



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2022/057

Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

**There is need to strengthen some aspects of
strategic planning and performance reporting
and address gaps in compliance with
administrative instructions and guidelines**

5 November 2022

Assignment No. AE2021-330-02

Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Regional Office for the Pacific (ROP). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management, and control processes in ensuring effective management of ROP's operations. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021 and included a review of risk areas relating to: (a) strategic planning; (b) performance reporting and monitoring; and (c) regulatory framework.

The audit showed that ROP had developed its strategy document (the Sub-Regional note for the Pacific) and was collaborating with the United Nations Country Teams in the region in implementing its programme of work. However, ROP needed to strengthen some aspects of strategic planning and performance reporting and address gaps in compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines.

OIOS made six recommendations. To address the issues identified in the audit, ROP needed to:

- Explain its approach to resource prioritization in its next Sub-Regional Note and annual work plans, and ensure that discussions with stakeholders are documented and used to inform the annual work planning process;
- Ensure that its strategies for climate change and disability inclusion have clearly defined objectives and performance indicators, and are incorporated in the next Sub-Regional Note;
- Strengthen its performance reporting framework by ensuring that baselines and targets are accurately defined based on available information, and progress reports address all planned activities and outputs;
- Strengthen supervision mechanisms to ensure full compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines, and provide training to staff responsible for administrative functions to enhance their awareness of the compliance requirements;
- Strengthen procedures for processing, recording and monitoring of official travel to ensure that travel claims are initiated and processed in a timely manner in accordance with established guidelines; and
- Ensure that all its staff take the mandatory training programmes.

OHCHR accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them. Actions required to close the open recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

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Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Regional Office for the Pacific (ROP).
2. ROP, based in Suva, Fiji, was established in August 2005 covering activities in 16 countries: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
3. ROP's strategic plan and programme of work were addressed in the 2018-2023 Sub-Regional Note for the Pacific and covered all the six thematic priorities set out in the OHCHR Management Plan, namely: (i) strengthening rule of law and accountability for human rights violations; (ii) enhancing and protecting civic space and people's participation; (iii) enhancing equality and countering discrimination; (iv) integrating human rights in sustainable development; (v) early warning, prevention, and protection of human rights in situations of conflict and insecurity; and (vi) increasing implementation of the international human rights mechanisms' outcomes.
4. ROP was headed by a Representative at the P-5 level who reported to the Chief of Asia Pacific, Middle East and North Africa Branch in the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division. The current Representative, who joined ROP in 2020, was supported by 10 staff including 1 P-4, 2 P-3s, 4 national officers and 3 general support staff. One of the P-3 posts was funded by the regular budget, and the other nine posts were funded by extrabudgetary resources. ROP also had one United Nations Volunteer and supported the Human Rights Adviser (HRA) post based in Papua New Guinea.
5. ROP's expenditure for 2020 and 2021 was \$1.26 million and \$1.07 million, respectively. The COVID-19 pandemic affected ROP's operations in 2020 and 2021 due to restrictions on programme-related travel and various other factors associated with the lockdowns.
6. Comments provided by ROP are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management, and control processes in ensuring effective management of ROP's operations.
8. This audit was included in the 2022 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the risk that potential weaknesses in the management of ROP's operations could impede the achievement of its objectives.
9. OIOS conducted this audit from March to July 2022. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered risks areas relating to: (a) strategic planning; (b) performance reporting and monitoring; and (c) regulatory framework.
10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) analytical review of data; and (d) sample testing.

11. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic planning

The strategic planning process was undertaken in accordance with established guidelines

12. The Sub-Regional Note for the Pacific was prepared in line with OHCHR guidelines for the development of country/sub-regional programmes. This included the internal consultations held in April 2017 to discuss ROP's strategic direction. The Sub-Regional Note had a well-defined results framework comprising of 12 pillar results for the six thematic priorities and 23 performance indicators. Annual work plans were prepared with outputs and activities aligned to the pillar results. ROP's work contributed to four of the six outcome groups in the United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS) for 2018-2022.

Efforts were made to enhance engagement with United Nations Country Teams

13. ROP has a broad mandate and limited resources amidst the growing humanitarian needs in the Pacific region. The Sub-Regional Note acknowledged ROP's limited resources and capacity, and the fact that relationships and partnerships would be critical in ROP's ability to deliver. ROP collaborated with the United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific notably by co-leading the United Nations Pacific outcome group on human rights. ROP was also a standing member of the Joint Steering Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the outputs of UNPS and ensuring coordinated implementation of the United Nations' engagement at the country level. ROP enhanced coordination with the United Nations Country Teams from the last quarter of 2020 by, inter alia, deploying a Human Rights Adviser (P-4) in the Resident Coordinator's Office in Samoa and ensuring that the work on statistics was prioritized in the next UNPS.

Need to document the approach and justification for prioritization of resources

14. Given ROP's broad mandate and limited resources, the question of coverage both in terms of country and thematic priorities and getting the right mix of the two was of critical importance. ROP had recognized that its ability to engage across all the pillars in the Sub-Regional Note had been limited due to staff and financial resources. ROP indicated that its prioritization of resources was determined by: (i) the regional and country priorities set by the OHCHR Organization Management Plan and UNPS; (ii) opportunities and requests for support from governments, civil society, and other stakeholders; and (iii) recommendations and gap analysis of international human rights mechanisms.

15. However, the Sub-Regional Note and work plans did not fully address the issue of prioritization of resources to the six thematic areas and the various countries that ROP is mandated to cover. In 2020 and 2021, ROP planned to implement 127 activities which included 38 activities at no cost, but there was no clear rationale for allocating resources to the various thematic areas and countries. ROP provided a record of issues identified during stakeholder consultations in 2017 which led to the preparation of the Sub-Regional note for 2018-2023. However, records were not kept of the priority issues identified during consultations with stakeholders since 2017 for annual work planning purposes. Therefore, it was not evident whether stakeholders' inputs were adequately considered when prioritizing the areas to focus on.

16. In 2020, OHCHR undertook and documented a situational analysis of human rights in the Pacific which indicated human rights profiles of countries in the region and provided key facts such as international human rights treaty ratifications and reporting obligations of each country, among others. ROP needs to

clarify how it will use the country profiles and other relevant information and factors as a basis for prioritization of its work and resource allocation, since this was not evident in the 2021 work plan.

(1) The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should: (a) explain its approach to resource prioritization in its next Sub-Regional Note and annual work plans; and (b) ensure that discussions with stakeholders are documented and used to inform the annual work planning process.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 1 and stated that: (a) the approach to resource prioritization will be explained in the next Sub-Regional Note; and (b) ROP will document consultations with stakeholders.

Need to include local strategies on climate change and disability inclusion in the next Sub-Regional Note

17. Given the vulnerability of the region to natural and environmental disasters, climate change is a priority area of work for ROP. Disability inclusion was also a priority thematic area because an estimated 17 per cent of people in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories had disabilities. The annual work plans of ROP contained activities related to climate change and disability inclusion. During the audit, ROP developed a Climate Change Strategy outlining its vision and goals in this area. However, while the climate change projects had results frameworks, the climate change strategy developed by ROP did not have well-defined objectives and timelines to facilitate effective operationalization and monitoring.

18. In 2020-2021, ROP jointly implemented a pilot programme on disability inclusion in coordination with the International Labour Organization's Regional Office in Fiji and the Resident Coordinator's Office, using the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy of 2019. However, the Sub-Regional Note did not include disability since it was prepared prior to the development of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and had not been updated. ROP needs to develop a local strategy on disability inclusion and related results framework in its next Sub-Regional Note to facilitate effective planning and monitoring.

(2) The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should ensure that its strategies for climate change and disability inclusion have clearly defined objectives and performance indicators and are incorporated in the next Sub-Regional Note.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 2 and stated that ROP had commenced a change management process in 2021. The next Sub-Regional Note will incorporate the strategies and refer to existing or new performance indicators.

B. Performance reporting and monitoring

Need to strengthen performance reporting

19. ROP reported on the results of achievement of planned activities and outputs through the end of year progress reports using the performance indicators and targets in the Sub-Regional Note. However, ROP did not report on all the planned outputs in the progress reports. In 2020, ROP did not report on 5 of the 20 outputs it had planned, while in 2021 it did not report on 6 of the 22 planned outputs. ROP attributed the non-achievement of outputs to the travel restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. For effective performance monitoring, the variances between planned and actual activities and outputs need to be clearly determined and explained in the end-of-year progress reports. Also, there were errors in defining baseline values and targets for three indicators in the Sub-Regional Note. Such errors affect performance reporting and monitoring, which need to be prevented by establishing appropriate review mechanisms.

- (3) The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should strengthen its performance reporting framework by ensuring that: (a) baselines and targets are accurately defined based on available information; and (b) progress reports address all planned activities and outputs.**

OHCHR accepted recommendation 3 and stated that: (a) baselines and targets will continue to be defined based on available information; and (b) annual and mid-year progress reports will continue to address all planned outputs and activities.

C. Regulatory framework

Need to ensure full compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines

20. The OHCHR Field Administration Manual provides guidance to staff who are assigned administrative responsibilities in the field. Compliance with such guidance helps in ensuring that resources are managed and used effectively, and assets are appropriately safeguarded. OIOS' review of the administrative processes indicated that ROP did not always comply with the established administrative instructions, as discussed below.

(a) Performance assessment of consultants were not documented

21. In 2020-2021, ROP procured the services of five consultants involving an expenditure of \$123,566 through the local administrative service provider (LSP) who supported it with advertising, shortlisting, selection and contracting. The expected outputs and deliverables were clearly defined in the terms of reference for the consultants engaged. All records associated with their selection were maintained by LSP. However, ROP did not undertake formal evaluation of the consultants as required by LSP's guidelines for engaging non-staff personnel. Evaluation of performance is essential for effective management of consultancies. Following the audit, ROP took corrective action and provided evidence of evaluations done in July and August 2022 for four consultants engaged in 2021 and 2022.

(b) Gaps in management of attendance records

22. Accurate records are essential to ensure that staff do not exceed their leave entitlements, and that their end-of-period leave balances do not exceed authorized limits. Certification of leave records by staff is important to ensure the accuracy of leave records. For international staff, leave records were maintained in Umoja which had inbuilt mechanisms for staff to certify their leave balances monthly and annually, and this was monitored at OHCHR headquarters. For local staff, leave records were maintained by the LSP with ROP maintaining parallel records for monitoring purposes. OIOS reviewed the 2020 and 2021 leave records and found that for seven local staff, there was no evidence that the leave balances at the end of the leave year had been verified and certified by the staff before the information was sent to the LSP. There was also no documentary evidence that ROP had regularly forwarded the leave records to the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division every month as required by the Field Administration Manual.

(c) Gaps in management of property and equipment

23. According to the OHCHR Field Administration Manual, heads of field offices are responsible for periodic verification, write-off and disposal of obsolete property and equipment held in their offices. ROP's database showed that it had 108 items acquired between 2006 and 2014. Out of these, 56 were categorized as good, 49 as obsolete, and 3 items (two laptops and a printer) were categorized as bad. ROP indicated

that OHCHR headquarters had accorded it authority to dispose of all obsolete laptops and furniture items, and ROP was working on it. However, write-off had been initiated for only 15 of the 52 items categorized as obsolete or bad. Further, the annual physical verification of assets was not conducted in 2021 as required by the Field Administration Manual. The last physical verification was conducted in 2020. *ROP stated that the physical verification exercise was not conducted in 2021 because of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and that it had started the 2022 physical verification exercise.*

(d) Procurement issues

24. The main concern in procurement was the delays in the process. OIOS' analysis showed delays ranging from 14 to 324 days above the established timelines which could, in some cases, be attributed to the LSP and in some cases to ROP. Delays cause inefficiencies and could lead to last-minute procurement actions which are not cost-effective. Reasons for delays need to be monitored, and any recurring causes addressed in a timely manner. *ROP stated that it reviewed the reasons for delays and attributed some of the delays to the COVID-19 pandemic as all non-essential businesses were closed. Regarding the delays attributed to the LSP, OHCHR indicated that this was a systemic issue, and it planned to undertake a delegation of authority project that will provide its field offices with more autonomy to process their transactions and reduce reliance on the LSP.*

25. The above-mentioned shortcomings show the need to strengthen supervision of staff involved in preparing, reviewing, and approving financial and administrative documents. There was also no evidence that ROP staff working in administration and finance-related activities had obtained training in these areas. Further, some areas such as travel and recruitment of consultants were governed by the LSP's policies and procedures; ROP needs to ensure that its staff are conversant with those policies and procedures.

(4) The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, in coordination with the Programme Support and Management Service, should: (a) strengthen supervision mechanisms to ensure full compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines; and (b) provide training to staff responsible for administrative functions to enhance their awareness of the compliance requirements.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 4 and stated that training on performance management and induction training on administrative procedures and guidelines will be conducted.

Need to strengthen the management of travel processed through the LSP

26. Travel transactions for international staff were processed using Umoja, while travel of local staff and meeting participants were processed through the LSP in line with Field Administration Manual. Travel claims need to be processed in a timely manner to ensure timely recovery of advances not accounted for. No significant weaknesses were noted from OIOS' review of travel of international staff. However, there were significant delays in processing travel claims for meeting participants. In two cases, the meeting participants travelled in November 2021, but the travel claims had not been processed as of July 2022 (eight months later). ROP indicated that the LSP had overlooked the two cases. In 17 other cases, travel claims for meeting participants who traveled in July 2020 were still outstanding as of July 2022 (two years later). ROP explained that the LSP had not processed the travel claims because of certain missing information. OIOS was not provided with adequate explanation or details of what exactly was missing. Further, in four cases involving travel of staff, mission reports were not submitted as required. The gaps noted show the need for ROP to improve: (i) monitoring of travel transactions and tracking of requests sent to the LSP; (ii) coordination with the LSP to ensure timely identification and resolution of outstanding transactions and

issues; and (iii) proper maintenance of travel records to ensure that there is a complete audit trail in records that can be easily accessed/retrieved.

(5) The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should strengthen procedures for processing, recording and monitoring of official travel to ensure that travel claims are initiated and processed in a timely manner in accordance with established guidelines.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 5 and stated that a review of the existing procedure will be conducted including with the LSP, and adjustments will be made as necessary to strengthen the procedures over travel management.

Corrective action was taken to migrate records to SharePoint and to finalize the business continuity plan

27. The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters had a negative impact on ROP's activities, resulting in a budget execution rate of 68 per cent and 62 per cent in 2020 and 2021, respectively. This was primarily due to suspension of outreach activities, including travel to other locations in the region. During the pandemic, ROP staff did not have access to the three shared drives when telecommuting, which limited their access to office files necessary for business continuity. Although ROP had a draft Business Continuity Plan, it did not recognize the risk of lack of remote access to its shared drives, nor was the plan prepared in consultation with the LSP. OIOS was informed that to address the problem, ROP was working with OHCHR headquarters to migrate its records to SharePoint. Regarding safety and security issues, ROP, in coordination with the Department of Safety and Security, had developed "Security Risk Measures and Residential Security Measures", and conducted fire drills in its office premises.

Need to ensure that all staff take the mandatory training programmes

28. Staff members are required to complete mandatory training programmes stipulated in the Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/2018/4. As of January 2022, only two out of eleven staff members had completed all the nine mandatory training programmes, which increased to five in May 2022 after ROP updated the training records. There was no monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance. This seems to be a systemic issue, as the OHCHR-wide compliance rate was low. There was a risk that staff members may not be aware of the expected behavioural standards and their responsibility to comply with the standards. For example, the Information Security Awareness training is one of the mandatory programmes that is critical for OHCHR staff, given the highly confidential nature of human rights data that they are likely to handle.

(6) The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should ensure that all its staff take the mandatory training programmes.

OHCHR accepted recommendation 6 and stated that all ROP staff had completed the mandatory training as of 31 August 2022.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should: (a) explain its approach to resource prioritization in its next Sub-Regional Note and annual work plans; and (b) ensure that discussions with stakeholders are documented and used to inform the annual work planning process.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that: (a) the approach to resource prioritization is clearly explained in the next Sub-Regional Note for the Pacific and ROP's annual work plans; and (b) priority issues identified during discussions with stakeholders are documented and used to inform the planning process.	31 December 2023
2	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should ensure that its strategies for climate change and disability inclusion have clearly defined objectives and performance indicators and are incorporated in the next Sub-Regional Note.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that climate change and disability inclusion strategies with clearly defined objectives and performance indicators have been developed for inclusion in the next Sub-Regional Note.	31 December 2023
3	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should strengthen its performance reporting framework by ensuring that: (a) baselines and targets are accurately defined based on available information; and (b) progress reports address all planned activities and outputs.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of action taken to ensure that: (a) baselines and targets are accurately defined based on available information; and (b) year-end progress reports address all planned activities and outputs.	30 June 2023
4	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, in coordination with the Programme Support and Management Service should: (a) strengthen supervision mechanisms to ensure full compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines; and (b) provide training to staff responsible for administrative functions to enhance their awareness of the compliance requirements.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of action taken to: (a) strengthen supervision mechanisms to ensure full compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines; and (b) provide training to staff responsible for administrative functions.	30 June 2023

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

³ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

⁴ Date provided by OHCHR and ROP in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

5	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should strengthen procedures for processing, recording and monitoring of official travel to ensure that travel claims are initiated and processed in a timely manner in accordance with established guidelines.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that all the outstanding travel claims for 2020 and 2021 have been processed, and procedures for processing official travel through the Local Service Provider have been strengthened.	30 June 2023
6	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should ensure that all its staff take the mandatory training programmes.	Important	C	Action completed.	Implemented

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should: (a) explain its approach to resource prioritization in its next Sub-Regional Note and annual work plans; and (b) ensure that discussions with stakeholders are documented and used to inform the annual work planning process.	Important	Yes	Regional Representative/ Director of Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division	31 December 2023	<u>Action to be taken:</u> (a) Approach to resource prioritization will be explained in next Sub-Regional Note 2023 (b) Regional Office will document consultations with stakeholders
2	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should ensure that its strategies for climate change and disability inclusion have clearly defined objectives and performance indicators and are incorporated in the next Sub-Regional Note.	Important	Yes	Regional Representative/ Director of Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division	31 December 2023	<u>Action to be taken:</u> The office since 2021 has commenced a change management process. The next Sub-Regional Note / regional strategy 2023 will incorporate these strategies and refer to existing or new performance indicators.
3	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should strengthen its performance reporting framework by ensuring that: (a) baselines and targets are accurately defined based on available information; and (b) progress reports address all planned activities and outputs.	Important	Yes	Regional Representative	30 June 2023	<u>Action to be taken:</u> (a) Baselines and targets will continue to be defined based on available information (b) Annual and mid-year progress reports will continue to address all planned outputs and activities
4	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific, in coordination with the Programme Support and Management Service should: (a) strengthen supervision mechanisms to ensure full	Important	Yes	Regional Representative/Chief of Programme Support and Management Services	30 June 2023	<u>Action to be taken:</u> (a) Training on performance management will be conducted

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Management Response

Audit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	compliance with administrative instructions and guidelines; and (b) provide training to staff responsible for administrative functions to enhance their awareness of the compliance requirements.					(b)Induction training on administrative procedures and guidelines will be conducted
5	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should strengthen procedures for processing, recording and monitoring of official travel to ensure that travel claims are initiated and processed in a timely manner in accordance with established guidelines.	Important	Yes	Regional Representative/Deputy and Chief of Programme Support and Management Services	30 June 2023	<u>Action to be taken:</u> A review of the existing procedure will be conducted including with the local service provider, and adjustments will be made as necessary to strengthen the procedures over travel management
6	The OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific should ensure that all its staff take the mandatory training programmes.	Important	No	Regional Representative	Implemented on 31 August 2022	All staff had completed their mandatory trainings as of 31 August 2022 and is supported with the attached evidence which was made available to OHCHR HQ by the ROP. OHCHR recommends that this recommendation be removed as it is no longer applicable.