



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2019/096

Audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

The Mission needed to continue organizing capacity and career development activities for national staff during the drawdown period

31 October 2019

Assignment No. AP2019/634/03

Audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The objective of the audit was to assess whether UNAMID effectively managed the phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period. The audit covered the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2019 and included human resources drawdown plan, comparative review process and staff termination, staff capacity building and career development and staff separation and check-out process.

The Mission had developed an adequate human resources drawdown plan, implemented an adequate process for abolishment of staff posts and positions in compliance with the comparative review framework and the human resources drawdown plan, effectively executed termination process of staff holding permanent and continuing appointments and established adequate check-out procedures and effectively processed final clearances for staff separation.

However, the Mission needed to provide additional capacity building activities for its national staff. To address this, OIOS recommended that UNAMID continue organizing capacity building and career enhancement programmes to improve employment opportunities of separating national staff. UNAMID accepted the recommendation and has initiated action to implement it.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
I. BACKGROUND	1
II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	2
III. AUDIT RESULTS	2-6
A. Human resources drawdown plan	2-3
B. Comparative review process and staff termination	3-4
C. Staff capacity building and career development	4-5
D. Staff separation check-out process	5-6
IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	6
 ANNEX I Status of audit recommendations	
 APPENDIX I Management response	

Audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

2. The special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the strategic review of UNAMID dated 18 May 2017, called for a civilian staffing review. This was endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2363 (2017) of 29 June 2017 with a view to ensuring that staffing levels were adjusted to implement the revised mandate. In the subsequent strategic review report dated 1 June 2018 and Security Council resolution 2429 (2018) of 13 July 2018, it was further decided that by 31 December 2018, troop strength should be reduced to 5,735 and by 30 June 2019 reduced to 4,050.

3. On 10 June 2018, the Joint Special Representative established a Workforce Review Working Group headed by the Deputy Joint Special Representative to review the Mission's structure and staffing. The working group reviewed and analyzed submission/inputs of various components, sections and units and, considering the closure of team sites and sector headquarters, the working group recommended that 1,183 civilian posts and positions be abolished. In its revised budget approved by the General Assembly for the period 2018/19, UNAMID had proposed abolishment of these posts in three phases: (a) 384 posts at the end of December 2018; (b) 88 posts at the end of March 2019; and (c) 711 posts at the end of June 2019. UNAMID civilian staffing strength as at 30 June 2018 and the retrenchment as at 30 June 2019 are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
UNAMID civilian post strength and abolishment

Category of staff	Post strength as at 30 June 2018	Posts abolished from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019	Post strength as at 30 June 2019
International	728	181	547
National	1,900	942	958
United Nations Volunteers	128	60	68
Total:	2,756	1,183	1,573

Source: UNAMID Human Resources Management Section

4. The UNAMID Human Resources Management Section (HRMS) is responsible for planning and coordinating the phasing out of civilian personnel after discussion with Mission senior management. The Section is headed by a Chief at P-5 level who is supported by two professional staff, 14 field service staff and 15 national staff.

5. Comments provided by UNAMID are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

6. The objective of the audit was to assess whether UNAMID effectively managed the phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period.
7. This audit was included in the 2019 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to operational and financial risks related to phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in UNAMID.
8. OIOS conducted this audit from May to July 2019. The audit covered the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2019, but also included a review of the national capacity building activities including job fairs organized by the Mission during the period from March 2015 to June 2019. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas in phasing out human resources, which included: human resources drawdown plan, comparative review process and staff termination, national staff capacity building and career development and staff separation and check-out process.
9. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation, (c) analytical reviews of data, and (d) testing of a random sample of staff subjected to the comparative review process.
10. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Human resources drawdown plan

Human resources drawdown was adequately planned and communicated

11. In accordance with the Liquidation Manual issued by the erstwhile Department of Field Support (DFS)¹, the planning for the downsizing of civilian staff should begin as early as possible, but not later than six months before the anticipated end of the mandate. The downsizing plan should be communicated to staff as early as possible and during all stages of the drawdown process.
12. HRMS developed the human resources drawdown plan in July 2018 to realign the civilian staffing level to the proposed changes. OIOS review of the plan noted that it detailed the main tasks to be carried out by responsible sections and units, together with their duration and implementation timelines. The Chief Human Resources Officer used a Gantt chart to monitor the implementation of the planned tasks and appraised the Workforce Review Working Group operating under the supervision of the senior advisers meeting chaired by the Head of the Mission. The main tasks included the development of a communications strategy to inform staff on the drawdown plan, conduct of comparative reviews, support to impacted staff, separation of staff, staff movements, reconciling and updating staff records, check-out process, staff entitlement monitoring, travel documents and other administrative issues necessary to conduct a comprehensive drawdown process.
13. The drawdown plan was communicated to staff at town hall meetings, through Mission broadcasts, staff briefings by respective programme managers' and HRMS briefings to representatives of the Field Staff Union and the National Staff Union. Also, representatives from the Human Resources Services

¹ Effective 1 January 2019, as part of the organizational reforms, functions previously performed by DFS are performed by the Department of Operational Support (DOS) and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC).

Division of DOS and representatives from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) visited the Mission to brief staff on their entitlements and provided clarifications on staffing matters. Based on the above, OIOS concluded that UNAMID had adequately planned the human resources drawdown and communicated it to staff.

B. Comparative review process and staff termination

Comparative review process was adequately conducted

14. Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations (ST/SGB/2018/1) require that termination of staff appointment arising from the abolition of posts or reduction of staff be done taking into consideration competencies, performance, core values and length of service of staff.

15. To ensure transparency and fairness of the process of identifying staff for termination, the Mission established Comparative Review Panels (CRPs) for international and national staff as well as United Nations Volunteers and communicated this to staff through a broadcast announcement. The CRP consisted of an equal number of representatives nominated by Mission management, Staff Representatives from the Field Service Union and the National Staff Association and included an ex officio from HRMS. A CRP for national staff was supported by one representative from the then Field Personnel Division of DFS to support and facilitate the process. Out of 1,183 posts/positions assessed for abolishment, 1,012 posts/positions were encumbered, and 171 were vacant. Of the encumbered 1,012 posts/positions, 881 were national staff, 85 international staff and 46 United Nations Volunteers. A total of 450 posts were subject to review by a CRP, comprising 373 national, 61 international and 16 United Nations Volunteers. The remaining posts were abolished where the related sections and units were closed, and staff contracts ended.

16. OIOS review of a randomly selected sample of 109 out of 450 posts/positions showed that CPRs established objective evaluation criteria, including: (i) relative experience; (ii) seniority; (iii) performance evaluation; (iv) gender; and (v) geographic representation. CPRs adhered to the established criteria, documented the comparative review in the evaluation matrix, and made recommendations on abolishment of encumbered posts. Reports of the CRPs were approved by DFS on 18 October 2018.

17. Based on the above, OIOS concluded that UNAMID had implemented an adequate process for abolishment of staff posts/positions in compliance with the comparative review framework and human resources drawdown plan.

Need to continue to inform staff members of their separation benefits during liquidation period

18. DFS Liquidation Manual requires the Mission to provide information to staff on separation entitlements sufficiently in advance of their actual separation.

19. The final payments for national staff were computed and processed by the Regional Service Center in Entebbe (RSCE), while for international staff, final payments were computed and processed by the Payroll Section of DMSPC. Pension benefits for both international and national staff were processed by UNJSPF. OIOS analysis of final payments to 321 national staff showed that 97 per cent of final payments were processed within 60 days, and 3 per cent of final payments took more than 60 days to process due to their complex nature.

20. UNAMID held weekly teleconference meetings with RSCE to follow up on final payments, and RSCE provided weekly status reports on those released. HRMS assisted international staff on following up on final payments and pension matters with the RSCE Payroll Section. The Chief Human Resources Officer

stated that based on their engagement with UNJSPF, pension payments for national staff on average took six to eight weeks and longer for international staff.

21. UNAMID issued a mission-wide broadcast to staff on the Administration of Justice System, explaining how they could contest decisions that impacted them adversely. Separation letters were issued to staff explaining the separation procedures including effective date of termination, e-Check-out, pension related matters, annual leave balance, exit interview and final settlement. The Client Support Teams established for separating staff provided individual briefings, which allowed staff members, especially national staff to ask questions and seek clarifications on matters pertaining to their benefits and entitlements.

Termination process was documented and duly approved

22. In accordance with the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, when staff holding permanent or continuing appointments are terminated, they should receive appropriate notice and termination indemnity pay.

23. During the first phase of human resources drawdown scheduled on 31 December 2018, UNAMID sought approval from DFS to terminate the appointments and pay termination indemnity to seven staff holding permanent and continuing appointments. Of the seven, five staff were reassigned and two were approved for payment of terminations indemnity.

24. Effective 1 January 2019, the Secretary-General had delegated the authority to the heads of entities to terminate appointments of staff members holding permanent or continuing appointments and approve payment of termination indemnity in accordance with Staff Regulations 9.3 and Annex III. On 6 February 2019, the Head of Mission approved the termination of appointments of 20 staff holding permanent and continuing appointments due to the abolition of their posts by 30 June 2019. These staff were eligible for termination indemnity. Of these 20 staff, 10 have been reassigned, 9 have checked out and 1 was in the process of checking-out. OIOS verification showed that: (a) the termination process of staff on permanent and continuing appointments was documented and adequately authorized; and (b) the preliminary computation of termination indemnity made by UNAMID, while payments were not yet made, was in accordance with Annex III of the Staff Regulation 9.3 based on number of completed years of service.

25. Based on the above, OIOS concluded that UNAMID effectively executed termination processes of staff holding permanent and continuing appointments.

C. Staff capacity building and career development

There is a need to continue staff capacity building and career development activities

26. In accordance with the DFS Liquidation Manual, UNAMID is required to assist locally recruited staff to obtain other employment at the duty station and explore employment opportunities, where their skills and experience could be matched to the needs of potential employers from the private sector, other United Nations entities, embassies and donor organizations in the Mission area.

27. In January 2015, the Integrated Mission Training Center (IMTC) had launched a full-fledged multidisciplinary national staff capacity-building programme, and at the time of the audit, 1,257 staff had attended the programme. The programme was conducted in collaboration with vocational schools and universities in Darfur. OIOS analysis showed that during 2017/18, 551 staff attended Small Business Management; 659 on Vocational Training; 44 on Comprehensive Project Management and 23 on Job Hunting and Career Development. Vocational trainings were conducted by vocational schools located at El

Fasher, El Geneina, Nyala and Zalengei. Practical trainings were given on: vehicle mechanics (160 participants), air conditioning (172 participants), general electricity (112 participants), general construction (95 participants), carpentry (31 participants), plumbing (37 participants) and welding (52 participants). The Mission provided transport for all participants. The Mission had adequately budgeted to meet the costs pertaining to capacity-building programmes undertaken.

28. In January 2019, the Mission initiated a new Programme “Multi Skills for Project Management” in collaboration with El-Fasher University, and 44 staff successfully completed the course. In addition, 800 national staff were trained and certified in on Microsoft Office and other computer application programmes.

29. The third job fair held in December 2017 was attended by seven prospective employers and 150 national staff. During the drawdown period effective December 2018, IMTC did not organize job fairs due to lack of interest from national staff and the reluctance of prospective employers to travel to El Fasher. Considering that there are still 958 national post to be abolished by 2020, these staff could benefit from capacity and career development programmes. Shortfalls in capacity building and career enhancing activities to improve employment opportunities of the separating staff may pose a reputation risk to the United Nations.

(1) UNAMID should continue organizing capacity building and career development programmes to improve employment opportunities of the separating national staff.

UNAMID accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the HRMS in conjunction with IMTC would continue providing career enhancing programmes including but not limited to capacity building of the national staff as well as organize a job fair for national staff in December 2019 with a view to improving their prospects for self-employment and employment within and outside Sudan. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that career enhancing programmes, including job fair for the national staff, have been successfully conducted.

D. Staff separation check-out process

Electronic check-out procedures and controls were effective

30. In accordance with the DFS Liquidation Manual, the Mission is required to establish appropriate check-out procedures for separating staff and ensure timely and accurate processing of final payments.

31. For the convenience of separating staff, UNAMID had established one-stop check-out centres at Mission headquarters as well as at sector levels, where staff electronically completed their check-out process in the Field Support Suite (FSS). Separating staff uploaded their private address, contact details and bank account number in FSS for the final payments. Filled forms related to pension and insurance were directly submitted to HRMS. The respective sections/units provided clearance for staff to be checked-out in the FSS with remarks on outstanding issues to be fulfilled and recoveries to be made from staff.

32. As at 14 July 2019, FSS showed that 901 of the 1,012 national and international staff had completed their check-out process. OIOS review of a sample of 323 out of 901 staff showed that although all were cleared for check-out: (a) 34 staff had requested cash advances ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000; (b) four staff members had debit balance ranging between \$1,800 and \$13,500; (c) 81 staff had unpaid balances for last two months telephone bills; (d) 48 staff had pending cases with the Security Investigation Unit (SIU); and (e) 49 staff had not submitted their leave records and had not finalized e-Performance documents.

33. Staff records were verified by RSCE in the FSS database for outstanding issues before processing the final payments. OIOS' subsequent review of final payments processed by RSCE showed that outstanding issues mentioned above were cleared prior to final payment. For example, none of the requests for cash advance were approved, and cost recoveries were made from staff members for outstanding telephone bills. OIOS confirmed with the Claims Unit of UNAMID that all 48 SIU pending cases had been cleared. As for those who did not complete their final e-Performance process despite HRMS's follow up, their e-Performance documents were deemed completed two weeks after appraisals by their supervisors as established procedures.

34. Based on the above, OIOS concluded that UNAMID established adequate check-out procedures and effectively processed final clearances for separating staff.

IV. Acknowledgement

35. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNAMID for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

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STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the
African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur**

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ² / Important ³	C/ O ⁴	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁵
1	UNAMID should continue organizing capacity building and career development programmes to improve employment opportunities of the separating national staff.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that career enhancing programmes including job fair for the national staff have been successfully conducted.	31 January 2020

² Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

³ Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

⁴ C = closed, O = open

⁵ Date provided by UNAMID in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of phasing out of human resources during the drawdown period in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNAMID should continue organizing capacity building and career development programmes to improve employment opportunities of the separating national staff.	Important	Yes	Chief Human Resources Officer and Integrated Mission Training Center (IMTC)	31 January 2020	UNAMID Human Resources Management Section in conjunction with Integrated Mission Training Center, will continue providing career enhancing programmes including but not limited to capacity building of the national staff as well as organize a job fair for national staff in December 2019 with a view to enhancing their prospects for self-employment and employment (within and outside Sudan).

¹ Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

² Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.