable protection. During the period addressed by the report, OIOS had completed 18 audits, 6 at headquarters and 12 involving field operations, as well as an advisory review of decentralization and regionalization.

2. Although pandemic travel restrictions had meant that 10 of the 12 field operation audits had been conducted remotely, OIOS had been able to travel since the last quarter of 2021 and would continue to use a combination of remote and on-site assessments for physical verification and data collection. The 18 audits contained 105 recommendations, 79 of which were directed towards improvements in field operations. Including recommendations issued in earlier years, 137 recommendations remained unimplemented at the end of the period. The implementation rate had been lower than in pre-pandemic years. OIOS continued to work closely with UNHCR to address implementation, focusing special attention on the 33 open or overdue recommendations that were older than 24 months or had missed their target date by over 12 months. OIOS received effective cooperation from UNHCR management and staff, and the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee continued to provide guidance and best practices that helped strengthen results. OIOS also coordinated its activities with the Inspector General's Office and the Evaluation Services in UNHCR and with the United Nations Board of Auditors and the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit.

3. **Mr. Baritt** (Controller and Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, UNHCR), responding to questions raised by delegations at the previous meeting, said that while the OIOS report pointed to a decline in the implementation rate from 63 per cent in 2019-2020 to 29 per cent in 2021-2022, it also noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on efforts to implement recommendations. UNHCR took the recommendations very seriously and actions were being taken to improve the implementation rate. Looking at the annual implementation rate for the past few years, it had generally been around 48 per cent. The high rate of 63 per cent in 2019-2020 was attributable to an extra effort to close the backlog of a large number of recommendations. The low rate of 29 per cent in 2021-2022 was in part attributable to the timing of issuance of audit reports compared to the due dates for implementation. Of the 137 recommendations outstanding on 30 June 2022, 42 per cent were not yet due and 34 per cent were less than one year overdue. Some responses to the recommendations of both OIOS and the Office of Internal Oversight Services would be incorporated into the Business Transformation Programme. In the past, such recommendations were addressed on an ad hoc basis, but now a comprehensive transformation programme was under way with a view to incorporating all responses into a single system. That meant implementation might take a little bit longer, but it would end up being better.

4. The European Union had raised a number of questions at the previous meeting, including how to ensure robust monitoring through the regional bureaux. There had always been coordination between the headquarters divisions, the regional bureaux and the country offices. Now, the monitoring and control functions, as well as support capabilities, had been reinforced at the regional bureaux through the decentralization and regionalization process, with the appointment of regional

controllers and with all structures working more closely together and reporting to the bureau director. The structures, roles and responsibilities at the regional level had been defined, but new roles relating to the new cloud-based systems needed to be clarified. The point made about strengthening information security was welcome and had been duly noted. Concerning COMPASS, he said that regular updates had been given through the regular sessions on budget and funding, but an informal briefing session could be held if delegations wished to receive further information. Regarding the question about harmonized cost classifications, he said that UNHCR already had harmonized cost reporting categories. The annual meeting of the Finance and Budget Network (FBN) had recently discussed how to further review and define operating costs, which would help to define indirect costs.

5. The Russian Federation had raised questions about the decentralization and regionalization process and whether there was a road map for the reform. The process was well established: key performance indicators showed that it had resulted in the delegation of decision-making authority objectives and certain efficiency objectives. Feedback from the field had demonstrated that the move had been timely due to the COVID-19 crisis. After three years of implementation, UNHCR would perform an evaluation of the decentralization and regionalization process. Detailed plans were in place with regard to the interdependencies between the systems within the Business Transformation Programme. The Russian Federation had queried paragraph 11 of the OIOS report, which specifically referred to what UNHCR did with information coming from advisories. To have a more holistic view, it was going to use the information received from advisories in the existing internal tracking and monitoring mechanism for OIOS audit recommendations and recommendations by the United Nations Board of Auditors. The OIOS report highlighted that UNHCR was on the right track to achieve an advanced level of risk maturity. With respect to the question on paragraph 33 of the OIOS report, concerning the budgetary allocation for child protection in South Sudan, he said that child protection was a priority incorporated into a number of budgeting categories, including investments, education and mental health. In response to the OIOS recommendation, UNHCR would be looking into how to better prioritize children during resource allocation in the South Sudan, but that was obviously a challenge given the limited funding available there.

6. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR) expressed her appreciation for the cooperation between the Office of Internal Oversight Services and UNHCR, which had been particularly intense and productive in recent months, especially on matters such as the risk-based approach.

7. She welcomed the discussion at the current meeting of the massive transformation being undertaken by UNHCR, one aspect of which was the Business Transformation Programme. It was encouraging to see that delegations strongly supported that effort. Several of the systems that UNHCR relied on, from donor tracking to partnership management and overall resource management were becoming technologically obsolete. They were inadequate to sustain the complex, large-scale and far-flung operations of an organization like UNHCR, mandated to serve so many. The six projects, substantial ones in their own right, that were pulled together under the Business Transformation Programme would enable coherent oversight and management of interdependencies and ensure strong direction and project leads. The sequencing of the individual projects was key: COMPASS had gone live in January 2021 and would continue to be improved, while the new human resources system, would go live in two weeks. The other four components would be cloud-based and implemented by mid-2023. Continuous enhancements would be possible, because UNHCR would be working with a cloud-based programme. All of those tools would allow it to manage a modern organization.

8. She did not wish to imply that everything was working perfectly. It was a highly interdependent set of activities that the organization was trying to bring forward. Now that UNHCR was a decentralized organization, it was particularly important that each part of the system should fit together seamlessly. The type of oversight instituted in the organization should help ensure that took place. A big challenge was change management, some aspects of which included the organizational culture, data transformation and ways to improve accountability and feedback mechanisms. A review of the resource allocation framework had begun. It was important to roll out change in a responsible and sequenced manner and to acknowledge that unexpected events, like the Ukraine situation, might need to be taken into account along the way.

(iv) **Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (EC/73/SC/CRP.20)**

9. **Mr. Ndoko** (Chairperson, Independent Audit and Oversight Committee), presenting the annual report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee for the period from July 2021 to June 2022, said that the Committee had met in three sessions over the period and it had also been given the opportunity to meet with the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner.

10. The report identified the increasing complexity of the operating environment and in particular the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlighted the risks with respect to future funding, given the growing trend of global risk and crisis and the need for more unearmarked funding that would allow more flexibility in allocation. Concerning business transformation, the Committee supported the increased focus on governance and leadership and the roll-out of the Business Transformation Programme and cloud-based systems, which would streamline processes and improve efficiency. Decentralization and regionalization had moved forward, even within the complexity of the COVID-19 period, and the Committee had been able to arrange useful meetings with three of the regional bureaux to assess progress. Part of the pursuit of decentralization and regionalization and business transformation would be to ensure business continuity and that synergies were not left aside. Advice had been included in the report on improving communication in the field, which would be essential during those processes.

11. Concerning integrity, the report had highlighted the importance of staff wellbeing and the extreme strain placed on staff, not only as a result of the pandemic but with the multiplication of emergencies. It had indicated a need to return to the post-pandemic business model. The Committee had commended the disciplinary process carried out by the Division of Human Resources and the Legal Affairs Service, which demonstrated a high level of diligence and collaboration. It had also commended UNHCR for the clarity and informative value of the 2021 report on the practice of the High Commissioner in disciplinary matters and cases of criminal behaviour, which it considered to be best practice within the United Nations system.

12. In the context of external oversight, the Committee had already expressed its appreciation for the quality of the 2021 financial statements. In future years, the Committee would be looking at how some of the financial statements would be adjusted to conform to International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). As speakers had already pointed out, the fact that the external auditors had been able to give an unqualified audit opinion should not be taken for granted: in June 2022, it had not been clear whether the opinion would be completed because of the delay in the reporting of implementing partners. Its successful completion was a result of the leadership of UNHCR and excellent communication with the Auditor-General of Germany.

13. The Committee had pushed for the inclusion of a specific type of model in risk-based internal audit planning; encouraged UNHCR and the Office of Internal Oversight Services to further clarify the indicators used in their engagement with one another; and suggested that UNHCR and the Office consider jointly developing an internal audit charter, as had been done by a number of other agencies. The Committee had welcomed the availability of resources for the Ombudsman to help to address concerns raised by staff.

14. Looking ahead, the Committee would continue to focus on the Business Transformation Programme as the finalization stage approached; on decentralization and regionalization; and on the risks associated with cybersecurity. It would also continue to advise on funding patterns and trends and engage with UNHCR on reducing its carbon footprint and investing resources into climate change adaptation strategies.

15. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) welcomed the proposal for an internal audit charter to be developed jointly by UNHCR and the Office of Internal Oversight Services but said that a draft of such a charter should be submitted to Member States, in the context of transparency and accountability. Referring to remote working mechanisms, including remote audit techniques, as mentioned in paragraph 8 of the report, he asked what Committee thought about such techniques and how it rated their effectiveness. He also asked UNHCR to indicate whether the consolidated platform for tracking recommendations could be made accessible to Member States. Access to such platforms had been made possible in other United Nations specialized agencies and would be useful for UNHCR Member States. Finally, he asked for clarification on whether any deadlines had been

established for investigations into allegations of misconduct, mentioned in paragraph 18.

16. **Ms. Bennett** (United States of America) agreed with the Committee that UNHCR should proceed with the headquarters alignment phase of the decentralization and regionalization process in order to clarify the roles of headquarters and regional bureaux. She echoed the Committee's commendation of UNHCR on the high level of training among peer advisors and focal points working on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the strong completion rates by the workforce of mandatory e-learning. She agreed with the Committee's views on the importance of extending guidance, support and training to implementing partner staff. She also agreed that the practice of the High Commissioner in disciplinary matters and cases of criminal behaviour should be considered best practice in the United Nations system and an effective tool for transparency. The United States shared the Committee's view that the project, reporting, oversight and monitoring solution (PROMS) currently under development showed potential for improving programme management at the field level and should remain a primary objective of organizational transformation.

17. UNHCR's dependency on a limited number of donor countries, an increase in earmarking and the Ukraine emergency had had a deleterious effect on funding for the rest of the world, representing a significant risk to UNHCR's operations overall. Accordingly, the United States fully supported UNHCR's advocacy for and diversification of funding beyond traditional sources, including through private sector fund-raising initiatives and cooperation with the World Bank and other development actors. The United States was making an additional contribution in 2022 to underfunded operations and called on Member States to examine their own abilities to increase funding and support for UNHCR.

18. **Mr. Vidvei** (Norway) thanked UNHCR for its important and valued work and encouraged it to take a proactive approach to addressing recurring issues. Norway valued UNHCR's continued efforts to strengthen its internal controls, anti-fraud efforts and cybersecurity, particularly amid several internal transformation processes and the emergence of major crises globally. It encouraged the organization to pursue the clarification of roles and responsibilities and the strengthening of its accountability framework. The internal audit had revealed that most weaknesses in field operations concerned low compliance and high inherent risk due to operational challenges and insufficient resources, and those issues must be addressed through strong monitoring and control by the relevant regional bureaux. More information in that regard would be welcome.

19. Noting with appreciation UNHCR's move towards an advanced level of risk maturity, Norway looked forward to learning more about the effects of aligning the 2022 risk framework with the results-based management framework. It welcomed the organization's commitment at the highest level and resources dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment. Norway encouraged further efforts to that end and supported the inclusion of implementing partners in that regard. UNHCR's mandate required it to uphold the highest standards of management and accountability, and the prevention of fraud, corruption, sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse and other forms of misconduct was essential. Lastly, Norway invited UNHCR to provide more information on the risk rating of recommendations from the internal auditor and on recurrent issues.

20. **Mr. Ndoko** (Chairperson, Independent Audit and Oversight Committee), responding to the Russian Federation's query regarding remote work, said that, even pre-pandemic, a significant proportion of control and verification work had been conducted remotely. The opinion of the Committee, as expressed in its report, was that onsite work undoubtedly carried benefits; it therefore had noted with satisfaction that internal and external auditors alike had conducted work on-site as soon as travel had become possible in the wake of the pandemic. However, a combination of remote and on-site work was optimal, particularly with the addition of automated systems as part of the Business Transformation Programme.

21. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR), replying to the Russian Federation's question about an internal audit charter, explained that UNHCR was still in the process of considering whether the development of such a charter would be the right avenue. In response to the question on the recommendation tracking platform, she said it was an internal management tool that would not be considered for public access. However, UNHCR welcomed comments by Member

States on their responses to the recommendations by the Board of Auditors, the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Joint Inspection Unit, which would remain public. Replying to the question on investigations into allegations of misconduct, she said UNHCR did not impose deadlines but did have targets. The target for replies to colleagues wishing to lodge a complaint was eight weeks, although the current norm stood at four weeks, as the team at the Inspector General's Office worked hard to move quickly. The normal length of an investigation currently stood at six months, but complaints were triaged and allegations of sexual misconduct were expedited. As a result, the average length of investigations into sexual misconduct stood at four months, but that, of course, depended on the individual case, some of which were particularly challenging.

22. She thanked the United States for the supportive comments made on numerous issues and echoed her call for more donors in order to broaden UNHCR's funding base. PROMS would have a substantial impact in terms of programme improvements. Regarding Norway's support for the inclusion of implementing partners in work on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, she emphasized the strong inter-agency leadership role played by UNHCR in promoting best practices in preventing sexual harassment.

23. **Mr. Baritt** (Controller and Director, Division of Finance and Administrative Management, UNHCR), referring to Norway's question of whether it was possible for the Office of Internal Oversight Services to consolidate and assess the impacts, and the risks, of each of its recommendations in each of its reports and to provide a more comprehensive analysis, he said that UNHCR would share that question with the Office.

(v) **UNHCR financial regulations and rules (EC/73/SC/CRP.21)**

24. **Mr. Baritt** (Controller and Director, Division of Finance and Administrative Management, UNHCR) said that UNHCR's two-year process of seeking permission to draft its own financial regulations had unfortunately not ended as hoped. The United Nations had its own financial regulations and financial rules, while UNHCR had its own financial rules but used the United Nations Financial Regulations. Explaining to field staff and donors how to marry together the United Nations Financial Regulations and the UNHCR financial rules was inefficient, caused confusion and gave rise to risks. The hope had therefore been to present the final draft of UNHCR regulations to the Standing Committee at its present meeting, but that had unfortunately not been possible.

25. The application for permission to draft financial regulations had been sent to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, which had responded with four observations: the operational urgency of financial regulations was unclear; the approval and adoption of revised regulations was under the sole purview of the General Assembly; approval of the request could lead to a proliferation of requests from other agencies; and such a proliferation would result in inconsistent standards and norms between agencies. UNHCR had addressed those four observations: the roll-out in 2023 of PROMS, an expensive piece of software, required policy coherence, which rendered the drafting of financial regulations operationally urgent; the Executive Committee could serve as the approval body of the financial regulations as the executive boards of other agencies had already done; and all United Nations agencies of scale already had their own financial regulations – with the exception of UNHCR.

26. Discussions had been held with the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, which had agreed that UNHCR required financial regulations that were "fit for purpose", but an animated debate surrounding the particularities of the approval process had resulted in no action being taken. UNHCR Member States had been briefed on the situation in June 2022 and presented with three potential ways forward: do nothing; attempt to negotiate once more with the Fifth Committee; or endeavour to capture the improvements that would have been brought by new financial regulations through adjustments to the existing UNHCR financial rules, which the High Commissioner had the delegated authority to change. Owing to limited support for returning to the Fifth Committee, the third option was chosen.

27. The revised financial rules were therefore before the Standing Committee. The changes were intended to better align UNHCR with the United Nations Financial Regulations by highlighting the non-applicability of certain regulations, such as those relating to peacekeeping or regular budget assessments, and by including UNHCR policy at the rule level. The main changes were:

clarifications on the UNHCR budgetary process; new rules to reflect the process for the regular budget allotment received by UNHCR from the United Nations; revisions to internal control provisions to include key principles; simplified rules on write-off; new rules on the period for the appropriations for commitments; new rules on asset management reflecting the updated language used in the United Nations rules; simplified the language on programme implementation; a raised threshold of authority delegated by the High Commissioner to the Controller for approval of ex-gratia payments from \$5,000 to \$25,000; adjustments to rules on procurement; and simplified language on the Working Capital Fund for Voluntary Contributions. The key improvements to highlight were the reduced risk of misinterpretation, increased clarity on the application of the financial framework governing UNHCR, and facilitation of understanding by external donors and partners of the internal control framework applicable to UNHCR.

28. Thanking Member States for their support and contributions throughout the process, he invited them to approve the draft decision contained in annex II to document EC/73/SC/CRP.21. All amendments and comments from Member States had been incorporated, apart from the request to adjust the maximum amount to be made available for any one programme from the operational reserve from \$100 million to \$50 million, which would be subsequently reflected. Further comments from Member States remained welcome.

29. **Mr. Koh** (Republic of Korea) said that his country supported the efforts to align UNHCR's financial rules with United Nations Financial Regulations in a comprehensive and harmonious manner. He reiterated that the maximum amount to be made available for any one programme from the operational reserve should not be increased to \$100 million, as proposed under revised UNHCR financial rule 413.9. As the maximum amount had already been increased five-fold from \$10 million to \$50 million in 2020, another significant increase was premature. In addition, retaining the maximum as it was would maintain a balance between flexibility in finance management, responsibility and accountability. The term "budget period" used in the same rule should be changed to "financial period."

30. **Ms. Briones** (Philippines) noted with interest the challenges faced during the discussions held with the Fifth Committee. UNHCR's ongoing transformation and modernization process would allow it to become more flexible, financially solvent and tightly regulated, enabling it to better deliver on its mandate and to deploy humanitarian assistance on the ground. She asked whether additional efforts to pursue the original goal of achieving a full set of financial regulations would be made in the years to come.

31. **Ms. Bennett** (United States of America) noted with regret that, following the Executive Committee's endorsement of UNHCR's proposal to seek United Nations General Assembly approval to develop and promulgate its own financial regulations, the process had concluded without securing such approval. The United States supported the proposal for an alternative way forward through amendments to the UNHCR financial rules within the existing framework of the United Nations Financial Regulations. While the approach would not bring all the benefits of a full realignment of UNHCR financial rules and regulations, the revised and streamlined set of financial rules would still support the efficiencies being pursued through the ongoing business transformation process. The United States therefore supported the draft decision.

32. **Mr. Ishida** (Japan) supported the draft decision. The revised rules would provide clear guidelines to UNHCR for the development of its budget, the allocation of the United Nations regular budget and the strengthening of internal control and audit. He expressed particular thanks to Mr. Baritt and his team for their devoted work.

33. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) welcomed the cooperative process that had led to the current discussion. He noted the complexity of the proposed amendments to the financial rules and the creative way in which UNHCR had updated that fundamental document. Recognizing that the innovative approach used by UNHCR was not common in the United Nations system, he asked whether it had sought the opinion and expertise of the External Auditor and the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee to ensure the legitimacy of the chosen approach. Such an evaluation would be prudent prior to further discussion at the upcoming session of the Executive Committee. Furthermore, he sought clarification with regard to the meaning in financial rule 101.5, which concerned the procedure for reviewing the financial rules, of the phrase "in consultation with the

Executive Committee". In his opinion, that meant that any such process should include the active participation of Member States, which had been the case in the current review. Finally, he said that the amendment of the financial rules should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of UNHCR's operations. Therefore, he proposed that an evaluation of the amendments should be carried out one year after their adoption.

34. **Mr. Baritt** (Controller and Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, UNHCR) thanked the representative of the Republic of Korea for his comments and said that both amendments he had proposed would be incorporated into the next draft of the document. He also thanked the representative of Japan for his Government's support. Concerning the question from the representative of the Philippines, he said that UNHCR was not planning in the immediate future to seek anew the authority to develop and promulgate its own financial regulations. Such an endeavour was not out of the question, but would require more time for the Standing Committee to prepare adequately for the discussions in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly; meanwhile, the focus of the UNHCR's work in the next two years would be to implement the outcomes of the Business Transformation Programme. He agreed with the representative of the United States of America that, while the situation was not ideal, the amendments to the financial rules would still lead to efficiencies within UNHCR. Responding to the comments made by the representative of the Russian Federation, he said that an innovative approach had in fact been required by the situation in which UNHCR had found itself. It had approached the External Auditor and the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee for their comments, which were to be received by 26 September 2022 and would be shared with the Executive Committee. Concerning rule 101.5, he agreed about the importance of working with Member States: consultation was part of the spirit and practice of UNHCR. He also agreed with the proposal to evaluate the amendments after their adoption and said that he would work with Member States to ensure that such an evaluation was effective and meaningful. Finally, he thanked Member States for their support and their engagement in the process, which he hoped had led to a better understanding of the financial regulations and rules and UNHCR's governance processes.

35. **The Chairperson** took it that the Standing Committee wished to adopt the draft decision on the UNHCR financial regulations and rules, as set out in annex II of document EC/73/SC/CRP.21.

36. *It was so decided.*

b. **Human resources, including staff wellbeing (EC/73/SC/CRP.22)**

37. *A short video about the UNHCR workforce was projected.*

38. **Ms. Bennet Sattler** (Director, Division of Human Resources, UNHCR) said that the number of displaced persons had reached 100 million, an unfathomable threshold that reflected the increasingly unpredictable global situation. The UNHCR workforce enabled the organization to respond to that humanitarian need, despite facing security threats, logistical challenges and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Having met members of the workforce in Sudan, Bangladesh, Ukraine and Afghanistan, she remained inspired by their resilience and perseverance, and their willingness to serve the most vulnerable people. That humanitarian spirit united the workforce, which comprised approximately 20,000 people of diverse nationalities, origins, languages, expertise and experiences. She thanked the members of the workforce for their commitment.

39. In the four years since she had begun working for UNHCR, much had changed following the decision to begin a transformation process to modernize humanitarian resources centres through a strong partnership with operations, simplify and streamline human resources processes and increase efficiencies through technology. Those priorities remained the focus of the work of the Division of Human Resources, as it adapted to the evolving needs of the workforce. Human resources should not be complicated; over the years, the Division had made strides towards simplifying daily processes, becoming more field-driven and client-oriented and placing greater emphasis on staff health and wellbeing. The decision had been made to move from the organization's current human resources tool to Workday@UNHCR, a cloud-based, user-friendly human resources system comprising payroll, recruitment, strategic workforce planning, personnel administration, learning and performance management. That had also provided an opportunity to review, simplify and streamline every human resources process and had created a new approach to performance



management. Workday would allow UNHCR to disaggregate workforce data and thus leverage global best practices to achieve its strategic goals, including relating to diversity and inclusion. Boldly embarking on that change during the COVID-19 pandemic and embracing new ways of working, human resource staff members had demonstrated a clear change in mindset that had been inspirational.

40. Diversity, equity and inclusion were fundamental pillars of the UNHCR transformation agenda. While the UNHCR workforce comprised 160 nationalities, and was thus inherently geographically diverse, it also represented differences in gender, age, religion, cultural difference, family composition, educational background and work and life experiences. Diversity was the strength of UNHCR; it was committed to achieving gender parity at all levels, including by hiring equal numbers of men and women in the international Professional category and by focusing on women converting their national roles to international careers. The number of women in leadership roles had increased in the previous year as a direct consequence of the decision that two thirds of the candidates on every shortlist should be women. The goals of gender parity and geographic diversity were complementary rather than competing and required leadership accountability, targeted recruitment and outreach efforts and initiatives to foster an inclusive and enabling environment.

41. It was not enough to achieve quantitative goals without a change in the institutional culture to ensure the inclusion of all. The multi-year action plan on race equality had been finalized in February 2022 and contained key actions to eliminate racial discrimination and racism in the organization. Efforts had also focused on disability inclusion, and the Organization's online systems were being optimized to be more accessible for staff members with disabilities. As internal assignments continued to make up a large part of workforce movement and attrition was low, the Division was seeking to strengthen the development of its national staff and affiliate workforce members to promote representation and growth at all levels.

42. Empowering the members of the workforce to take ownership of their growth and development was vital to a positive employee experience, and thus a key part of the organization's human resources transformation. For that reason, the Division had launched Evolve, a new performance management approach which was designed to support the relationship between manager and employee and place greater emphasis on development and continuous feedback in order to achieve both collective and individual goals. That new tool would help to strengthen talent at all levels and provide dynamic development opportunities. Continuous dialogue was a key element of workforce engagement, and rolling out short, focused surveys provided relevant feedback. By making that feedback available to managers in real time, they were able to make targeted interventions and address gaps and concerns in their teams.

43. In some places, the spotlight on COVID-19 had diminished, replaced by other emergencies. However, she wished to highlight the work of UNHCR's medical and psychosocial professionals, including through the new vaccination policy and other on-the-ground support. By protecting its workforce, UNHCR had been able to stay and deliver to the people it served, despite the challenges. Future challenges relating to COVID-19 would be met with the knowledge, skills and policies that were now in place. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic had contributed to a stronger occupational health and safety framework and had highlighted the vital importance of mental health and psychosocial services.

44. UNHCR's greatest asset was its workforce. The many challenges of the previous year, particularly the emergencies in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Ukraine, had necessitated bold action combined with efforts to enhance efficiency and expediency: getting the right people on the ground at the right time. Never before had UNHCR deployed such a large number of colleagues to an emergency situation so quickly as in Ukraine. The lessons learned from that process would continue to inform the development of policies and procedures across UNHCR.

45. None of the Division's efforts to maximize the potential of the workforce, and thereby the ability of UNHCR to make a difference in the lives of the people it served, would be possible without the generous support of Member States. The world continued to present challenges requiring creativity and innovation, but one thing that did not change was that UNHCR's workforce remained central to everything it did.

46. **Ms. Ramboll** (Norway) recognized the progress made towards a more modern, effective and people-centric human resource function at UNHCR and commended the results achieved towards gender equality in international staff and leadership positions. She encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts towards gender equality, including at higher levels. Commending the emphasis on staff health and wellbeing and the increase in dialogue with the workforce, including through the PeoplePulse surveys, she noted the development of the new performance management tool, Evolve, with a greater focus on team achievements and results-based impact. She paid tribute to UNHCR staff for their dedication to stay and deliver, often under highly challenging circumstances, and noted that a new policy on occupational health and safety had been launched in 2021. Welcoming the information shared on integrity, she encouraged UNHCR to provide relevant updates, including on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as on measures to combat abuse. Given UNHCR's operations in high-risk environments, ensuring a safe and healthy working environment for all was crucial.

47. **Ms. Nzoiki** (Kenya) commended UNHCR staff for staying and delivering, despite difficult circumstances characterized by security threats and tough living conditions. She honoured the memory of those staff members who had paid the ultimate price in the line of duty. Agreeing that a well-supported workforce was better able to care for others, she welcomed efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of the workforce and in particular the focus on mental health. She called on UNHCR to sustain the momentum that had led to an increase in the number of women in leadership positions and in roles at other levels across the workforce. She welcomed the disability inclusion framework and the multi-year action plan on race equality, which were steps towards strengthening inclusion. Lastly, she urged UNHCR to continue working on innovative ways to enhance the wellbeing of its workforce.

48. **Mr. Ishida** (Japan) urged UNHCR to continue its efforts towards workforce diversity and inclusion. Noting the upcoming launch of Workday@UNHCR, he called on the organization to fully integrate that tool with other systems through the Business Transformation Programme in order to ensure that UNHCR had a more robust human resources system.

49. **Ms. Papka** (Nigeria) commended the efforts of UNHCR staff in often difficult field operations, UNHCR's initiatives to prioritize the health and wellbeing of its workforce and simplify human resources processes and the introduction of the vaccination policy. UNHCR's largest presence was in sub-Saharan Africa, where 72 per cent of the workforce was locally recruited and 45 per cent were women. Equitable representation was key within the workforce, and she underscored the need to ensure Member States were informed of vacancy announcements in a timely manner.

50. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) acknowledged the work of UNHCR staff, in particular those on the frontline of humanitarian work. He expressed support for efforts towards inclusion and diversity and urged the organization to continue to enhance representation in terms of gender, disability, age, race, sexual orientation and gender identity. Gender and geographical representation should be ensured at all levels, including in senior leadership roles and in the Junior Professional Officer programme. He asked whether the requirement of having a command of a second United Nations language besides English for entry to and promotion within UNHCR had had an impact on diversity and inclusion, and to what extent that rule was being imposed in Geneva and other locations.

51. **Mr. Karhu** (Finland) said that the rapid evolution of new crises and an increasingly challenging operating environment required a more capable staff than ever. He commended UNHCR for its quick response to humanitarian crises, including the one caused by Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, by filling positions through fast-track procedures. In Ukraine and other crises, the wellbeing of personnel was of crucial importance, and he welcomed the attention paid to staff mental health. Finland acknowledged efforts towards inclusion and diversity, with particular regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, which required further attention in some countries, and urged the organization to continue its efforts to attain gender equality and gender parity at all levels. He asked how the implementation of the disability inclusion framework was being monitored. Finally, he welcomed the Junior Professional Officers programme and encouraged the continuation of cooperation in that regard.

52. **Mr. Widmer** (Switzerland) took note of the successful measures to manage the COVID-19

situation and additional staffing needs relating to the crisis in Ukraine. He welcomed the measures to promote and maintain staff diversity and inclusion. The introduction of digital survey tools was useful and would enhance dialogue with staff across UNHCR. He asked whether UNHCR had an active staff association through which the workforce could submit proposals and grievances. If such an association existed, he asked what role it was playing in the continuous improvement of human resources management. Finally, he asked whether those in leadership roles were fully aware of the system of career progression within UNHCR, so as to ensure a diverse, inclusive and meritocratic organization that promoted a healthy work–life balance.

53. **Ms. Kibere** (Uganda) commended efforts to ensure the wellbeing and safety of UNHCR staff, which would also benefit the people served by the organization. While efforts were being made to ensure that recruitment was based on merit but also reflected a balance of gender, race and nationality and the inclusion of persons with disabilities, she said that more needed to be done to attain equitable regional and geographical distribution of staff. It was particularly important to ensure the representation of those Member States that hosted large numbers of refugees, because the experience of staff from such countries was vital. Moreover, she expressed concern regarding the requirement to have a command of a second United Nations language for recruitment. In countries like her own, where English was widely spoken and access to foreign language teaching was poor, that requirement could be seen as a barrier to recruitment. Any evaluation of that requirement by UNHCR should be shared with Member States.

54. **Ms. Moruke** (South Africa) expressed concern regarding the data on the distribution of professional staff by grade and nationality, which did not demonstrate true geographical representation. The number of staff members from the Southern Africa region, and South Africa in particular, was low. She asked for clarification of the responsibilities of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Southern Africa in reaching out to young professionals from the region, as such people could offer invaluable insights and help to identify durable solutions. She also noted that South African nationals hired by UNHCR were limited to short-term contracts, which did not allow them to expand their professional experience or progress within the organization. She encouraged it to facilitate an open conversation with the Member States in the Southern Africa region to develop opportunities and guidance on how to reach out to professionals in their countries. A more balanced representation of all regions would add new perspectives when addressing challenges and seeking to identify durable solutions to humanitarian situations.

55. **Mr. Mayr** (Germany) commended UNHCR's commitment to its staff and their wellbeing, especially for those deployed in challenging environments. He asked for comments on the barriers to increasing the percentage of women in leadership positions and requested UNHCR to continue to monitor and report on the issue of gender equality. He reiterated his comments regarding the need to protect the mental health of staff and partners.

56. **Ms. Nkole** (Zambia) applauded the resilience of UNHCR staff, despite the difficult and unpredictable environments in which they operated. She noted the ongoing difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise in the number of conflicts and displaced persons and the impact of those challenges on staff wellbeing, as well as the dedication and resilience of the workforce to stay and deliver, despite many challenges. She asked how UNHCR, in partnership with Member States, had conducted targeted outreach campaigns to attract recruitment candidates from underrepresented countries and requested information on the success of those campaigns thus far. She noted with serious concern the underrepresentation of the Southern Africa region in the staffing data published, and asked what corrective measures, if any, had been incorporated into UNHCR policies to ensure that talent spotting was carried out in underrepresented regions.

57. **Ms. Bennett** (United States of America) said that her delegation recognized that the ongoing crises worldwide, including COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, continued to place enormous strain on staff. The United States applauded UNHCR's efforts to diversify its workforce. Increased diversity in leadership roles both at headquarters locations and in the field was of great importance. Diversity and inclusion, with equitable consideration for gender parity, racial equity, equality, disability and age, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity, were a priority for the United States.

58. Her delegation was relieved to read in the report on human resources (EC/73/SC/CRP.22)

that UNHCR's workforce had suffered no fatalities due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the past year, and it paid tribute to the 18 colleagues who had died in 2020 and the first half of 2021 in the pandemic. It sought further information about trends regarding the safety and security of UNHCR's staff worldwide in dangerous contexts.

59. UNHCR's move towards better utilization of technology to manage its human resources was a step in the right direction. Her delegation hoped to see those streamlined processes result in a workforce better equipped to serve persons of concern. Greater flexibility, simplified processes and swifter deployment made for a workforce that was better able to respond to emergencies and protracted crises. Her delegation would like to hear more about the systematic efforts to gauge employee feedback on the ongoing reforms. Given some of the fundamental system-wide changes introduced, she asked whether the PeoplePulse surveys had shown an observable effect on staff morale as the transformation process had been rolled out.

60. **Mr. Tarutin** (Russian Federation) said it was regrettable that UNHCR was introducing concepts in human resource management that had not been agreed upon by Member States. Paragraph 4 of the report stated that UNHCR strove for inclusivity and diversity, including with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity. In its 2018 report, the International Civil Service Commission, which set the service conditions for the United Nations common system, had defined diversity as including equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, cultural, generational and multilingual perspectives and the perspectives of persons with disabilities. Those should be the criteria that guided UNHCR. As indicated in Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, the paramount consideration for the employment of staff should be the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Due consideration should be given to recruiting as broadly as possible on the basis of geographic distribution. His delegation called on UNHCR to pay closer attention to the guidance issued by the United Nations and to refrain from introducing concepts that had not been agreed upon by Member States.

61. He drew attention to the External Auditor's recommendation on the need for UNHCR to develop a comprehensive staff management strategy. Such an innovation would make the work of human resources more structured and transparent. The recommendation should be implemented as soon as possible, in consultation with Member States. Future reports on human resources should include detailed staff statistics; his delegation would like to see how the situation changed over time. It also expected to see an early review of the functioning of the new Workday@UNHCR system. Lastly, he commended efforts to promote multilingualism within UNHCR by making the learning curriculum available in more languages, as stated in paragraph 15 of the report.

62. **Ms. Hanga** (Zimbabwe) said that, despite the complex challenges during the reporting period, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in the number of conflicts and natural disasters, UNHCR continued to be of great service to displaced persons. Her delegation was pleased to note the various innovative measures that the organization had implemented to fulfil its mandate effectively and efficiently. It appreciated the increase of female participation in the total workforce. It welcomed the measures to shorten the recruitment process that had been put in place under urgent conditions to respond quickly to emerging crises.

63. Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest number of employees, accounting for 36 per cent of UNHCR's total workforce. However, her delegation was concerned that Southern Africa had a very low representation, as already pointed out by the delegations of South Africa and Zambia. That weakness and the rather low representation of women from Southern Africa needed to be explained and addressed. Zimbabwe was also concerned about the increase in funding gaps in UNHCR's programmes which, coupled with low workforce representation, suggested that it would be difficult to deliver on the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019.

64. With respect to paragraph 4 of the document, Zimbabwe appreciated UNHCR's inclusivity with regard to gender parity, racial equality, disability and age, but it shared the concern voiced by the Russian Federation about the addition of sexual orientation and gender identity. UNHCR should continue to implement principles of inclusivity that were internationally and universally acceptable, including international labour standards. Zimbabwe commended the UNHCR workforce for its dedication and resilience and for the life-changing impact that it continued to have on the lives of persons of concern.

65. **Mr. Koh** (Republic of Korea ) said his delegation agreed with South Africa's remarks on geographical balance. Unfortunately, the format for UNHCR statistics made it very difficult to assess whether there was regional balance or, if not, how severe the imbalance was, because data was gathered only by country. He therefore asked UNHCR to develop relevant statistics and circulate them before the upcoming session of the Executive Committee.

66. While noting the growing number of people of concern to UNHCR, he said that there was an alarming pace of increase in the total number of Professional staff, particularly in the four years since the end of 2018. Noting with concern the increase in salary and other costs, he asked whether staffing needs could be met by means other than recruitment, including temporary or flexible arrangements, given ongoing budget restraints.

67. **Mr. Banzet** (Canada) said that his delegation paid tribute to the more than 20,000 men and women in all their diversity that formed the solid foundation of UNHCR's work: the organization's workforce was its strongest asset. UNHCR staff, affiliated personnel and implementing partners carried out their duties in support of persons of concern in challenging environments. Canada commended UNHCR for the attention given to the health and safety of its workforce during the pandemic.

68. His delegation welcomed UNHCR's efforts to promote gender equality and women in leadership roles and to encourage diversity and inclusion within its workforce, which was key to UNHCR's success in delivering on its mandate. It welcomed the multi-year action plan on race equality created in February 2022 and the continued efforts in connection with the disability inclusion framework launched in 2021. It endorsed UNHCR's inclusive vision of diversity and its recognition of the value of lived experience in responding to vulnerability and humanitarian needs, including with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Canada commended UNHCR for its ongoing effort to introduce improvements in its ways of working and using technology, developing modern business techniques to ensure that its workforce remained ready to adapt and deliver in changing contexts.

69. **Ms. Nelson** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) commended the UNHCR workforce for its dedication and for delivering on UNHCR's mandate in headquarters and in the field. Her delegation was pleased to hear about UNHCR's efforts to promote inclusion and diversity. It was important for recruitment to take into account both merit and difference and to give consideration to leading factors such as race, nationality and ethnicity, age, disability, and gender and sexual identity. Her delegation welcomed that inclusive vision of diversity, the increasing participation of women in leadership positions and the creation in February of the multi-year action plan for race equality. It called on UNHCR to sustain those positive developments.

70. The United Kingdom agreed with the premise that a well-supported workforce was better able to care for others; accordingly, it welcomed the focus on staff wellbeing and psychosocial support for staff. It was pleased see how technology was being utilized to streamline processes and make them more efficient. Noting the launch of the first online PeoplePulse surveys in October 2021, she asked whether the Director of the Division of Human Resources could share how the findings of those surveys fed back into senior management process and led to change.

71. **Ms. Chandra** (Australia) said that her delegation thanked UNHCR and its staff for its dedication, often in difficult and risky situations. Australia was supportive of UNHCR's work to improve human resources systems and management, with a focus on the health and wellbeing of the workforce. It endorsed UNHCR's efforts to conduct reviews and establish frameworks for gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and racial equality in the workforce. The increase in the number of women in leadership roles was particularly welcome, and Australia strongly supported UNHCR's ongoing work on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

72. Noting that the Asia and Pacific region currently represented 13 per cent of the UNHCR workforce and 14 per cent of UNHCR staff, she asked whether that staffing profile was adequate, given ongoing large displacement situations in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Australia acknowledged that budget pressures and management would impact human resources, including decisions on relocation or potential reduction of staff in certain settings.

73. **Ms. Arango** (Colombia) expressed appreciation for the work of UNHCR staff in helping to

publicize information on her country's temporary protection for the Venezuelan migrant population. With UNHCR support, Colombia had assisted more than 1.5 million of the more than 2 million Venezuelan migrants currently present in the country. In addition, UNHCR staff had provided assistance in processing asylum requests. Her delegation also appreciated the work carried out on the ground to assist victims of internal displacement. Colombia hoped to continue to benefit from UNHCR staff assistance to the migrant population. It was working on multi-year response plans geared to addressing the humanitarian situation.

74. **Mr. Gul** (Pakistan) commended UNHCR staff for carrying out mandated activities in providing humanitarian relief, often in challenging situations. The significant progress made by the organization in meeting its goal of achieving gender equality was encouraging. However, it was a matter of concern that gender disparities persisted, as did low representation of persons from developing and refugee-hosting countries. Pakistan reiterated the call for UNHCR to take effective measures to ensure balanced geographical representation and gender parity across the regions, focusing in particular on persons from States underrepresented in its workforce at headquarters and in the field. It again called for more equitable geographic distribution of employment opportunities, especially with respect to balanced representation of developing and refugee-hosting countries, in line with universally accepted concepts of inclusion. UNHCR should widely disseminate information about job opportunities, giving sufficient time for candidates to file applications, and it should encourage candidates with local knowledge of the working environment in which UNHCR operated.

75. **Mr. Matinrazm** (Islamic Republic of Iran) commended UNHCR and its tireless staff for helping to mitigate the suffering of refugees around the world. There was significant room for improvement in the geographical diversity of UNHCR staff. Unfortunately, the host countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, were still underrepresented, although they were the ones most deeply affected. In deploying staff around the world, cultural diversity and the principal values of the host communities must be borne in mind, and the use of consensual terms and concepts on gender issues was essential, in the spirit of a people-centred and a whole-of-society approach in UNHCR's work.

76. **Ms. Bennet Sattler** (Director, Division of Human Resources, UNHCR), responding to comments and questions on the PeoplePulse surveys, said that in 2018 a lengthy survey had been carried out; it had taken a long time to complete, and it had generated only low participation. For the latest survey, launched in October 2021, participation had stood at only 39 per cent, which was a weak point. On the other hand, 79 per cent of respondents had stated that they would stay with UNHCR for another year, which was positive; 84 per cent had reported that they knew what they were meant to do, which was encouraging; 66 per cent had stated that UNHCR was a great place to work; 80 per cent had indicated that they understood the basics of what was expected of them; and around 60 per cent of respondents had felt that they had the support of managers.

77. As to what was being done to ensure follow-up by managers and leaders, she said that only 41 per cent of respondents had felt confident that feedback would be acted upon. Human resource staff members were working with managers to suggest concrete action that they could immediately take based on the data received. A survey had recently been conducted on people management, and another, on team collaboration, would be launched in November 2022. That follow-up was critical to enhancing future participation, building trust that action would be taken and better communicated and ensuring that managers were better equipped to react.

78. With regard to Workday@UNHCR, she had never seen such a high level of engagement, in particular by the younger workforce. People were interested to see how technologies were driving UNHCR forward, and that momentum needed to be built upon. Concerning representation, she said that one of the assets of Workday was that it gave better and more focused data, facilitating a data-driven approach, which in turn helped to achieve better representation.

79. The human resources action plan addressed representation, accountability and building the capacity of managers and employees to work and thrive in an inclusive environment. A very successful campaign had been launched around working with allies and learning to thrive in an environment of diversity, including with respect to accountability and recruitment. UNHCR had partnered on a pilot basis with the consulting firms McKinsey & Company and the Black Leadership

Academy to obtain more insight into modern best practices with regard to diversity and inclusion. A number of concerns had been expressed about UNHCR's relatively broad definition of inclusion. She reiterated that UNHCR was a progressive organization that stressed best practices in human resources and people management. Member States had in fact urged UNHCR to pursue that course and, more recently, had congratulated it on the progress made. Such an approach involved looking beyond the minimum standards set by the International Civil Service Commission to see how an organization could truly be inclusive. For UNHCR, that meant creating an organization that represented the people it served. The broader definition of inclusion showed that UNHCR wanted its internal values to reflect its external mandate, in which persecution on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity was explicitly recognized.

80. On the questions on global staffing, she acknowledged that representation from Southern Africa and other countries of the global south was lower than wished. However, it was difficult to change the organization's make-up solely by recruitment. That said, a new pilot initiative was soon to be launched under which the regional bureaux would actively scout and develop talent. Part of the effort would focus on UNHCR's rich base of affiliate workforce members with broad experience and understanding of the organization. In reality, less than 25 per cent of truly external collaborators were brought into the workforce annually. She would welcome feedback from Member States on where to find good markets for human resources; in general, UNHCR was keen to explore with Member States more solutions and options for attracting talent.

81. Regarding timely information on vacancies, she said that was another aspect that would change with Workday, which would be much more user-friendly for applications online and would provide more and better data. Concerning geographical representation, she noted that 65 per cent of candidates who applied for positions were from the global south. That was a welcome opportunity for the organization to continue to diversify, but the process would take time. She acknowledged the investments by Member States in initiatives such as the Junior Professional Officers programme, which helped candidates get a feel for what it was like to work with UNHCR. Such investments paid off over time. She did not have any data on the impact of the second language requirement on recruitment. It perhaps made it more difficult to join the organization, but once someone was on board, competence in a second language increased opportunities dramatically.

82. Replying to a question by Australia on whether the current staffing profile was adequate, she said she was confident about the way operations were using strategic workforce planning to ascertain current and future needs, which in turn determined whether staff positions or temporary support were needed and how those needs were best met, whether through affiliates or through the addition of specific skills. Concerning a question from Switzerland on staff representation in decision-making, she said that there was close collaboration with the Staff Council and both staff and management were represented in all policy development processes and in selection bodies.

83. COVID-19 had dramatically changed how UNHCR looked at its workforce. The organization had already been a trailblazer in the area of occupational health and safety, but it would not have been able to survive COVID-19 without the staff health and wellbeing teams on the ground in the various regions. The vaccination policy, introduced six months earlier, had been extended for another six months, because it was working well; indeed, it had made it possible for the Standing Committee to meet.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*