



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2022/090

Audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

The Mission needed to strengthen emergency response mechanisms

27 December 2022

Assignment No. AP2022-630-01

Audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNAMA's emergency response mechanisms before, during and after the August 2021 security crisis in Afghanistan. The audit covered the period from January 2021 to March 2022 and included: a) governance and crisis management mechanisms; b) organizational resilience management system (ORMS); c) emergency response mechanisms; and d) financial costs.

UNAMA implemented the required emergency response mechanisms; however, the Mission encountered many challenges during the response. The business continuity plan had not been appropriately tested to identify gaps and weaknesses, and staff evacuation was not guided by the developed programme criticality prioritization. An inaccurate staff list, weak internal crisis communications and inadequate arrangements for national staff evacuation also affected the effectiveness of the emergency response mechanisms. Differences between the implementation of the humanitarian mandates of agencies, funds and programmes and UNAMA's political mandate resulted in challenges to the authority of the Designated Official.

OIOS made five recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNAMA needed to:

- Ensure all elements of ORMS are fully developed, including business continuity, internal crisis communications and crisis management plans;
- Develop and implement a process to test and update plans supporting ORMS through a regular maintenance programme and after-action reviews following response to a crisis event;
- Conduct, in coordination with the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) and major stakeholders an after-action review of the evacuation of national staff and report the results to relevant entities at Headquarters to strengthen guidance on various aspects, including the visa and immigration status of the staff and their ability to work from the evacuation location; and
- Clarify with the Department for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and other relevant offices on the eligibility of staff who were outside the Mission at the time of evacuation to receive security evacuation allowance and review the disparity between the security evacuation allowance and danger pay during periods of mandatory evacuation.

In addition, the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security needed to engage with the executive directors of agencies, funds and programmes and heads of other components of the United Nations security management system (UNSMS) to discuss the implementation of security decisions taken under the UNSMS framework of accountability, as well as the lessons learned from the August 2021 crisis in Afghanistan.

UNAMA and DSS accepted the recommendations and initiated actions to implement them. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

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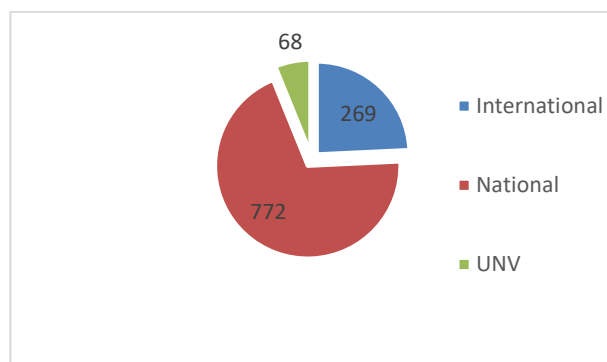
Audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

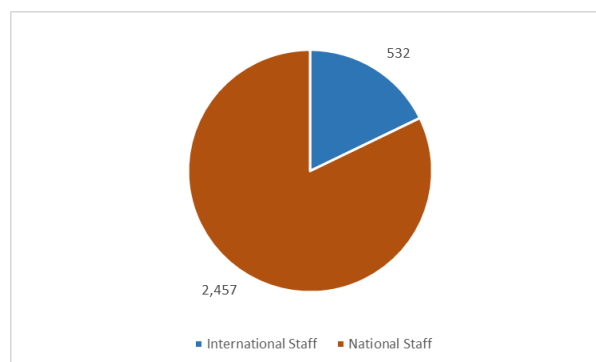
2. UNAMA was established as a special political mission on 28 March 2002 by United Nations Security Council resolution 1401. It operates in an integrated mission setting, wherein 24 United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes (AFPs) work in a multidimensional and integrated manner to better assist Afghanistan’s humanitarian and developmental needs, according to each agency’s priorities at the country level. The demographics of UNAMA and AFP staff as of 31 December 2021 were as follows:

Figure 1: Demographics of 1,109 UNAMA staff as of 31 December 2021



United Nations Volunteer (UNV)

Figure 2: Demographics of 2,989 AFP staff as of 31 December 2021



3. Up to August 2021, UNAMA managed and occupied four compounds in Kabul (UNOCA, Alpha, Palace 7 and United Nations Terminal) incorporating offices and residential accommodations for UNAMA, as well as facilitating common services through service level agreements with some AFPs in the United Nations country team (UNCT). Services included general maintenance of amenities, such as security, roads, water, electricity, medical services and common areas such as gyms and restaurants. There were also UNAMA compounds in two provincial offices (Maimana and Pul-e-Kumri) and six regional offices (Kunduz, Mazar, Kandahar, Gardez, Jalalabad and Bamyan). UNAMA is a tenant of other AFPs in Herat and Faizabad and has liaison offices in Pakistan and Iran.

4. The United States announced the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan in May 2021 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also announced withdrawal shortly thereafter. The security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated rapidly as the Taliban took over many cities and provinces from the then government, culminating in the fall of Kabul on 15 August 2021. This changed the security situation in Afghanistan and posed uncertainty and imminent risk to the safety of United Nations staff and the ability of the United Nations to “stay and deliver” in Afghanistan. The Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG), as the Designated Official (DO), led the Security Management Team (SMT) to manage and coordinate the safety of staff and the overall crisis, guided by various United Nations policies and procedures, including the policy on organizational resilience management system (ORMS) and the United Nations security management system (UNSMS) framework of accountability. The Department of Safety

and Security (DSS) provided integrated security services and coordinated the security emergency responses for all UNSMS organizations in Afghanistan, including UNAMA.

5. Starting June 2021, national staff and their dependents in regional locations were relocated within the country as shown in Table 1.

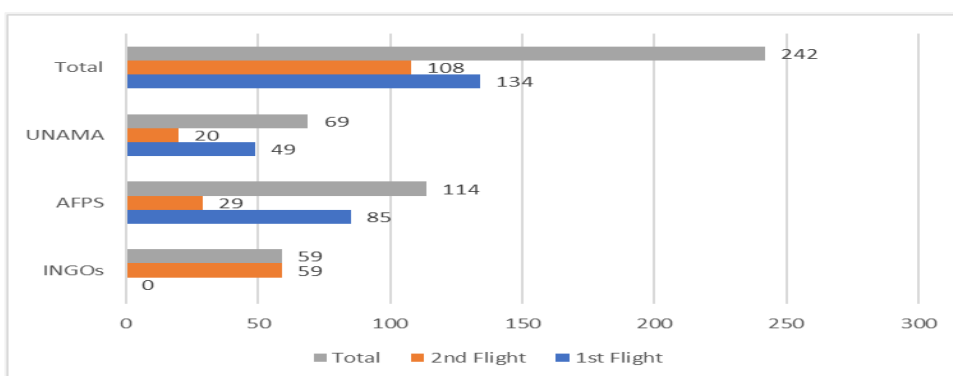
Table 1: Summary of UNAMA national staff and dependents relocations within Afghanistan

From	To	Number of staff	Number of dependents	Relocation start date	Return date
Maimana	Mazar	14	63	19-Jun 21	04-Sep 21
Puli Khumri	Kabul	21	103	22-Jun 21	19-Sep 21
Kandahar	Kabul	41	239	29-Jul 21	4-Sep 21
Herat	Kabul	28	96	01-Aug 21	4-Sep 21
Herat	Jalalabad	1	3	01-Aug 21	4-Sep 21
Gardez	Kabul	29	72	08-Aug 21	19-Sep 21
Gardez	Khost	2	14	08-Aug 21	19-Sep 21
Kunduz	Kabul	30	162	08-Aug 21	19-Sep 21
Bamyan	Kabul	29	127	16-Aug 21	4-Sep 21
Total		195	879		

Source: UNAMA Human Resources office

6. On 15 August 2021, the DO recommended the partial evacuation of international personnel, which was endorsed at an extraordinary meeting of the SMT on that date. A subsequent request on 16 August 2021 by the DO for a full evacuation of international staff was, however, not endorsed by the SMT members. The SMT decided to activate the partial evacuation of international staff from Kabul to the identified safe haven, Almaty, Kazakhstan. This was authorized on 19 August 2021 by the Under-Secretary-General (USG), DSS and resulted in a partial evacuation of international staff as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Summary of the partial evacuation of international staff from Afghanistan 18 and 22 August 2022



INGO (international non-governmental organizations)

7. Although evacuation is normally reserved for international personnel, the DO invoked paragraph 13 of the security policy manual allowing in exceptional circumstances for the evacuation of national personnel. The manual stipulates that the provision can only be invoked under the most compelling circumstances when other measures are deemed ineffective to address the security risk, which had arisen as a direct consequence of staff employment by the United Nations. A decision in this regard can only be made by the Secretary-General, as recommended by USG, DSS, based on a recommendation of the DO. On 19 August 2021, SMT members were informed by the Deputy SRSG (DSRSG) - Political Pillar that the

Executive Committee Working Group (ECWG)¹ at New York Headquarters had concurred on the exceptional evacuation of national staff from Kabul to countries outside Afghanistan. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General subsequently issued six approvals on behalf of the Secretary-General for 136 national personnel² to be evacuated from Afghanistan from August 2021 to February 2022. As of 25 February 2022, 136 national United Nations personnel including 91 UNAMA staff and 261 dependents were evacuated (Figures 4 and 5). Twenty-two staff members could not be evacuated for various reasons including opting to stay, while others had no travel documents.

Figure 4: Summary of national staff by work category, exceptionally approved for evacuation from Kabul to countries outside of Afghanistan

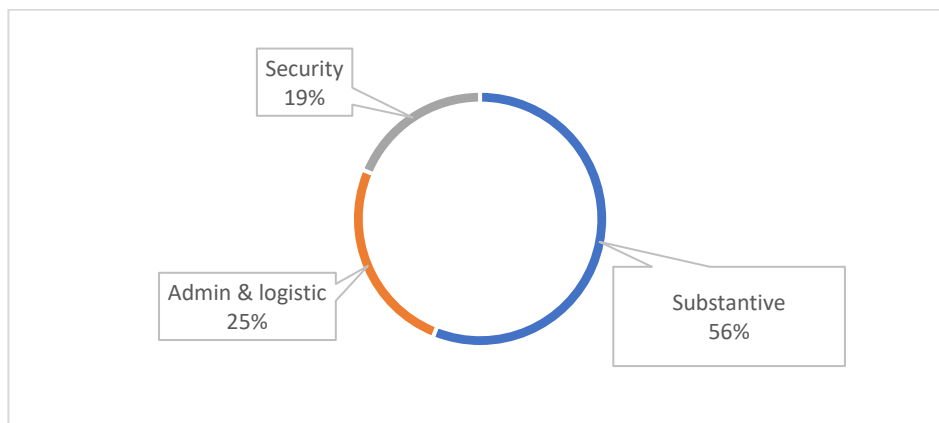
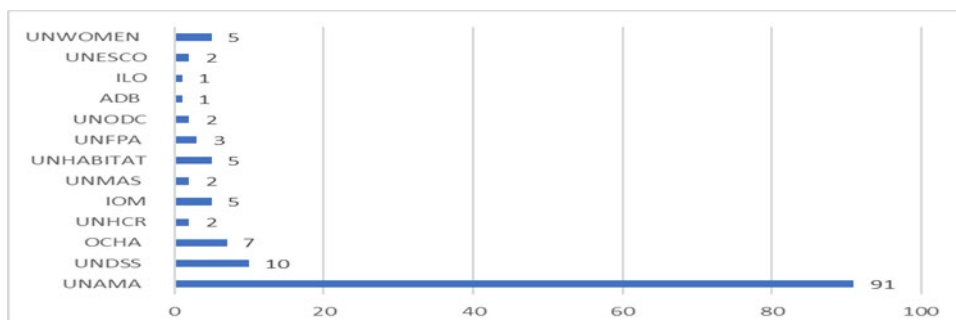


Figure 5: UNCT national personnel evacuated as of 25 February 2022



Source: DSS recommended staff evacuation list

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Labour Organization (ILO), Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

¹ The ECWG team was led by the Deputy Secretary-General and comprised representatives from the Department of Political and Peace-building Affairs (DPPA, lead), DSS, UNAMA SRSG and DSRSGs, Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) and executive heads of 12 AFPs.

² The lists included 151 names but 15 were duplicated.

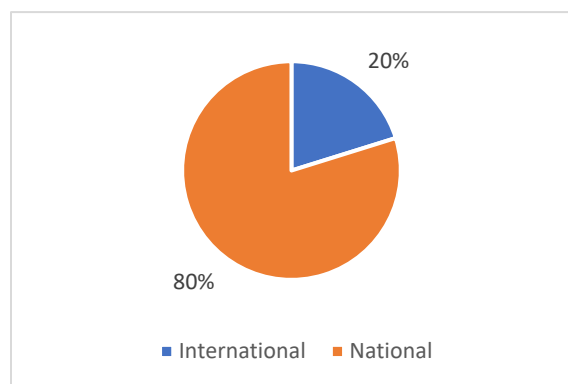
8. As part of the emergency response mechanisms, UNAMA arranged various payments to its international and national personnel.³ Costs associated with the evacuation, relocation and other aspects of the emergency crisis are outlined in Table 2 and depicted in Figure 6.

Table 2: Financial implications for UNAMA of staff relocations as of 12 May 2022

Financial expenses	National staff (\$)	International staff (\$)	Total expenses (\$)
Daily subsistence allowance (DSA) for staff relocations	2,772,163	243,230	3,015,393
Security evacuation allowance	5,699,925	1,696,150	7,396,075
Charter flights for staff evacuation	189,112	665,540	854,652
Total costs	8,661,200	2,604,920	11,266,120

Source: KJSO/ Umoja records

Figure 6: Proportion for financial evacuation and relocation expenses for national vs international staff



9. In addition, due to the closure of banks, the Mission paid salary as cash advances amounting to \$1.65 million mainly to national staff.

10. The requirement for evacuation of international staff and relocation of national personnel was lifted on 19 September 2021. However, the evacuation of national staff continued until February 2022, and some staff remain outside the country.

11. Comments provided by UNAMA are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

12. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNAMA’s emergency response mechanisms before, during and after the August 2021 security crisis in Afghanistan.

³ Chapter VI of the security policy manual (para 5 and 6) stipulates that evacuated personnel are entitled to security evacuation allowance of \$200 per day during the first 30 days and \$150 per day from the 31st day until the personnel returns, or until six months have elapsed following evacuation, whichever is soonest. Additionally, a flat payment of \$500 for relocation and incidental expenses is provided.

13. This audit was included in the 2022 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the strategic and operational risks relating to the safety and security of staff and the continuation of UNAMA's mandate implementation.

14. OIOS conducted this audit from April to August 2022. The audit covered the period from January 2021 to March 2022. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas in UNAMA's emergency response mechanisms, which included: (a) governance and crisis management; (b) ORMS; (c) emergency response mechanisms; and (d) financial cost.

15. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel, (b) review of relevant documentation such as minutes of meetings of senior leadership and crisis and security management teams, and (c) analytical review of data. Due to their confidentiality, some documents, including the Personal Security Risk Assessments (PSRA) of national staff evacuated from Afghanistan, were not made available to OIOS for review and assessment. Therefore, OIOS could not provide assurance on the Mission's compliance with the requisite criteria, policies and procedures in the implementation of the PSRA, including the list of national staff and dependents who were recommended and those subsequently evacuated.

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

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Governance and crisis management mechanisms

While UNAMA implemented the required crisis management mechanisms, there were challenges

17. UNSMS Afghanistan established the Designated Area Security Plan (DASP) which was approved in November 2020. The first meeting of the international military withdrawal (IMW) working group was convened in January 2021, following the announcement of the withdrawal of American and NATO forces from Afghanistan. The IMW working group was chaired by the Chief of Staff with management representatives from UNAMA's Strategic Communications, Joint Medical Services and Mission Support sections, as well as the Senior Military Adviser, Head of the Resident Coordinator's Office and the Principal Security Adviser, DSS. The IMW working group had no terms of reference but was nonetheless instrumental in implementing the IMW contingency planning and keeping the Mission's leadership apprised of progress on the implementation of the various tasks assigned to its members. This included updates on different thematic areas such as medical and aviation capacity with a focal lead for each thematic area and lightening of staff footprint. The Mission also conducted region-specific security, aviation and medical capacity gap assessments and identified the necessary mitigating actions. To enhance its medical capacity, the Mission requested additional budgetary resources through Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and an additional aeromedical team was deployed early in August 2021, but it only became fully operational on 30 August 2021 following the release of medical equipment from customs. Fortunately, no casualties occurred during the crisis and the need for such medical care did not materialize.

18. Following the onset of military withdrawal in May 2021, the IMW working group transferred its tasks to the responsible operational departments in the Mission (medical and aviation), the Crisis Management Team (CMT) and SMT.

19. In June 2021, USG, DSS visited UNAMA (Kabul, Kandahar and Bamyan regions) and had discussions with the management and staff on their concerns. Following his visit, UNAMA revised its contingency plan for the preparation of the military withdrawal, including action points for immediate/mid-term implementation at the Mission level.

20. As the security situation further deteriorated, the ECWG was formed in June 2021 to ensure the highest level of engagement, including provision of policy guidance and support to the UNCT. They held 11 meetings between 28 June and 11 November 2021, to address critical issues of a strategic nature impacting safety and security of staff in Afghanistan, including evacuation and relocation of staff and implementation of the Secretary-General's "stay and deliver" agenda. On 13 August 2021, DSS HQ activated a 24-hour Crisis Coordination Centre to support the UNSMS in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The DO briefed the CMT, SMT and UNAMA senior leadership team on the decisions of ECWG. Recommendations for evacuations/relocations from the local crisis structures (and working groups) were channelled for decisions to DSS and the ECWG.

21. The CMT, activated in June 2021, held 11 meetings from 22 June to 13 August 2021, during which it deliberated on and passed various emergency response decisions and recommendations including lightening of staff footprint and relocations of staff within Afghanistan (Table 1), formation of a national staff working group dedicated to overseeing the needs, peculiar situations and welfare of national staff, and also started to research the selection of offshore locations to serve as safe havens for staff evacuations. This included notes verbales to various embassies to assist with visas needed for national staff evacuation. The existing SMT continued to hold regular meetings that focused on the assessment of security developments in the country by region and types of security threats with implications on the United Nations. On 15 August 2021, a joint decision of the CMT, UNAMA and the SMT was reached to integrate the CMT into the regular SMT structure to avoid duplication of efforts and to reach out to the wider AFPs represented in the SMT. While this enhanced participation of AFPs in emergency response decisions, there were challenges in implementing these decisions as illustrated later in this report.

22. In July 2021, UNAMA revised its internal standard operating procedures on relocation and evacuation and started preparations for evacuation on 12 August 2021 by composing a list of international staff to be evacuated. The Mission and DSS also contacted the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to secure the protection of the staff convoy en route to the international airport. A partial evacuation was conducted for 242 international staff (69 UNAMA, and 173 AFPs and non-United Nations international organizations) from Afghanistan to Almaty, Kazakhstan, onboard two contracted flights on 18 and 22 August 2021.

23. Despite the various crisis mechanisms implemented, the sudden fall of Kabul and the speed of its fall, as well as other noted inadequacies, resulted in various challenges as outlined in this report. OIOS notes that DSS started a lesson learned review in September 2022 to examine the UNSMS' response, decisions and actions at all levels to identify lessons, positive and negative, that could serve to develop and share best practices or adjust operational guidance, policies, practices and relevant training.

B. Organizational resilience management system

Inadequacy of some ORMS elements and challenges in their operationalization

24. The UNAMA 29 December 2018 ORMS Playbook documents the policies and procedures used by the Mission to prepare, prevent, respond and recover from disruptive events. This includes crisis management, security response, crisis communication, business continuity, and information technology disaster recovery for the Mission. The respective components of the Mission are responsible for preparing and maintaining detailed plans and guidelines in each of the identified areas.

(a) Business continuity plan

25. The Mission initiated its crisis preparedness in October 2020 and updated its business continuity plan (BCP) in July 2021. The previous BCP had been drafted in October 2017 but was not finalized. The revised 2021 BCP identified UNAMA's strategies for maintaining its essential and time-critical business services during and/or in the aftermath of a disruptive event, which included (i) essential and time-sensitive business services; (ii) continuity strategies for maintaining critical business processes and activities; (iii) contact details of personnel with essential and time-sensitive functions; (iv) dependencies on information, communication and technology (ICT) infrastructure and applications; (v) list of vendors, suppliers and partners with an essential and time critical function; and (vi) list of vital records.

26. The Mission adequately safeguarded its ICT infrastructure and applications, and vital records. As the United Nations had advocated for paperless records and for working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission's records were already digitalized and all UNAMA data were maintained in the cloud (SharePoint Online). During the crisis, the Field Technology Section (FTS) coordinated with other UNAMA offices to remotely shut down systems and cleanse vital data. Although 25 laptops/computers were reported stolen from field offices, the Mission's security investigation reports did not refer to any loss of sensitive data as users had been advised to store only non-critical data on their laptops. Also, all laptops with critical data were encrypted (with BitLocker). Prior to the crisis, the transfer of vital data from the Kabul Alpha Disaster Recovery Centre to UNOCA had been completed, and sensitive ICT equipment from field offices were also transferred, where the security situation permitted.

27. However, due to the delay in finalizing the revised BCP (July 2021), the Mission did not have sufficient time to test its feasibility through a tabletop exercise to identify and rectify gaps and weaknesses. As a result, the following areas of the BCP needed improvements:

i. **Essential and time-sensitive business services:** The BCP listed "accounting for all staff members, personnel members and visitors, as well as ensuring the protection of staff, visitors and physical assets" as one of the primary essential and time-sensitive business services. However, UNAMA and DSS had not implemented appropriate mechanisms to maintain an accurate list of staff in the Mission and therefore a readily available, accurate and complete list of UNAMA personnel, including national staff and their dependents, did not exist. Developing a comprehensive staff list that contained names and details of recognized dependents including passport information was the subject of management meetings at the height of the crisis and it impeded the smooth evacuation of those who were exceptionally approved. The personnel list compiled by DSS from input provided by UNSMS organizations was inaccurate and included staff on vacation, duplicated names and names of people who no longer worked in the Mission. The list, therefore, needed a lot of reworks to identify staff who were to be evacuated on 18 and 22 August 2021, adding to anxiety, fear and further confusion. This was exacerbated by other difficulties such as disagreements among United Nations entities on the reduction of footprint, inability to land United Nations chartered aircraft due to lack of clearance from necessary authorities, and difficulties in moving staff to the airport due to uncontrolled crowds and security issues.

ii. **Continuity strategies for maintaining critical business processes and activities:**

- The BCP did not provide adequate information on existing arrangements for relocation of operations to alternate locations within or outside the country. The draft 2014 and 2017 BCPs had mentioned Kuwait as a possible evacuation location stating that the existing United Nations' facilities there offered the most practical and cost-effective solution for UNAMA to relocate functions, while the DASP indicated Dubai as the

primary safe haven for evacuation of international personnel from Afghanistan. As this was not a requirement in the revised BCP template, no alternate location was specified in the 2021 BCP or any other updated document on crisis management. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the willingness of the Kazakhstan government to accommodate the United Nations at short notice, staff were evacuated to Almaty, Kazakhstan, as it was thought to be easier to access than Dubai. The Mission stated that Kuwait was not a viable option at the time due to the tight COVID-19 restrictions.

- The BCP also did not include and discuss shelter-in-place protocols and alternate recovery locations prior to evacuation being authorized. Although these may not have been options for this crisis, such considerations were necessary to ensure the BCP is complete.

iii. **Contact details of personnel with essential and time-sensitive functions:** The BCP listed 95 international personnel with essential and time-sensitive functions and mapped the names with the critical business processes. The list included the SRSG, two DSRSGs, 15 staff members from the integrated security workforce, 10 from close protection units, 6 from premises and guard force units, and 61 substantive and support personnel who were required to deliver mandated activities and mission support. Additionally, 30 international staff had been earlier identified in a separate document entitled UNAMA Rated Outputs dated 21 June 2021 as Programme Criticality (PC 1) to fulfill priority activities that included:

- Building public awareness and support for an inclusive peace process and giving a voice to the needs and interests of all sectors of the population, including civil society;
- Promoting the rights of all Afghans, including women, youth, and marginalized groups;
- Monitoring and reporting on the protection of civilians, and the advancement of human rights in Afghanistan, including the promotion of victim-centered justice; and
- Dialogue with the Taliban on the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights.

While the BCP identified contact details and names of staff on the critical services list, the concerned critical staff were not informed of their roles and responsibilities in the event of a crisis. In addition, the programme criticality list was inaccurate and not well managed leading to challenges on deciding who should remain in country and who should be evacuated. The DO also encountered resistance in reducing the staff footprint in the country as detailed later in the report. As a result, only 3 of the 30 identified UNAMA PC 1 staff remained in the Mission. They were supported by 29 security personnel, 1 international consultant, 8 United Nations Volunteers and 7 civilian international staff who were not previously identified on the PC 1 list. The United Nations' key message for July and early August 2021 was to "stay and deliver" the mandate while ensuring the safety and security of staff. However, one of the BCP's time-sensitive business processes as a political mission, to maintain situational awareness and reinforce the Mission's mandated priorities on the spot, might not have been possible to deliver due to the absence of relevant staff.

iv. **List of vendors, suppliers, partners with an essential and time critical function:** The fuel vendor was not among the 10 listed vendors to be contacted during emergency events. While there were no documented issues regarding fuel during this crisis, the names and details of such

vendors should have been included in the BCP as fuel is necessary to maintain critical services during a crisis.

(b) Crisis management plan

28. In accordance with ORMS, UNAMA prepared a crisis management plan that included crisis management activities at tactical, operational and strategic levels, and highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the different parties involved in the emergency response, including the Crisis Manager (DO) and DSS. However, there were gaps in the following areas:

29. **Use of helicopter:** The crisis management plan did not outline how UNAMA would use its helicopter to respond to a crisis. The helicopter was parked at the airport when Kabul fell on 15 August 2022, while the crew was at the UNOCA compound and had no access to it. Also, as the Mission did not have a secure helipad from which to operate, the helicopter was not a viable option to transport staff to the international airport and road convoys were used instead. The crisis management plan needed to consider how UNAMA would use its helicopter during a crisis and, if required, incorporate relevant actions to mitigate the associated risks.

30. **Mission physical security arrangements:** At the fall of Kabul, the UNOCA compound was left without any external security arrangements. The compound's external perimeter had been guarded by a rotating pool of 155 personnel from the National Directorate of Security of the Ministry of Interior of Afghanistan, all of whom vacated their posts, leaving behind, in some instances, their weapons at the UNOCA gate. During interviews, it was noted that for approximately two days the external security of the compound was compromised as the United Nations was not sure who were surrounding the compound and providing guard service. They were later replaced by Taliban guards who provided security at the entrance and exit of the compound. The internal security of the compound was under the management of DSS with 3 international security officers, 45 United Nations Guard Force, 95 "Gurkhas" armed guards, and 199 brown shirt security personnel.

(c) Crisis communications

31. The Mission used the good offices of the SRSG, DSRSGs and the UNAMA Strategic Communication Office to disseminate information relating to Afghanistan's situation and to manage communication on the crisis to external audiences. UNAMA's Chief, Strategic Communications attended CMT/SMT meetings and coordinated with AFPs' communication heads and the Department of Global Communication to develop common key messaging on issues such as the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan and the safety and security of staff. In July 2021, the Mission prepared 10 headline/key messages (6 on United Nations' role in Afghanistan and 4 on staff security) relating to the then evolving security situation. In August 2021, a crisis communication cell (led by the Department of Global Communications and some AFPs) was operationalized to manage public communication from United Nations Headquarters. United Nations Afghanistan CMT Working Group on communication, comprising several AFPs and UNAMA, also developed a communication plan for the evolving security situation in Afghanistan. The messages highlighted the key civilian nature of the United Nations' work, the need to "stay and deliver", the safety and security of staff and other key objectives of the United Nations. These key messages were approved by the SRSG, CMT and ECWG.

32. In June and July 2021, the International Field Staff Union and other staff federations communicated to UNAMA's management through the submission of frequently asked questions (FAQs), concerns relating to the implications of IMW and the impact of Afghanistan's security deterioration on the overall safety and well-being of staff. Mission leadership addressed staff questions and concerns through:

- Communication exchanges and high-level engagement with heads of staff unions and federations from the United Nations system.
- Town hall meetings led by the Secretary-General, USG, DSS, SRSRSG, DSRSGs and other senior management.
- Answering the FAQs and through all-staff broadcasts to communicate crisis-related administrative guidelines, the security situation and the status of its efforts to support national staff.

33. OIOS interviews, however, indicated that UNAMA's management communication and engagement with the UNAMA Field Service Union and the National Staff Association representatives did not meet expectations, leading to a lack of confidence in some of the emergency response measures. Interviewees stated that information flow during the crisis was at times decentralized, not clear and inconsistent leading to misinterpretation of the management messages and actions. The following are examples:

- Due to inadequate communications, the national staff (mostly working in critical support areas) reported to the office on the day the Taliban took control of Kabul city and had problems getting home. UNAMA stated that this was due to a lack of intelligence that Kabul would fall sooner than expected.
- There were delays in providing timely communication to ease the anxiety of evacuated national staff. To diffuse staff concerns, the Mission could have conveyed, for instance, its reliance on Member States to acquiesce to the Mission's requests to support national staff evacuation, including the likelihood of negative and non-responses to UNAMA's requests for visas for national staff, which was not made known to everyone.
- On 7th August 2021, the CMT communication working group drafted an internal communication plan for the Mission and AFPs, which included communication objectives, FAQs, key messages and action items with timelines and responsible offices. However, this was not approved, monitored and followed through by the various crisis management structures to ensure effective implementation.
- Interviewed staff felt that there was inadequate communication flow from the Senior Leadership on the evacuation plans and what was happening on the ground when the Taliban took control of Kabul on August 15. Until the DO decided to move staff to the international airport, who were eventually evacuated on 18 August 2021, some staff indicated that they had received no assurances from Mission management and were uncertain as to what was happening and the Mission's position regarding their safety. UNAMA management, however, attributed this to inadequate information flow during a rapidly changing situation. Additionally, while proceeding to the airport prior to evacuation, a lack of proper convoy management and communications breakdown resulted in the 51-car convoy being stuck on the road for three hours without its occupants being updated on the situation. The Mission attributed this to procedures that had been adopted that day but that security officers were being kept informed.

34. In addition, in April 2021, UNAMA drafted an internal communication plan for security transition until June 2021. However, this plan was not endorsed/approved by the CMT and was not updated to serve as an internal crisis communications plan.

35. UNAMA needed to review the various elements of its ORMS to ensure they are adequate to enable a robust response to a crisis event. This should include ensuring that: (a) there is an accurate and updated record of staff and their dependents to facilitate accounting for them and implementing any other actions that may be necessary; (b) the lists of critical programme activities and essential and time-sensitive business services are well identified and staff with responsibilities to conduct them are notified of their roles and trained to work as a team under crisis conditions; (c) there are adequate arrangements for alternate locations from which to operate within or outside the country and methods of evacuation/relocation; (d) there is a solid internal crisis communication plan to guide messaging and communications to staff and ensure they are provided with regular updates on security, situational awareness and the Mission's response to the crisis; and (e) the crisis management plan is strengthened to improve the physical security of the Mission's compound.

36. UNAMA also needed to develop and implement a maintenance, exercise and review regime for ORMS to ensure that the underlying plans are tested to check the feasibility of emergency management procedures and to identify areas for improvement.

(1) UNAMA should implement measures to ensure all elements of its organizational resilience management system are fully developed, including its business continuity, internal crisis communications and crisis management plans.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that elements of the crisis management plan were reflected in the UNAMA ORMS Playbook, which includes crisis management responsibilities and other aspects of crisis management preparedness and response. The ORMS Playbook as well as the internal crisis communication plan, were in the process of being revised/updated.

(2) UNAMA should develop and implement a process to test and update the plans supporting its organizational resilience management system through a regular maintenance programme and after-action reviews following response to a crisis event.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 2.

C. Emergency response mechanisms

Differences in the implementation of AFPs and UNAMA's mandates impacted the ability of the DO to effectively direct the crisis response

37. The United Nations system-wide Crisis Management Policy (2018) stipulates that in the event of a safety and security crisis, the DO retains accountability for specific decision-making in accordance with the UNSMS framework of accountability and relevant UNSMS policy guidance including the Guidelines on Management of Safety and Security Crisis Situations.

38. The security crisis required a reduction in the number of United Nations staff in the country. Prior to the takeover of Afghanistan, UNAMA had begun lightening its international staff footprint in Afghanistan by requiring staff to work from home. However, although AFPs were members of the SMT and CMT, attended the ECWG and were included in the decision-making process, they did not take similar measures. This was because they did not agree on the optimal staff footprint that would enable them to "stay and deliver," considering that the security crisis would further exacerbate the existing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. OIOS was informed that the AFPs received directives from their headquarters offices to "stay and deliver," despite guidance by the Principal Security Advisor on the worsening security situation in Afghanistan and the decision of the DO to evacuate staff. To ensure minimal staff presence in

Afghanistan, the DO was therefore forced to evacuate the majority of UNAMA staff including critical staff⁴ who were required to conduct activities such as facilities management of the UNOCA compound and provide logistics arrangements including field technology, counselling, life support services, centralized warehouse, ground transportation and aviation and movement control to both the Mission and AFPs. This heightened the challenges UNAMA was already facing in running the United Nations integrated facilities⁵.

39. The Director, Division of Regional Operations, DSS indicated that the DO had escalated the issue of AFPs' non-compliance with security measures to both the Director and USG, DSS but the matter was difficult to resolve. OIOS noted that the reduction of United Nations footprint in Afghanistan was discussed on 16 August 2021 at the meeting of the Executive Group on Security (EGS)⁶ with all members agreeing with the temporary evacuation of international staff. However, OIOS discussions with the then SRSR/DO and other key staff, indicated the DO had serious challenges from the executive heads of the AFPs during the crisis to enforce her decisions in an expeditious manner.

(3) The Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security should engage with the executive directors of agencies, funds and programmes and heads of other components of the United Nations security management system (UNSMS) to discuss the implementation of security decisions taken under the UNSMS framework of accountability, as well as the lessons learned from the August 2021 crisis in Afghanistan.

DSS accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the USG, DSS would meet bilaterally with executive directors of AFPs and heads of other components of the UNSMS to discuss the implementation of security decisions.

Criteria for the evacuation of national staff needed further clarification

40. In July 2021, a DPPA-led working group, including UNAMA, drafted policy guidance that was approved by the ECWG in August 2021 for the exceptional evacuation of national staff. In addition to the United Nations policy on evacuation for locally recruited personnel, UNAMA implemented a National Staff Unit led by the Chief Legal Office, which was instrumental in drafting a guideline that proposed two additional criteria for evacuation, i.e., staff performing certain functions and having public visibility, in addition to case-by-case profile risk assessments. The assessments were to be conducted by DSS with inputs provided by AFP security focal points and programme managers. Accordingly, programme managers provided to DSS the names and details of national staff who may be at risk. This was followed by the individual PSRA assessments led by DSS with inputs provided by AFP security focal points, which then made recommendations for exceptional approval of the Secretary-General.

41. Due to the confidential nature of PSRAs, these documents were not made available to OIOS. Therefore, OIOS could not verify compliance with the requisite criteria, policies and procedures in the implementation of the PSRA. However, OIOS believed that the criteria used to evacuate some national support staff, such as a mail and pouch attendant, were unclear as these staff members' activities were not visible to the public. OIOS requested the DSS Director of Security Operations to provide assurance that his office had overseen the PSRA process, including the Secretary-General's approval, and verified the

⁴ To minimize footprint in Kabul, UNAMA evacuated on 18 and 22 August, 73 of its 126 international staff including most of its critical staff.

⁵ An audit of UNAMA integrated facilities and cost-sharing arrangements for services provided by/to UNAMA will be conducted in 2023.

⁶ EGS was established by the Chief Executives Board to facilitate the rapid decision-making capacity of USG, DSS when there is an impasse or exigencies that impact the ability of the DO or SMT to rapidly address developing or critical events.

documentation of the selected national staff. While the Director verbally indicated that his office reviewed the documents, despite the request, OIOS has not received this verification in writing.

42. OIOS, in its interviews and document reviews, noted that there were ambiguous and unaddressed issues relating to the legal status of evacuated national staff in the countries to which they are sent, including the status of their employment contracts and their ability to continue working for the United Nations from those locations. UNAMA did not obtain requisite expertise from immigration experts on the implications for national staff, such as immigration status after evacuation. This has led to complaints and anxiety of evacuated staff (and their dependents) who were not certain of their status for several months and has impacted the productivity of substantive sections due to the vacancies created. Also, the evacuated national staff have not been able to return to work once the crisis abated, as the return to the Mission area was conditional upon individual security risk. Although the Mission stated that staff were expected to work remotely and this was communicated to them, OIOS believes that this was not feasible as some of the posts the staff are holding (such as security) are location dependent and the political landscape had changed.

43. While the Mission was reassessing the security profiles of evacuated staff to decide on their return to Afghanistan, it also needed to conduct an after-action review of their evacuation that includes the participation of all major stakeholders, including the Department for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC), Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), Department of Operational Support, DSS and DPPA, as relevant.

(4) UNAMA should, in coordination with DSS and other major stakeholders, conduct an after-action review of the evacuation of national staff and report the results to relevant entities at Headquarters to strengthen guidance on various aspects, including the visa and immigration status of the staff and their ability to work from the evacuation location.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the after-action review of the evacuation of national and international staff would be conducted with the participation of all major stakeholders and may trigger a comprehensive review of procedures or necessary protocols and guidance on various aspects to be used in similar situations in the future.

D. Financial costs

Security evacuation policy needed review

44. DSA and security evacuation allowance were disbursed in accordance with relevant guidance on staff relocation and evacuation from DMSPC and with DSS authorizations. As per the guidance, an evacuation allowance is to be paid to all staff outside the duty station. As a result, international staff who were on rest and recuperation or working from home at the time of the evacuation also received security evacuation allowance even though they had not been evacuated. In addition, a payment of \$200 per day during the first 30 days of evacuation and \$150 for up to 5 months thereafter if the situation remains unchanged, resulted in the evacuation allowance being higher than the danger pay (\$55 per day) received by staff who stayed on at the Mission to continue operations during the crisis. This may be a disincentive for staff to remain in the duty station during a period of heightened security and other hazards.

(5) UNAMA should clarify with DMSPC and other relevant offices on the eligibility of staff who were outside the Mission at the time of evacuation to receive security evacuation allowance; and review the disparity between the security evacuation allowance and danger pay during periods of mandatory evacuation.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 5.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

45. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNAMA 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 effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁷ / Important ⁸	C/ O ⁹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ¹⁰
1	UNAMA should implement measures to ensure that all elements of its organizational resilience management system are fully developed, including its business continuity, internal crisis communications and crisis management plans.	Important		Receipt of the revised/updated ORMS Playbook that is fully developed and incorporates all the necessary elements.	31 March 2023
2	UNAMA should develop and implement a process to test and update the plans supporting its organizational resilience management system through a regular maintenance programme and after-action reviews following response to a crisis event.	Important		Receipt of a maintenance programme to regularly test and update ORMS.	31 March 2023
3	The Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security should engage with the executive directors of agencies, funds and programmes and heads of other components of the United Nations security management system (UNSMS) to discuss the implementation of security decisions taken under the UNSMS framework of accountability, as well as lessons learned from the August 2021 crisis in Afghanistan.	Important		Receipt of evidence of implementation of action points from USG, DSS on engagement with the executive directors of AFPs and heads of other UNSMS components to discuss the implementation of security decision taken under the UNSMS framework of accountability, as well as lessons learned from the August 2021 crisis in Afghanistan.	30 June 2023
4	UNAMA should, in coordination with DSS, conduct an after-action review of the evacuation of national staff and report the results to relevant entities at Headquarters to strengthen guidance on various aspects, including the visa and immigration status of the staff and their ability to work from the evacuation location	Important		Receipt of the report on the after-action review conducted by UNAMA and other major stakeholders on the evacuation of staff.	30 June 2023

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

¹⁰ Date provided by UNAMA and DSS in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁷ / Important ⁸	C/ O ⁹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ¹⁰
5	UNAMA should clarify with DMSPC and other relevant offices on the eligibility of staff who were outside the Mission at the time of evacuation to receive security evacuation allowance; and review the disparity between the security evacuation allowance and danger pay during periods of mandatory evacuation.	Important		Receipt of the outcome of consultations with DMSPC and other relevant offices on the eligibility of staff who were outside the Mission at the time of evacuation to receive security evacuation allowance; and the disparity between the security evacuation allowance and danger pay during periods of mandatory evacuation.	30 June 2023

APPENDIX I

Management Response


United Nations  Nations Unies

UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN
UNAMA

Office of the Chief of Mission Support

18 December 2022

To : Ms. Muriette Lawrence-Hume
Chief,
New York Audit Service
Internal Audit Division, OIOS

From : Jorge Goncalves 
Chief of Mission Support

Subject: **Draft report on an audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanism by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (Assignment No. AP2022-63-01)**

1. Reference is made to your memorandum dated 5 December 2022, ref. OIOS-2022-01837, on the above subject.
2. As requested, please find attached UNAMA's response on the Report as well as on the recommendations.

Kind regards.

cc: Ms. Denise Wilman, Chief of Staff, UNAMA
Mr. Bill Miller, DSS
Mr. Antoine Abisamra, DSS
Ms. Savita Hande, DSS
Ms. Olga Mokrova, DSS
Mr. Adityavikram Pachisia, Audit Focal Point, UNAMA
Mr. Jeffrey Lin, OIOS

Management Response

Audit of the effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNAMA should implement measures to ensure that all elements of its organizational resilience management system are fully developed, including its business continuity, internal crisis communications and crisis management plans.	Important	Yes	Chief of Staff	31 March 2023	For the crisis management plan, it is understood that the elements are reflected in the UNAMA ORMS Playbook, which includes crisis management responsibilities and other aspects of crisis management preparedness and response. The ORMS Playbook, as well as the internal crisis communication plan, are in the process of being revised/updated with deadlines of either 31 December 2022 or 31 March 2023.
2	UNAMA should develop and implement a process to test and update the plans supporting its organizational resilience management system through a regular maintenance programme and after-action reviews following response to a crisis event.	Important	Yes	Chief of Staff	31 March 2023	
3	DSS should engage the Executive Group on Security to review the challenges encountered by the Designated Official for Afghanistan in obtaining the cooperation of the United Nations system organizations in the country in implementing security decisions taken during the August 2021	Important	Yes	OUSG/DSS	30 June 2023	Suggest paraphrasing this to: "USG for Safety and Security shall perform bilateral meetings with Executive Directors of AFP and heads of other components of the UN SMS to discuss the implementation of security decision as per the UN SMS

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 effectiveness of emergency response mechanisms by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	crisis; and provide guidance for dealing with similar situations in the future.					Policy on the Framework of Accountability, including based on the lessons learnt from the crisis in Afghanistan
4	UNAMA should, in coordination with DSS, conduct an after-action review of the evacuation of national staff and report the results to relevant entities at Headquarters to strengthen guidance on various aspects, such visa and immigration status of the staff and their ability to work from the evacuation location	Important	Yes	Chief of Mission Support	30 June 2023	The after-action review of the evacuation of national and international staff shall be conducted with the participation of all major stakeholders, such as DMSPC, OHRM, OLA, DOS, DSS, DPPA, other relevant partners in HQ, and the Secretariat, with the lead role of UNAMA. The after-action report may trigger a comprehensive review of procedures or prompt necessary protocols and guidance on various aspects which will be used in similar situations in the future.
5	UNAMA should clarify with DMSPC, in coordination with DSS, the eligibility of staff who were outside the Mission at the time of evacuation to receive security evacuation allowance; and review the disparity between the security evacuation allowance and danger pay during periods of mandatory evacuation.	Important	Yes	Chief of Mission Support	30 June 2023	DSS proposed re-wording: "UNAMA should clarify with OHRM/DMSPC, and if necessary with the Office of Legal Affairs and ICSC, the eligibility of staff who were outside the Mission at the time of evacuation to receive security evacuation allowance; and review the disparity between the security evacuation allowance and danger pay during periods of mandatory evacuation".