



## **INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION**

### **REPORT 2022/018**

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**Audit of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Venezuela**

**While coordination mechanisms were functioning adequately and the Venezuela Humanitarian Fund was well managed, there was a need to enhance management of the country office**

**6 June 2022**

**Assignment No. AN2021-590-01**

# **Audit of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Venezuela**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Venezuela. The objective of the audit was to determine whether the OCHA country office in Venezuela delivered its mandate in an efficient and effective manner in line with OCHA's strategic objectives. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021 and included the following high-risk areas: (a) organization and overall management of OCHA Venezuela; (b) coordination of humanitarian response in Venezuela, (c) management of Venezuela Humanitarian Fund; (d) management of staff and other resources; (e) mainstreaming duty of care elements in operations; and (f) mainstreaming gender, human rights, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and multilingualism.

While coordination mechanisms were functioning adequately and the Venezuela Humanitarian Fund was well managed, there was a need to enhance the management of the country office as the work plans of the office's units and sub-offices were not well developed with specific goals and deliverables to facilitate monitoring and prevent duplication. Duty of care elements were not mainstreamed into the office's operations which impacted the safety, health and well-being of staff. Action points that arose during meetings of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) were not logged to ensure timely follow-up.

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

- Develop work plans for each unit and sub-office with specific goals and deliverables to facilitate monitoring and prevent duplications and overlaps;
- Develop procedures for logging and following up on action points that arise during meetings of the HCT;
- Collaborate with the Department of Safety and Security to provide required security telecommunications equipment to staff in the State of Apure;
- Develop a comprehensive action plan to: (i) identify and address existing staff concerns; and (ii) mainstream duty of care elements into office operations to enhance the safety, health and well-being of staff; and
- Develop and implement a plan to build the capacity of national staff to effectively use one of the working languages of the Secretariat.

In addition, OCHA needed to:

- Update the operational guidance for establishing country offices and compile lessons learned during the set up and scaling up of OCHA Venezuela for use in such guidance.

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

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# **Audit of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Venezuela**

## **I. BACKGROUND**

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Venezuela.

2. By its resolution 46/182 dated 19 December 1991, the General Assembly created OCHA as a part of the United Nations Secretariat to further strengthen the collective humanitarian efforts of the United Nations system in responding to complex emergencies and natural disasters. OCHA's country and regional offices are responsible for delivering five core functions in the field: (a) coordination, (b) humanitarian financing, (c) policy, (d) advocacy; and (e) information management. The OCHA Office in Venezuela was established in 2019 and is focused on supporting the humanitarian coordination architecture in the country.

3. According to the 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview, years of economic contraction, episodes of hyperinflation, political polarization and institutional challenges are the key drivers of humanitarian needs in Venezuela and have led to decreased public spending and provision of essential services. People's incomes, savings and purchasing power have also been severely affected. In 2020, improvements in the humanitarian situation were reversed by the COVID-19 pandemic and compounded by rising costs of food and essential non-food items, declining foreign remittances and lower global oil prices.

4. The Government of Venezuela's (GoV) gradual recognition of the need for humanitarian assistance has allowed the United Nations and partners to scale up assistance. Humanitarian partners in Venezuela have established humanitarian coordination structures, in line with guidelines issued by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The structures include the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), which works alongside the eight clusters activated in Venezuela to ensure coherence in providing humanitarian response in the country. The designated Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and HCT provide the overall strategic direction to the humanitarian response, while the inter-cluster coordination platform facilitates the clusters to work together to provide humanitarian assistance to affected persons. Other coordination mechanisms include working groups and applicable networks.

5. The 2020 and 2021 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) were developed by the inter-cluster coordination group (ICCG) under the supervision of the HCT and in consultation with GoV. The 2020 HRP identified five critical humanitarian issues in Venezuela: (a) health; (b) malnutrition and food insecurity; (c) human mobility and protection risks; (d) provision of and access to essential services; and (e) coping mechanisms for those affected. The 2021 HRP was based on a revised analysis of the critical issues identified in 2020 and took into consideration the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on those issues. The 2021 HRP was finalized in June 2021 due to lengthy consultations with GoV. Noting that delays in publication of the HRP impact resource mobilization, the HCT recommended a multi-year HRP. Consequently, the next HRP will be prepared for the two-year period 2022-2023.

6. In the 2021 HRP, an estimated 7 million people were identified as in need and humanitarian assistance was targeted at 4.5 million people. The Venezuela HRP received \$181.5 million (24 per cent) out of the \$762.5 million funding requirements in 2020. The funding received increased to \$260.7 million (37 per cent) out of the \$708.1 million required in 2021.

7. The Emergency Relief Coordinator established the Venezuela Humanitarian Fund (VHF) in September 2020. The Fund received voluntary contributions amounting to \$5.44 million and \$10.20 million in 2020 and 2021 from six and eight donors, respectively. A total of \$3.49 million was allocated in January

2021 under the first regular allocation of the VHF, and \$8 million in November 2021 under the second. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is used in complementarity with VHF to provide on-going life-saving humanitarian assistance. CERF allocations of \$8 million were made between January 2020 and September 2021.

8. The Office has four regional hubs and three sub-offices in Maracaibo, San Cristobal and Ciudad Guayana. It is headed by a Head of Office at the D-1 level, who is supported by 11 international staff, 17 national staff and 21 United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) with a budget of \$4.5 million.

9. Comments provided by OCHA are incorporated in italics.

## **II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

10. The objective of the audit was to determine whether the OCHA country office in Venezuela delivered its mandate in an efficient and effective manner in line with OCHA's strategic objectives.

11. This audit was included in the 2021 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to risks related to the coordination and delivery of humanitarian response in Venezuela.

12. OIOS conducted this audit from October 2021 to February 2022. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered the following high-risk areas: (a) organization and overall management of OCHA Venezuela; (b) coordination of humanitarian response in Venezuela, (c) management of VHF; (d) management of staff and other resources; (e) mainstreaming duty of care elements in operations; and (f) mainstreaming gender, human rights, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and multilingualism.

13. The audit methodology included: (a) interview with key personnel, (b) review of relevant documentation, (c) analytical review of data, and (d) sample testing of selected transactions.

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

## **III. AUDIT RESULTS**

### **A. Organization and overall management of OCHA Venezuela**

#### OCHA needed to improve planning and oversight of the establishment and scaling up of its field-based offices

15. OCHA Venezuela was initially established as part of the OCHA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC) in 2019 and became an independent country office from 1 January 2020. One administrative staff was hired to start the Operations Unit with active support from ROLAC and a service provider. The individual worked for over 10 months (between August 2019 and July 2020) performing all administrative functions including procurement, human resources, travel and finance, as the Head of Office was not able to find a suitable candidate to head the Unit. Five national staff were subsequently recruited to join the Operations Unit including a national officer as the head of the Unit. While the team was working to decrease the backlog of administrative tasks, several inefficiencies were reported including:

- Errors, leading to OCHA service providers often sending back requisitions for correction; and

- Delays in establishing procurement contracts for example, for office equipment and supplies and translation. In addition, all five staff in the Operations Unit were performing procurement actions. These staff informed OIOS that they needed further training to enable them carry out their functions more efficiently.

16. While self-paced training was available, staff in the Operations Unit stated that they were not able to avail themselves of the training due to competing priorities. For example, the head of the Operations Unit had not completed seven of the nine United Nations mandatory training courses as of 31 December 2021. In addition, due to delays in getting access to Umoja and the required training, staff in the Operations Unit were not adept at using the system. OIOS is of the view that the Operations Unit staff may benefit from on-the-job training by a staff member with more experience in handling similar responsibilities.

17. Other inefficiencies also impacted the operations of the Office. For example, for almost two years, OCHA Venezuela did not have any petty cash. Staff were paying for items such as fuel for official vehicles, office supplies, air tickets and minor vehicle maintenance from their personal funds and claiming reimbursements. In November 2021, four emergency petty cash advances of \$800 each were made to OCHA units in Caracas and each of the three sub-offices for use in the months of November and December 2021. OCHA staff welcomed the cash advances since there were often delays in getting reimbursements, which amounted to \$6,520 and \$19,069 in 2020 and 2021, respectively.

18. In January 2022, OCHA Headquarters approved the extension of the cash advance totalling \$4,518 as of 17 January 2022. OCHA Headquarters also stated that plans to establish an imprest account (as it was more suitable) for its office in Venezuela were ongoing. A petty cash imprest had not been established partly due to operational challenges including hyperinflation, no access to local currency and no official policy on the use of the United States dollar. Government policy subsequently changed on the use of the dollar and OCHA was able to find a solution through the emergency cash advance. However, there were no procedures for assessing the need for petty cash or a cash advance, which also contributed to the delay in establishing a petty cash/emergency cash advance/imprest account.

19. OCHA's policy instruction on the roles and responsibilities of country offices was last reviewed in June 2012. While the policy document indicates the structures of small, medium and large offices (depending on the budget), it does not articulate several pertinent issues including: (a) the required staffing capacity (numbers and post levels); and (b) procedures for identifying the need for and establishing required petty cash or imprest accounts. In addition, the document has not been revised to include the establishment of the required delegations of authority and procedures to ensure offices are created in the Umoja system with initial roles duly mapped in accordance with this delegation of authority.

20. The above inefficiencies may have been avoided with proper planning, training and deploying the right number of staff at the right level as the office was scaling up. In addition, proper oversight and guidance by OCHA's Advocacy and Operations Division (OAD)<sup>1</sup> over the establishment of the OCHA Venezuela country office may have identified and addressed the above anomalies in a timely manner. OCHA stated that it established offices based on the actual requirements for an emergency after a situational overview and analysis of the response. OCHA needed to compile lessons learned from the establishment of OCHA Venezuela to inform updates to its guidance on the establishment of country offices.

<p><b>(1) OCHA should: (i) update the operational guidance on establishing country offices; and (ii) compile lessons learned during the set up and scaling up of OCHA Venezuela for use in such guidance.</b></p>
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<sup>1</sup> OAD is responsible for providing strategic, policy and technical advice and support on all operational issues to OCHA senior leaders in the field

*OCHA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it would update the policy instruction on country offices that would also build on lessons learned during the setup and scaling up of OCHA Venezuela. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of the revised policy instruction on the establishment of country offices and compilation of lessons learned during the set-up of OCHA Venezuela.*

#### Need to prepare comprehensive work plans

21. OCHA Venezuela developed annual work plans for 2020 and 2021 in accordance with corporate strategic objectives and country specific priorities. While the work plans indicated country wide activities, timeframes and responsible units, they did not include the specific deliverables for each unit or sub-office. For example, the 2021 work plan indicated that both coordination and public information units were responsible for: (a) regular monitoring of humanitarian access and constraints in the country; and (b) effective data collection and assessment strategy to support regular needs analysis without indicating the specific deliverables for each unit. In the absence of work plans for each unit or sub-office indicating specific activities and deliverables, there was no system for monitoring the performance of each unit or sub-office to hold them accountable and to prevent duplications and overlaps.

**(2) OCHA Venezuela should develop work plans for each unit and sub-office with specific goals and deliverables to facilitate monitoring and prevent duplications and overlaps.**

*OCHA Venezuela accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the development of unit and sub-office work plans with specific goals and deliverables was one of action points from its February 2022 mini retreat. The Office would present the work plans to the whole staff at its retreat in July 2022 and make any final adjustments. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of the first set of work plans developed for each unit and sub-office of OCHA Venezuela.*

## **B. Coordination of humanitarian response in Venezuela**

#### Need to establish a system for tracking HCT action points

22. OCHA was coordinating humanitarian response at the national and sub-national levels in Venezuela. At the national level, the key coordination structures were HCT and ICCG. Other key humanitarian coordination mechanisms included the Accountability to Affected People working group; Cash Transfer Group; and the Humanitarian Communication Group.

23. During interviews, HCT members and cluster coordinators recognized the strong leadership by the HC and OCHA's Head of Office and acknowledged OCHA's effectiveness in coordinating the humanitarian response cycle process and effectively managing VHF and CERF. They also acknowledged OCHA's professional engagement with GoV.

24. In September 2020, the HCT adopted the Humanitarian Access Strategy, to facilitate analysis and monitoring of access dynamics in four specific areas: politicization of humanitarian assistance; bureaucratic impediments; physical and infrastructure constraints; and COVID-19 mobility restrictions. OCHA and HCT were engaged in facilitating implementation of the Access Strategy. For instance, in late 2020, when five humanitarian workers from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were detained, OCHA played a key role in advocating for their release in February 2021. The HCT endorsed a revised Access Strategy in February 2022.

25. HCT minutes indicated some key concerns of humanitarian partners including: (a) extended suspension of the cash transfer programme; (b) access to official data; (c) international NGO registration; and (d) access to fuel. These issues were included in the revised 2022 Access Strategy and action plan and were prioritized in HCT meetings. In addition, HC and OCHA were engaging with the host authorities particularly the Foreign Ministry to try to resolve these issues. HCT members also stressed in meetings the importance of strengthening liaison with the host authorities, both at the national and local levels, since some of the challenges faced were perceived as due to misunderstanding by local authorities who did not have adequate knowledge about humanitarian response. However, while action points were included in subsequent HCT meetings, OCHA did not establish a system to ensure follow-up and implementation. Without such system, it was difficult to determine the specific actions taken, related timelines and OCHA's suitable engagement with the individual or agency assigned to implement them.

**(3) OCHA Venezuela should develop procedures for logging and following up on action points that arise during meetings of the Humanitarian Country Team.**

*OCHA Venezuela accepted recommendation 3 and stated that it had developed a matrix for tracking HCT action points, which would be updated as needed. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of the finalized HCT action point matrix.*

HCT was making progress towards linking humanitarian and development assistance

26. The HCT was responsible for supporting and contributing to efforts of humanitarian-development assistance. In Venezuela, political dynamism posed a challenge, with humanitarian action being very new as the country was transitioning from development assistance. HCT recognized the importance of linking humanitarian actions with strategic development action, indicating that this would make it possible to articulate humanitarian action within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and complement the Government's development plans. However, some HCT members were concerned that humanitarian needs may become invisible if the situation was characterized as in the "transition phase".

27. The HC was already identifying opportunities to fund responses geared towards greater sustainability. Following the decision to make the HRP a two-year plan, the HC emphasized the need for project activities to promote humanitarian-development integration and OCHA Venezuela was participating in forums that were contributing to identifying complementarities, engaging donors to provide multi-year funding and collaborating with development partners and the government on how resilient programmes can be implemented. For example, the 2022-2023 HRP aims to promote better coordination between humanitarian and development interventions. Since the HC and HCT were looking to provide sustainable responses, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

### **C. Management of the Venezuela Humanitarian Fund**

VHF management and capacity building of partners were adequate

28. VHF has a two-tier governance structure: (a) an advisory board that supports the HC to steer the strategy and oversee the performance of the VHF, and (b) two review committees responsible for the strategic and technical reviews of project proposals. In November 2020, the VHF Advisory Board agreed to prioritize the financing of NGOs and local partners if they have the financial capacity and operations required to fulfil the global guidelines of country-based pooled funds (CBPFs).

29. The VHF launched its first standard allocation of \$3.49 million in January 2021. Eighteen project proposals were submitted and after review by the strategic and technical committees, the HC and Advisory



Board approved 12 projects implemented by 11 national NGOs and one international NGO. These allocations reached 35,000 (20 per cent) of the 174,000 people targeted. Reasons for rejecting the six projects were duly documented and communicated to the implementing partners.

30. To develop the capacity and knowledge of implementing partners, OCHA Venezuela provided four briefings to eligible partners on different topics, including: CBPF global guidelines, accountability to affected populations, communications guidelines and PSEA. Additionally, OCHA Venezuela prepared and shared a question-and-answer document with frequently raised questions by implementing partners including financial statement requirements, disbursements and expenditures. The VHF management team also reviewed lessons learned and good practices through a brief survey sent to implementing partners, members of the Advisory Board, cluster coordinators and members of the Strategic and Technical Review Committees. The results were positive in five out of the six areas covered.

31. OIOS considers that OCHA Venezuela was effective in applying best practices, especially in the following areas:

- Selection of NGOs (mostly local).
- Provision of feedback on areas for improvement on rejected projects.
- Provision of training in various themes to implementing partners.
- Identification of areas of improvement through surveys.

32. Generally, the VHF was well managed in terms of reviewing proposals, timely disbursing funds, and monitoring and reporting on the progress of projects.

#### OCHA was strengthening oversight and assurance mechanisms for sub-contracted implementing partners

33. The Venezuela Humanitarian Pooled Fund operational manual issued in December 2020 details the eligibility process for applicants (both international and national NGOs) to access the VHF. The process consists of three phases: registration, due diligence and capacity assessment. The registration process includes submission of the applicant's registration certificate and banking information. During the due diligence stage, the VHF Unit performs a detailed review of each implementing partner's application to ensure that it meets the minimum required standards. For the capacity assessments, the Unit analyses the governance, coordination, partnership, financial and technical capacity of the implementing partner.

34. OIOS review of proposals of all 12 projects funded in the first allocation indicated that they were prepared, evaluated and selected in accordance with the VHF operational manual. All projects had grant agreements that were signed by both parties, and funds were disbursed within the timeframe specified in the agreements. Interim and final financial reports, progress and final narrative reports were all submitted timely.

35. For four of the projects, the implementing partners used eight sub-contracted partners. While the sub-contracted partners were duly disclosed in the project proposals and included in the budgets, OCHA did not have a policy and procedure on the extent of due diligence and capacity assessments to be conducted for sub-contracted implementing partners. While no issues were identified in connection with sub-contractors, the lack of due diligence and capacity assessment could result in failure to mitigate the following risks:

- Subcontractors might not have the technical, managerial and financial capacity to implement humanitarian projects assigned to them.
- Misappropriation of funds.

- Reputational risks.

36. The issue was highlighted in a prior Board of Auditors' report A/76/5 (Vol. I) and in OIOS report 2017/014. In response, OCHA stated that the use of sub-grantees was in line with localization efforts as per the Grand Bargain commitments. Accordingly, the sub-grantees, who were mainly national NGOs, were sub-contacted as a way of building their capacity with an ultimate objective of making them direct implementing partners. However, to ensure related risks are mitigated, OCHA was in the process of establishing assurance mechanisms and strengthening oversight over sub-grantees including conducting light due diligence. Based on the action being taken, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

## **D. Management of staff and other resources**

### OCHA was filling temporarily encumbered posts through regular recruitment processes

37. According to administrative instruction ST/AI/2010/4/Rev.1, temporary appointments are to be used to appoint staff for seasonal or peak workloads and specific short-term requirements of less than one year. They can be renewed upon exceptional approval from the Executive Office beyond 364 days but not beyond 729 days.

38. During the audit period, eight staff in OCHA Venezuela were recruited on temporary appointments. As of 31 December 2021, four of the posts had been regularized through fixed term contracts while the other four were still temporary posts, including two that had been encumbered temporarily for over 364 days and one for over 841 days. OCHA's Executive Office exceptionally approved the extension of the temporary appointment that exceeded the 729 days mark. Extended temporary appointments have a negative impact on both the control environment and the morale of staff encumbering such posts.

39. OCHA indicated that it was in the process of filling two of the four posts from the roster and was exploring options to fill the remaining two. Therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

### Controls over security risks needed improvement

40. OIOS assessment of the security controls in OCHA Venezuela operations identified the following security management procedures:

- Staff were required to attend security briefings and to sign a document certifying that they had been briefed. While OCHA Venezuela provided the briefing in Spanish, it did not always ensure that the briefing was also available in English or French, the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. On one occasion, a non-Spanish speaking staff member visiting on a short mission was not able to participate in the security briefing as the briefing was being held in Spanish only. OCHA stated that this was a one-off case, and the Office would take steps to avoid a recurrence.
- OCHA provided its staff with applicable security equipment as recommended by the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) except for those in the State of Apure, where eligible staff were not provided with recommended high frequency radios.

**(4) OCHA Venezuela should, in collaboration with DSS, provide required security telecommunications equipment to staff in the State of Apure.**

*OCHA Venezuela accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the staff in Apure had been provided with primary telecommunications equipment as required. The Office would also explore providing*

*additional backup equipment, including satellite phones, in 2023. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that staff in the State of Apure have been provided with the required security telecommunications equipment.*

## **E. Mainstreaming duty of care elements in operations**

### There was a need to mainstream duty of care elements into office operations

41. In his reform proposals, the Secretary-General emphasized the importance of establishing a sound organizational culture as a pre-requisite for effectively managing operations and resources and achieving results. Organizational culture includes elements of leadership management philosophy, human resources practices and performance management.

42. At the global level, OCHA had established initiatives to enhance the safety, health and well-being of staff and improve the workplace culture including:

- Developing a people strategy in 2018 to foster a work culture where all personnel can contribute to OCHA's mandate and fulfill their potential;
- Identifying duty of care related responsibilities as an organizational risk in OCHA's risk register, which needed to be managed; and
- Developing the COVID-19 Duty of Care Strategy in response to the pandemic.

43. These initiatives were complemented by OCHA's Learning and Development Unit's (LDU) monthly broadcast, which highlighted different aspects of duty of care such as productive relationships, respectful workplace, importance of kindness and overcoming unconscious bias. The Unit also drew staff attention to OCHA's Learning Management System, which had several resources encompassing people management, duty of care, diversity and inclusion, and humanitarian-specific topics that managers could use to support staff and teams to grow professionally and to enhance staff well-being.

44. In addition, OCHA's Under-Secretary-General underscored the United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework launched by the Office of Human Resources in October 2021, whose objective was to enable staff to contribute their maximum potential by creating a work environment in which staff feel valued, respected and empowered. Two focus areas of the framework were duty of care and organizational culture.

45. However, while the work plans articulated duty of care activities, e.g., training in specified areas and access to staff counselling services, there was no monitoring and reporting on their implementation. In the 2020 and 2021 work plans, OCHA Venezuela did not include duty of care elements that would result in staff feeling valued, respected and empowered, and would enhance accountability. Also, staff felt that more needed to be done to address the following concerns:

- Inadequate induction and guidance for new staff members. While OCHA had developed a guide to ensure a standardized approach to the orientation process, several staff expressed concern that they did not receive comprehensive orientation including on practices specific to the United Nations and to their roles to allow them to efficiently carry out their responsibilities. Some staff also stated that they were often given tasks without proper guidance/training by their supervisors.
- Anxiety due to the temporary nature of their contracts. Four of the 11 international staff had temporary contracts as at the end of December 2021.
- Inadequate communication and lack of follow-up of issues raised during staff meetings.

- Inadequate procedures for handling conflict. In one case brought to the attention of the audit team, the staff member felt that interventions of OCHA, both at the country office and at Headquarters, as well as by other parties were ineffective.

46. OCHA Headquarters conducted a survey in July 2021 to assess the work environment to identify weaknesses and strengths as well as employee satisfaction within the OCHA Venezuela team. To address emerging issues, management engaged the support of the staff counselor and LDU. While the survey indicated that staff were generally satisfied with the work environment, it highlighted the following areas needing improvement, which were corroborated with staff during the audit:

- Accessibility to information and training for new staff. While OCHA had developed an induction package that directs new staff to available learning resources, the package was not being shared with them promptly;
- Personal career development planning; and
- Availability of duty of care resources to all OCHA personnel including UNVs.

47. These issues and other staff concerns were discussed at a mini office retreat held in February 2022.

**(5) OCHA Venezuela should develop and implement a comprehensive action plan to: (i) identify and address existing staff concerns; and (ii) mainstream duty of care elements into office operations to enhance the safety, health and well-being of staff.**

*OCHA Venezuela accepted recommendation 5 and stated that it had taken several steps to address duty of care concerns which include hiring a consultant to identify priority staff concerns, providing coaching sessions to strengthen staff members' managerial skills, engaging with the Ombudsman to address specific staff issues, and developing an action plan that incorporates various duty of care elements. Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of the action plan that addresses existing staff concerns and evidence of its implementation.*

## **F. Mainstreaming gender, human rights, PSEA and multilingualism**

OCHA Venezuela was identifying alternate focal points for gender, human rights and PSEA

48. All humanitarian partners in Venezuela committed to placing affected persons at the center of the humanitarian response. As part of these efforts, an interorganizational team of focal points from HCT with technical support from OCHA developed the Collective Framework of Accountability to Affected Communities and Populations of the Humanitarian Response in Venezuela. In July 2020, HCT approved the PSEA protocol that defines standard procedures and tools for handling cases.

49. OCHA and HCT also made efforts to mainstream cross-cutting principles into their programmes including gender and PSEA, and link centrality of protection with human rights issues. For example, in July 2020, HCT approved the PSEA Protocol that defines standard procedures and tools for reporting and forwarding complaints and allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse cases. Subsequently, protection professionals, service providers and humanitarian partners participated in PSEA-related training and workshops and developed inter-agency communication materials for dissemination in 2021. One such training was provided to implementing partners of the VHF in June 2021.

50. OCHA appointed focal points to lead initiatives relating to gender, disability, PSEA and designated a focal point for protection who was also responsible for human rights issues. However, it did not identify alternates to represent the focal points in their absence to facilitate continued engagement. OCHA stated

that it was in the process of identifying alternate focal points. Therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

Need to enhance multilingualism among national staff

51. The General Assembly in its resolution 73/346 stated that the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat are English and French. The resolution: (i) requested the Secretary-General to ensure United Nations staff can use one of the working languages of the Secretariat; and (ii) encouraged United Nations staff members to continue to actively use existing training facilities to acquire and enhance proficiency in one or more of the official languages of the United Nations. In addition, the resolution called for all entities of the Secretariat to build an inventory of staff language skills.

52. In OCHA Venezuela, 25 (50 per cent) of the 49 personnel, mainly national staff, had basic or no ability to use either of the working languages of the Secretariat. This limited their ability to access guidance materials and to generally keep up to date with developments in the Secretariat as United Nations staff members.

**(6) OCHA Venezuela should develop and implement a plan to build the capacity of national staff to effectively use one of the working languages of the Secretariat.**

*OCHA Venezuela accepted recommendation 6 and stated that it was working with the Learning and Development Unit to develop and implement a plan to support multilingualism among national staff. Recommendation 6 remains open pending receipt of the plan to build the capacity of national staff to use one of the working languages of the Secretariat.*

#### IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

53. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of OCHA 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 the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Venezuela

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>2</sup> / Important <sup>3</sup>	C/ O <sup>4</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>5</sup>
1	OCHA should: (i) update the operational guidance for establishing its country offices; and (ii) compile lessons learned during the set up and scaling up of OCHA Venezuela for use in such guidance.	Important	O	Receipt of the revised policy instruction on the establishment of country offices and compilation of lessons learned during the set-up of OCHA Venezuela.	30 June 2024
2	OCHA Venezuela should develop work plans for each unit and sub-office with specific goals and deliverables to facilitate monitoring and prevent duplications and overlaps.	Important	O	Receipt of work plans with specific goals and deliverables developed for each unit and sub-office of OCHA Venezuela.	31 December 2022
3	OCHA Venezuela should develop procedures for logging and following up on action points that arise during meetings of the Humanitarian Country Team.	Important	O	Receipt of the finalized matrix for tracking HCT action points.	31 July 2022
4	OCHA Venezuela should, in collaboration with the Department of Safety and Security, provide required security telecommunications equipment to staff in the State of Apure.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that staff in the State of Apure have been provided with the required security telecommunications equipment.	31 December 2023
5	OCHA Venezuela should develop a comprehensive action plan to: (i) identify and address existing staff concerns; and (ii) mainstream duty of care elements into office operations to enhance the safety, health and well-being of staff.	Important	O	Receipt of the action plan that addresses existing staff concerns and evidence of its implementation.	31 December 2022
6	OCHA Venezuela should develop and implement a plan to build the capacity of national staff to effectively use one of the working languages of the Secretariat.	Important	O	Receipt of the plan to build the capacity of national staff to use one of the working languages of the Secretariat.	31 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

<sup>5</sup> Date provided by OCHA in response to recommendations.

# **APPENDIX I**

## **Management Response**

United Nations  Nations Unies  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

to: Ms. Eleanor T. Burns, Director  
A: Internal Audit Division, OIOS

DATE: 23 May 2022

REFERENCE:

THROUGH:

S/C DE:

FROM: Mr. Martin Griffiths,  
DE: Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian  
Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator



SUBJECT: **Draft report on the audit of the operations of the Office  
OBJET: for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Venezuela  
(Assignment No. AN2021/590/01)**

In reference to your memorandum dated 6 May 2022, I am enclosing herewith OCHA's management response to the draft report and the recommendations issued.

cc: Ms. Menada Wind-Andersen, Executive Officer, OCHA



## Management Response

## Audit of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Venezuela

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	OCHA should: (i) update the operational guidance for establishing its country offices; and (ii) compile lessons learned during the set up and scaling up of OCHA Venezuela for use in such guidance.	Important	Yes	OAD Director	30 June 2024	OCHA will update the Policy Instruction on Country Offices by June 2024 that will also build on lessons learned during the set up and scaling up of OCHA Venezuela.
2	OCHA Venezuela should develop work plans for each unit and sub-office with specific goals and deliverables to facilitate monitoring and prevent duplications and overlaps.	Important	Yes	Head of Office	31 December 2022	An action point from the February 2022 OCHA Venezuela mini-retreat, was for each unit/sub-office to develop a work plan with specific goals and deliverables. The July 2022 OCHA Venezuela retreat will be an opportunity to present the workplans to whole staff and make any final adjustments.
3	OCHA Venezuela should develop procedures for logging and following up on action points that arise during meetings of the Humanitarian Country Team.	Important	Yes	Head of Office	31 July 2022	A Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) action point matrix has been developed and will be updated.
4	OCHA Venezuela should, in collaboration with the Department of Safety and Security, provide required security telecommunications equipment to staff in the State of Apure.	Important	Yes	Head of Office	31 December 2023	The staff member in Apure has been provided with the primary recommended means of telecommunication (mobile phone, including two providers). For the back-up recommendation (satellite phone), one will be made available to the staff member during her missions

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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						outside of her duty station (where the primary communication is reliable). OCHA Venezuela will explore acquiring additional satellite phones, as back-up, in 2023.
5	OCHA Venezuela should develop a comprehensive action plan to: (i) identify and address existing staff concerns; and (ii) mainstream duty of care elements into office operations to enhance the safety, health and well-being of staff.	Important	Yes	Head of Office	31 December 2022	<p>OCHA Venezuela has taken a number of actions to address staff concerns and duty of care elements. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hiring a consultancy company, with support of Learning Development Unit (LDU), to conduct a survey and focus group discussion with staff to identify priority issues</li> <li>• OCHA Venezuela used the findings to design the upcoming all staff retreat (July 2022)</li> <li>• Based on the finding of the consulting company, 16 coaching sessions were provided to three staff members with a focus on strengthening managerial skills</li> <li>• OCHA Venezuela enlisted the support of the Ombudsman to address specific issues between staff and provide support in the preparation of the OCHA Venezuela retreat</li> <li>• OCHA Venezuela has developed an action plan</li> </ul>

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						<p>which includes various duty of care elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Q&amp;A on Human Resources Session with HQ has been programmed for 20 May 2022.</li> </ul>
6	OCHA Venezuela should develop and implement a plan to build the capacity of national staff to effectively use one of the working languages of the Secretariat.	Important	Yes	Head of Office with support of LDU	31 December 2023	<p>OCHA Venezuela is working with LDU to develop and implement a plan to support multilingualism among national staff. The broad elements of the proposed plan include the following phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs assessment of language levels and identification of suitable providers (ongoing to early July 2022)</li> <li>• Preparation of language training plan (July 2022) and implement a menu of training options for all staff including tailored and tutor led for groups (December 2022)</li> <li>• Follow up and refresher training (2023 and onwards)</li> </ul>