

UPDATE ON STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Additional documents for this item: Administrative review statistical overview for 2025 (UNAIDS/PCB (58)/CRP1); Disciplinary and other corrective actions in 2025 (UNAIDS/PCB (58)/CRP2).

Action required at this meeting—the Programme Coordinating Board is invited to:

56. *Take note* of the update on strategic human resource management issues.

Cost implications for the implementation of the decisions: none

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Executive Summary

1. This paper provides an update on the UNAIDS workforce in 2025–2026, a period in which significant organizational restructuring was undertaken to align the Secretariat with severe financial constraints and revised strategic priorities. The analysis draws primarily on 2025 data, with selective reference to 2026, where necessary, to reflect the transitional nature of the implementation of the organizational restructuring.
2. Following restructuring decisions taken in 2025, the UNAIDS Secretariat has substantially reduced its staff headcount, from 671 staff to a projected 296 approved core budget positions by mid-2026, representing a reduction of approximately 57%. This transformation has accelerated a longer-term shift toward a more efficient and decentralized organizational model, with most staff now based in regional, country and liaison offices, and a markedly reduced footprint in Geneva. The changes have contributed to cost containment and a more streamlined operational structure.
3. Restructuring has been implemented through transparent, policy-compliant, and phased processes. This has included separations, reassignment and compendium exercises, as well as strengthened oversight mechanisms. Performance management frameworks were adapted to ensure fairness, continuity and accountability during the transition. At the same time, UNAIDS has increased its use of flexible workforce modalities, such as affiliates, consultants and UN Volunteers.
4. Recognizing the human impact of downsizing, the organization significantly expanded career transition support, leadership development, skills-based workforce planning, and staff counselling services. This helped to safeguard well-being, preserve institutional knowledge, and mitigate operational risk.
5. Overall, the restructuring has reshaped the UNAIDS workforce while positioning the organization to operate in a more agile, flexible and sustainable manner, aligned with its mandate and resource environment.

Introduction

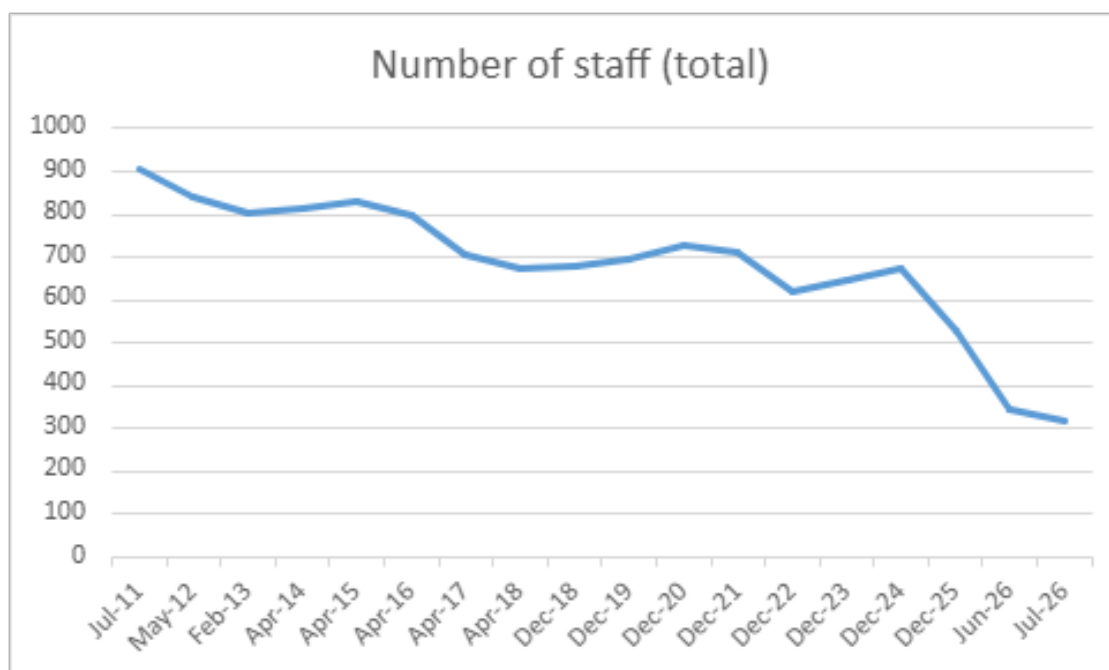
6. People have always been and remain the most valuable asset of the UNAIDS Secretariat and the Joint Programme to achieve their mandate in a complex environment. As is customary for this annual update to the PCB, the data provided in this section is a snapshot of the organization in 2025. For the sake of greater clarity and transparency, this report also includes preliminary data on 2026 when referring to the organizational restructuring, as the exercise spans from July 2025 until mid-2026.
7. As requested by the PCB at its 50th session, workforce statistics are included in this update. In past sessions, UNAIDS usually provided a separate illustrated brochure titled “People of UNAIDS”. This has been discontinued due to cost-saving needs and the added complications of the changing headcount of the organization through 2025 and 2026.

Staff headcount and distribution

8. The previous update to the PCB reported that 671 members of staff were employed by the UNAIDS Secretariat. As a consequence of the restructuring decisions made by the Executive Director and Executive Cabinet in 2025, administrative processes consistent with UNAIDS policies were put in place to reduce the global headcount to the 296 approved core positions by mid-2026 (a core staff headcount decrease of 57%). As

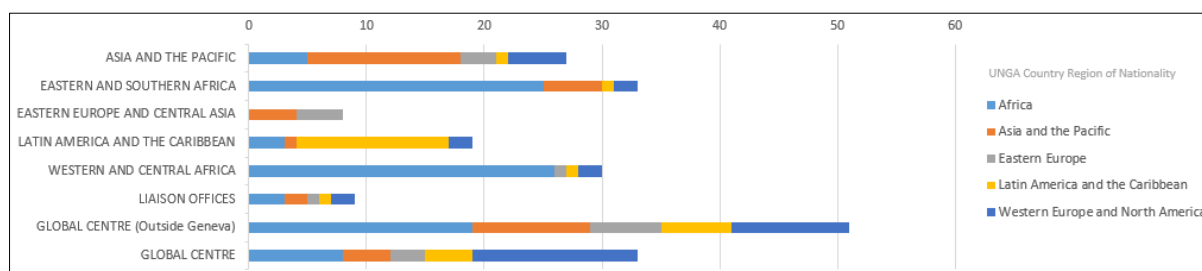
shown in Figure 1, between July 2011 and June 2026, UNAIDS will have reduced its staff by two thirds.

Figure 1. UNAIDS staff headcount evolution from July 2011 to June 2026 (projected)



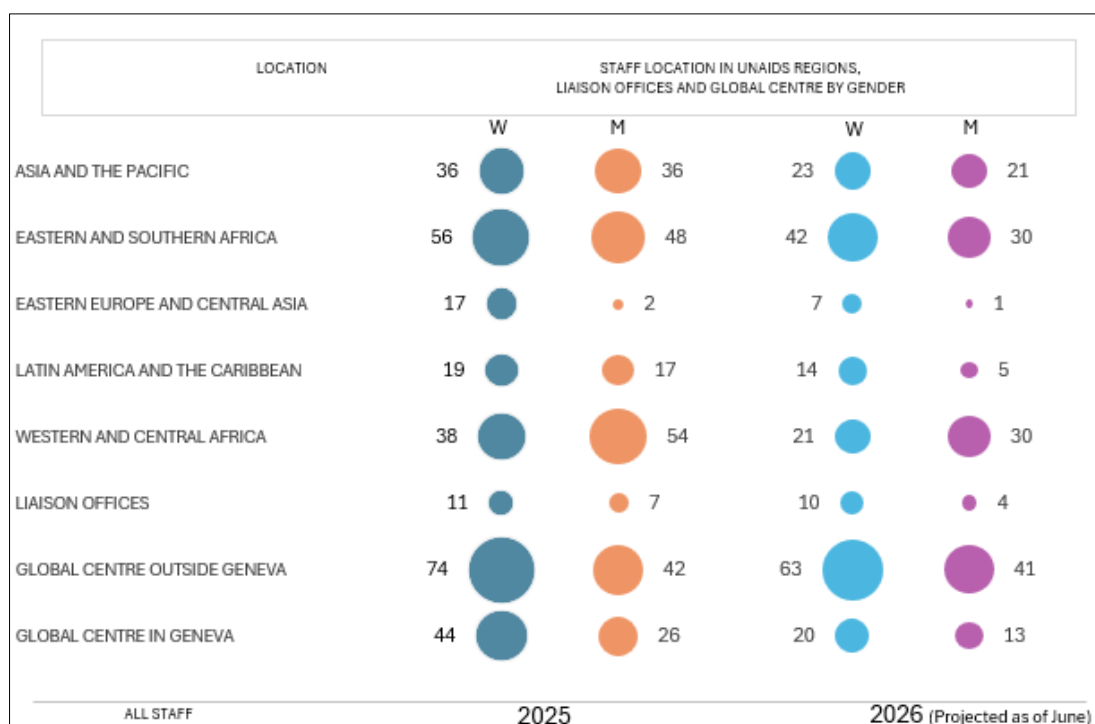
9. Implementation of restructuring decisions was prompt. By the end of 2025, the staff headcount had decreased to 527 people (21.4% fewer staff). The initial decrease of over one fifth of staff was due to a combination of restructuring measures, contract expirations, retirements and resignations.
10. A broad effort is ongoing to raise extra-budgetary resources to continue priority activities. UNAIDS is grateful to donor countries and other entities that allow continuation of important initiatives. At the time of preparing this paper, it was projected that, by 1 July 2026, at least 32 active staff would be funded through extra-budgetary resources, representing approximately 10% of UNAIDS staff.
11. Since 2012, UNAIDS has consistently sought to reduce the number of staff in the Global Center. In 2025, restructuring decisions steeply accelerated the relocation of positions outside Geneva, including Global Center functions. Before the restructuring, 120 staff were based in Geneva. Following the final wave of staff separations, UNAIDS plans to maintain 18 positions in Geneva, primarily in leadership, the Executive Office, governance, and resource mobilization. Other Global Center functions were either abolished or moved to Bonn, Johannesburg or Nairobi. Consequently, only a small number of offices have been retained in the joint UNAIDS/WHO building in Geneva, and an agreement was reached with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to rent out most of the space previously occupied by UNAIDS staff, thereby contributing significantly to austerity measures.
12. At the end of 2025, UNAIDS staff were from 75 nationalities: 48% from Africa, 20% from Asia and the Pacific, 18% from western Europe and north America, 9% from Latin America, and 5% from eastern Europe and central Asia. Figure 2 shows an overview of the distribution of UNAIDS staff by nationality.

Figure 2. Staff nationalities by UNAIDS structure



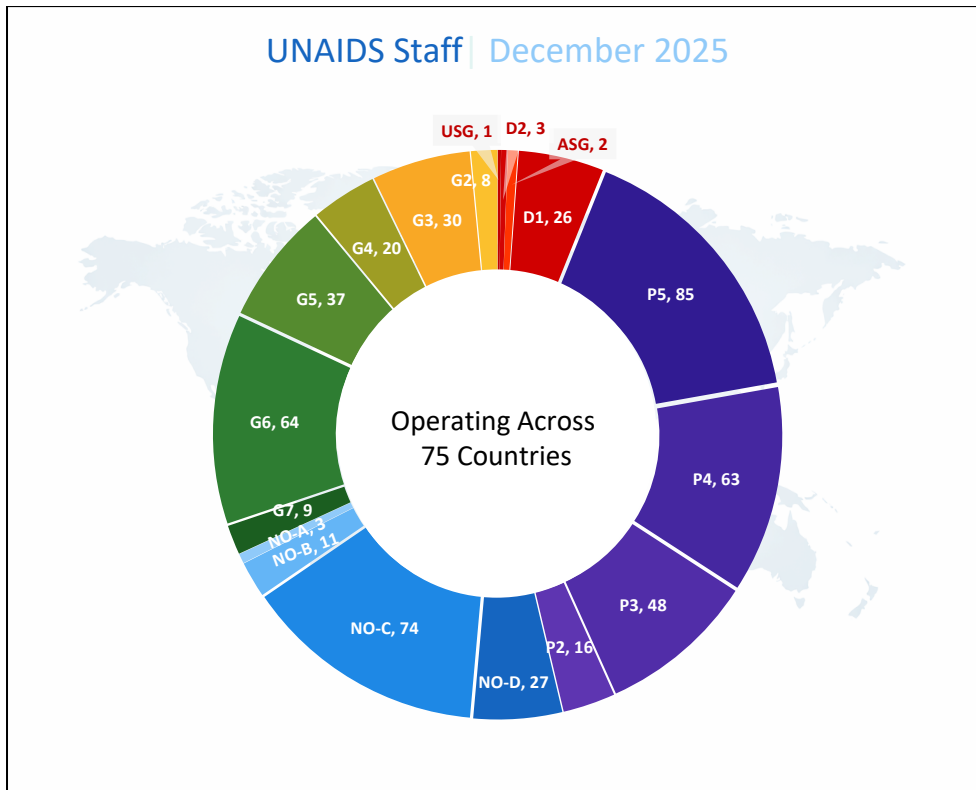
13. By the end of 2025, UNAIDS staff was predominantly female, with 295 women and 232 men (56% and 44% of the workforce respectively) and included entirely female senior leadership teams. Women outnumbered men at all grades, except for P5 (the most senior of P positions) and junior General Service grades (G2 to G4). Figure 3 provides a gender breakdown of UNAIDS staff.

Figure 3. Distribution of UNAIDS staff by location and gender (December 2025 and projected June 2026)



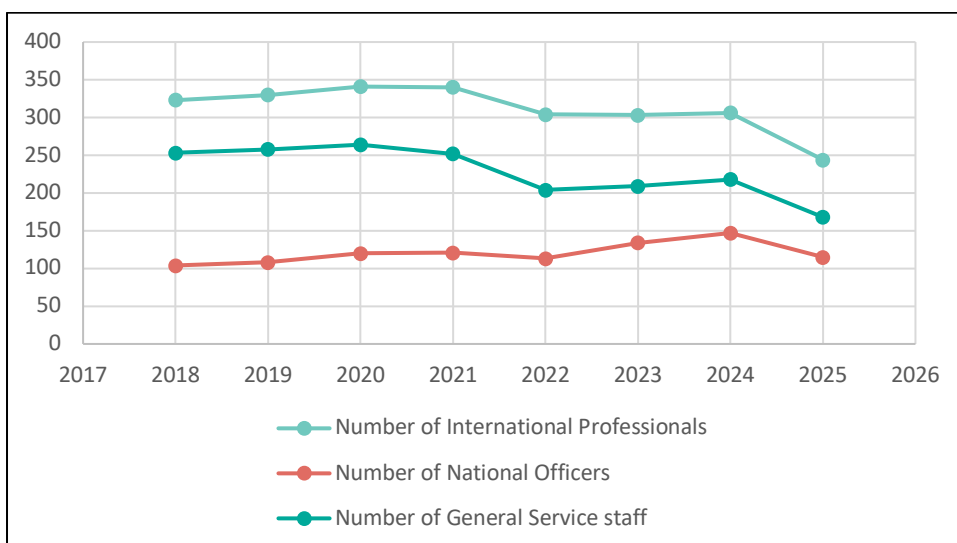
14. The “International Professional” category accounted for 40.1%, “General Service” staff 31.9%, “National Professional Officers” 21.8%, and Directors and above 6.1% of UNAIDS workforce in December 2025.

Figure 4. Overview of grade distribution



15. Figure 5 shows that, before the recent decrease in the number of staff in each category, the share of National Professional Officers in the total UNAIDS workforce had been increasing.

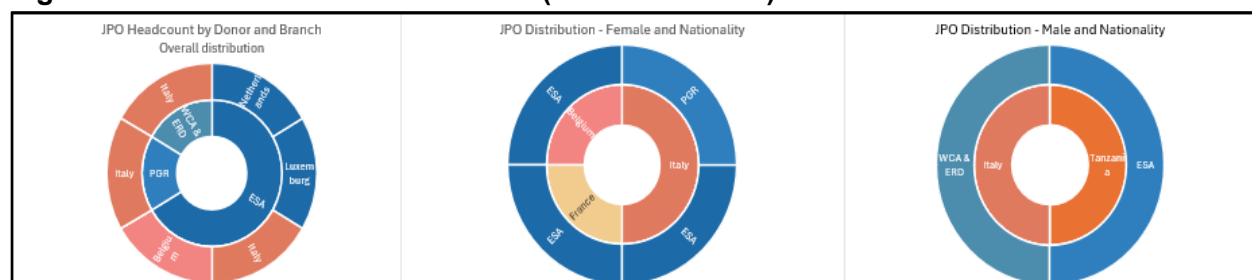
Figure 5. Staff evolution by category



Other contributors to UNAIDS work

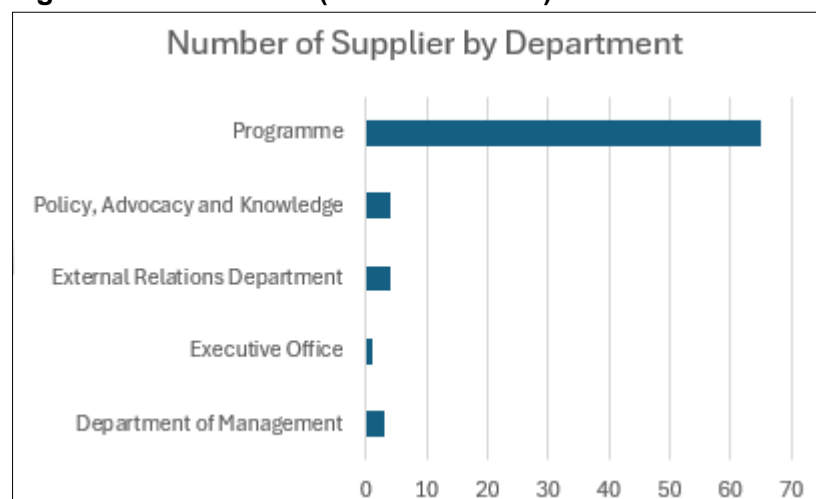
16. UNAIDS has benefited from the generous support of several donor countries for Junior Professional Officers (JPOs), with some former JPOs (in UNAIDS or other United Nations entities) reaching grades of P5 or higher. By the end of 2025, UNAIDS had six JPOs, with Italy sponsoring three of them and Belgium, France and Netherlands sponsoring one each. Those numbers were lower than in previous years. As in previous years, most JPOs in UNAIDS were female (two thirds in 2025). Figure 6 shows the respective region or department of deployment of JPOs.

Figure 6. Junior Professional Officers (December 2025)



17. UNAIDS's financial situation increased the need to consider alternative contractual modalities to secure adequate resources, allowing more flexibility and comparatively lower financial liability with respect to staff. The affiliate workforce (i.e., personnel engaged through other than staff contracts) has increased when compared to decreasing staff levels and represented approximately 15% of the total workforce at the end of 2025, a share that is expected to increase in 2026.
18. After the establishment of the UNAIDS Office in Bonn in 2022, relations with UN Volunteers have grown stronger. By the end of 2025, UNAIDS offices had 11 full-time UN volunteers in Latin America and the Caribbean, eastern and southern Africa, and Asia and the Pacific and eastern Europe and central Asia, as well as in the Bonn hub. That number is continuously changing, given the versatility of this contractual modality. Similarly, the number of personnel hired through UNDP Personnel Service Agreements is on the rise, with five people deployed in December 2025.
19. An already common modality, long-term consultant contracts, has come to constitute a relatively larger part of UNAIDS overall workforce, with 77 consultants on contract at the end of 2025. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of consultant deployment.

Figure 7. Consultants (December 2025)



Criteria and methodology for organizational restructuring

20. Pursuant to the request of the PCB at its 56th meeting, the organizational restructuring undertaken in 2025–2026 was guided by a structured, criteria-based methodology to ensure alignment with strategic priorities while upholding principles of fairness, transparency, and due process.
21. The exercise was based on an organization-wide review grounded in the state of the HIV epidemic. First, UNAIDS conducted an analysis of countries' epidemiological, socio-economic and human rights context, as well as other indicators; second, a review of the Secretariat's functions, mandates, and staffing levels to identify roles requiring realignment or discontinuation. Decisions on post abolishment were primarily driven by organizational criteria, including: (i) relevance to strategic priorities; (ii) redundancy or overlap of functions; (iii) operational necessity and value added; and (iv) cost considerations.
22. In cases where multiple staff occupied comparable functions, a comparative assessment was conducted using pre-defined and consistently applied criteria, including: (i) skills and competencies required for future organizational needs; (ii) documented performance; and (iii) versatility and adaptability.
23. The process followed a defined methodology comprising: (i) organizational review and validation; (ii) identification and formal abolishment of posts; (iii) comparative assessment, where applicable; (iv) decision-making by designated authorities; and (v) communication to affected staff. All steps were documented to ensure consistency and accountability.
24. Implementation was carried out in accordance with applicable staff regulations and rules, including the provision of due process, access to appeal mechanisms, and support measures for affected staff. Data on the impact of restructuring was systematically tracked, including disaggregation by region, function, staff level, and gender, to support oversight and reporting to the Board.

Human resource operationalization of restructuring

25. In the face of significant change, emphasis was put on implementing the restructuring in a dignified manner. By end of May 2025, managers had received guidelines for meeting with their team members individually to inform them verbally of the impact of the restructuring on their positions. A new organizational chart was published on June 2025, after all staff members had been verbally notified.
26. Letters were sent to staff on the 30 June 2025 to notify them of their situations and the administrative process that lay ahead. A phased calendar of separations was established in compliance with applicable rules and policies. Depending on the type of appointment, acquired rights of impacted individuals, and their functions within the organization, separations were implemented in phases, starting in 31 July 2025, and will continue through mid-2026.
27. Restructuring implementation guidelines were published to transparently define the approach and processes for transitioning to the new structure and staffing complement, and webinars and human resource clinics in English, French and Spanish were offered to staff. While objective criteria would underpin organizational transformation, a specific commitment was made to retain staff openly living with HIV – following the Greater Involvement of People living with HIV (GIPA) principle that is embedded in UNAIDS' values.

28. To minimize the loss of key staff, an updated Flexible Working Arrangements Policy was issued, allowing for longer-term teleworking outside of the country of the duty station. Twenty-four staff requested to remain in their current duty stations for longer than 90 days beyond the 15 September 2025 deadline. In doing so, they accepted a lower post adjustment to their salaries, as well as the responsibility to comply with the applicable immigration legislation. Determinations on long-term teleworking outside of the country of the duty station will be made on a yearly basis, taking into account decisions on UNAIDS's future transformation.
29. During the restructuring, 51 job descriptions were revised to ensure business continuity in different offices and alignment with the new structure. A compendium exercise was organized to competitively appoint staff on positions phased out to available positions, which were advertised in batches (starting from locally recruited positions) from mid-July to mid-September 2025.
30. Membership of the UNAIDS appointments committee, the Review Board, was altered to include a group of 11 staff representing UNAIDS diversity in terms of location, function, grade and gender, and the members were briefed and trained. To further strengthen oversight and transparency, and ensure that policy provisions would be strictly adhered to, the Review Board considered progress on each vacancy process twice: at the time of shortlisting candidates and after the final selection report had been agreed by the specific panel. Selection documentation was then submitted to the Executive Director for final decision-making. Finally, as the compendium exercise was approaching completion, and with numerous staff awaiting reassignment, the Review Board received a comprehensive overview of unplaced staff and potentially available positions.
31. While most compendium positions were filled, a few remained vacant because no suitable candidate could be identified. Those instances are being resolved on a case-by-case basis. (One selection was in its final stages when this report was prepared.)
32. With a view to giving possibilities to staff in need of placement, extremely few positions were advertised in 2025 outside of the compendium.

Appointment of UNAIDS Country Directors

33. UNAIDS Country Director selection and appointments were managed separately from the compendium, in compliance with the Country Director Selection and Reassignment Policy. The 2025 Country Director reassignments were finalized through a structured, time-bound process that was conducted in June-July 2025. All eligible Country Directors were invited to submit a standardized expression of interest confirming eligibility, performance over the preceding three years, language proficiency, and availability to serve a full assignment. This was supported by written responses assessing leadership, strategic vision, and resource-mobilization experience. Applications were assessed against predefined criteria, including merit, gender equality, diversity, equitable geographical representation, and commitment to community and key population engagement.
34. A senior-level review panel, with the support of the Department of People and Culture, undertook a rigorous comparative assessment of all applications, supported by structured scoring, response analysis, and consultations with Regional Directors to ensure alignment with country-specific requirements. Panel recommendations were ranked and submitted for executive consideration, with final decisions endorsed by the Executive Director. Following this process, 17 Country Directors were appointed to lead 11 Multi-Country Offices and 6 UNAIDS Country Offices, with appointments formally announced in June 2025.

35. Finally, at the time of writing, UNAIDS and The United Nations Development Coordination Office were engaged with Resident Coordinators to validate the proposed two-phase plan for placing HIV Advisors in Resident Coordinator Offices in several countries. The initial focus was on six countries where existing UNAIDS staff were available for immediate transfer: Burundi, El Salvador, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uzbekistan. Five Resident Coordinators have expressed support for the transition of those advisors, apart from Sudan, where the complexity of the context required additional consideration. In Fiji, UNAIDS already has an arrangement of this kind and it will be maintained.
36. A further group of countries—Algeria, Eswatini, Ghana, Jamaica, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Venezuela—is expected to transition to a similar model within the next 12–18 months.

Supporting the workforce through restructuring and building capacity for the post-restructuring context

37. During the organizational transformation outlined in the previous section, staff development and performance processes were aligned to two overarching priorities which complemented restructuring measures:
 - safeguarding fairness, consistency, and duty of care for staff affected by restructuring, while maintaining organisational continuity; and
 - strengthening the capabilities, leadership, and resourcing approaches required for a reduced workforce to deliver the UNAIDS mandate in an increasingly complex and resource-constrained environment.

Ensuring fairness, continuity, and organizational integrity

38. During the transition period, performance management frameworks were adapted alongside position abolition, separation and reassignment processes to mitigate people-related risk, while preserving policy compliance and assessment integrity. Key measures included:
 - Streamlining work objectives and deliverables, aligned with revised roles and workloads, and supported by guidance to managers and staff;
 - Earlier initiation of final performance evaluations for up to 250 separating staff, enabling timely completion prior to the loss of system access, and supporting orderly clearance processes; and
 - Extension of performance cycles of up to 18 months, with individualized follow-up supported by temporary policy adjustments, to avoid multiple evaluation cycles for affected staff.

Together, these adaptations ensured that performance management remained fit for purpose, proportionate and transparent during restructuring.

Capacity building for a leaner organization

39. As restructuring decisions were implemented and the new organizational structure took shape, developmental activities shifted from transition management to organizational readiness. This reflected preparing for the post-restructuring context, including a reduced core workforce, increased reliance on flexible contractual modalities, and evolving leadership and delivery models.

Scaled career and transition support

40. UNAIDS prioritized practical, demand-driven career and transition support through a blended model of individual coaching, facilitated group learning, and digital tools.
41. In 2025, 936 participations were recorded across career and transition interventions, reflecting the scale of position abolitions and compendium placements. Support included:
 - Individualized CV and interview coaching and live, facilitated group interventions to strengthen skill articulation, career planning, and psychosocial re-orientation for competitive selection processes within and beyond the compendium;
 - Forward-looking coaching to support reflection on transferable skills and next steps for staff exiting the organization; and
 - Scalable digital and AI-enabled tools providing personalized assistance on applications, interviews, career path exploration, and knowledge management.

Leadership, ethics, and digital and operational capability

42. In the post-restructuring organizational model, leadership capability remains critical for continuity, accountability and impact. Key initiatives include:
 - **Country Director and HIV Advisor Development Programme** (launching in Q2 2026), aligned with the Global AIDS Strategy 2026–2031 and complementing Country Director appointment and reassignment processes;
 - **Leading for Transformational Change**, a flagship programme since 2022, has been streamlined for relaunch in Q2 2026 to support leadership continuity and institutional knowledge retention;
 - **Aligning for Success Programme**, linked to performance management, supporting translation of strategic priorities into clear objectives aligned with revised team workplans; and
 - **New Ethics Learning**, to mitigate risks associated with transition additional focus was placed on developing four ethics learning programmes in three languages, supporting implementation of digital literacy learning pathways and online training modules on the new Business Management System to support efficient adoption.

Workforce agility and skills-based resourcing

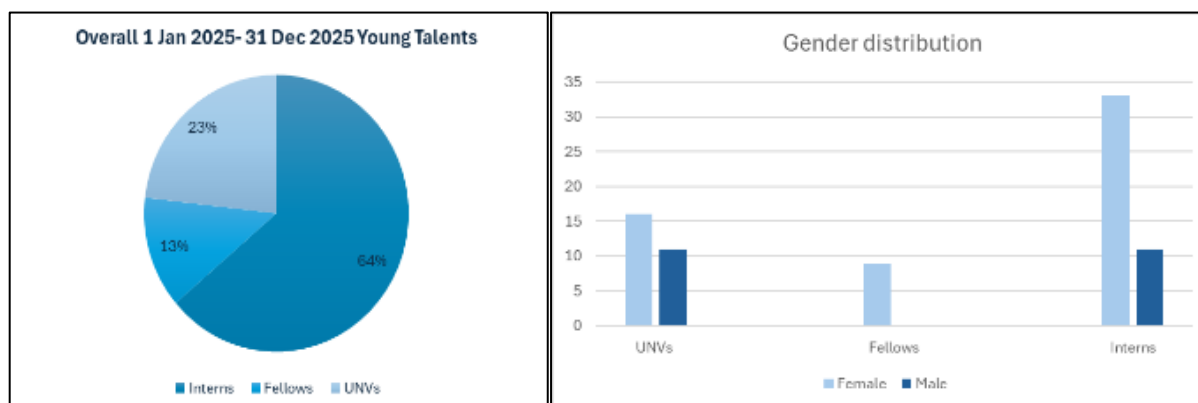
43. To support delivery under the new staffing model, including increased reliance on affiliates, consultants and various temporary modalities, Department of People and Culture advanced “skills and talent mapping”. A Skills Inventory captured and structured staff skills and experience, including those of departing staff, enabling rapid mobilization of internal expertise, short-term surge support, and preservation of institutional knowledge during and after restructuring.

Young talent as a development and learning enabler

44. UNAIDS strengthened the development and learning framework for young talent, interns, fellows and UN Volunteers, placing them in Country Offices. In 2025, over 70 young professionals were assigned across regions, enhancing in-country capacity while benefiting from structured onboarding, supervision and performance monitoring to enhance on-the-job learning.

45. Fellowship and partnership models, including the Tobitate-UNAIDS Programme (funded by Japan), further expanded learning opportunities while providing flexible support to countries. Ongoing strategic engagement with academic institutions has also been advanced, and several memoranda of understanding are being developed with universities in China and the Republic of Korea.

Figure 8. Breakdown of UN volunteers, interns and fellows, 2025



46. Staff development and performance processes supported staff with dignity, reinforced due process, and contributed to organizational continuity in a significantly transformed context.

Preserving staff mental health & well-being

47. To preserve a workforce under extreme strain, staff counselling interventions substantially intensified: an unprecedented 1,132 participants took part in 46 group interventions in 2025. Out of those, 36 sessions from April 2025 onwards were designed specifically to address the peak impact of uncertainty, job loss, programmatic and office closures, among other major changes.
48. In 2025, the staff counsellor conducted over 302 individual counselling sessions for 86 personnel, 40% of whom were managers/leadership. Most of the counselling (65%) remained accessed by field personnel, outside the Global Centre, across many cultures.
49. Through 14 urgent interventions in 2025 and six additional critical incident responses in early 2026, immediate psychological support was provided to 48 staff members and their relatives, which helped stabilize personnel facing insecurity and life disruptions.
50. Counselling capacity continued to be diversified and extended through the external partnership with the Rome Institute, which supported 15 staff members across 82 sessions.
51. Through these interventions, the service played a decisive role in risk mitigation by addressing the psychological impact of the transition, including survivor guilt, grief and long-term uncertainty.
52. Such adherence to UNAIDS's duty of care, tracked via the "Mental Health and Well-being "Scorecard", is aimed at preventing and mitigating the erosion of morale and productivity among the remaining staff.

53. As UNAIDS moves into 2026, sustaining psychosocial support remains essential to stabilize the restructured workforce and help ensure the viability of its mission through the transition.

Conclusion

54. The restructuring significantly reduced staff headcount and shifted the organization toward a more flexible workforce model. Structured and policy-compliant measures, including phased separations, reassignment processes, and strengthened oversight, ensured a transparent and orderly transition.
55. Performance management and staff development frameworks were adapted to maintain fairness, continuity, and operational integrity during this period of change, while counselling services supported staff well-being. The rapid changes have also placed a great deal of strain on staff who have remained with UNAIDS. However, the organization is transitioning toward a more streamlined and adaptable workforce aligned with its strategic and financial realities.

Proposed decision point

The Programme Coordinating Board is invited to:

56. *Take note* of the update on strategic human resource management issues.

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