



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2019/097

Audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe

**Action has been taken to enhance oversight
of recruitment activities, but improvements
were needed to expedite the process**

**1 November 2019
Assignment No. AP2019/616/01**

Audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe (RSCE). The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process in RCSE, and its compliance with established rules and procedures. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2017 to May 2019 and included the management of vacancies, action taken to achieve its gender parity targets and administration of recruitment activities.

RSCE had enhanced its oversight of recruitment, but still needed to reduce the time taken to complete the process, improve those processes manually conducted, and undertake reference checks of successful candidates.

OIOS made four recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, RSCE needed to:

- Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of its recruitment activities by clearly allocating relevant responsibilities between the Human Resources and Talent Management Unit and hiring managers and establishing key performance indicators to monitor achievement of established targets;
- Review and improve its manual processes for recruitment of national staff and its record management and consider using Inspira to create efficiencies in the process;
- Improve its administration of written tests by enhancing security features of its testing portal or using available United Nations corporate technology test tools; and
- Conduct education and work experience verification for (a) all new recruitments prior to issuance of offer of appointment; and (b) currently serving staff for whom a reference check has not been conducted.

RSCE accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
I. BACKGROUND	1
II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	1
III. AUDIT RESULTS	2-7
A. Management of vacancies and gender parity targets	2-3
B. Administration of recruitment activities	3-7
IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	7
ANNEX I Status of audit recommendations	
APPENDIX I Management response	

Audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe (RSCE).
2. The Chief of RSCE has delegated authority for recruitment of international and national staff for the Centre. Various guidelines including the Staff Regulations and Rules and the administrative instruction on staff selection system (ST/AI/2010/3) provided guidance on recruitment activities.
3. The Human Resources and Talent Management Unit (HRTMU), established in May 2018, is responsible for monitoring vacancies and gender parity targets and providing recruitment support and guidance to RSCE hiring managers. The Unit, headed by the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) at the P-4 level, reports to the Deputy Chief of RSCE and had 10 staff comprising 5 international and 5 national staff. From 1 January 2017 to May 2019, RSCE made a total of 99 staff selections through 71 generic job openings (GJOs), 10 temporary job openings (TJOs), 9 recruits from roster (RfRs), 6 reassignments and 3 position-specific job openings (PSJOs). During the period 2018/19, RSCE had 406 approved posts, comprising 131 international and 269 national staff and 6 United Nations Volunteers.
4. Comments provided by RSCE are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

5. The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process in RCSE, and its compliance with established rules and procedures.
6. This audit was included in the 2019 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to operational and reputation risks associated with recruitment activities.
7. OIOS conducted this audit from February to May 2019. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2017 to May 2019. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas including management of vacancies, gender parity targets and administration of recruitment activities.
8. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation, (c) analytical reviews of data, and (d) testing of a randomly selected sample of 30 out of 99 recruitment actions concluded during the audit period.
9. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Management of vacancy and gender parity targets

RSCE managed its vacancy rates within projected rates and took actions to prioritize and fill critical posts

10. The erstwhile Department of Field Support (DFS) standard operating procedures on staff selection system requires RSCE to develop a recruitment plan at the start of each budget cycle ensuring vacant posts are filled in a timely manner, prioritising positions required to maintain operational priorities.

11. As at April 2019, the vacancy rates in RSCE were 16, 14 and 10 per cent for international staff, national professional officers and national general service staff. To manage its vacancies, HRTMU conducted monthly reviews and updates of the staffing table to incorporate staff movements and to inform hiring managers to promptly initiate new recruitment actions if needed. Also, following the Secretary-General's reform initiative related to the Global Service Delivery Model (GSDM), in 2017 a freeze on external recruitments was imposed on RSCE. This presented a challenge for them to reduce its vacancy rates and minimize adverse impact on their operational activities. To assist in addressing the challenge, in August 2018, RSCE developed and implemented a strategic plan which identified 19 out of the then 64 vacant posts as critical and needed to be filled as a priority. As of May 2019, RSCE had completed the recruitment process for all the 19 critical posts, with 8 incumbents of the 19 already on board. This reduced the vacancy rate to about 13 per cent overall.

12. OIOS concluded that RSCE has been taking adequate measures, within current constraints, to manage its vacancy rates and minimize the impact on operational activities owing to a freeze on external recruitments.

RSCE achieved overall gender parity targets but improvement was needed for the international female staff categories

13. The United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity and guidelines on staff selection system required RSCE to achieve 50/50 gender parity at all levels including in the professional and higher categories and to have a geographically diverse workforce.

14. The current RSCE staff comprised 51 nationalities from diverse nationalities, where a country with the highest number of staff members contributed 7 per cent of international staff. By December 2018, RSCE had achieved an overall gender ratio of 54 per cent female and 46 per cent male staff, above the 50/50 target. However, as at 14 May 2019, RSCE achieved only 37 per cent for the international female staff category below the target of 50 per cent, especially at the P-3 level where the ratio of international female to male staff members was only 28 per cent, as indicated in Table 1. The ratio of female staff at the P-5 level in 2019 increased by the recruitment of female candidates for the Deputy Chief of the Centre and the Client Services Section.

Table 1
RSCE gender parity statistics for international staff as at 14 May 2019

Level	31-Dec-17		31-Dec-18		14-May-19		Change in per cent of women increase (+)/decrease (-) 2017 to 2019
	Number of women	Per cent of women	Number of women	Per cent of women	Number of women	Per cent of women	
D-1	-	0%	-	0%	-	0%	0%
P-5	-	0%	1	25%	2	40%	40%
P-4	3	33%	5	45%	4	40%	7%
P-3	9	41%	6	33%	5	28%	-14%
P-2	2	67%	1	50%	2	67%	0%
FS	29	41%	29	40%	27	39%	-3%
Total/Average of international female staff	43	39%	42	38%	40	37%	-2%
National staff	142	61%	141	61%	148	61%	0%
Total/Average of all female staff	185	54%	183	54%	188	54%	0%

Source: RSCE's staffing database

15. RSCE took measures aimed at achieving and sustaining the gender parity targets for the international staff categories. This included gender reports and regularly monitoring gender parity status. The Centre also conducted a job fair during United Nations Women's Day to promote and encourage female applicants through demonstrating the suitability of the environment. During the audit period, RSCE selected female candidates in 11 of the 25 (44 per cent) international staff recruitments. A further 10 female candidates selected declined the Centre's offer stating the uncertainty of the job security relating to the GSDM reform initiative and the low level of post adjustment at the duty station. RSCE also carried out gender parity sensitization activities to all staff including hiring managers, emphasizing the importance of taking steps to achieve gender parity in the staff recruitment and management processes. OIOS concluded that RSCE management was taking measures to improve gender parity for international and professional and above categories.

B. Administration of recruitment activities

Management made noticeable improvements, but further actions were needed to enhance its recruitment activities

16. HRTMU and hiring managers were required to conduct various procedures to screen applicants on information provided in their application, to determine whether they meet the minimum requirements of the approved job openings (JO) and identify shortlisted candidates and further evaluate them through written test and Competency Based Interview (CBI).

(a) The recruitment process was well managed

17. OIOS review of 30 of 99 recruitments indicated that HRTMU and hiring managers generally followed the required recruitment procedures. The review noted that: (a) HRTMU posted JOs for the required period and conducted eligibility pre-screening of applications; and (b) hiring managers evaluated

all released candidates against the requirements of the JO, prepared a shortlist of candidates and administered written technical assessments and CBIs. Interview panels were established for all JOs issued and the panels comprised at least three members who had undergone the CBI training, and each panel included a female member. Interview results were adequately documented, with hiring managers preparing comparative analysis reports to demonstrate that candidates were evaluated against the competencies needed for the position.

(b) RSCE was in the process of establishing a recruitment review panel

18. RSCE had not yet established a review panel to verify compliance of national staff recruitment activities on all job openings at GS-5 level and above. RSCE explained it would establish the panel prior to the end of 2019, and had already developed terms of reference, checklists and templates to ensure proper functioning of the panel. It had also identified candidates to be members of the panel who were undergoing the CBI training. In view of the actions being taken, OIOS did not make a recommendation on the subject.

(c) Work plans were developed but needed to be improved to clarify roles and responsibilities in the recruitment process

19. Prior to establishment of HRTMU in 2018, recruitment activities were handled by the Office of the Chief of RSCE. With the establishment of HRTMU, RSCE management had made noticeable improvement in organizing the recruitment function and enhancing the expertise of the six newly hired staff of the Unit. Additionally, in August 2018, HRTMU developed an annual work plan specifying 11 goals, including the development and implementation of a recruitment strategy. However, the strategy and work plan did not clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities in the recruitment process between HRTMU and hiring managers. There were also insufficient specific and measurable performance indicators to allow RSCE to assess the effectiveness of its work.

20. In assessing the timeliness of the recruitment process, OIOS used the targets established in the Manuals on Staff Selection System and for the Recruiter, which were 86 calendar days for RfR and 126 calendar days for all other JOs to complete relevant staff selection process from the day of their announcement to onboarding. Further, the recommendation of candidates by the hiring manager, including suitability assessment, shortlisting, and assessment tests should be conducted within 40 days.

21. An analysis of all 99 recruitments showed that the average time taken from vacancy announcement to onboarding was 294 days, which exceeded the target of 126 days. None of the 71 GJO staff recruitments were completed within the targeted timelines, with an average delay of 214 days, and the three international staff recruitments processed through PSJOs took an average of 347 days. RfRs; however, were all conducted within 86 days. Further analysis noted that there were often significant delays in the shortlisting of applicants and written assessment stages. Delays in the process mainly resulted because RSCE did not promulgate the specific responsibilities of HRTMU staff and hiring managers and the related target timelines for each major stage in the recruitment process. Delays in the recruitment could adversely affect the ability of RSCE to carry out its operational activities.

(d) Need to safeguard the integrity of the written test process

22. RSCE is required to ensure that the written tests assessing candidates are administered in a manner ensuring the integrity of the process. RSCE developed a web-based survey/testing portal for administering the assessment tests. The portal was maintained by a staff member in HRTMU, who had not yet been adequately trained on its use, and its technical soundness had not been adequately assessed by the Regional Field Technology Service Section of RSCE. HRTMU informed OIOS of an incident in which the portal failed to limit the time set for the assessment test. This incident pertained to GJO in which three staff were

recruited. System glitches such as the one reported could have resulted in unfairness in the process such as sharing or discussion of test materials among candidates.

(e) Systems for management of the recruitment process needed to improve

23. RSCE did not have a well-organized system for maintaining important recruitment records, as they were held in different systems (generic email of HRTMU, emails of individual staff of the Unit, and paper files) and therefore search for relevant records took a long time to locate and consolidate. OIOS also noted that due to inadequate record management, a total of 17 successful candidates were not included in the national staff roster.

24. RSCE had not used the corporate recruitment platform, Inspira, in the recruitment of national staff. All 74 recruitments for national staff were done manually including the receipt of applications, eligibility screening and assessments ensuring applicants meet the required job specifications. This was mainly as RSCE was considered as a 'mission' for budgeting purposes and only obtained a standalone budget for fiscal year 2019/20. However, as with other duty stations, such as the United Nations Office in Nairobi, RSCE could start using Inspira to improve the management of its recruitment of national staff.

(1) RSCE should enhance efficiency and effectiveness of its recruitment activities by clearly allocating relevant responsibilities between the Human Resources and Talent Management Unit and hiring managers and establishing key performance indicators to monitor achievement of established targets.

RSCE accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it has already taken steps to allocate responsibilities between HRTMU and hiring managers. Also, organizational recruitment targets have been defined for all recruitment processes and going forward to fully address the gap, those targets would be included and monitored in the work plans. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that recruitment responsibilities are clearly allocated between HRTMU and hiring managers and key performance indicators are established and effectively monitored.

(2) RSCE should review and improve its manual processes for recruitment of national staff and its record management and consider using Inspira to create efficiencies in the process.

RSCE accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the decision to use Inspira was beyond the RSCE management authority. It stated that missions were not allowed to use Inspira for recruitment of national staff. RSCE had been considered as a Mission until 1 July 2019 when through RSCE 2019/20 budget, RSCE was recognized as an entity, not a Mission. The Centre had started engaging United Nations Headquarters on the use of Inspira for national staff recruitment and would implement it when approved. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that improvements have been made to its manual processes and its record management of national staff recruitment or that Inspira has been implemented to manage the process.

(3) RSCE should improve its administration of written tests by enhancing security features of its testing portal or using available United Nations corporate technology test tools.

RSCE accepted recommendation 3 and stated that DMSPC and DOS during a meeting on 25 July 2019 updated the Centre with an initiative to integrate Inspira with Moodle as global testing solution. The new tools were expected to go live on August 2019 which RSCE would roll out. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence on the implementation of the United Nations corporate test tools in RSCE.

The management of temporary appointments have improved

25. Temporary appointments are for specific, non-core short-term requirements that are expected to last up to 364 days. This limit could be extended under exceptional cases for an additional 365 days to make the maximum period of temporary appointment to 729 days. Temporary appointments made for duration of three months without competitive recruitment process should only be extended through a competitive TJO.

26. OIOS review of all 37 (10 international and 27 national staff) temporary appointments made during the audit period showed the following:

- The average duration for the 37 temporary appointments was 500 days, with the longest temporary appointment being 941 days. A total of 8 temporary appointments exceeded 729 days, 15 appointments lasted between 365 and 728 days and 14 lasted shorter than 364 days. These extended durations were all justified by management; for example, that the staff member performed critical functions and had specific knowledge of ongoing projects. However, OIOS noted that temporary appointments were made even for core activities like travel, human resources and finance. This included one finance staff on board since December 2014 through extending the temporary appointment 14 times that included reappointments and extensions using three different job titles while conducting the same function. The RSCE management regularized 22 of 37 posts and the process to regularize the rest was ongoing, and
- In the case of a human resources assistant, the temporary appointment was extended twice (March 2017 to January 2018) and without posting a TJO and conducting a recruitment process. The same appointment was exceptionally extended for 90 days without the required break in service of three months. This position was subsequently regularized through a fixed term appointment.

27. Most of the above-mentioned cases happened prior to the establishment of HRTMU, when temporary appointments were administered on an ad hoc basis without adequate documentation of the processes, which the Unit had improved and thus reduced non-compliance cases. There were some recent cases extending duration of temporary appointments, which were justified to cope with the freeze on external recruitments during the GSDM reform initiative. In view of the improvements, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

Need to conduct reference checks in all recruitments

28. The Guidelines for the Selection of Locally Recruited Staff requires reference checks, consisting of verification of candidates' educational qualifications and employment records, to be undertaken for all external candidates applying for national and international staff posts, as well as currently serving staff for whom a reference check had not yet been conducted. Reference checks must be completed prior to an offer of appointment to a selected candidate.

29. OIOS reviewed records for 30 (15 international and 15 national) of 99 staff recruitments and noted that for all 15 national staff selected, although they had submitted documents to support their educational qualifications and work experience, HRTMU had not verified them. For these cases, OIOS: (a) checked if the university education institutions were accredited by UNESCO through the World Higher Education Database (whed.net); (b) compared certificates from same institutions for any visible variance or defects; and (c) checked if the documents submitted met the minimum education requirement for high school diploma for general service staff. The following was noted that:

- Three out of 10 cases where university level education was required, the university degree certificates were dubious, as they had varying print formats although issued by the same university.
- One high school graduation certificate did not contain a valid serial number, raising concerns about its validity.
- In one case, a high school examination transcript showing an overall failure was accepted as an equivalent to the high school diploma certificate.
- Although the minimum entry level requirement for general service staff is a high school diploma, eight applicants who did not have a high school diploma submitted ordinary level certificates instead a high school diploma were accepted as the meeting minimum education requirement.

30. RSCE had a procedure to conduct reference checks for recruitments at the national professional officer level, but not for national general service level staff before issuance of their offer of appointment. Failure to conduct reference checks for education qualifications and work experience at any staff level may expose United Nations to the risk of having unqualified staff and less than optimal performance.

(4) RSCE should conduct education and work experience verification for (a) all new recruitments prior to issuance of offer of appointment; and (b) currently serving staff for whom a reference check has not been conducted.

RSCE accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it was committed to conducting reference checks in accordance with the Secretariat guidelines and has taken steps since the establishment of HRTMU for all new recruitments. The management would also conduct reference checks for serving staff for whom a reference check was not previously undertaken. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that reference checks are systematically undertaken for newly recruited staff and have been conducted for those serving RSCE staff for whom reference check was not already undertaken.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

(Signed) Eleanor T. Burns
 Director, Internal Audit Division
 Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	RSCE should enhance efficiency and effectiveness of its recruitment activities by clearly allocating relevant responsibilities between the Human Resources and Talent Management Unit and hiring managers and establishing key performance indicators to monitor achievement of established targets.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that recruitment responsibilities are clearly allocated between HRTMU and hiring managers and key performance indicators are established and effectively monitored.	30 June 2020
2	RSCE should review and improve its manual processes for recruitment of national staff and its record management and consider using Inspira to create efficiencies in the process.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that improvements have been made to its manual processes and its record management of national staff recruitment or that Inspira has been implemented to manage the process.	30 September 2020
3	RSCE should improve its administration of written tests by enhancing security features of its testing portal or using available United Nations corporate technology test tools.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence on the implementation of the United Nations corporate test tools in RSCE.	30 September 2020
4	RSCE should conduct education and work experience verification for (a) all new recruitments prior to issuance of offer of appointment; and (b) currently serving staff for whom a reference check has not been conducted.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that reference checks are systematically undertaken for newly recruited staff and have been conducted for those serving RSCE staff for whom reference check was not already undertaken.	30 June 2020

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.

³ C = closed, O = open

⁴ Date provided by DOS/RSCE in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response



UNCLASSIFIED

Immediate

DATE: **OCT 24 2019**

REFERENCE: DOS-2019-06883

TO: Mr. Daeyoung Park, Chief
A: Peacekeeping Audit Service, Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General
DE: for Operational Support

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Atul Khare', written over a horizontal line.

SUBJECT: **Draft report on an audit of recruitment activities by Regional Service Centre in**
OBJET: **Entebbe (Assignment No.: AP2019/616/01)**

1. I refer to your memorandum, dated 17 September 2019, regarding the draft report on an audit of recruitment activities by regional Service Centre in Entebbe.
2. As requested, please find our comments attached herewith as Annex I.
3. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report. We stand ready to provide any further information that may be required.

cc: Cynthia Avena-Castillo
Joseph Kibuci

Management Response

Audit of recruitment activities by the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	RSCE should enhance efficiency and effectiveness of its recruitment activities by clearly allocating relevant responsibilities between the Human Resources and Talent Management Unit and hiring managers and establishing key performance indicators to monitor achievement of established targets.	Important	Yes	Deputy Chief, RSCE	Second quarter of 2020	RSCE's comments are reflected in the report.
2	RSCE should review and improve its manual processes for recruitment of national staff and its record management and consider using Inspira to create efficiencies in the process.	Important	Yes	Deputy Chief, RSCE	Third quarter of 2020	RSCE's comments are reflected in the report.
3	RSCE should improve its administration of written tests by enhancing security features of its testing portal or using available United Nations corporate technology test tools.	Important	Yes	Deputy Chief, RSCE	Third quarter of 2020	RSCE's comments are reflected in the report.
4	RSCE should conduct education and work experience verification for (a) all new recruitments prior to issuance of offer of appointment; and (b) currently serving staff for whom a reference check has not been conducted.	Important	Yes	Deputy Chief, RSCE	Second quarter of 2020	RSCE's comments are reflected in the report

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.