



Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2019/018

Audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

**The Mission needed to complete the data
cleansing exercise expeditiously and
accurately**

27 March 2019

Assignment No. AP2018/630/02

Audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNAMA's implementation and monitoring of the data cleansing exercise to ensure accuracy and completeness of personal data in Umoja. The audit covered the period from 1 March 2016 to 31 October 2018 and included higher and medium risk areas in conducting and monitoring the exercise.

UNAMA communicated relevant deadlines to staff and verified staff requests for amendments to ensure accuracy of data. However, to further enhance data quality, UNAMA needed to confirm the accuracy of updates and finalize the data cleansing exercise.

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

- Ensure the personal data cleansing exercise is completed expeditiously and accurately; and
- Require its Human Resources Section to review and update the personal data of the 177 staff members that did not participate in the data cleansing exercise, based on available documents.

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

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
I. BACKGROUND	1
II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	1-2
III. AUDIT RESULTS	
Implementation of data cleansing exercise	2-4
IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	5
ANNEX I Status of audit recommendations	
APPENDIX I Management response	

Audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).
2. The Human Resources Section (HRS) in UNAMA implemented a personal data cleansing exercise to address anomalies and challenges associated with inaccurate personal data migration prior to the implementation of Umoja for national staff effective 1 November 2016. The anomalies in personal data arose because of various reasons, including data input errors by HRS, provision by staff members of incomplete or inaccurate details, national identity cards indicating names incorrectly and years of birth without relevant days and months. This was because during protracted Afghan wars in the 1980s and 1990s, the host Government did not have an adequate system in place for birth registrations and thus relied on estimated dates. Since the United Nations system requires first name, last name, day, month and year of birth, HRS assigned middle names as last names and 1 January or 1 July as the dates of birth for all staff recruited with incomplete details.
3. On 14 March 2016, HRS requested all national staff to review their personal data and request any necessary corrections by 15 April 2016. HRS also requested the Kuwait Joint Support Office (KJSO), as service provider to the Mission, to process changes in Umoja in line with their existing service level agreement. The exercise was guided by Umoja cluster 5 data cleansing instructions, which highlighted the need to verify personal data of staff in the Field Services Suite prior to migration of data to Umoja. The Mission established a local Deployment Coordination Committee to oversee the exercise and ensure compliance with relevant guidelines.
4. The introduction of new digital passports in Afghanistan provided a more authoritative source of staff personal data as they are in English, which eliminated the need for translation from local languages and conversion of dates from Hijri to Gregorian calendars. However, it also resulted in further discrepancies in personal data as most staff used different family names and dates of birth in their new passports. Consequently, vital data such as family names and dates of birth already available in staff personal files maintained by HRS did not match with requests for corrections that were mostly based on newly issued digital passports. The Mission therefore had to extend the data cleansing exercise after implementation of Umoja to incorporate changes introduced by the passports.
5. Eighty-four per cent of UNAMA's national staff members requested changes to their own and dependents' personal information in Umoja. This information was sent to KJSO, where the transactions were processed. Progress reports indicated that from April 2016 to September 2018 UNAMA received requests for rectification of personal data of 924 national staff, their spouses and dependent children.
6. Comments provided by UNAMA are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNAMA's implementation and monitoring of the data cleansing exercise to ensure accuracy and completeness of personal data in Umoja.

8. This audit was included in the 2018 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the financial implications associated with changes to personal data. OIOS audit report (2018/037) on Umoja implementation in KJSO, UNAMA and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq in May 2018 also highlighted the need for timely completion of data cleansing and validation of information pertaining to national staff members and their dependents.

9. OIOS conducted this audit from November 2018 to January 2019. The audit covered the period from 1 March 2016 to 31 October 2018. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas in the implementation and monitoring of the personal data cleansing exercise.

10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation such as HRS periodic internal reports, relevant personnel reports and portfolios of evidence, and (c) analytical reviews of data from Umoja. Visits were made to Kabul and field offices in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif.

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

III. AUDIT RESULTS

Implementation of data cleansing exercise

The Mission needed to accurately complete the data cleansing exercise

12. In accordance with the Umoja cluster 5 data cleansing instructions, UNAMA established a local Deployment Coordination Committee to monitor the number of data cleansing amendments processed, oversee the personal data cleansing exercise and ensure compliance with relevant guidelines. The Committee held 25 meetings with the Umoja focal point team at United Nations Headquarters by video teleconference between 13 April and 31 October 2016 and action points arising from the meetings were shared with all attendees to promote accountability.

13. In addition, HRS held several townhall and ad hoc meetings with the National Staff Association and staff members to implement the exercise, in which the deadline for submission of requests for amendment was initially communicated as 15 April 2016. Additional meetings were held between the Chief Human Resources Officer and the Team Leader, Client Support Unit for National Staff to monitor progress on the exercise after implementation of Umoja on 1 November 2016. However, no minutes of the meetings were maintained, which hindered effective oversight and follow-up of matters. As a result, the exercise took longer than planned and some discrepancies remained pending, even though the deadline for submitting data cleansing requests was extended to 21 August 2017, 28 February 2018 and then to 30 June 2018. It also resulted in greater cost to the Mission in dedicated person hours.

14. Although KJSO advised on 10 February 2019 that pending cases had been cleared, there were additional matters identified by the audit that warrant further data cleansing by UNAMA, as highlighted in this report.

<p>(1) UNAMA should implement measures to ensure the personal data cleansing exercise is completed expeditiously and accurately.</p>

UNAMA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that KJSO had committed to recheck the list of data entry errors submitted by the auditors and rectify them in Umoja. Also, following the audit, additional errors were identified where dates of birth were shown in lieu of marriage dates due to glitches in data conversion from legacy systems. UNAMA HRS would obtain copies of verified marriage certificates and liaise with KJSO for corrective action in Umoja. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that errors are duly corrected for all staff.

The Mission needed to further review and verify data to ensure accuracy

15. As required by the Umoja cluster 5 data cleansing instructions, amendments to personal data requested by staff were verified by HRS against supporting documents such as digital passports, national identity cards and marriage certificates before scanned copies of memorandums and documents were submitted to KJSO for updates to be made in Umoja after further verification. The following 3,754 amendments were made for 924 staff (810 at the local level and 114 at the national professional officer level):

Table 1: Summary of personal data amendments in Umoja

Staff category	Total number of amendments	Staff				Dependents	
		Spellings and family names	Marriage dates (2-40 years)	Ages (1 year and below)	Ages (2-17 years)	Spellings and family names	Ages (2-30 years)
Local level	3,320	303	418	152	65	1,547	835
National professional officers	434	23	51	13	3	205	139
Total	3,754	326	469	165	68	1,752	974

16. The significant variations in marriage dates were because relevant fields in Umoja were initially populated with birth dates. The variations in birth dates were attributed to corrections of faulty conversions from Afghan Hijri to Georgian calendars, as well as to instances where staff initially submitted incorrect dates upon recruitment and reported that they had lost relevant identity documents during the war or had not been able to obtain official documents due to instability during the war. Such staff merely provided required data in personal history profiles without supporting documentation. HRS advised that such cases were tolerated, especially at the launch of the Mission, because it experienced difficulties in attracting local staff.

17. The audit reviewed a sample of 99 staff members’ requested amendments effected between April 2016 and September 2018 against digital passports, translations of marriage and educational certificates, as well as Field Services Suite and Umoja records. Taking into consideration calculations and analyses of implied ages at graduation, entry on duty and marriage, the verifications confirmed that amendments for most staff were largely reasonable and based on official documents. Some staff recruited at the inception of UNAMA in 2002 did not provide copies of high school diplomas to the Mission and others had none, which hindered corroboration of years of birth during the audit. However, despite several reminders during the data cleansing exercise, some staff did not thoroughly review amendments to their data in Umoja to ensure they had been correctly updated. The following errors were noted during the audit:

- a) Six sampled amendment requests were not processed accurately in Umoja, resulting in errors in birth dates of staff and dependents ranging between 1 month and 7 years;

- b) Ten sampled staff had differently spelt family names for dependents within their Umoja profiles due to clerical errors by the Government authorities during the issue of digital passports;
- c) Twenty sampled staff still had their marriage dates fields mistakenly populated with birth dates in Umoja after data cleansing; and
- d) In eight sampled cases, dates of marriage of staff differed from the marriage dates mentioned against their spouses in their Umoja profiles, resulting in inconsistencies.

18. The continued existence of inconsistencies after the data cleansing exercise meant data in Umoja was still unreliable and may lead to difficulties for staff, pensioners and dependents in claiming benefits. Recommendation 1 addresses this issue.

The Mission needed to verify accuracy of personal data of the remaining 177 staff members

19. Despite several requests by HRS in emails, circulars and townhall meetings, 177 staff did not request changes to their personal data. The Mission and the National Staff Association explained that main causes of inadequate response were that some staff did not understand the requirements and significance of the exercise, while others did not understand English to read details in Umoja or felt it was cumbersome to take leave and go to Government offices in their districts of origin to rectify their details. In addition, staff were not generally interested in incurring extra costs associated with obtaining passports, which are optional documents. A review of documents for 30 of the 177 staff indicated the following errors in Umoja:

- a) Seven staff had their marriage date fields mistakenly populated with birth dates;
- b) In two cases, dates of marriage of staff differed from the marriage dates mentioned against their spouses, resulting in inconsistencies;
- c) A staff member's profile indicated that the staff was single, yet details of a spouse were included in his profile, indicating that the staff was married. After audit query, HRS rectified the mistake; and
- d) Another staff member's date of birth in Umoja was incorrectly reflected as 15 March 1968 instead of 25 July 1968.

20. While the staff members did not point out discrepancies in their personal data despite repeated requests by HRS, the Section already had information available in staff personal files to review and correct the accuracy and integrity of the Umoja database.

(2) UNAMA should require the Human Resources Section to review personal data of all the 177 staff members that did not request necessary changes during the 2016 data cleansing exercise and make necessary corrections based on available documents.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the Mission would accept requests for data rectification from these 177 national staff only if it relates to changes of their marriage dates. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence of correction of data pertaining to the remaining 177 staff.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

21. 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.

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

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	UNAMA should implement measures to ensure the personal data cleansing exercise is completed expeditiously and accurately.	Important	O	Submission of evidence that errors are duly corrected for all staff.	31 August 20 19
2	UNAMA should require the Human Resources Section to review personal data of all the 177 staff members that did not request necessary changes during the 2016 data cleansing exercise and make necessary corrections based on available documents.	Important	O	Submission of evidence of correction of data pertaining to the remaining 177 staff.	31 August 20 19

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 UNAMA in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

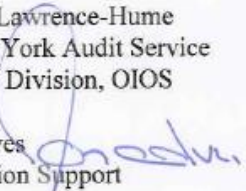
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UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN
UNAMA

Office of the Chief of Mission Support

25 March 2019

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

From : Jorge Goncalves 
Chief of Mission Support

Subject: **Draft report on an audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (Assignment No. AP2018/630/02)**

1. Reference is made to your memorandum dated 22 March 2019 on the above subject.
2. As requested, please find attached UNAMA's response to the two recommendations along with target dates of implementation.

Kind regards.

cc: Ms. Denise Wilman, Chief of Staff, UNAMA
Mr. Conrad Lesa, Chief, Kuwait joint Support Office, Kuwait
Ms. Cynthia Avena-Castillo, Professional Practice Section, IAD-OIOS
Mr. Zulfiqar Gill, Chief, Resident Audit Office Kuwait, IAD-OIOS
Ms. Niramol Jirapokakul, Chief, Human Resources Section, UNAMA
Mr. Adityavikram Pachisia, Audit Focal Point, UNAMA
Mr. Fernando Cavalcante, Office of the Chief of Staff, UNAMA

Management Response

Audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁵ / Important ⁶	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNAMA should implement measures to ensure the personal data cleansing exercise is completed expeditiously and accurately	Important	Yes	UNAMAHR and KJSO HR	31 August 20 19	KJSO has confirmed that the National Staff (NS) data cleansing exercise was completed on 10 February 2019. However, during their review, the auditors identified a few cases related to errors made in the Umoja data entry by the KJSO HR partners. KJSO has committed to recheck the list submitted by the auditors and rectify the errors in Umoja (after verification and comparison against documents submitted by UNAMA HR) by 31 August 2019. In addition to rectification of these data entry errors, on 17 March 2019, UNHQ ran a report on NS personal information. This enabled UNAMA HR to identify 63 cases where the date of birth was recorded as the date of marriage date. This has been attributed to glitches in data conversion from legacy systems. Consequently, during the migration to Umoja, where the date of marriage was blank, the date of birth was uploaded as the marriage date. UNAMA HR will check the dates reflected in the Official Status Files of the requisite or request them to submit their marriage certificate

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

Management Response

Audit of personal data cleansing in Umoja in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁵ / Important ⁶	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						to verify the marriage date. This information will be forwarded to KJSO for correction in Umoja by 31 August 2019.
2	UNAMA should require the Human Resources Section to review personal data of all the 177 staff members that did not request necessary changes during the 2016 data cleansing exercise and make necessary corrections based on available documents.	Important	Yes	UNAMA HR and KJSO HR	31 August 2019 Ongoing	A total of 177 NS did not request rectification of their personal data in Umoja. UNAMA HR will only accept any requests for data rectification from these 177 NS if it relates to the change of their marriage date, an exercise which is scheduled for completion by KJSO HR partners by 31 August 2019.