INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2024/046

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The Office needed to address some important gaps, including in workforce planning, to further strengthen human resources management

01 October 2024
Assignment No. AN2023-590-01

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the management of human resources in OCHA to deliver its mandate. The audit covered the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023. Based on an activity level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium-risk areas in human resources management, which included: (a) governance and organizational arrangements; (b) recruitment; and (c) support for staff learning and development.

OCHA has implemented certain elements of effective governance and organizational arrangements for human resources management. The Human Resources Committee and People Strategy were established, staff roles and responsibilities in human resources management were clearly defined, and strategic key performance indicators were monitored. However, OCHA needed to improve its workforce planning and develop a business case to evaluate whether national staff, who make up approximately 58 per cent of its workforce and are currently managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under a service level agreement, should be transitioned to Secretariat contracts.

Although OCHA met the target Secretariat-wide recruitment timeline of 120 days for staff under its administration, OCHA did not actively monitor and manage all vacant positions to ensure effective mandate delivery. Additionally, the limited documentation on annual planning and reporting on learning and development activities across all budget sources made it unclear whether the established learning priorities were achieved.

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

- Develop a workforce planning strategy;
- Maintain an accurate consolidated staffing table for all staff;
- Develop a business case to justify the decision on whether to transition staff on UNDP contracts to Secretariat contracts;
- Include national staff under UNDP contracts in the measurement of all relevant strategic human resources key performance indicators;
- Develop an action plan and assess the need for additional resources and capacity to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy;
- Analyze exceptions in implementing human resources policies related to reduced break-in-service between temporary appointments to identify and address the underlying issues;
- Monitor and actively manage all vacant positions, including those funded by extrabudgetary resources, and national staff administered by UNDP ;
- Establish annual learning and development plans for all budget sources and report on their implementation; and
- Review and address cases where the grade of the second reporting officer is lower than that of the first reporting officer.

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

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Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

I. BACKGROUND

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

2. By its resolution 46/182 dated 19 December 1991, the General Assembly created OCHA as part of the United Nations Secretariat to further strengthen and make more effective the collective humanitarian efforts of the United Nations system in responding to complex emergencies and natural disasters in countries in need. OCHA brings together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. It is responsible for delivering five core functions: (a) coordination, (b) humanitarian financing, (c) policy, (d) advocacy, and (e) information management. OCHA also manages country-based pooled funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund to help ensure that urgently needed humanitarian assistance reaches people of concern as quickly and effectively as possible.

3. OCHA is headed by the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator supported by an Assistant Secretary-General (ASG). It is funded by regular budget and extrabudgetary resources, with budgeted staffing of 2,132; 2,257; and 2,288 personnel for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively, as shown in Tables 1 and 2:

Tables 1 and 2: Overview of OCHA budgeted staffing for 2022, 2023 and 2024

Funding sources	2022		2023		2024	
	No. of posts	$ million	No. of posts	$ million	No. of posts	$ million
Regular budget	72	18,644.3	72	25,861.8	71	25,975.5
Extrabudgetary	2,060	324,196.0	2,185	352,058.1	2,217	352,058.1
Total	**2,132**	**342,840.3**	**2,257**	**377,919.9**	**2,288**	**378,033.6**

Staff category by funding source	2022		2023		2024	
	Regular budget	Extrabudgetary	Regular budget	Extrabudgetary	Regular budget	Extrabudgetary
Professional	55	791	55	835	54	784
General service	17	783	17	798	17	778
National professional officer	-	486	-	552	-	655
Total	**72**	**2,060**	**72**	**2,185**	**71**	**2,217**

Source: OCHA proposed programme budgets for 2022 - A/76/6 (Sect.27), 2023 - A/77/6 (Sect.27), and 2024 - A/78/6 (Sect.27)

4. As per its staffing table of 31 December 2023, OCHA had 2,259 active staff, of which 1,318 were national staff administered[1] by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), representing 58 per cent of the OCHA workforce. Approximately 478 staff were based in headquarters locations (New York, Geneva, Nairobi) and 1,781 in the field.

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[1] This included the recruitment of national staff and non-staff categories (service contracts, individual contractors and United Nations volunteers), related contract and payroll management, and other administrative services such as issuance and renewal of identification cards.

5.   Responsibility for administration of OCHA human resources is split between the Human Resources Section (HRS), People and Culture Section (PCS) and administrative officers in the field (five regional offices and 27 country offices). HRS and PCS are positioned in the Executive Office and are led by section chiefs at P5 level reporting to the Executive Officer, at D1 level. Surge capacity, through which coordination experts and other specialized humanitarian personnel are swiftly deployed to meet urgent needs in a field operation, is managed by the Operations and Advocacy Division. First reporting officers across OCHA are responsible for setting goals and supervising and evaluating the performance of staff.

6.   In addition to the Staff Regulations and Rules and related administrative issuances, OCHA's management of human resources is guided by the People Strategy. First introduced in 2018, the current People Strategy 2022-2026 was launched in September 2022. It outlines OCHA's commitment to promoting the health, safety and well-being of staff, and how OCHA would provide staff with new opportunities for learning, growth and development. Its goal is to shift OCHA's organizational culture by making it a "kind, respectful, diverse and inclusive organization" (objective 1) with "a 'people first' approach" (objective 2), while "fostering a healthy, safe and secure environment" (objective 3).

7.   Comments provided by OCHA are incorporated in italics.

II.   AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

8.   The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the management of human resources in OCHA to deliver its mandate.

9.   This audit was included in the 2023 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the risks relating to workforce planning and human resources management in OCHA. OIOS conducted this audit from January to June 2024. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas in the human resources management and focused on the following areas: (a) governance and organizational arrangements; (b) recruitment; and (c) support for staff learning and development.

10.   The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) assessment of systems, practices and processes for data management, and analytical review of data on recruitment, staffing, vacancies, performance management, span of control, exceptions to human resources guidelines, and separations; and (d) sample testing of 28 recruitment cases using a judgmental sampling approach. Most reviewed data were extracted from Umoja and Inspira systems. The audit scope did not include management of surge capacity by the Operations and Advocacy Division, which will be the subject of a separate OIOS audit.

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

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Governance and organizational arrangements

<u>A Human Resources Committee was established, and efforts were being made to increase the frequency of their meetings</u>

12.   OCHA established a Human Resources Committee (the Committee) to enhance OCHA's collective leadership and transparency in human resources planning and management. It is composed of the ASG, division directors, branch chiefs and the Executive Officer.

13.   The terms of reference (TORs) of the Committee require it to meet quarterly, but only five meetings have taken place since its establishment (11 August 2022, 3 November 2022, 26 October 2023, 26 February 2024 and 24 June 2024). During the meetings held, the Committee reviewed and discussed matters related to human resources planning and management such as: geographical diversity, gender parity, vacancies, mobility, lien management, performance management, recruitments, flexible working arrangements, fixed-term limited appointments, stretch assignments, and internships. Action points were prepared and followed up. The meetings were scheduled more frequently. However, they were often postponed because of other pressing priorities related to humanitarian crises and due to transitions in senior management and thus the Committee members. Without regular quarterly meetings, the Committee may not be able to provide adequate strategic direction and oversight in human resources management. OCHA confirmed its commitment to more frequent Committee meetings, which have been held regularly since the third quarter of 2023, with the next one scheduled for 11 September 2024.

<u>PCS roles and responsibilities will be formalized through TORs</u>

14.   Roles and responsibilities of HRS and PCS were clear to facilitate an effective execution of human resources processes within OCHA. HRS provided authoritative advice and guidance on all issues related to human resources management, as well as a range of administrative services from staff recruitment and onboarding to separation. PCS supported the implementation of the People Strategy including duty of care, learning and development, and staff welfare. While HRS responsibilities were described in its TORs, PCS responsibilities were only described at a high-level in the OCHA Hub and at a much more granular level in its 2023 work plan. OCHA agreed to issue formal TORs for PCS.

<u>OCHA was enhancing measures to monitor progress on implementation of the People Strategy</u>

15.   The People Strategy 2022-2026 broke down its three objectives into 11 actions and assigned responsibilities to organizational units within OCHA for implementation.

16.   To track progress on the implementation of the People Strategy, PCS prepared a People Strategy monitoring plan in March 2023, which aimed to monitor the trends on 53 indicators on an annual, biannual or biennial basis. PCS prepared quarterly and annual reports on the implementation of the People Strategy and shared them with the Global Management Team.[2] However, while the results of the various indicators were reported, the results could not be assessed against targets or timelines as none had been set. There were also no annual plans to operationalize the Strategy. As of May 2024, PCS was finetuning baselines and lessons learned and was considering organizing working level meetings on specific indicators to discuss the monitoring approach further.

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[2] The Global Management Team is responsible for fostering coherence and coordination of strategic and operational issues. It serves as consultative body to the Senior Leadership Group and is composed of the USG, ASG, and all staff at P5 and above.

<u>OCHA implemented initiatives to meet staffing needs, but workforce planning needed to be enhanced</u>

17.   In addition to the People Strategy, which focused on the softer aspects of human resources management, OCHA implemented a few initiatives to meet its staffing needs:

- In 2013, OCHA implemented a recruitment modality called fixed-term limited appointment (FTA-limited). This modality enabled faster deployment of staff compared to regular fixed-term appointments, while providing full benefits and entitlements to staff in hardship locations that are not available under temporary appointments. FTA-limited recruitments are not reviewed by a Secretariat central review body and the appointment of staff under this modality is limited to OCHA.

- In 2024, OCHA started developing a concept of "Stretch Assignments" to allow staff holding permanent, continuing or fixed-term contracts to be assigned to short-term tasks for a maximum of three months in a different OCHA office. The assignments were to be implemented as mission travel to meet short-term gaps in operational capacity other than surge capacity (e.g., short-term projects, unexpected tasks with stringent deadlines, gaps due to staffing changes, etc.). The concept of stretch assignments was still under development at the time of audit.

- Also, with effect from 1 January 2024 and following a recommendation from the Board of Auditors, OCHA discontinued a contract modality called "partner personnel" that it operated under an agreement with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and engaged the personnel as consultants, fully administered and supervised by UNOPS.

18.   However, despite the above initiatives, OCHA did not have a holistic workforce planning to support the implementation of its mandate as recommended in the Workforce Planning Guide.[3] The goal of the workforce planning is to ensure that an organization has the right number of people with the appropriate skills in the right positions at the right time, in order to achieve its short- and long-term objectives. Immediate staffing needs were identified by programme managers as part of the budget preparation exercise and human resources business partners in HRS informed managers of upcoming retirements and contract expirations and discussed plans to fill upcoming vacancies for international positions. For national staff, operational workforce planning was delegated to the heads of country offices, working together with their administrative staff.

19.   The TORs for the recently established Talent Acquisition, Outreach and Management team in HRS specified that the team should contribute to forecasting and analyzing OCHA's workforce needs and identify/develop relevant corporate sourcing strategies and plans in support of OCHA's management vision on workforce planning. However, no such forecasts and analyses were done. Instead, the Talent Acquisition, Outreach and Management team focused on assisting hiring managers in country offices to recruit international staff.

> **(1)   OCHA should strengthen its workforce planning by developing a workforce planning strategy in line with guidance issued by the Department of Operational Support and taking into account the exigencies in implementing the humanitarian mandate.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it had started work on developing its workforce planning strategy based on DOS guidance, taking into account the unpredictable nature of OCHA's humanitarian mandate.*

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[3] Published in August 2020 by the Department of Operational Support to guide entities to conduct operational workforce planning at the entity level.

<u>Absence of an accurate consolidated staffing table also impacted ability to conduct effective workforce planning</u>

20. OCHA did not have a reliable consolidated staffing table that included all OCHA staff posts, which limited its ability to conduct effective operational workforce planning. OCHA maintained four separate spreadsheets: a table of encumbered posts in Umoja, table of encumbered posts in UNDP, table of vacancies in Umoja and table of vacancies for UNDP administered staff. However, as of 31 December 2023, the total number of staff reflected on these spreadsheets exceeded the budgeted staff count by 255, as shown in Table 3. This difference was even higher, considering that the analysis did not take into account the estimated 20 per cent vacancy rate in UNDP administered posts. The specific number of vacancies in posts administered by UNDP could not be determined due to unreliable records.

Table 3: OCHA posts as of 31 December 2023

	Encumbered posts	**Vacant posts**	**Total posts**
Staff posts in Umoja	941	253	1,194
UNDP administered staff posts	1,318	0*	1,318
Total OCHA staff posts	**2,259**	**253***	**2,512**
Budgeted posts estimate for 2023			2,257
Difference			255

* Number of vacant posts not available because of unreliable data but estimated to be about 20 per cent of encumbered posts or 330 posts
Source: Data provided by OCHA and proposed programme budget for 2023, A/77/6 (Sect. 27)

21. Without an accurate staffing table, OCHA is not able to conduct operational workforce planning activities outlined in the Workforce Planning Guide. A clean and up-to-date staffing table reflecting all positions is needed to be able to compare current and future staffing requirements and develop action plans to close the identified gaps. While OCHA expected to see certain differences in the staffing table, they acknowledged that the identified difference needed further reconciliation. Also, further discrepancies and duplications were found in the encumbered posts data for staff administered by OCHA, impacting its accuracy. OCHA commented that most of the discrepancies were attributable to data maintained by UNDP, therefore OCHA needed to collaborate with UNDP to clean the staffing table data.

> **(2) OCHA should, in collaboration with UNDP, maintain a consolidated staffing table that accurately records the status of all its staff posts at headquarters and in the field.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it would collaborate with UNDP (as the UNDP staffing table, including positions managed by UNDP, is maintained by UNDP in their information management system) to obtain the position data on a periodic basis to ensure OCHA can maintain a consolidated staffing table.*

<u>The decision on whether to transition national staff from UNDP to Secretariat contracts requires proper analysis</u>

22. As of December 2023, approximately 58 per cent of the OCHA workforce was being administered by UNDP. The administration of national staff under UNDP contracts caused managerial challenges in the field and limited overall management and oversight of this staff category at the headquarters level as OCHA did not have ready access to various human resources data and sometimes such data was not reliable.

23. All other Secretariat entities that had similar arrangements with UNDP have already transitioned their staff from UNDP to Secretariat contracts. Several recommendations had been issued to OCHA to

transition the UNDP administered staff to Secretariat contracts, with the last one issued by the Department of Operational Support (DOS) during its light review of the OCHA Executive Office in 2022. Based on the ensuing action plan, chief of HRS together with the Operations and Advocacy Division was to identify a country or regional office to pilot the migration of national staff from UNDP to Secretariat contracts. While informal conversations were taking place, the Executive Office expressed reservations on discontinuing the business model of using UNDP, which appears to have served OCHA well in delivering its mandate. Nevertheless, neither a cost-benefit analysis, nor a risk analysis had been prepared to support or challenge the existing recommendations.

> **(3)** **OCHA should develop a business case to justify the decision on whether to transition staff on UNDP contracts to Secretariat contracts including: (a) cost-benefit analysis; (b) incorporation of lessons learned from other departments and offices that have already made the transition; and (c) an analysis of risks resulting from the move and an action plan to mitigate them.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 3 and stated that given that national staff represented the majority of OCHA's personnel in the field and were vital to OCHA's ability to maintain its critical humanitarian operations, OCHA would develop a business case, including cost-benefit analysis, risk analysis and lessons learned from other entities that had transitioned from external service providers, to anticipate and mitigate risks and present the results to OCHA senior management for their consideration.*

<u>Strategic human resources key performance indicators were established, monitored and reported but UNDP administered staff was not always included in their calculation</u>

24.   Human resources key performance indicators (KPIs) were established, monitored and reported on in the context of the People Strategy, OCHA strategic plan and the USG compact with the Secretary-General. These KPIs measured performance on areas such as staff recruitment timelines, completeness of end-of-cycle performance evaluations, gender parity, and geographical diversity. The OCHA strategic plan had additional metrics such as percentage of women in leadership positions and percentage of staff supported by Counsellors during crises. However, the measurement of KPIs for the USG compact and strategic plan relating to staff recruitment timelines did not include UNDP administered staff, who comprised 58 per cent of the OCHA workforce.

25.   OCHA commented that the 120-day recruitment timeline KPI was applicable to job openings in Inspira only, which do not include staff recruited on UNDP contracts. However, the KPI benchmark is for selecting a candidate within 120 days of issuance of job opening, with no mention of the underlying system. Therefore, OIOS is of a view that recruitment timeline KPI should include all OCHA recruitment selections, inclusive of national staff on UNDP contracts. The completion rate of end-of-cycle performance evaluations for the USG compact assessment also excluded national staff. Monitoring and reporting on strategic human resources KPIs that exclude a significant component of OCHA staff hindered full visibility of human resources management performance within OCHA and did not sufficiently contribute to informed decision-making.

26.   OCHA stated that they were working with the Business Transformation and Accountability Division (BTAD) in the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC) to incorporate the status of end-of-cycle performance evaluations of UNDP administered staff in the Secretariat-wide BTAD management dashboard. In the meantime, OCHA tracked the completion rate of end-of-cycle performance evaluations for all staff in an internal dashboard. OCHA also needed to implement measures to obtain periodic reporting from UNDP on recruitment timelines to be able to include this staff category in KPI calculations to reflect OCHA performance for the entire workforce.

> **(4)   OCHA should implement measures to include national staff under UNDP contracts in the measurement of all relevant strategic human resources key performance indicators to ensure complete and accurate performance reporting.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it would conduct a review of KPIs to ascertain the relevant measures and take necessary actions. Efforts were already underway with BTAD to incorporate the status of performance management documents of national staff (which are completed in Inspira for OCHA national staff) in the management dashboard managed by BTAD. Currently, the status was not yet captured correctly from Inspira, and BTAD was addressing the issue.*

<u>HRS and PCS could develop more specific indicators to measure their performance</u>

27.   Current indicators used to measure the operational efficiency of HRS and PCS were limited to the high-level human resources management-related KPIs reflected in the OCHA strategy. While HRS and PCS prepared annual work plans listing planned outputs and activities, with a few exceptions, the plans did not establish timeframes for planned outputs and activities or they were vague, such as "ongoing" or "2023". Also, HRS and PCS had not designed quantitative and qualitative operational indicators to measure their performance. At the time of the audit, HRS was internally discussing the establishment of operational performance indicators such as processing timelines for education grant and letters of appointments. OCHA indicated that it would consider improving performance monitoring of human resources administrative management activities by defining operational performance indicators in the annual work plans of HRS and PCS and measuring and reporting performance against the indicators periodically.

<u>There was progress in overall gender parity and geographic diversity, but challenges remained in specific contexts</u>

28.   OCHA achieved overall gender parity for international staff, but there were significant disparities in some locations. For example, among countries with 10 or more staff, female staff made up less than 30 per cent of the international staff complement in five countries, while they accounted for 60 per cent or more in the United States and Switzerland (the United Nations system-wide gender strategy considers gender parity to be within the 43-53 per cent margin). While the strategy sets targets for internationally recruited professional staff only, OCHA internally tracks gender parity for overall OCHA workforce and includes this information in the quarterly updates on the People Strategy to GMT. Entity-wide, there were 39.3 per cent females to 60.7 per cent males as of January 2024, which was a slight improvement on the status as of January 2023 – 38.9 per cent females to 61.1 per cent males. This was primarily because most positions in the field at the G2 and G3 levels were for functions traditionally performed by male staff (e.g., drivers).

29.   Despite ongoing efforts, the Western European and Other States Group (WEOG) of staff was highly overrepresented, whereas the Eastern European Group (EEG) and Latin American and Caribbean Group (LACG) remained highly underrepresented. There has been a gradual decrease in WEOG representation from 58 per cent in 2018 to 45 per cent 2024 as reported to GMT but OCHA had not set any targets regarding geographic diversity.

30.   As the factors affecting gender parity and geographic diversity may be country specific, OIOS will continue to review these metrics in audits of individual OCHA offices.

31. Two actions on disability inclusion were included in the People Strategy. Nevertheless, OCHA had neither its own policy on disability inclusion as required by the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) nor action plans to implement the Strategy.

32. The minimum score required for UNDIS compliance was 32 points, maximum score possible was 48 points. While OCHA made progress and reported scoring 25 points in 2023 compared to 9 points in 2019, there was no plan outlining when and how OCHA would reach 32 points to achieve minimum UNDIS compliance. At the end of 2023, OCHA was approaching requirements on nine indicators (e.g., employment, capacity development) and meeting or exceeding requirements on seven indicators (e.g., joint initiatives, country programme documents). Further, only one staff member was assigned to work 50 per cent of their time on disability inclusion and did not have sufficient capacity.

> **(5) OCHA should develop an action plan and assess the need for additional resources and capacity to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, to ensure compliance within a reasonable timeframe.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 5 and stated that under the lead of the OCHA Disability Focal Point, an action plan would be developed, which would be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Group, including the need for additional resources and capacity to lead on the implementation of the UNDIS.*

Exceptions to human resources policies were reported promptly, but their numbers were significant

33. OCHA reported its human resources exceptions to BTAD promptly using its own portal on delegation of authority, which made the process more efficient. OCHA reported 217 exceptions in 2022 and 66 in 2023. The decline was primarily due to a decrease in COVID-19 related exceptions.

34. However, 66 exceptions in 2023 for approximately 941 staff on Secretariat contracts was a significant number and overall, OCHA reported the most exceptions among the 17 largest headquarters offices and departments of the Secretariat both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of staff size for 2022 and 2023. Thirty-seven of the 66 exceptions in 2023 were for reduced break-in-service mostly between temporary appointments, which might imply poor succession planning. Exceptions for UNDP administered staff were not included in the monitoring.

> **(6) OCHA should analyze exceptions in implementing human resources policies related to reduced break-in-service between temporary appointments to identify and address the underlying issues.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 6 and stated that it would analyze the details of the 37 exceptions in implementing human resources policies related to reduced break-in-service, with an aim to reduce such exceptions and share best practices with programme managers to limit these exceptions.*

B. Recruitment

OCHA was streamlining the management of records supporting its recruitment process

35. Recruitment should ensure selecting the right talent to fill job vacancies within OCHA in a timely manner. It should be conducted in compliance with the existing policies to ensure a due and fair process. OCHA published 416 job openings and temporary job openings in Inspira in 2022 and 455 in 2023, of

which 68 per cent were for P3 and P4 positions. OCHA made 365 selections in 2022 and 420 in 2023, totaling 785 selections.

36.   OIOS selected a judgmental sample of 28 recruitment cases resulting in 30 selections for detailed testing. However, OIOS was not able to conclude on the integrity of the recruitment process in five reviewed cases because key records pertaining to the comparative analysis of candidates leading to justification of the selected candidate by the hiring manager were not provided. Some documents were uploaded to Inspira, but the extent of records maintained varied from case to case. Other documents had to be retrieved by HRS from other sources, which was a time-consuming process. Without proper records management, evidence to support the adequacy of the recruitment process cannot be retrieved in an efficient manner or might not be retrievable at all.

37.   OCHA commented that it had been streamlining the management of records supporting its recruitment process since the Talent Acquisition, Outreach and Management Team was established in 2023. Consequently, several documents were now being uploaded to Inspira, in addition to those already embedded in the system. OIOS noted the progress that has been made to improve records management related to the recruitment process.

OCHA's recruitment timeline met the Secretariat-wide target of 120 days although temporary job openings did not meet the internal target of completion within 30 days

38.   The average timeline between posting a job opening and selecting a candidate in 2022 and 2023 was 122 days, ranging from 4 to 620 days. Although the average timeline was in line with the 120 days Secretariat-wide KPI, 40.4 per cent of job openings did not meet this KPI even though OCHA often reduced the duration of the job posting by the means of exceptional approvals for such reduction. Approximately 30.7 per cent of job openings in the professional and higher categories were posted for less than the normal duration of at least 30 days, and 18 per cent of job openings in the general service and related categories were posted for less than the required 30 days. This was the case even for headquarters locations that were not responding to any specific crisis. Nevertheless, OIOS noted that Secretariat entities took on average 203 days to fill a post in 2023 and 184.6 days in 2022, thus OCHA overall performance was better than the Secretariat average.

39.   OCHA set an internal KPI of 30 days for timely recruitment for temporary job openings, but only 25 per cent of temporary job openings met the target, with the average being 71 days. The average duration of temporary job opening postings was 15 days in 2022 and 2023.

40.   OCHA developed an internal recruitment dashboard to track recruitment timelines. However, OIOS observed discrepancies between the KPI on recruitment timelines reported by OCHA in its dashboard and strategic plan, and OIOS calculations based on the data provided. OCHA was unable to explain the variances. Additionally, monitoring did not include recruitment timelines for UNDP recruited and administered staff.

41.   The length of the recruitment process is inherently even more important in OCHA than in other Secretariat entities given the emergency character of its operations. Lack of reliable indicators might lead to ineffective decision making. OCHA indicated that it would improve data quality in its internal recruitment dashboard to ensure that recruitment timelines for job openings are calculated accurately and reported indicators are reliable for informed decision-making.

Vacancy management required attention

42.   As of 31 December 2023, OCHA had a vacancy rate of 21.4 per cent for staff on Secretariat contracts. Table 4 shows the vacancy rates for staff on Secretariat contracts as of 31 December 2023. At least 72 (28.5 per cent) out of the 253 vacant positions at year end 2023 had been vacant for over a year. There were additional 62 positions for which the Umoja report did not show when they became vacant, so it was not possible to calculate how long they had been vacant.

Table 4: Vacancy rates for staff on Secretariat contracts as of 31 December 2023

Funding/ Position status	Extrabudgetary		Regular budget		Total number of positions	Total percentage
	Number of positions	Percentage	Number of positions	Percentage		
Encumbered	848	79.5%	82	70.7%	930	78.6%
Vacant	219	20.5%	34	29.3%	253	21.4%
Total	**1,067**	**100.0%**	**116**	**100.0%**	**1,183**	**100.0%**

Source: OIOS analysis based on data from OCHA and Umoja

43.   Thirty-four out of the 116 positions funded by the regular budget were vacant, representing a 29.3 per cent vacancy rate. HRS was closely monitoring the vacancy rates for positions funded by regular budget to comply with the measures resulting from the liquidity crisis.

44.   However, there was little focus on vacancy management of positions funded by extrabudgetary resources. Forty-eight out of 72 positions vacant for over one year were funded by extrabudgetary resources, of which 33 were positions for professional staff, 14 for general service staff and position type was not indicated in one case. According to OCHA, human resources business partners from HRS had only an advisory role in vacancy management of extrabudgetary positions with the hiring managers exercising full control. Further, OCHA did not monitor vacancy rates for national staff administered by UNDP due to unreliable data. Without active vacancy management, OCHA might not fill vacancies in a timely manner to be able to continue delivering on its mandates.

> **(7)   OCHA should implement measures to improve its vacancy management by monitoring and actively managing all vacant positions, including those funded by extrabudgetary resources, and national staff administered by UNDP.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 7 and stated that since national staff recruitment and administration were supported by UNDP, OCHA would need to collaborate with UNDP as the information was maintained by UNDP in their information management systems. OCHA will undertake a one-time data clean-up for UNDP positions in collaboration with UNDP and will collaborate with UNDP to build a dashboard that will support monitoring the status of all OCHA positions (vacant and encumbered).*

While FTA-limited appointments contributed to faster deployment of staff to emergency operations, the selection process needed to be improved

45.   Fifty-seven recruitments in 2022 and 2023 were FTA-limited appointments. OIOS recruitment sample included seven of these selections. The assessment of candidates for positions subject to FTA-limited appointment must be conducted in accordance with the administrative instruction on staff selection system (ST/AI/2010/3/Rev.2) with the exception that selections of candidates for FTA-limited are not reviewed by Secretariat central review bodies.

46.   However, in all seven cases reviewed, the selection procedure did not follow the administrative instruction. The assessment methods did not include a competency-based interview and/or other appropriate evaluation mechanisms, such as written tests, work sample tests or assessment centres, but only a desk review. While OCHA provided a communication from DMSPC stating that as part of their delegated authority for staff selection, entities had the authority to decide on the types of assessments that can be considered "appropriate" for each job opening, OIOS did not consider a desk review to be a sufficient evaluation mechanism to grant FTA-limited appointment. Also, OCHA did not establish an internal review board or body to review the process followed for proposed selections.

47.   Similar observations were raised by the Board of Auditors in its memorandum from 9 May 2024. This happened due to lack of monitoring and detailed guidance on FTA-limited appointments, which were only issued by OCHA and OHR in January 2024 and March 2024, respectively. The new OCHA guidance requires prior approval of the front office of OCHA USG/ASG of the intent to use the FTA-limited appointment modality before the issuance of the job opening. Since this requirement, only two appointments had been cleared by June 2024. DMSPC advised that it would be issuing revised guidance on FTA-limited appointments for all Secretariat entities, following the Board of Auditors' recommendation.

C.   Support for staff learning and development

Planning and reporting on learning and development needed to be enhanced

48.   The second objective of the People Strategy – Leading with a "People first" approach – emphasized the importance of learning and development. The Learning and Development team of three substantive and one administrative staff member in PCS supported the implementation of this objective by providing opportunities for learning, coaching, staff development, leadership development and other activities. Table 5 provides information on the learning areas and participants. The total expenditure for learning was $827,735 in 2023.

Table 5: Learning areas and number of participants

Learning areas	Number of participants	
	2022	**2023**
Leadership and management	569	495
Career development	231	257
Core/technical/thematic	240	1,697
Total	**1,040**	**2,449**

Source: OCHA data

49.   OCHA established learning priorities, but there were no comprehensive annual learning plans outlining the learning objectives or targets for all budget sources. Further, apart from the People Strategy budget utilization reports and the high-level summaries on learning and development activities included in reporting on the People Strategy and OCHA strategic plan, there was no assessment of the extent to which planned learning and development activities, objectives and targets were implemented and achieved during the year.

50.   To enhance monitoring of completion of mandatory and non-mandatory training activities, PCS was at the time of the audit developing an online KPI reporting tool called Global Learning Tracker. The tool aimed to track 12 learning and development KPIs that stemmed from the People Strategy and OCHA strategic plan. While some results were already visible, the tool was still being developed in 2024.

51.   Outcome level evaluations of training programmes and Pulse Check[4] surveys provided a feedback loop on the effectiveness of training activities. Also, at the end of each activity, participants' feedback was collected. However, PCS did not collect this information centrally and was not able to obtain an overall impression on the usefulness of the training provided. For larger programmes, evaluations measuring outcome or lessons learned reports were prepared. For example, an independent evaluation with outcome level reporting for the Humanitarian Coordination Foundation Programme in 2023 concluded that there was clear evidence that the programme equipped participants with enhanced knowledge and skills that made them more effective in their work.

52.   OCHA staff completion rate of all mandatory courses stood at 57 per cent as of 12 August 2024. This indicator however included the Information Security Awareness Foundational course, for which the completion deadline was 30 June 2024 and its completion rate so far was only 59 per cent. Without taking into account this course, the overall completion rate would be 77 per cent. The completion rate for all other courses was between 83 to 92 per cent.

> **(8)   OCHA should strengthen its monitoring and reporting on learning and development activities by establishing annual learning and development plans for all budget sources and reporting on their implementation.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 8 and stated that measures were being taken to develop a corporate planning, monitoring and evaluation system for all OCHA learning and training. OCHA will prepare an annual learning plan for 2025 including activities from all budget sources across OCHA. The implementation of the 2025 OCHA Learning and Development Plan will be reported on by the end of the second quarter of 2026, and the report will focus on programmatic activities, outputs and outcomes with high-level budget expenditure information.*

Staff performance management was adequately managed, but some reporting relationships needed to be reviewed

53.   OCHA maintained an internal dashboard with performance management data to monitor and provide the status of the current compliance rates and details of pending documents for all its staff. As of 31 July 2024, 87.9 per cent of OCHA staff had completed the 2022-2023 end-of-cycle performance evaluations, 2.1 per cent short of a 90 per cent target in the USG compact. The compliance rate for the 2023-2024 cycle was 91 per cent for the 2,083 staff members who were required to complete performance evaluations as of 31 July 2024.

54.   Best practice suggest that managers should have 10 or fewer staff in their span of control referring to the number of staff reporting to a given manager. Only six first reporting officers representing 1 per cent of first reporting officers (6 out of 695) exceeded this threshold, with between 11 and 17 direct reports. While there is no defined best practice for span of control for second reporting officers, OIOS found most of them in OCHA had 20 or fewer reports. The maximum number of staff members assigned to a second reporting officer was 27.

55.   OIOS identified 255 cases where the direct reports, first reporting officers and second reporting officers were not hierarchically subordinated, as detailed in Table 6. While the administrative instruction on performance management and development system (ST/AI/2021/4) allows for direct reports, first reporting officers and second reporting officers to be at the same level, there were over 200 such cases representing more than 10 per cent of OCHA staff. In a hierarchical organization like the Secretariat, first

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[4] An employee listening tool designed for OCHA personnel to provide feedback every six months on how they perceive their work environment, including relationship and support from managers and colleagues, and organizational system and resources.

and second reporting officers at the same level may not be perceived as having sufficient authority as performance managers. OCHA could benefit from reviewing these cases to ensure that they are justified.

56. Further, in 28 cases the grade of the second reporting officer was lower than the grade of the first reporting officer. OCHA commented that this was probably due to the erroneous entries in Inspira in cases where the managers manually entered the first or second reporting officers for the performance management documents. The second reporting officer cannot effectively perform the role envisioned in the administrative instruction if their grade is lower than that of the first reporting office.

Table 6: Direct reports, first reporting officers and second reporting officers not hierarchically subordinated

Performance reporting relationship	Number of cases	Rationale
The grade of the second reporting officer was lower than the grade of the first reporting officer.	28	Potentially erroneous entries in Inspira.
The direct reports, first reporting officers and/or second reporting officers were at the same level.	204	Allowed as per the administrative instruction on performance management and development system (ST/AI/2021/4) but a review of these cases could be beneficial.
The first and second reporting officer were the same person.	23	In 15 cases, staff member reported directly to the Head of Office/USG. In six exceptional cases it was not possible to identify two different individuals to be the first and second reporting officer. Two cases were corrected during the audit.
Total	**255**	

> **(9)   OCHA should review all performance management cases in Inspira where the grade of the second reporting officer is lower than that of the first reporting officer and take necessary remedial action.**
>
> *OCHA accepted recommendation 9 and stated it was already reviewing these cases and flagged necessary corrective actions to relevant staff, as required, and where technically possible, since the 2023-24 performance cycle had already ended on 31 March 2024. To ensure that erroneous entries are corrected in time for the current performance cycle of 2024-25, OCHA had already updated the internal OCHA performance management dashboard to flag cases where the grade of the second reporting officer may have been erroneously entered as lower than that of the first reporting officer in the Inspira performance management system so that the necessary remedial action can be taken as soon as possible.*

IV.   ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

57. 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.

<div align="right">
Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services
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STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[5]/ Important[6]	C/ O[7]	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date[8]
1	OCHA should strengthen its workforce planning by developing a workforce planning strategy in line with guidance issued by the Department of Operational Support and taking into account the exigencies in implementing the humanitarian mandate.	Important	O	Receipt of the OCHA workforce planning strategy.	31 December 2025
2	OCHA should, in collaboration with UNDP, maintain a consolidated staffing table that accurately records the status of all its staff posts at headquarters and in the field.	Important	O	Receipt of a consolidated staffing table corresponding to the approved budgeted staff count.	30 September 2025
3	OCHA should develop a business case to justify the decision on whether to transition staff on UNDP contracts to Secretariat contracts including: (a) cost-benefit analysis; (b) incorporation of lessons learned from other departments and offices that have already made the transition; and (c) an analysis of risks resulting from the move and an action plan to mitigate them.	Important	O	Receipt of the business case and related actions.	31 December 2025
4	OCHA should implement measures to include national staff under UNDP contracts in the measurement of all relevant strategic human resources key performance indicators to ensure complete and accurate performance reporting.	Important	O	Notification of measures introduced to include all staff in the measurement of performance against relevant strategic KPIs, including the recruitment timeline.	31 December 2025
5	OCHA should develop an action plan and assess the need for additional resources and capacity to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion	Important	O	Receipt of an action plan and the results of the assessment of the need for additional resources	31 December 2025

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[5] 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.

[6] 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.

[7] Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

[8] Date provided by OCHA in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[5]/ Important[6]	C/ O[7]	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date[8]
	Strategy, to ensure compliance within a reasonable timeframe.			to implement United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.	
6	OCHA should analyze exceptions in implementing human resources policies related to reduced break-in-service between temporary appointments to identify and address the underlying issues.	Important	O	Receipt of the results of the analysis of exceptions related to reduced break-in-service and the action plan to address the underlying issues.	30 June 2025
7	OCHA should implement measures to improve its vacancy management by monitoring and actively managing all vacant positions, including those funded by extrabudgetary resources, and national staff administered by UNDP.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of active management of all vacant positions.	31 March 2026
8	OCHA should strengthen its monitoring and reporting on learning and development activities by establishing annual learning and development plans for all budget sources and reporting on their implementation.	Important	O	Receipt of annual learning and development plans for all budget sources and reporting on their implementation.	30 June 2026
9	OCHA should review all performance management cases in Inspira where the grade of the second reporting officer is lower than that of the first reporting officer and take necessary remedial action.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of remedial action for 28 cases where the grade of the second reporting officer is lower than that of the first reporting officer.	31 July 2025

APPENDIX I

Management Response

TO: Mr. Byung-Kun Min, Director
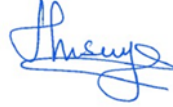A: Internal Audit Division, OIOS

DATE: 24 September 2024

REFERENCE:

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Ms. Joyce Msuya,
DE: Acting Under-Secretary-General and
Emergency Relief Coordinator

SUBJECT: **OCHA comments on the draft report of an audit of human**
OBJET: **resources management in the Office for the Coordination**
of Humanitarian Affairs (AN2023-590-01)

In reference to your memorandum dated 23 August 2024, I am
enclosing herewith OCHA's management response to the draft
report and the recommendations issued.

Attachment:
Appendix I – Management response: audit of human resources
management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian
Affairs

Cc: Menada Wind-Andersen, Ali Buzurukov, Assefa Bahta

Management Response

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	OCHA should strengthen its workforce planning by developing a workforce planning strategy in line with guidance issued by the Department of Operational Support and taking into account the exigencies in implementing the humanitarian mandate.	Important	Yes	Chief, Human Resources Section (HRS)	31/12/2025	OCHA has started work on developing its workforce planning strategy based on DOS guidance, taking into account the unpredictable nature of OCHA's humanitarian mandate.
2	OCHA should, in collaboration with UNDP, maintain a consolidated staffing table that accurately records the status of all its staff posts at headquarters and in the field.	Important	Yes	Chief, HRS	30/09/2025	OCHA will collaborate with UNDP (as the UNDP staffing table, including positions managed by UNDP, is maintained by UNDP in their system i.e., Quantum) to obtain the position data on a periodic basis to ensure OCHA can maintain a consolidated staffing table.
3	OCHA should develop a business case to justify the decision on whether to transition staff on UNDP contracts to Secretariat contracts including: (a) cost-benefit analysis; (b) incorporation of lessons learned from other departments and offices that have already made the transition; and (c) an analysis of risks resulting from the move and an action plan to mitigate them.	Important	Yes	Chief, HRS	31/12/2025	Given that national staff (General Service (GS) and National Officer (NO)) represent the majority of OCHA's personnel in the field which are vital to OCHA's ability to maintain it's critical humanitarian operations, OCHA will develop a business case, including cost-benefit analysis, risk analysis and lessons learned from other entities that have transitioned from external service providers (e.g., DSS, DOS and OHCHR ongoing) to anticipate and

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

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

Management Response

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						mitigate risks, as well as incorporate lessons learned from other entities, and present it to the OCHA senior management for their consideration.
4	OCHA should implement measures to include national staff under UNDP contracts in the measurement of all relevant strategic human resources key performance indicators to ensure complete and accurate performance reporting.	Important	Yes	Chief HRS	31/12/2025	OCHA HRS will conduct a review of KPIs to ascertain the relevant measures and take necessary actions.

Efforts are already underway with BTAD to incorporate the status of the performance management documents of national staff (which are completed in Inspira for OCHA national staff) in the management dashboard managed by BTAD. Currently, the status is not yet captured correctly from Inspira and BTAD is addressing the issue. |
| 5 | OCHA should develop an action plan and assess the need for additional resources and capacity to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, to ensure compliance within a reasonable timeframe. | Important | Yes | OCHA Disability & Inclusion Focal Point | 31/12/2025 | An action plan will be developed under the lead of the OCHA Disability Focal Point. The action plan will be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Group (SLG), including the relevance of putting in place additional resources and capacity to lead on the implementation of the UNDIS. |
| 6 | OCHA should analyze exceptions in implementing human resources policies related to reduced break-in-service to identify and address the underlying issues. | Important | Yes | Chief HRS | 30/06/2025 | OCHA will analyze the details of 37 exceptions in implementing human resources policies related to reduced break-in-service, with an aim to reduce such exceptions and share best |

Management Response

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						practices with programme managers to limit these exceptions.
7	OCHA should implement measures to improve its vacancy management by monitoring and actively managing all vacant positions, including those funded by extrabudgetary resources, and national staff administered by UNDP.	Important	Yes	Chief HRS	31/03/2026	As national staff recruitment and administration is supported by UNDP, OCHA will need to collaborate with UNDP as the information is maintained by UNDP in their systems i.e., Quantum, UNAll. OCHA will undertake a one-time data clean-up exercise for UNDP positions in collaboration with UNDP, and will collaborate with UNDP to build a dashboard that will support monitoring the status of all OCHA positions (vacant and encumbered.)
8	OCHA should strengthen its monitoring and reporting on learning and development activities by establishing annual learning and development plans for all budget sources and reporting on their implementation.	Important	Yes	Head, Learning and Development Unit (LDU), People and Culture Section (PCS)	30 June 2026	Measures are being taken to develop a corporate planning, monitoring and evaluation system for all OCHA learning and training. OCHA will prepare an annual learning plan for 2025 including activities from all budget sources across OCHA. The implementation of the 2025 OCHA Learning and Development Plan will be reported on by the end of the second quarter of 2026. The plan will include OCHA-wide learning and development activities including approximate budgets allocated. The report on the implementation will focus on programmatic activities,

Management Response

Audit of human resources management in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						outputs and outcomes, with high level budget expenditure information.
9	OCHA should review all performance management cases in Inspira where the grade of the second reporting officer is lower than that of the first reporting officer and take necessary remedial action.	Important	Yes	Chief HRS	31/07/2025	OCHA is already reviewing these cases and flagged necessary corrective actions to relevant staff, as required, and where technically possible since the 2023-24 performance cycle has already ended on 31 March 2024. To ensure that erroneous entries are corrected in time in the current performance cycle for 2024-25, OCHA has already updated the internal OCHA performance management dashboard to flag cases where the grade of the second reporting officer may have been erroneously entered as lower than that of the first reporting officer in the Inspira performance management system so that the necessary remedial action can be taken as soon as possible.