



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2024/044

Audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

**UNAMI needed to address the important gaps
in its human resource management in the
context of its recent mandate**

20 September 2024

Assignment No. AP2022-812-03

Audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of human resources management in UNAMI. The audit covered the period from January 2021 to March 2023 and included: (a) mainstreaming United Nations cross-cutting principles; (b) recruitment, onboarding and staff separation; (c) performance management; and (d) learning and development.

The audit report takes into consideration the UNAMI new mandate as per Security Council Resolution 2732 (2024) adopted on 31 May 2024, which extends the Mission's mandate until 31 December 2025, after which it will cease all work and operations, except for any remaining liquidation activities. The resolution also mandates the Mission to complete a transition and liquidation plan by 31 December 2024, initiate the transfer of its tasks, and begin the orderly and safe drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel and assets, including identifying an end date for liquidation activities in Iraq.

The audit found that, to mainstream United Nations cross-cutting principles in human resources management, UNAMI: a) developed a mission-specific strategy and action plan for disability inclusion; and integrated multilingualism into the work plans of relevant Mission components. However, the Mission could have made more efforts towards achieving gender parity goals.

Regarding day-to-day human resources management, UNAMI: a) did not consistently obtain and document justifications and approvals for job advertisements posted for less than the required period; and b) did not consistently use the global separation checklist to verify and process separation entitlements, which led to inadequate separation documentation, including missing exit questionnaires, performance documents, and termination or resignation notices. (OIOS did not make recommendations to address the observed gaps as UNAMI is soon to liquidate its activities.)

Also, the Mission did not effectively ensure the completion of mandatory training courses, which continues to be relevant in the new operating environment. OIOS recommended that UNAMI establish mechanisms to enforce the completion of the mandatory training courses, including providing status updates to senior management.

UNAMI accepted the recommendation and has initiated action to implement it. Action required to close the recommendation is indicated in Annex I.

CONTENTS

I. BACKGROUND	1-2
II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	2
III. AUDIT RESULTS	2-7
A. Mainstreaming United Nations cross-cutting principles	2-3
B. Recruitment, onboarding and separation	3-5
C. Performance management	5-6
D. Learning and development	6-7
IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	7
ANNEX I	Status of audit recommendations
APPENDIX I	Management response

Audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

2. Security Council Resolution 2732 (2024), adopted on 31 May 2024, extended the Mission's mandate until 31 December 2025, after which it will cease all work and operations, except for any remaining liquidation activities. The resolution also mandated the Mission to complete a transition and liquidation plan by 31 December 2024, initiate the transfer of its tasks, and begin the orderly and safe drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel and assets, including identifying an end date for liquidation activities in Iraq.

3. A competent and qualified workforce, supported by effective and efficient human resources management, is crucial for mandate implementation. Under the current delegation of authority framework (ST/SGB/2019/2), the Secretary-General delegated to the UNAMI Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) the authority to manage human resources under the Staff Regulations and Rules and Financial Regulations and Rules. Under this framework, the SRSG can subdelegate decision-making authorities to authorized officials based on their function but remains accountable and responsible for the exercising of all delegated authorities.

4. Table 1 below shows approved staffing posts and actual expenditures for UNAMI from 2021 to 2023. UNAMI staff members are based in 22 locations across Iraq and Kuwait, including 63 per cent in Baghdad, 16 per cent in Erbil, 8 per cent in Kuwait, and 13 per cent in the remaining 19 locations. As of 31 March 2023, UNAMI's staff vacancy rate was 32 per cent.

Table 1: UNAMI staff categories, expenditure and number of posts for 2021, 2022 and 2023

Staff category	2021		2022		2023	
	Cost (\$'000)	Approved posts	Cost (\$'000)	Approved posts	Cost (\$'000)	Approved posts
International staff	51,325	303	53,423	293	51,742	279
National staff	26,134	502	26,670	509	27,442	495
United Nations volunteers	83	2	48	2	123	2
Consultants and consulting services	74	-	241	-	175	-
Total	77,616	807	80,382	804	79,481	776

Source: UNAMI Budget Unit and documents (A/76/6 (Sect3/Add.6, A/77/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.6 and A/78/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.6

5. The UNAMI Human Resources Section falls under the Office of Operations and Support Management and provides advice and guidance to mission management and staff on all aspects of human resources. A Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) at the P-4 level heads the Section and is assisted by 13 staff comprising 5 international and 8 national staff, all based in Iraq. The Section has four units, namely: (i) Client Support and Visa Unit, (ii) Operational Management Unit, (iii) Recruitment Unit, and (iv) Specialist Unit. The Kuwait Joint Support Office (KJSO) executes related transactions on behalf of the Mission based on a service-level agreement.

6. Human resources management in UNAMI is governed by the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules, relevant administrative instructions, Secretary-General's bulletins, and UNAMI-issued standard operating procedures. The Department of Management, Strategy, Policy, and Compliance (DMSPC) and the Department of Operational Support provide overall policy guidance.

7. Comments provided by UNAMI are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

8. The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of human resources management in UNAMI.

9. This audit was included in OIOS' 2023 risk-based work plan due to the critical role of effective human resource management in implementing the Mission's mandated activities.

10. OIOS conducted this audit from April to December 2023 and covered the period from January 2021 to March 2023. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas, in human resources management, including: (a) mainstreaming United Nations cross-cutting principles; (b) recruitment, onboarding and staff separation; (c) performance management; and (d) learning and development.

11. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel involved in human resource management; (b) reviews of relevant documentation, including staff files, performance documents, work plans, and training records; (c) analytical reviews of human resources data; and (d) tests of random samples for key human resources transactions, including onboarding and separations.

12. Given the final extension of the Mission's mandate, OIOS primarily focused on the risks relevant and applicable to the new operating environment.

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

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Mainstreaming United Nations cross-cutting principles

14. The Secretary-General's Vision 2.0 on workforce planning capabilities sets targets and timelines for key priority areas, including gender, disability inclusion and multilingualism.

a) The Mission's gender parity goals were not achieved

15. The United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity requires UNAMI to develop and implement action plans to achieve gender parity, defined as a ratio of 47-53 percent margin for each staff level.

16. In 2019, UNAMI developed a gender parity implementation plan, updated in 2023, to improve recruitment and retention of female staff at all levels. The Mission also established a Gender Parity Working Group, chaired by the Deputy SRSG (Political Affairs) and comprised of representatives from the Human Resources Section, the Office of the Chief of Staff, and the Gender Advisor. The Working Group's

responsibilities included reviewing the gender parity implementation strategy regularly, recommending actions to advance gender balance, and providing quarterly progress reports to the Senior Leadership Team.

17. However, as of 20 August 2024, gender parity had not been achieved for any of its staffing levels, with female staff accounting for only 29 per cent of its international workforce. OIOS also noted that out of 34 sections/units in the Mission, male representation was higher in 27 sections/units compared to 7 sections/units with a higher female representation. There were no female staff in seven sections/units, and all four staff in the Surface Transport and Engineering sections, respectively, were male. Only the Environment Unit had achieved gender parity at the organizational unit level.

18. OIOS analysis of 46 recruitments for professional and higher posts conducted from January 2021 to March 2023 showed that UNAMI did not adequately consider gender in its selection processes. Of the 46 cases, only 18 female candidates (39 per cent) were selected, and in 11 (24 per cent) cases, female candidates possessed the required competencies for the job openings, and their qualifications were similar or superior to those of male candidates. Further, adequate justification was not provided for their non-selection, nor was exceptional approval obtained from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, where applicable. Moreover, 23 of these recruitment exercises did not yield a minimum of 20 per cent female applicants, and there was no evidence of outreach measures by the Mission to attract female applicants as required by the system-wide strategy on gender parity. OIOS did not make any recommendation as the Mission does not expect to conduct further recruitment due to its planned liquidation in 2025.

b) The Mission was taking measures to implement its disability inclusion strategy and mainstream multilingualism

19. In accordance with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, UNAMI developed a mission-specific strategy and action plan focusing on four themes: (i) leadership, strategic planning, and management, (ii) inclusiveness, (iii) mainstreamed in programmes, and (iv) organizational culture. UNAMI appointed a focal point and established a disability-inclusive working group headed by the Deputy SRSG (Political Affairs) to oversee the implementation of the strategy. In line with its strategy, the Mission improved the physical environment for persons with disabilities by providing accessible sanitation facilities, enhancing building access, adjusting office and residential accommodation, and offering sign language products.

20. UNAMI was also mainstreaming multilingualism as a cross-cutting issue by incorporating it into the work plans of relevant Mission components and producing strategic communications and public information materials, including multimedia, in English, Arabic and Kurdish, with translations provided for the minority languages spoken in Iraq.

21. OIOS concluded that UNAMI was taking measures to implement its disability inclusion strategy and mainstream multilingualism in its operations.

B. Recruitment, onboarding and separation

The Mission did not obtain approvals for shorter period job adverts and did not track recruitment timelines

22. Special political missions are responsible for completing the staff selection process within 86 calendar days for recruitments from the roster (RfR) and 126 for all other job openings. Additionally, job adverts are required to be posted on the intranet for: (i) 30 calendar days for position-specific job openings (PSJO)s, or exceptionally, 15 calendar days for RfRs with CHRO approval; (ii) 30 calendar days for generic

job openings; and (iii) one week for temporary job openings (TJOs). Approval from the Chief of Mission Support (CMS) is required for vacancy announcements posted for less than the required days.

23. During the audit period, UNAMI filled 211 vacancies under three job opening categories: 80 PSJOs, 65 RfRs, and 66 TJOs for specific short-term requirements expected not to exceed one year. OIOS analysis of job posting timelines for these 211 cases revealed that:

- All 66 TJOs were posted for 7 days, as allowed.
- All 65 RfRs were posted for 15 days, as allowed, but the CMS/CHRO's justifications and approval were not documented.
- 4 PSJOs were posted for the required 30 days, while the remaining 76 PSJOs were posted for less than 30 days, with 10 posted for 7 days and 66 posted for 14 to 23 days.

24. Posting job adverts for less than the required timeframe could limit the number of applicants to job openings and negatively impact the Mission's efforts to achieve gender parity. The UNAMI Human Resources Section indicated that the timelines were reduced to expedite the recruitment process to meet operational needs quickly. However, the Mission did not consistently obtain and document justifications and approvals for job adverts posted for less than the required period Mission. However, UNAMI does not expect to recruit new staff due to its drawdown beginning in January 2025 and closing on December 31, 2025. Therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

25. Furthermore, 91 of the 211 recruitments (43 per cent) were not completed timely, taking between 128 to 854 days. On average, it took 132 days to complete PSJOs/TJOs and 153 days for RfRs. Delays in filling posts may impact the productivity of sections and the delivery of the Mission's mandate. UNAMI attributed the delays to the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021 and the United Nations liquidity crisis, which resulted in a recruitment freeze from 2020 to 2022. Given the explanation and the new operating environment where Mission does not expect to conduct further recruitment due to its planned liquidation in 2025, OIOS did not make a recommendation regarding recruitment delays.

There was no evidence that all competency-based interview panel members completed the mandatory training

26. UNAMI conducted 80 PSJO recruitment assessments during the audit period, including competency-based interviews (CBIs), for which recruitment assessment panels were convened. OIOS review of 29 assessment panels noted that they met the appropriate composition of: (a) at least three members, including two subject matter experts at the same or higher level than the job opening and one from outside the unit/section where the job was located; and (b) one female staff member. However, there was no evidence that 12 of the 50 sampled panel members had completed the required CBI training, which could compromise the legality, effectiveness and objectivity of the assessment process. Some panel members indicated that they previously completed the training but had misplaced their certificates.

27. The Mission assured OIOS that while a refresher course was not required, it would encourage the panel members who could not provide their certificates to complete the online CBI training. Based on this assurance, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

Reference verification checks for national staff were ongoing

28. KJSO is responsible for onboarding UNAMI staff and conducting verification checks for all national staff. The United Nations Global Service Centre Reference Verification Unit (RVU) in Brindisi handles reference verification checks for international staff recruitments after provisional job offers are issued.

29. KJSO completed onboarding tasks on time, averaging one month for national staff and two months for international staff, per its key performance indicators. OIOS review of the recruitment files of 46 (22 per cent) of 208 onboarded staff (21 international and 25 national staff) showed that all were medically cleared. The RVU completed the reference checks for all the sampled international staff and recorded them in Inspira. Inspira records confirmed that RVU conducted reference checks with positive results.

30. The Mission canceled the onboarding process for 2 of the 25 sampled national staff. For the remaining 23 national staff, the employment verifications for four national staff recruited in 2022 were not completed. Although KJSO had established a 14-day timeframe for completing these verifications, there was insufficient monitoring to ensure that employment history checks were completed during onboarding. This led to significant delays and the potential recruitment of unsuitable or unqualified candidates for national posts contrary to the recruitment guidelines, which require satisfactory completion of background checks for all appointments.

31. UNAMI noted that contacting former employers in Iraq's post-conflict environment was challenging. As a result, it requested the four national staff members to follow up with their previous employers to complete the employment verification checks. At the time of the audit, the Mission had completed the verifications for the four national staff. Given the Mission's ongoing action, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

The global separation checklist form was not used

32. Separating staff are required to complete a global separation checklist to ensure all administrative tasks and assets assigned to them are addressed before employment ends. The KJSO Human Resources Office is responsible for monitoring its completion and preparing a checkout memorandum as evidence that the process has been completed before issuing final payments to staff.

33. OIOS review of 56 (32 per cent) of 173 files related to separated staff showed that only 21 (38 per cent) included the KJSO checkout memorandum, indicating that the checkout process may be incomplete for the other 35 cases. Even in the 21 instances where there was a KJSO checkout memorandum, KJSO did not maintain the required documents for 12 cases. For example, only 4 of these 12 files included exit questionnaires, and only 3 had performance documents. Moreover, in 30 (54 per cent) of the 56 cases reviewed, there was no Mission-approved evidence of termination notices to staff or resignation notices from staff.

34. An inadequate checkout process could lead to staff members separating from the Mission without settling outstanding obligations, resulting in subsequent write-offs, incorrect computation of staff entitlements, and delays in final payments to staff. As separation processes will be covered in a draw-down and liquidation audit for the Mission in 2025, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

C. Performance management

Section work plans were developed properly but some were not finalized

35. OIOS reviewed the work plans of Mission's sections and noted that they were developed in accordance with the instructions and templates, clearly indicating the objectives, activities, outputs, deliverables, and indicators of achievements required to implement relevant mandated activities.

36. However, some work plans were still in draft form or lacked date stamps and signatures. As a result, OIOS could not establish whether the Planning Unit or pillar heads had reviewed and cleared the final work plans to be used. In addition, some sections indicated that there had been changes to their key functions/

tasks, but the work plans had not been updated to reflect this. Although no United Nations policy requires the approval of section work plans, documenting revisions to work plans would be a best practice to ensure the relevance of the work plan for monitoring and reporting purposes. Therefore, the Mission could encourage section chiefs to endorse finalized work plans and document any revisions to provide an audit trail.

Evaluation and completion of staff performance documents were done timely

37. Staff performance documents and individual work plans are required to cascade from the sections' work plans, detailing key activities and expected performance.

38. OIOS review of 30 of 671 staff performance documents showed that they aligned adequately with activities in their respective section work plans. Performance monitoring mechanisms, including ongoing discussions, weekly and monthly performance meetings with staff, and end-of-cycle performance evaluations, were established. OIOS concluded that staff performance documents aligned with section work plans and were evaluated timely.

D. Learning and development

Completion of mandatory training courses was not effectively conducted

39. The Secretary-General's bulletin on United Nations mandatory learning programmes (ST/SGB/2018/4) outlines courses that all staff members should complete regardless of their level or functions. Newly recruited staff must complete mandatory courses within six months of joining the Organization.

40. The UNAMI Training Unit led and coordinated training activities, including facilitating and providing training, advising and guiding staff in collaboration with the various section heads, and preparing monthly training reports¹. Yearly training needs surveys, conducted with guidance from CDOTS², were distributed to all staff, and learning needs were adequately incorporated into the training plans. Some training courses for national staff were conducted in Arabic and Kurdish, considering multilingualism.

41. As of January 2024, the DMSPC dashboard for monitoring the completion of Secretariat-wide mandatory training courses reported a compliance rate of 70 to 100 per cent for 32 of the 34 sections/units. However, the Tehran Liaison Office and Regional Office staff members in Erbil had a compliance rate of 50 per cent and below. Uncompleted mandatory courses included records and information management, information security, and ethics and integrity, which are key courses for staff in these offices because they handle sensitive and confidential information. Furthermore, only 18 of the 32 staff required to complete the executive management programme³ had done so.

42. Furthermore, a review of mission-specific mandatory course completion certificates for 25 (41 per cent) of the 61 newly recruited staff showed that only five (20 per cent) completed the induction training within one month of arrival in the Mission. There was no mechanism to inform the Training Unit of the arrival of new staff for monitoring and tracking purposes. After the audit fieldwork and OIOS'

¹ The Training Unit monthly reports indicated the type of training, number of courses, place of training, medium of instruction, staff category, number of staff, and gender.

² Capacity Development and Operational Training Service

³ It provides second reporting officers at P-4/P-5 levels with the skills to support system coherence, enhance communication, manage change, develop people and teams, and deliver organizational results.

benchmarking of the check-in process at various field missions⁴ effective August 2023, the Training Unit was included in the Field Technology Section’s mailing list, enabling it to receive notifications of new staff check-ins initiated by the Human Resource Section. Subsequently, 16 additional staff completed the induction training.

43. There was also a need to ensure that all staff completed the full training on Safe and Secure Approaches to Field Environments. The Security Section Training Unit’s records from January 2021 to March 2023 indicated that of 203 staff trained, 109 completed the full training, while 94 only did the virtual training. UNAMI explained that due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the physical training was not conducted, resulting in a backlog. Security clearances for official travel to high-risk areas were only granted after staff completed the training or obtained a waiver from the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. However, waivers granted to staff to travel to high-risk areas could limit their ability to identify threats and vulnerabilities and their knowledge of procedures to mitigate risks and ensure safety.

44. Non-completion of mandatory training limits staff awareness of rules, regulations and procedures and could expose the organization to risks. Additionally, without an effective mechanism to enforce the completion of mandatory training, non-compliance would persist.

(1) UNAMI should establish mechanisms to enforce the completion of the mandatory training courses, including providing status updates to senior management.

UNAMI accepted recommendation 1 and stated it would establish mechanisms to enforce compliance with the following: (a) completion of the 10 mandatory United Nations training courses by sending monthly follow-up emails to staff who have not yet completed them, and (b) completion of the mandatory SSAFE training course, by enrolling all new staff without SSAFE certification in upcoming sessions, with monthly follow-ups until the SSAFE certificate is provided. Status updates would be shared with senior management through quarterly reports on non-compliance for the 10 mandatory training courses and the SSAFE training.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

⁴ The check-in process of the various missions showed that their training units either received notifications from the United Nations Field Support Suite (FSS) or the Human Resources Section provided periodic lists of staff check-ins from FSS.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁵ / Important ⁶	C/ O ⁷	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁸
1	UNAMI should establish mechanisms to enforce the completion of the mandatory training courses, including providing status updates to senior management.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the Mission has established mechanisms to enforce the completion of the mandatory training courses, including providing status updates to senior management.	30 November 2024

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 UNAMI in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of human resources management in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNAMI should establish mechanisms to enforce the completion of the mandatory training courses, including providing status updates to senior management.	Important	Yes	UNAMI, Chief Training Unit and UNDSS-I, Head of Administration & Support Unit	30 Nov-24	UNAMI will establish mechanisms to enforce the completion of: a) the 10 mandatory UN training courses through monthly follow-up emails addressed to UNAMI staff with non-compliance on 10 mandatory UN training courses, b) the mandatory UNDSS SSAFE training course through enlisting all new UNAMI staff without SSAFE certification to upcoming SSAFE training course with monthly follow-up till presentation of SSAFE certificate, including providing status updates to senior management (through quarterly provided “Reports on Non-Compliance from UNAMI Staff on 10 mandatory UN training courses and SSAFE”).

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.