Update on the context and trends

UNICEF’s global workforce has grown annually by 5% between 2015 and 2019 (from over 12,600 in 2015 to 15,278 in 2019). In 2020, it is up by only 3.1% (15,745).

The effects of COVID-19 continue to be significant on UNICEF workforce. The organization rapidly pivoted to mandated teleworking modality as part of the already existing policy on Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) in many affected duty stations, issuing guidance, moving learning activities online, and providing dedicated peer support sessions for senior leaders on “Leading During COVID”. An external hiring freeze was implemented to manage the growth of the organization at a time of fiscal uncertainty while providing career opportunities to our internal personnel. Workforce Planning activities were also accelerated, with an emphasis on the skills and roles required for the future of work, particularly in emerging thematic areas. Policies on misconduct and the disciplinary process were strengthened, supplemented by an informal guidance note for Heads of Offices that provided suggestions in addressing inter-personal conflicts more promptly and proactively.

Three years into the quadrennium, the recommendations from the Independent Task Force in early 2019 and subsequent organizational culture change initiatives have surfaced the urgent need for significant expansion and acceleration of our endeavours, and to contribute to building a more ethically aware, inclusive, empowering and collaborative workplace where all our staff respect, enable, and inspire each other to do our best for the world’s children.

The updated Competency Framework, based on the core values of Care, Respect, Integrity, Trust and Accountability was rolled out with expected behavioural competencies from all employees. The Values Charter was disseminated, with specific behaviours UNICEF expects of all its employees, and what employees can expect of UNICEF.

The Humans of UNICEF staff-to-staff appreciation programme was launched, with over 1,200 Humans nominated so far for living the core values with their colleagues. A Global Staff Survey was launched in July 2020 with 80 per cent participation. Offices have started implementing their Action Plans. Office-by-office calls with the highest- and lowest-scoring Country Offices in each region were held, and findings will be shared back (around 60 offices or roughly 1/3 of all field offices).

The internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination was established in June. The Action Plan to be submitted in March 2021 will outline recommendations for action in areas such as human resources, learning and awareness raising, programming, supply, communications and fundraising. UNICEF continued to engage in UN inter-agency thinking processes related to organizational culture. In co-leading the Workstream on “New Ways of Working” in the HLCM Task Force on the Future of Work in the UN system, UNICEF was able to influence the work in a bolder direction (e.g. advocating for more attention to non-discrimination and racial justice in the TF’s work). UNICEF initiated the establishment of an informal sharing group across 15 different UN entities on anti-racism and discrimination.

Major contributions and drivers of results

1. **Ensuring that the right people are in the right place at the right time**

   In 2020, the total staff count was 15,745 with 70 per cent being national staff. UNICEF continued to
meet the targets of the Secretary-General’s system-wide strategy on gender parity among international professional staff, maintaining the ratio of 48 per cent women and 52 per cent men. Full gender parity was achieved among senior staff. Geographical diversity among all IP staff is 55 per cent programme nationals (slightly decreased from 54 percent in 2019). In the senior leadership cadre, it is 42 per cent programme country nationals (39 per cent in 2019) and this is expected to improve with the implementation of the upcoming 2020 appointments. Time to recruit continued to be reduced in 2020. It took an overall average of 58 days to complete 3,682 recruitment cases in 2020, compared to 59 days in 2019. For regular recruitment, the average was 60 days against the target of 90 days (compared to 63 days in 2019), while for emergency recruitment it was 48 days compared to the targets of 30 days (45 days in 2019).

The Recruitment Monitoring and Evaluation (RME) function continues to play a valuable role in proactively identifying recruitment trends, highlighting best practices, identifying areas that require closer attention, and closely monitoring and ensuring compliance with UNICEF selection principles and policy. In 2020, 44 reports were produced regions (11 each quarter respective regions/divisions), which synthesized the review of over 1,219 recruitment cases (i.e. over 33% of total completed staff recruitments in 2020). A summary of the key observations, recommendations and actions taken were discussed with the UNICEF Global Staff Association (GSA) on quarterly basis. Quarterly global reports have also been published on the UNICEF intranet as part of a larger strategy to support efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability in recruitment.

UNICEF continued to expand the Background Verification (BV) of external candidates through the UN OneHR Centre in Bonn, which became mandatory in 2020 for all International Professional level appointments (initial and reappointments, for fixed-term posts). By partnering with OneHR in Bonn, UNICEF has achieved economies of scale through inter-agency collaboration.

As part of the Senior Staff Rotation and Reassignment Exercise (SSRRE), a corporate annual exercise to foster mobility, promote succession planning, and facilitate talent identification for future leadership posts, 33 positions were filled in 2020. The Leadership Talent Group (LTG) that was established in 2017 continued to be an effective tool to identify talent for senior leadership posts and to enhance succession planning. 75% of first-time SSR candidates appointed to posts as part of this year’s SSRRE originated from the LTG. At the end of 2020, both the geographic diversity and gender balance of the Deputy Representative Programmes cadre improved by 3%, as compared to the end of 2019. The diversity of the Deputy Representative Operations cadre remains a focus and will require further efforts.

In 2020, the Mobility Team began implementing recommendations contained in the User Experience Design Project Report from 2019, which included enhanced communication with the staff and increased involvement of HR colleagues at the early stages of the mobility exercise. A new and proactive mobility concept was also initiated, with a focus on working with staff prior to completing their full tour of duty that will have stronger linkages to career development and skills support. In 2020, a slight increase occurred in the number of proactive moves from staff due to rotate (38% of staff in 2019 to 40% of staff in 2020). Of the 438 staff initially included in the 2020 mobility exercise (September 2020), 177 had proactively found their next post outside of the mobility exercise (March 2021). This resulted in 37 (21%) promotions, 42 (24%) cross-functional moves, and 107 (60%) cross-regional moves. 122 (69%) of the moves happened across different duty station classifications, and 57 (32%) across different family / non-family duty station classifications.

Despite the challenges faced due to COVID-19, a total of 24 Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) were successfully onboarded in 2020. As outreach efforts continued with non-traditional donors, a new JPO agreement was signed with Qatar and a cooperation agreement with USA was extended until March 2023. Overall, the number of JPOs have increased from 55 in 2016 to 95 in 2020.
A highly engaged Talent Community was cultivated to conduct strategic **talent outreach** and employer branding activities, and ensure offices were supported in fulfilling UNICEF’s strategic talent acquisition needs. In 2020, the newly revamped UNICEF Careers website, which also introduced a mobile and user-friendly interface for applicants, participate in positioning UNICEF as an employer of choice. In 2020, the **Internship policy** was revised to implement the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System (JIU) recommendations on the standardized general management of interns, including payment of stipend, insurance, and leave days. The revised policy encourages enhanced diversity and inclusion efforts through partnerships with Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), institutions from the Global South and non-traditional participants. Career development resources for the internship community were also enhanced to include career development webinars, networking events and learning sessions for UNICEF’s interns worldwide. The number of partnerships with Academia grew from 24 in 2018 to 42 in 2020.

The number of **UN Volunteers (UNV)** increased to 902, compared to 660 in 2019. A programme to engage UNVs with disabilities will be implemented in 2021. The partnership with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) continues to be strengthened, which resulted in 8 KOICA Multilateral Cooperation Officers (KMCOs) deployed in 2020. Following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the African Union (AU), UNICEF deployed 12 AU volunteers in 2020. Engagement with Public and Private Sector partners remained a priority: in addition to an existing secondment agreement with Unilever, an agreement with ING was signed in 2020 and another one with Johnson & Johnson is underway with the aim to deploy 4 Sr. Fellows in field offices by early 2021.

**Sourcing and talent acquisition** have been expanded for humanitarian contexts, covering surge, emergency recruitment, sourcing support to UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS), Polio and Security functions. This enhanced the centrality of sourcing support, with innovative tools such as Frontlines, Areas of Expertise and Sourcing intelligence, allowing faster identification, intelligence and analysis to support humanitarian contexts. It resulted in sourcing more than 81 requests between July and December 2020 in support of surge and recruitment. The HR Business Partner Team (HRBP) in coordination with EMOPS supported 48 Emergency Response Team missions, and 48 Humanitarian Surge Deployments with increased remote support as deployment modality (30% of these missions were of remote support modality). Out of 612 surge requests, 299 (50%) were filled. Frontlines (former Humanitarian Questionnaire) was launched, with the profile of 771 staff and other UNICEF Personnel.

2. **Providing clarity on what is expected of staff, and ensuring they are equipped to deliver on those expectations**

The updated **Competency Framework**, based on the core values of Care, Respect, Integrity, Trust and Accountability was rolled out with expected behavioural competencies from all employees. The Values Charter was disseminated, with specific behaviours UNICEF expects of all its employees, and what employees can expect of UNICEF. All management and leadership learning programmes were updated to include the new competency and UNICEF values. In 2020, over 500 workshops and webinars were delivered globally to UNICEF staff despite the global pandemic. As an emphasis was placed on staff wellbeing services, a reduced demand for many of the **Performance Management & Career Development (PMCD)** team’ workshops, webinars and other career support services was noticed. The REACH pilot programme was launched in 5 regions, with 45 National Staff who want to pursue international careers, as well as the ASPIRE programme that targets staff preparing or strengthening their supervisor roles.

From its inception in mid-2016, the **Case Management Team (CMT)** in DHR has provided direct guidance and support in 295 cases of under-performance, with 74 of these in 2020. Since mid-2016,
there have been 90 rebuttals, with 20 in 2020. The CMT worked directly with over 50 offices in 2020 (some offices handle underperformance without direct support from the CMT).

A series of special measures have been developed by the Policy, Employee Relations, Compensation and Social Benefits Team (PERCS) and socialised with clients by the HRBP Team, and guidance was provided by the HRBP Team through webinars and 1-1 conversations. A site was successfully launched to support UNICEF Personnel with useful information related to onboarding and offboarding.

3. **Fostering a culture of continuous learning as well as professional and personal growth**

Although 2020 was unprecedented for staff, managers and leaders alike, yet agility and flexibility were demonstrated in adapting key **learning and development** programmes for delivery in a virtual context and creating safe spaces for sensitive conversations. The journey on empowering staff to deliver on the organizational cultural change continued. Bespoke learning experiences and content were created to empower staff to engage and collaborate in a remote context. Managers were empowered to support their teams to deliver in unsettling times with shifting priorities.

The following series of core learning programmes were delivered:

- 448 colleagues participated in the **Management MasterClass** (MMC), of which 411 completed the embedded mandatory 360 Degree Assessment, component.
- 379 learners from 7 Regions & 2 HQ Offices are currently enrolled in the National staff programme **IMPACT+** (120 enrolled in 2019 and 259 in 2020).
- 48 Deputy Representatives and 51 members of the Leadership Talent Group (TLG) participated in programmes to enhance their leadership effectiveness, impact and build readiness for senior leadership responsibilities handling unique challenges of the VUCA (Volatility-Uncertainty-Complexity-Ambiguity) organizational context and the global pandemic.
- 93 GMT members participated in bespoke sessions. MasterClass (29), to them reflect on their leadership behaviors against UNICEF's desired culture and a session on Creating a Sense of Belonging - anti-racism and discrimination (64).

In 2020, an overarching framework was launched to guide all current and future **mentoring programmes** across the organization. This initiative supports in strengthening the personal development and leadership capacity of UNICEF’s global staff. The first programme offered 22 young UNICEF staff, the opportunity to navigate the complex organizational environment with ease and excel with confidence with 22 senior colleagues. The **ASPIRE** programme was also launched for 259 participants in 5 country offices to strengthen people skills and individual effectiveness linked to UNICEF values. It targets staff currently in supervisory roles not covered by the MMC, as well as those aspiring to become supervisor or who are new to supervisory roles. In addition, learning sessions on relevant topics were attended by 479 managers and 84 SSR members. Staff had increasing access to bite-sized, just-in-time learning paths, including new videos and were supported in becoming effective virtual team members etc.

The “**Essential Guide for UNICEF Managers**” including two videos have were rolled out. They provide practical guidance on managing remote teams and flexible working arrangements, better understand managers role, help deal with people issues, supports decision-making process to make timely, fair and effective decisions, and contributes to the organisational culture change.

4. **Strengthening skills for strategic engagement to enhance people management in a spirit of partnership between line management and HR**

The UNICEF Executive Director approved the activation of a Level 3 Scale-Up Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure for the **COVID-19 Pandemic** in April 2020. The HRBP team involvement in the
response to COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of having a dedicated HR Team that can support emergencies with the appropriate expertise and knowledge, and that can quickly respond and put in place adequate measures to support teams, managers and staff.

In close coordination with key stakeholders, DHR continued to enhance the current Talent Management System (TMS) and existing HR data sources to address evolving HR business requirements, new organizational projects and initiatives, and increasing demands for HR data analysis, insightful reports, and actionable insights. As a result, the recruitment and workforce data have significantly improved in terms of consistency and accuracy as the main basis for reporting and analytics, including access to user-friendly and interactive dashboards easily accessible by the whole HR Community and UNICEF workforce.

5. Maintaining staff motivation and engagement, and an environment that allows everyone to contribute to their full potential

In partnership with the Global Staff Association (GSA), DHR successfully implemented the Global Staff Survey in June 2020 to measure our progress in promoting an inclusive workplace environment. A total of 13,571 personnel completed the survey, including 12,295 staff members (79% of the workforce) and 767 consultants, 432 UN Volunteers and 77 interns. Following an extensive consultation process with personnel, this year’s survey included new and revised questions. This includes questions related to COVID-19 and racism. For the first time, the survey was open to all of UNICEF’s personnel – staff, consultants, volunteers and interns – and conducted online in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Each office was provided with reports on the results of the survey. Offices are currently in the process of implementing their agreed priority action points to address issues from the survey through an online Action Planning Tool that was developed jointly with the external vendor. The tool includes a Dashboard which can monitor the status of implementation of the office action plans.

In June 2020, UNICEF was re-certified with Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE). The organisation scored better in perceptions on flexible work and improvements to organizational culture, but a persistent challenge in perceptions around transparency in recruitment remains. A renewed commitment from the UNICEF Executive Director came with an Action Plan for the next two years.

In the area of recruitment and promotion, the persistent gender gap at the P5 level, where UNICEF is stuck below 45% women over the last decade, is being addressed. Following the guidance from the UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, the UN Secretariat Administrative Instruction ST/AI/2020/5 and the request from Member States in the Executive Board, UNICEF adopted in October 2020 a set of “Temporary Special Measures to Achieve Gender Parity at the P5 Level” (valid until the end of 2021). The temporary measures give priority to qualified female candidates for P5 positions, with a strong talent outreach component and a monitoring mechanism. This effort at P5 level is being complemented in the area of recruitment and promotion with a new Staff Selection Policy where gender and other dimensions of diversity are mainstreamed, with a focus on representation of marginalized groups and bias mitigation in selection processes.

Finally, a new external job site was also launched in 2020, showcasing UNICEF’s commitment to a diverse, inclusive and equitable workforce to attract the best possible talent, and a Diversity Dashboard has been made available to all personnel, with diversity and engagement data by office and the chance to make historical comparisons.

In the area of flexible work and more broadly on COVID-19 response, the ‘DHR Guidance for All Employees on Telework During COVID-19 Outbreak’ and a guide for managers on long-term telework were developed, best practices on support to staff during COVID-19 times were collected...
from more than 40 country and regional offices, and NYHQ wellbeing surveys for all personnel was conducted. The exit interview process was revamped with a pilot starting in October 2020.

A new HR Policy was adopted on disability inclusion (Procedure on Disability-Inclusive HR Management) which paved the way for improvements to the self-disclosure process. As results, more persons with disabilities were recruited and allowed colleagues to self-disclose their disability safely. Training was conducted for HR colleagues and 11 webinars in 5 languages were held in all regions to roll out the policy provisions.

The Policy, Employee Relations, Compensation and Social Benefits team was the key contributor in the critical UNICEF HR response during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. 12 regulatory instruments were issued in addition to dozens of guidance tools on staff care, health and wellbeing; with flexible work, alternative work, and workforce retention to stay and deliver. The team contributed to and advised on over 140 UN-wide COVID-19 guidance tools, as well as ensured effective medical evacuations of critically ill staff and dependents despite airspace closures in close collaboration with UNDMOSH. It further responded to over 1,500 HQ escalated policy inquiries while resolving and handling a range of complex individual legal escalation and conflict cases.

In 2020, UNICEF’s global staff wellbeing programme focused on helping staff cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. To address the increased demands, all interventions, initiatives and innovations were based on need assessments tailored at both country and regional levels. Strategy included dissemination of psycho-education material, conducting thematic workshops and technical training to strengthen the Peer Support Volunteers (PSV) programme to better support staff during the pandemic. Key interventions included the launch of a new intranet site and webpage on Coping during the Coronavirus; hosting external expert talks on COVID-19-related topics (e.g., sleep, managing burnout, communication in relationships); hosting live online fitness sessions; conducting mindfulness and relaxation sessions; training first responding and peer staff in how to support others while maintaining their own resiliency; supporting inter-agency psychosocial support hotlines; being part of COVID-19 integrated protocol teams to proactively track and support staff and their direct contacts in some country offices.

The programme also continued to provide 4,939 individual and 763 group counselling, which represent an increase over 2019 (40 and 59 per cent, respectively). Global staff support also had a wider reach with the addition of Portuguese, Arabic, French and Spanish language options. A new comprehensive Pre-/Post-Deployment Protocol was developed in preparation for the implementation of a post-deployment briefing system. The seventh booklet in the “Wellbeing and You” series, titled Wellbeing in Frequent Travel, was published.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

Special measures, including external recruitment freeze guidance, launch of Expression of Interest, gender parity have impacted recruitments. It is too early to draw lessons learnt. IP Recruitments for Emergencies have been gradually delegated to Regional and Country Offices. The pandemic has slowed down the ability to deploy and recruit rapidly. A new Child Safeguarding framework was also launched.

Half of the surge deployments focused on supporting the COVID-19 pandemic, of which almost 40% was remote. While remote support has been cost-efficient, it has also brought several challenges. Remote support could affect the impact of the support provided. Sourcing intelligence has helped anticipate recruitment success and the areas of expertise uncovered by the HR Emergency cone have accelerated workforce mapping and intelligence in humanitarian contexts. This will help in internal
talent search through Frontlines and provide for equal opportunities for all, including national staff.

Explicit consideration was given to gender and geographic diversity, in addition to country-specific requirements when making candidate recommendations to the post. Of the 33 appointments made as part of SSRRE 2021, 42% of the recommended candidates were female and 67% were programme country nationals. These appointments are projected to improve the geographic diversity, while maintaining the gender parity of the SSR cadre in 2021. Having a strong talent pipeline and maintaining and expanding the Leadership Talent Group is important to focus on diversity.

The COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns around staff mobility and the need to physically rotate. Nevertheless, it remained a priority to promote mobility amongst duty station and hardship classifications to ensure fair and equitable opportunities for all. DHR accelerated efforts to move to pro-active mobility and look at linkages with workforce planning and career development to ensure that staff are planning for their next move well in advance of completing their full Tour of Duty, which should minimize stress and uncertainty in the process. Lessons learned from 2020 were also taken to accelerate our workforce planning efforts, which will focus on: Skills Inventory for posts and staff; the future of work and work modalities; Functional Area Review; and Sourcing an Internal Talent Marketplace platform.

Given the COVID pandemic, there was organisational requirement for innovative approaches to working remotely. Several new programmes were developed, with a focus on managing individual and team performances remotely and working effectively from home. New offerings will be provided in 2021, through enhanced collaboration with Country Offices, HR Community and Global Staff Association. Additionally, new coaching clinics and coaching cafes will be implemented, and specific career support programme aimed at Young UNICEF developed.

The management of the Global Staff Survey continues to improve, thanks for the excellent partnership with the GSA, stakeholders and the external vendor. Timing of the 2020 GSS was a challenge due to the COVID-19 pandemic and many personnel were working from home or outside their duty station. One area that was further strengthened this year was the faster turnaround time in generating the GSS reports (about 1,000 total) which was made possible through the GSS Focal Points of the different regions and HQs offices.

The Case Management Team rapidly adapted its advisory function to the constraints presented by the pandemic. Guidance on remote management and capacity of managers to strike a balance between care for supervisees and accountability for programme results were strengthened. In this way, UNICEF continued its commitment to handling under-performance by using tailored solutions to fit the unique situations of 2020. As a result, a guidance is being developed on managing underperformance where supervisor-supervisee relationship is remote, management is being done through multiple time zone, and there is increased stress due to health/family concerns.

Innovative learning & development strategies were used to ensure all UNICEF learners had access to virtual, timely and relevant learning opportunities. Engagement continued to be a key element in the design and implementation of virtual learning offerings. It is challenging to deliver soft skills learning in a virtual context with limited resources. It was crucial to be flexible in providing learners with additional support and we learned that learning circles play a key role in changing mindset and ensuring connectivity. Due to the volume of work, some offices faced challenges in attracting participants for learning programmes and prioritizing learning. Learning on remote working and leading proved to be particularly useful for staff and leaders as well as the knowledge connect sessions provided for the global HR community. Huge demand in mentoring was observed, which will require additional organizational investments to scale-up the initiative.

The pandemic created a catalyst for more flexible work arrangements focused on real results-based
work with recognition of the need to balance personal and work lives of our workforce. UNICEF will benefit from a full toolkit of contract arrangement that manifest the benefits proven by such arrangement and technology during 2020. Lessons learnt will be used for better contract terms for short-term staffing needs that recognize that extensive periods without employee benefits stands against UNICEF values. Special attention will be given to safe and healthy return to office measures in 2021, considering the potential risk of loss of life during the pandemic. Duty of care must a key priority for all. Finally, serious challenges remain for an agile social security scheme that allow staff work under different insurance plan locations as the UNICEF scheme follows the UN-wide frameworks.

The staff wellbeing programme was adjusted to meet the higher demand for support despite COVID-19 restrictions. All individual counselling, group sessions and workshops were conducted virtually requiring counsellors to explore innovative ways to build rapport and generate participation online. Travel restrictions and the lack of wellbeing missions also made it harder for staff counsellors who had relocated at the start of COVID-19, to build relationships with managers and staff. Notwithstanding, staff counsellors and PSV managed to support the increased demand while being confronted with their own personal challenges. While UNICEF expects the demand for staff psychosocial support may lessen as COVID-19 cases decrease, a need to restructure the global staff wellbeing function to meet future challenges is being explored.