



OIOS

Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

AUDIT REPORT

UNHCR recruitment process for national staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

**Inadequate monitoring of recruitment actions
resulted in unnecessary delays of more than one
year in filling key posts**

16 June 2009

Assignment No. AR2008/110/04

United Nations  Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

OFFICE OF INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES - BUREAU DES SERVICES DE CONTRÔLE INTERNE
INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION - DIVISION DE L'AUDIT INTERNE

TO Mr. António Guterres, High Commissioner
A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

DATE 16 June 2009



REFERENCE IAD: 09-02561

FROM Fatoumata Ndiaye, Acting Director
DE Internal Audit Division, OIOS

SUBJECT: **Assignment No. AR2008/110/04 - Audit of the UNHCR recruitment process for national staff**
OBJET **in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

1. I am pleased to present the report on the above-mentioned audit.
2. Based on your comments, we are pleased to inform you that we will close recommendation 1 in the OIOS recommendations database as indicated in Annex 1. In order for us to close the remaining recommendations contained in the report, we request that you provide us with the additional information as discussed in the text of the report and also summarized in Annex 1.
3. Please note that OIOS will report on the progress made to implement its recommendations, particularly recommendation 2 which has been designated as high risk, in its annual report to the General Assembly and semi-annual report to the Secretary-General.

cc: Mr. L. Craig Johnstone, Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR
Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Assistant High Commissioner, UNHCR
Ms. Karen Farkas, Controller and Director, DFAM, UNHCR
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INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

FUNCTION

“The Office shall, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations examine, review and appraise the use of financial resources of the United Nations in order to guarantee the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, ascertain compliance of programme managers with the financial and administrative regulations and rules, as well as with the approved recommendations of external oversight bodies, undertake management audits, reviews and surveys to improve the structure of the Organization and its responsiveness to the requirements of programmes and legislative mandates, and monitor the effectiveness of the systems of internal control of the Organization” (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Audit of the UNHCR recruitment process for national staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recruitment process for national staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The overall objective of the audit was to determine whether an effective system of internal control was in place for the recruitment of national staff in the UNHCR operation in the DRC, within the authority delegated to the Representative. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

Overall, the audit found that the internal control system needed to be improved to ensure that recruitment of national staff is carried out in a timely manner and in compliance with rules. UNHCR agreed with the concerns raised by OIOS and had initiated action in all the areas identified:

- There were delays in filling vacancies as a result of inadequate performance targets and monitoring controls. Several posts could not be filled for one year, including National Professional Officer posts in such key areas as protection and supply chain management. In response to the audit, the UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa has established a comprehensive list of vacant posts with specific target dates for the various actions that are required. This list will serve as a monitoring and accountability tool in an ongoing effort to reduce the time taken to fill vacant posts.
- The establishment of criteria for the selection of staff needed improvement. Criteria should be determined and weighted in order of importance before the interview takes place. OIOS noted cases where the second- or third-ranked candidate was nominated while no clear explanation was given in the minutes of the interview panel or the Appointments, Postings and Promotions Committee (APPC). As a result, the transparency and objectivity of the process were diminished. In response to the audit, the Representation plans to develop a guideline on the recruitment process, which will include the criteria to be considered during an oral interview and the weighting of these criteria. In addition, a team has been established in the Human Resources Unit to review all recommendations made before they are submitted to the APPC.
- The Representation did not have the UNHCR black list of colleges and universities to ensure that selected candidates received certificates from properly accredited universities and colleges. The Representation has since requested the UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management to share the black list of colleges and universities with the office and, once received, plans to use it for all newly recruited staff in 2009 and also to verify the degrees of those recruited in 2008.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Paragraphs
I. INTRODUCTION	1 – 5
II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES	6
III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	7 – 8
IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
A. Efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process	9 – 14
B. Fairness and transparency of the recruitment process	15 – 25
V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	26
ANNEX 1 – Status of audit recommendations	

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recruitment process for national staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

2. The recruitment of national staff, i.e., General Service category (GS) staff and National Professional Officers (NPO), falls under the authority of the Representative, fully delegated from UNHCR Headquarters. The Human Resources Unit in Kinshasa deals with the recruitment of national staff in the DRC, and each staff member of the Unit is responsible for monitoring the recruitment of a portfolio of recruitment cases in the different field offices across the country. An Appointments, Postings and Promotions Committee (APPC) is centralized in Kinshasa and covers three sub-offices (Goma, Bukavu and Lubumbashi) and eight field offices (Buburu, Bunia, Kisangani, Moba, Pweto, Kalemie, Uvira and Baraka). The APPC is responsible for nominating staff to posts and will either endorse recommendations by the recruitment panels or select a candidate of its choice upon review of the interview reports and supporting documents.

3. The requirements for national staff are determined in the Country Operation Plan. Upon the approval of the plan and the classification of posts at Headquarters and based on job descriptions, positions are advertised internally and externally. Human Resources Unit personnel pre-screen and invite candidates for a written test and an interview. The test and interview results are then submitted to the APPC. Since the recruitment management module for local staff of the Management System Renewal Project (MSRP) has not yet been rolled out in the DRC, recruitment actions are processed manually.

4. National staff working in the DRC comprised 226 GS staff and 7 NPOs. The number of recruitment actions in 2007-2008 covered by the audit was 117.

5. Comments made by UNHCR are shown in *italics*.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES

6. The overall objective of the audit was to determine whether an effective system of internal control was in place for the recruitment of national staff in the UNHCR operation in the DRC, within the authority delegated to the Representative. Specifically, the audit assessed the:

- (a) Efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process; and,
 - (b) Compliance of the recruitment process with UNHCR Staff Rules and Regulations.
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III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The audit covered recruitment actions for national staff at UNHCR in the DRC for the period 2007-2008. The field portion of the review included visits to Sub-Office Lubumbashi and the Representation in Kinshasa. The audit fieldwork was conducted in December 2008.

8. The audit methodology comprised: (a) review of policies, procedures and administrative guidelines; (b) analysis of relevant Management System Renewal Project (MSRP) data; (c) interviews with responsible personnel; (d) assessment of the effectiveness of controls, and (e) verification of processes, as appropriate.

IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process

Inadequate monitoring and accountability mechanisms impact timeliness of recruitment

9. The UNHCR operation in the DRC had experienced significant delays in recruiting staff, which could have been avoided if there had been a stronger focus on monitoring and holding staff accountable for an efficient and effective recruitment process. In many instances the Representation in Kinshasa, while making efforts to monitor the recruitment actions, was dependent on input from field offices who often conducted the interviews. The main delays identified by OIOS pertained to recruitment cases in field offices, as highlighted below:

- Three posts created toward the end of 2007 had not been filled for more than 12 months:
 - (i) An Associate Protection Officer post at National Officer A (NOA) level in Sub Office Lubumbashi;
 - (ii) A Driver post at GS-2 level in Moba; and
 - (iii) A Driver post at GS-2 level in Pweto.

- Another eleven posts created on 1 January 2008 had remained vacant for almost one year:
 - (iv) A Field Officer post at NOA level in Kisangani;
 - (v) An Assistant Security Officer post at NOA level in Kinshasa;
 - (vi) A Senior Protection Clerk GS-5 post in Goma;
 - (vii) A Field Assistant GS-6 post in Bukavu;
 - (viii) An Administration Clerk GS-4 post in Kalemie;
 - (ix) A Telecom Operator GS-4 post in Uvira; and
 - (x)-(xiv) Five Driver posts at GS-2 level in various field offices.

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- Furthermore, an important post of Associate Supply Officer for Sub-Office Lubumbashi had been vacant for over six months leaving significant procurement to two newly recruited clerks who were yet to be trained. The Sub-Office was also responsible for procurement activities for the Field Offices in Moba and Kalemie.

10. The Representation explained that for the NOA Associate Protection Officer post in Lubumbashi, an internal candidate who was recommended could not be selected as she did not meet the academic requirement of having a degree in law. Consequently, the post had to be re-advertised. The driver posts had remained vacant due to delays in taking the practical tests in the field. This was due to the fact that the staff members who were to supervise the test had to attend to urgent matters in Kinshasa. The NOA Field Officer post in Kisangani, on the other hand, was divided into two Field Assistant posts and the office was still awaiting post creation to be finalized in Geneva. The Senior Protection Clerk post in Goma was expected to be re-advertised as the Field Office in Goma could not trace the application forms of the candidates and, hence, no interviews could take place.

11. The explanations provided reinforce the OIOS point that better planning and management oversight are required to improve the efficiency of the recruitment process. Management should devise corrective measures to ensure the posts are filled within an agreed-upon timeframe. The table of advertised and vacant posts that is currently used to track vacancies should be subject to regular management scrutiny. In particular, the planned Entry on Duty (EOD) date should be used as a monitoring benchmark and both the management and the APPC should be duly informed when there is a risk of the EOD target not being met. Accountability of the field offices participating in the recruitment process to meet established deadlines should be clearly spelled out and should include, inter alia, specific timelines for submitting interview panel recommendations to the APPC.

Recommendations 1 and 2

The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa should:

- (1) Taking into account the adverse impact of the protracted vacancies on operations, set performance targets for the recruitment of national staff; and**
- (2) Strengthen the monitoring controls over recruitment activities to reduce the time taken to fill vacant posts. Offices participating in the recruitment process should be held accountable for meeting established deadlines for various stages of the recruitment process.**

12. *The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa accepted recommendation 1 and stated that a comprehensive list of vacant posts has been established with specific target dates for the various actions that are required. Based on the*

action taken by UNHCR and the documentation provided to OIOS, recommendation 1 has been closed.

13. *The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa accepted recommendation 2 and indicated that the matrix of vacant posts will serve as the monitoring tool, and offices will be held accountable according to the deadlines given. The matrix will be frequently reviewed and updated.* Recommendation 2 remains open pending information that posts are being filled within agreed-upon timeframes and that the recruitment process is reviewed regularly by management.

Need to ensure timely action is taken when the probation period ends

14. OIOS observed a case of the recruitment of the Telecom Assistant (GS-6) in 2005 in Goma, who went through the interview process and emerged as the best candidate with the panel recommending him for the post on condition of undergoing a probationary period of six months to assess his performance. The staff member was only nominated to the post by the APPC, nearly two years later in June 2007. OIOS notes that the expiry of the six-month probation period should have triggered action by management. In addition, the supervisor of the staff member in question should have been properly informed of the panel's recommendation and respected the probationary period of six months, or alternatively consulted management on the way forward. Improved communication between the Branch Office Kinshasa and field offices is required to ensure that vacant posts are filled on a timely basis. Management took note of the OIOS observation and therefore no action is proposed.

B. Fairness and transparency of the recruitment process

Inadequate criteria and vague scoring system reduce transparency of recruitment decisions

15. In accordance with UNHCR's Staff Administration Management Manual (SAMM), the criteria to be considered during the oral interview should be determined using the job description as a guide. The same criteria should be weighted in order of importance and used consistently. It is essential that the weighting be completed before the interviews take place. The weighting should be reasonable and take into consideration all important factors needed for the particular post at the given duty station. The scoring system should be objective and transparent and the candidate with the highest aggregate score for written and oral tests should be recommended to the APPC.

16. During the audit, a number of critical exceptions were noted where the criteria for selecting a candidate for a post was not clear and did not meet the minimum requirements of transparency and objectivity, as described in the following paragraphs.

17. OIOS came across a case where the highest score in the written test was 9.5 out of 28, i.e., a mere 34 per cent pass mark rate. This candidate and three others, the lowest obtaining just 7.5 out of 28 (or 26 per cent), were all invited for the oral interview. The minimum pass mark score must always be determined

before the actual interviews. This ensures that UNHCR not only gets the best candidates but also does not compromise on quality while ensuring the transparency of the recruitment process. OIOS is pleased to note that subsequent to the audit, the minimum pass mark has been established to be 50 per cent of the total marks and has been applied since March 2009. Nevertheless, OIOS is of the opinion that the above mentioned post should have been re-advertised.

18. In another case, the candidate with the higher aggregate score 15/20 was not ranked first by the panel. Instead, the candidate who came second with a lower score 13/20 was recommended, and subsequently endorsed by the APPC without being questioned. Both candidates had UNHCR experience. The circumstances for the decision were not clear.

19. In another case, a candidate selected for a GS post in a sub-office had three weeks earlier been rejected for an identical post in a field office on the grounds that he had 'never been trained in the use of MSRP software'. This criterion appears to have been ignored by the APPC when he was nominated for the sub-office post, a much larger office, where knowledge of MSRP should have been deemed even more important. During the interview for the same vacancy in the sub-office, one of the other shortlisted candidates had undergone MSRP training but was not selected. Notably, the APPC did not select this first-ranked candidate who had a combined score of 14.16 from the written test and oral interview. Instead, it picked the second-placed candidate with a score of 13.33 without providing an adequate explanation on the criteria for selection.

20. The Representation in Kinshasa sought clarification from the sub-office following the OIOS observation. The supporting documents they received contradicted the panel summary even more, whereby the selected candidate actually came in third place with a score of 13.0. The discrepancy could not be explained. OIOS is further concerned by the fact that the same candidate who was selected for the sub-office post had earlier been interviewed for another post in another field office, although he had not even applied for the post. OIOS noted that the interview panel had made the correct decision not to consider the candidate for that post.

Recommendations 3 to 4

The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa should:

(3) In order to ensure that the selection of candidates is transparent and objective: (a) determine the criteria to be considered during the oral interview using the job description as a guide; (b) weight the criteria, in order of importance, while taking into consideration all important factors needed for the particular job at the given duty station, and use this weighting consistently throughout the recruitment process; and

(4) Ensure that (a) the candidate with the highest aggregate score of written and oral tests is recommended to

the Appointments, Postings and Promotions Committee (APPC), using a comparative table to support the recommendation and showing how each panelist scored the interviewed candidates on the various criteria. If a candidate other than the one with the highest score is selected for whatever reason, this should be properly justified in both the table and the report of the panel; (b) the APPC scrutinizes each case it receives carefully. If the APPC decides to select a different candidate other than the recommended candidate or other than the highest-scoring candidate, this must be properly justified and explained in the APPC minutes.

21. *The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa accepted recommendation 3 and stated that during the interview process UNHCR Kinshasa uses the interview forms provided by Geneva and used by all offices for submission to the APPC. The various assessments are however not weighted but are graded in terms of levels. A guideline will be established on the recruitment process which will be applied by each office to include the criteria to be considered during an oral interview and the weighting of these criteria. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of the guideline on the recruitment process, including the criteria to be considered during an oral interview and the weighting of these criteria.*

22. *The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa accepted recommendation 4 and stated that, except for cases highlighted by the auditors, all recommendations to the APPC are made in accordance with the established procedures. To ensure that these procedures are followed a team has been established in the Human Resources Unit in Kinshasa to review all recommendations made before they are submitted to the APPC. The audit recommendations were shared with members of the APPC during their first and second meetings in 2009 and are being applied by the Committee. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of the Terms of Reference of the team established in the Human Resources Unit in Kinshasa to review all recommendations made before they are submitted to the APPC and a copy of the minutes of the APPC meetings held so far in 2009.*

Incomplete background checks for NPOs could lead to selection of unqualified candidates

23. The growing demand for college degrees, the globalization of the education market, and the Internet are combining to create a risk of proliferation of the so called “diploma mills” – educational institutions without proper accreditation. This makes the conduct of personal background checks even more important especially for staff occupying National Professional Officer posts. OIOS review indicated that basic internal controls in the area of background checks were in place. The Representation in Kinshasa attaches copies of original certificates to the file of newly appointed staff members only when such copies have been agreed to the originals. It also obtains three references.

24. The UNHCR Division of Human Resources Management (DHRM) at Headquarters issues regularly a black list of universities and colleges to be used

for background checks. OIOS found that the Representation did not have this list and, as a result, it could not be ensured that selected staff in the NPO category obtained a degree from accredited universities and colleges.

Recommendation 5

(5) The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa should ensure that background checks for National Professional Officers systematically involve checking that staff taken on board received certificates from properly accredited universities and colleges.

25. *The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa accepted recommendation 5 and stated that it had requested DHRM to share the black list of colleges and universities with the office. This list will be used for all newly recruited staff in 2009 and also to verify those recruited in 2008. Recommendation 5 remains open pending the outcome of the review by the Representation of the newly recruited NPOs and those recruited in 2008 against the list of blacklisted colleges and universities.*

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

26. We wish to express our appreciation to the Management and staff of UNHCR in the DRC for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ²
1	The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa, taking into account the adverse impact of the protracted vacancies on operations, should set performance targets for the recruitment of national staff.	Operational	H	C	Action completed	Implemented
2	The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa should strengthen the monitoring controls over recruitment activities, in order to reduce the time currently taken to fill vacant posts. Offices participating in the recruitment process should be held accountable for meeting established deadlines for various stages of the recruitment process.	Governance	H	O	Information that posts are being filled within agreed upon time-frames and the recruitment process is subject to regular management scrutiny	Not provided
3	The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa, in order to ensure that the selection of candidates is transparent and objective, should: (a) determine the criteria to be considered during the oral interview using the job description as a guide; (b) weight the criteria, in order of importance, while taking into consideration all important factors needed for the particular job at the given duty station, and use this weighting consistently throughout the recruitment process.	Operational	M	O	Guideline on the recruitment process, including the criteria to be considered during an oral interview and the weighting of these criteria.	30 June 2009
4	The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa should ensure that: (a) the candidate with the highest aggregate score of written and oral tests is recommended to the Appointments, Postings and Promotions Committee (APPC), using a comparative table to support the recommendation and	Operational	M	O	a) Terms of Reference of the team established in the HR section in Kinshasa to review all recommendations made before they are submitted to the APPC b) a copy of the minutes of the APPC meetings held so far in 2009	Not provided

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O ¹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ²
5	<p>showing how each panelist scored the interviewed candidates on the various criteria. If a different candidate than the one with the highest score is selected for whatever reason, this should be properly justified in both the table and the report of the panel; (b) the APPC scrutinizes each case it receives carefully. If the APPC decides to select a candidate other than the recommended candidate or other than the highest-scoring candidate, this must be properly justified and explained in the APPC minutes.</p> <p>The UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa should ensure that background checks for National Professional Officers systematically involve checking that staff taken on board received certificates from properly accredited universities and colleges.</p>	Operational	M	O	Outcome of the review of the newly recruited NPOs and those recruited in 2008 against the list of blacklisted colleges and universities.	Not provided

¹ C = closed, O = open

² Date provided by the UNHCR Representation in Kinshasa in response to recommendations