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AUDIT OF UNHCR INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ROSTER

Auditors:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Towards the end of 2005 and extending into 2006, OIOS conducted an audit of the UNHCR International Professional Roster (IPR) at Headquarters. The audit covered activities related to the IPR from its establishment in 2004. The responsibility for these activities was the Roster Unit of the Recruitment and Postings Section. During an Exit Conference held on 21 April 2006, OIOS presented the audit results to the Head of the Roster Unit. *A positive reaction was received to the recommendations made.*

Overall Assessment

• OIOS assessed the establishment and start-up management of the IPR as <u>above average</u>. This was a new initiative in UNHCR that needed dedicated input and creativity by DHRM staff, as well as close support and observance by management. Overall, apart from normal teething problems, it was well managed and monitored closely, and the activities were re-assessed early on allowing corrective action in a timely manner. In OIOS' opinion the IPR pilot project was successful and although some enhancements are still required it has to a great extent helped UNHCR in meeting certain recruitment and staff advancement needs.

Call for Candidates

• The annual calls for candidates attracted an increased number of applications each year. It has resulted in a fairly wide range of applications by job profiles; the most popular was for protection functions. The Roster Unit made concerted efforts to attract more applicants with technical/logistics backgrounds by targeting them when announcing the call for candidates, as well as making presentations to universities in certain countries to raise awareness to the Roster to attract and motivate potential candidates to apply.

Entry Tests

- The entry tests, which were initially mandatory for external candidates and optional for internal candidates, have proved very helpful in the Roster process by clearly identifying strong candidates through its rating system. The policies and procedures surrounding the entry test have developed since the launch of the Roster. All potential candidates are required to pass the entry test before being accepted. The test's formulation has been changed to assess competencies and skills rather than knowledge of the UN and UNHCR, and of its policies and procedures.
- The tests have been conducted in English but certain sections allowed candidates to demonstrate
 their skills and competency in French or Arabic. OIOS' agrees with such an approach, as
 competency in other languages is very important considering UNHCR's rotation policy and the
 fact that UNHCR has already identified that the number of staff with competency in French
 should be increased.

Placing Candidates on Shortlists

• After candidates pass the screening and entry test they are placed on the Roster and can be presented on the shortlists given to managers selecting personnel for vacancies. For selected candidates, an interview was not mandatory but it was OIOS' view, that the manager responsible for the selection process should conduct an interview. This would aim to verify the test results and to assess whether the candidate had the required language and other skills necessary to effectively carry out the functions to be assigned.

IPR Database System

All relevant data on the Roster is kept in a stand-alone database system, which was created and
developed within the Roster Unit. It was custom-made for the Roster from a common openly
available system. OIOS noted there were no user guides or other documentation available on its
functions or processes, and no guaranteed technical support. OIOS recommended that this be
addressed to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data gathered for the IPR.

June 2006

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I. INTRODUCTION

- 1. OIOS carried out an audit of UNHCR's International Professional Roster (IPR) during the period from late 2005 extending into early 2006. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.
- 2. As UNHCR normally fills posts through re-assignments and the rotation of internal staff, there have been some difficulties in filling vacant posts, particularly in the least attractive locations. Some posts had to be re-advertised causing long delays in filling them. As a result, the IPR was established through IOM/02/2004& FOM/02/2004, dated 7 January 2004 as a pilot project to enable UNHCR to maintain a list of qualified candidates that could be included with the vacancy shortlists for managers' review, if there was an insufficient number of internal applicants, i.e. less than three. The Roster aimed at filling entry-level international positions (P-2 and P-3) in a timely manner with qualified professionals.
- 3. The Roster contains data on pre-screened and pre-selected candidates, who meet various UNHCR requirements and can be employed/deployed by UNHCR within a relatively short period. It includes various categories of UNHCR internal staff, staff and persons from the UN common system, as well as external candidates. Also, staff at the G category, JPOs and UNVs can apply to be included on the Roster. It can therefore serve as an instrument for promotions and assignments to higher or more permanent employment categories in UNHCR.
- 4. The IPR is maintained by the Division of Human Resources Management/Roster Unit. The Roster Sub-Unit consists of two GS regular staff and occasionally one temporary assistant, reporting to the Head of the Recruitment Unit, which also includes the JPO/Consultants Sub-Unit. Additional resources were allocated, when required, e.g. during the pre-screening process or the conducting of the entry tests. During these periods, the Roster Unit sourced assistance from their colleagues of the Postings Unit or from staff in between assignments. For the design, development and the administration of the entry tests, the Roster Unit hired assistance from the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) in Turin.
- 5. Apart from staff resources, no direct costs are associated with the IPR. Initially, some travel and other costs for candidates were incurred, however, such costs are no longer accepted.
- 6. The findings and recommendations contained in this final audit report have been discussed with the officials directly responsible for the audited activities during the exit conference held on 21 April 2006. A draft of this report was sent to the Director, Division of Human Resources Management and the Head of the Roster Unit on 2 May 2006, on which comments were received on 30 May 2006 and are reflected as appropriate in this final report. DHRM has responded positively to all of the audit recommendations made and is in the process of implementing them.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES

- 7. The main objectives of the audit were to evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of controls established for the International Professional Roster, and to:
 - Assess the level of improved recruitment actions after its establishment

- with regard to timeliness of recruitment and the increased level of appropriate candidates for selection purposes
- Determine the level of compliance with the requirements established under IOM/02/2004 FOM/02/2004 and Rev. 1
- Assess the appropriateness of the IPR Database information, including the regular updating and maintenance of the Roster system

III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

8. The audit focused on activities undertaken during the period from the establishment of the Roster in 2004 until early 2006. It included a review of two calls for candidates, the prescreening process, the design and administration of the entry tests including the marking process. It also reviewed the management and administration of the IPR data system and the recruitment procedure, including the shortlisting of candidates for selection by managers. The audit activities included interviews with staff, analysis of applicable data and a review of the IPR data system, as well as available documents and other relevant records.

IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Call for Candidates

- 9. Since the establishment of the IPR, there have been three annual calls for candidates. They were advertised in either December or January via the UNHCR Broadcast system for the attention of internal candidates and on the UNHCR website for external candidates. In July 2004 there was an exceptional second call for internal candidates. The calls for internal candidates set out all the criteria required and contained relevant information concerning the application, e.g. recruitment profiles, specific eligibility criteria, deadlines, as well as the required documents and application forms that were to be completed. For external candidates, all the necessary information concerning the application and the respective forms were provided on the UNHCR website. The period for reception of applications was about four to six weeks from the time the advertisement was placed. No major communication or technical problems were identified by the audit in this area.
- 10. The calls for candidates were successful, as many applications were received. It is also interesting to note that while the number of external candidates increased considerably every year, the number of internal candidates reduced drastically. The relevant details are as follows:

2004	Applicants	Eligible	Passed test	Inc. in IPR
UNHCR Staff	602	281	(test optional)	281
External Candidates	598	533	252	252
Exceptional 2 nd internal call	Unknown	100	(test optional)	100

2005	Applicants	Eligible	Passed test	Inc. in IPR
UNHCR Staff	162	82	(test optional)	82
External Candidates	2193	932	180	180
UNVs	150	75	16	16

- 11. The 2006 call resulted in over 4,000 applications from which well over 1,400 candidates passed the initial screening done to confirm their qualifications and were offered to sit the entry test on 30 May 2006. Of those, there were over 1,000 external candidates and 420 internal ones. The above figures show the growing interest in the IPR as total applications moved from 1,200 to 2,500 to 4,000 over three calls from 2004 to 2006.
- 12. At the end of each calendar year, the IPR Unit writes to the candidates and asks them to express their interest in remaining on the roster. At the end of 2005, about 650 candidates were requested to confirm their interest. Around 170 candidates did not revert within the deadline, which appeared to the Roster Unit to be a reasonable number as likely they got jobs elsewhere. As part of this annual exercise, candidates were asked to send updates on their Curriculum Vitae so that they can be recorded in the IPR database.
- 13. During 2004 and 2005 about 215 UNHCR entry-level vacancies (mainly P-2 and P-3 posts) were filled with Roster candidates. There was a rather negative feedback by managers concerning the shortlisted candidates for technical job profiles (e.g. logistics). The Roster Unit discussed these concerns with the managers involved, and initiated action to improve the situation. In order to increase the number and quality of Roster candidates with a technical background, the Roster Unit contacted other international organizations that may have had a pool of suitable candidates. The IPR information was also posted on targeted websites, which may have been frequented by potential candidates. Furthermore there have been presentations from UNHCR Representatives in university circles in the USA, Norway and Japan, in which the IPR has been presented and discussed in an effort to attract and motivate potential candidates to apply.

Recommendation:

- The UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management should continue to target potential candidates with required backgrounds to ensure that the Roster will meet UNHCR recruitment needs for all functions (Rec. 01).
- 14. In response, DHRM stated that the IPR Unit will continue to request assistance of technical departments in UNHCR such as Public Information and Supply/Logistics in order to expand the information on the IPR. The outcome of the 2006 IPR will show whether the expanded and targeted publicity has resulted in an increased number of suitable candidates for these profiles. OIOS is pleased to note the action to be taken and will monitor the outcome of the 2006 IPR.
- 15. Only the candidates having met the eligibility criteria were considered for the Roster. To determine whether applicants met these criteria, the candidates were pre-screened by checking their curriculum vitae. If it was difficult to determine whether the candidates met the requirements, the cases were presented, discussed and resolved within a panel. The relatively small Roster Unit needed assistance to cope with the large number of interested candidates and to complete the related pre-screening. *The Recruitment Unit will be discontinued on 30 June 2006, and the Roster Sub-Unit will be attached to the Postings Unit, reporting to the Head of that Unit as of 1 July 2006.*

B. Entry Tests

- 16. According to Para 18 of the IOM/02/2004 FOM/02/2004 and its subsequent revision, external candidates applying for the Roster were required to take an entry test, while internal candidates were given the option as whether to sit the test or not. In 2005, it was decided that irrelevant of their status, all future applicants should sit the entry test, and only the successful ones be considered for the Roster. Only candidates applying for Finance posts, who have successfully passed the UN Competitive Finance Examination or the UN NCE were exempt.
- 17. The High Commissioner announced on 19 December 2005 that henceforth the IPR test was mandatory for all IPR applicants. Candidates for Finance posts as referred to above were except as was those for Field Safety Adviser posts are not required to undergo the IPR test, since they are subject to a rigorous selection and vetting process, which involves the UN Secretariat (UNDSS, previously UNSECORD).
- 18. Since the establishment of the IPR, two entry tests have been conducted, the first on 18 March 2004 and the second on 28 April 2005. Of the 381 candidates who attended the first entry test a total of 305 candidates (53 internal and 252 external) (80 per cent) passed. Almost 800 applicants took the second entry test in April 2005 and this time the overall pass rate was lower and only 204 (25 per cent) candidates passed. The disparity in the percentage passing the tests was due to the different approach taken when 2004 is compared to 2005. The pass-mark for the 2004 test was set after the grading/assessment, while for the 2005 test, the pass-mark (50 out of 100) was set in advance and was strictly applied. OIOS understands that several candidates only just failed (e.g. 49/48 out of 100). In a few cases, borderline applicants were reconsidered and included in the Roster after an examination of their files.
- 19. DHRM stated that the disparity in the percentage could be explained by the fact that the first entry exam was done in a non-controlled environment and the second one in a controlled environment. Candidates who passed the entry test in 2004 had a full working day to return the exam and could work from any location even from home. In 2005 candidates were given a fixed time, venue and focal points were designated to monitor the test location. In 2006 the test will again be conducted in a controlled environment.
- 20. The initial intention was to evaluate *inter alia* the applicants' analytical skills, awareness of the international environment, knowledge of the United Nations and refugee affaires, skills in English and computer literacy. A demonstrated working knowledge of French, as well as another official UN language was to be taken into account. Accordingly, DHRM developed the entry tests in collaboration with divisions and functional units at Headquarters and in consultation with the UNSSC. The Staff College was also involved in the grading process and provided a comprehensive evaluation of the 2004 entry test. DHRM is in the progress of implementing the recommendations made in the evaluation report. These mainly relate to modifying the test structure towards a more 'general test' to examine candidates' core competencies. DHRM further explained that the Staff Development Section was charged with validation and preparation of the future IPR test and in this capacity invited the UNSSC in 2004 for post-facto validation of questions and methodology as well coordinated the stakeholders from other concerned Divisions (DOS, DIP); in 2005 they were involved in validation and correction procedures. However, the IPR Unit does all the work from the initial call to the candidates until the first screening. Furthermore, IPR Unit

provides the database of all screened candidates as well as the focal points to the UNSSC so that they can focus on the design of the entry exam and its final administration.

21. The entry test was in English however the first entry test (in March 2004) gave candidates the choice to answer 4 out of 10 questions of part IV in French or Arabic to demonstrate their language skills. It is also planned that the 2006 candidates can choose to answer some of the questions in French. OIOS is of the opinion that language skills are essential to perform UNHCR assignments worldwide because of the UNHCR principle of staff rotation. Therefore, the entry test should be designed not only to test the candidates' proficiency in English, but also their knowledge of other UNHCR working languages. *DHRM stated that considering the fact that important refugee situations are in francophone areas, candidates who are proficient in French will be given the opportunity to reply in that language to one of the sections in the forthcoming 2006 IPR test. Apart from that UNHCR will continue to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that IPR candidates are appointed who are proficient in at least one other official UN language. OIOS is pleased to note DHRM agrees with our recommendation and we will monitor its implementation.*

Recommendation:

The UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management should not limit the entry test to assess candidates' proficiency in English, but design it to also assess their abilities and level of proficiency in other UNHCR working languages (Rec.02).

C. Functional Clearance

- 22. Each candidate can apply for up to three different occupational groups/ job profiles. The candidates should possess the necessary and required qualifications, work experience and core competencies as defined and described in the (sample) job profiles for each occupational group. To be considered for Finance functions, candidates have to pass the UN Competitive Finance Examination.
- 23. To assess whether Roster candidates have the required skills and qualifications, the respective UNHCR Sections/Units (e.g. DIP for protection officers) check the statements made in the candidates curriculum vitae and application forms against the requirements. If candidates meet all the criteria and requirements as outlined in the job profiles, they are endorsed by the respective occupational group. If rejected for a specific group, they could still qualify for another group. DHRM added that candidates who are not endorsed by any of the technical departments are placed in the "Field Officer" profile group for which there is no endorsement requirement.

D. Roster Unit Processing and Data Maintenance

24. Staff members under the supervision of the Roster Unit are responsible for the input and update of the database. The data has to be constantly updated, whenever the status of a candidate on the Roster changes such as when a candidate is recruited. OIOS test-checked the data entered and did not find any major errors or faults. In all sample cases examined by OIOS, the personnel data in the IPR correlated with the information of other available sources (e.g. P.11, application forms).

- 25. The Roster Unit discussed with the MSRP project team the possibility of the incorporation of this data system into the MSRP Human Resources Module. Although there is no firm planning on this yet, it would be to UNHCR's advantage to have a fully integrated system. For example an automated pre-screening procedure within the system would be very helpful.
- 26. The MSRP HR Module will include an automated on-line application process to handle IPR applications as and when candidates will be invited to apply for the Roster. The MSRP HR Module related to recruitment and postings is scheduled to go live as of 1 November 2006. The next IPR invitation (for which no date has been fixed yet) will make use of the new on-line application system. The information in the existing IPR database is to be incorporated in the new MSRP HR Module.
- 27. OIOS also met with the Management Performance Section of DHRM and reviewed some Performance Appraisal Reports (PAR) of staff recruited through the Roster. This allowed OIOS to get some feedback on the performance of Roster candidates. In general the work performance reporting was positive, and similar to that of other staff members. Only in a few cases, especially for external Roster candidates, was it considered that there was some lack of an 'introduction period' to enable them to get more familiar with UNHCR's work, rules, guidelines and procedures before being employed. UNHCR may want to consider the tracking and monitoring of PARs from the Roster candidates, particularly the first cycle after recruitment.
- 28. DHRM agreed that ideally new recruits from the IPR should come to Headquarters for an induction, but it is dependent on the budget of the hiring departments and their operational needs. Since these new recruits from the IPR are often sent to emergency operations, priority is given to their quick deployment. A tracking system is in place to the extent that newly recruited staff are given a one-year fixed-term contract upon appointment, which may only be extended upon a recommendation from the supervising manager. Such a recommendation has to be supported by a performance appraisal report. The fact that extensions have been recommended for virtually all new recruits indicates that the screening process while still open to further improvement is highly successful in identifying qualified and suitable candidates.

E. <u>Placing Candidates on Shortlists</u>

- 29. OIOS reviewed the process of placing candidates on the general recruitment shortlists for vacant posts. Whenever there are less than three (internal compendium) candidates, eligible persons from the Roster are included for consideration by managers. The shortlists are compiled and prepared by the Postings Unit and candidates are taken from the "IVN view" (the database field that keeps track of which candidate applied to which Vacancy Notice). There is a mechanism in place to avoid a Roster candidate being recommended for more than one post. This is taken into account, along with the order of preference by managers at the APPB when decisions are made.
- 30. Candidates from the Roster, who are appointed through the APPB or who have rejected offers have their names promptly blocked and they are no longer visible under the normal view of most users of the Roster. It therefore eliminates the risk of including someone no longer available on a shortlist.

31. Frequently, Roster candidates were selected for a post without being interviewed, as interviews are not a mandatory part of the employment process channelled through the Roster. In OIOS' view managers responsible for the selection process should arrange interviews with the candidates, particularly to confirm the entry test results and to assess basic competencies. DHRM fully agrees that as part of the recruitment process, the recommended candidate(s) should be interviewed by the manager of the post and that this should be reflected in the recommendation. Managers are currently strongly encouraged to do so. It is intended to include this as a requirement in the revised APPB procedural guidelines due to enter into force in September 2006. OIOS is pleased to note the proposed action and this requirement will be included in the revised APPB guidelines.

Recommendation:

The UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management should ensure that candidates selected from the International Professional Roster be interviewed by managers responsible for the selection process before being offered an employment with UNHCR to confirm the entry test results and to assess basic competencies (Rec.03).

F. IPR Database System

- 32. The IPR data system was created and developed in the Roster Unit by a Temporary Assistant, who has changed functions and no longer works in the Unit. The system is easy to use and has sufficient features to manage the Roster, e.g. search tools by different criteria (occupational groups, languages, external/internal candidate), print-out functions, statistics, etc, and it was continuously modified and improved since its introduction. Appropriate access controls such as passwords, limited and restricted use are in place to prevent misuse or unauthorized use of the data and the system.
- 33. OIOS noted that the developer of the system, whenever needed to provide some technical assistance, could still be contacted in UNHCR in 2005. Nonetheless, this is a tenuous arrangement. OIOS noted that DIST/Applications Development and Support Section had not been involved in any maintenance or support for this system. If the system is going to continue in the longer-term, their involvement may be required.
- 34. OIOS found that there was no back-up copy of the data system, and no standard data back-up procedures were followed. Furthermore, there are no user or maintenance guides available, or any other documented information on the system. Although so far there have not been any serious or major technical problems with the data system, OIOS considers the above shortcomings as an unnecessary risk, as the system contains valuable information that should not be lost or corrupted. DHRM explained that the IPR database is located on the main UNHCR server (DHRM L-Drive) and Techline and Lanops are responsible for the back-up system (on a daily basis). DHRM nevertheless fully agrees that there is a risk involved in maintaining a "home-made" database, and the issue is being addressed through the introduction of the MSRP HR Module for recruitment in November 2006.

Recommendation:

The UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management should ensure the availability at all times of adequate technical support and basic information on the system's functions and processes (Rec.04).

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

35. I wish to express my appreciation for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors by the staff of the Division of Human Resources Management.

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