UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

CEB

Chief Executives Board
for Coordination

CEB/2026/HLCM/HRN/17
31 July 2026

Summary of Conclusions of 49th Human Resources Network Directors Retreat

FAO Shared Services Centre, Budapest

24-26 June 2026

I. Opening and Welcome

1. The Human Resources Network (HRN) held its 49th session from 24 to 26 June 2026 at the Food and Agriculture Organization Global Shared Services Center in Budapest. The meeting, held in person format with an option for limited online participation, was co-chaired by Ms. Martha Helena Lopez (UN Secretariat), Ms. Catty Bennet Sattler (UNHCR), Mr. Peter Frobel (IAEA), Ms. Adelaide Barbier (WIPO), and Ms. Robosa Gbinoba (WFP).
2. The agenda was adopted as reflected in the table of contents.
3. The list of participating organizations and their representatives at the meeting is provided in Annex 1.

II. Informal exchange on proposed merger of UNSSC and UNITAR as per UN80 action 68 - Discussion on key features of the Merger Proposal

4. The aim of this session was to brief the HRN on the proposed merger of UNSSC and UNITAR under UN80 action 68. The session provided for a briefing on the key features of the merger proposal and an exchange on design features, implementation considerations and possible feedback to HLCM.
5. The Executive Director of UNITAR informally briefed the HRN on the status and main elements of the proposal. It was noted that the draft was before the governing bodies of UNITAR and UNSSC and that, subject to the Secretary-General's decision, the proposal would be submitted to Member States during the eightieth session of the General Assembly.
6. The proposal was presented as seeking to establish a more coherent United Nations learning and capability development platform, while preserving the distinct mandates of UNSSC and UNITAR.
7. HRN members welcomed the informal exchange while also noting with concern the lack of formal consultations with HLCM and its relevant functional networks so far. They underlined the need for meaningful engagement with HR Directors and client entities before finalization of the proposal, particularly on governance, funding, service continuity and implementation risks.
8. Governance, system ownership and representation were identified as central issues. Participants emphasized the need for balanced and meaningful representation of UN system entities, including specialized agencies, and for safeguards against actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Cost-effectiveness, transparent pricing, ring-fencing contributions for staff development, and protection of the internal workforce learning mandate were also highlighted as essential design considerations.
9. The HRN emphasized that the strategic value of the merger would depend on sound design choices from the outset, including clear arrangements on governance, funding, system ownership, efficiencies and continuity of critical learning services. It called for stronger, structured engagement with HLCM and its relevant networks, in particular the HRN and the Finance and Budget Network (FBN), through the appropriate CEB mechanisms. The Network

agreed to communicate its comprehensive position on the topic internally as outlined in Annex 2.

III. Alignment on approaches for staff compensation (Part 1, local staff)

10. The HRN discussed the potential application of operational rules for the implementation of local salary survey results in group 2 duty stations, including delayed or phased implementation in exceptional cases of significant increases. It was clarified that the proposed approach would affect results implementation modalities, rather than the underlying methodology itself, and would require appropriate safeguards and governance arrangements to ensure sound and coherent implementation.
11. Participants recognized the financial and operational challenges arising from large salary increases, particularly where implementation is retroactive over extended periods. The discussion emphasized the importance of consistency across organizations operating in the same duty station, predictability for staff, clear communication, and careful management of legal and staff relations risks.
12. *Conclusion: The HR Network agreed to*
    a. *Seek legal advice, with applicable jurisdiction in both administrative tribunal systems in mind, before taking a final decision on the matter.*
    b. *explore, as soon as practical, the possibilities of limiting retroactive implementation of salary results, and to engage with ICSC on the topic to facilitate a solution when effects on the review cycle would be expected.*
    c. *raise the need for further review of LSS methodology in the context of the ICSC procedures ahead of the next round of surveys.*

IV. Driving efficiency and transparency through HR Analytics and data-driven decision support

13. The HRN reviewed progress of the Community of Practice (CoP) HR Data Analytics, namely the UN System HR Analytics Framework, related data governance work, and the development of the People Insights Platform.
14. The framework was presented not as a prescriptive tool for internal or external reporting of individual agencies, but as a guideline intended to serve as a common reference to seek harmonization in definitions and methodologies for internal comparisons and to foster benchmarking practices across the system. Given the diversity of mandates and contexts, the framework cannot account for all variations and is intended to remain a living document to be refined and adopted over time. Participants expressed strong support for the work, noting its potential to strengthen evidence-based decision-making, improve comparability across organizations where applicable, and enhance transparency in workforce planning and organizational design.

15. The People Insights Platform, of which an advanced prototype was demonstrated during the meeting, was welcomed as a practical tool for benchmarking, enabling organizations to compare their own workforce data against anonymized system and peer-group data while maintaining privacy and data protection safeguards.
16. *Conclusion: The HR Network*
    a. *endorsed the HR Analytics Framework as a reference for further efforts for interagency benchmarking, as a living document.*
    b. *supported continued development of the People Insights Platform.*
    c. *strongly encouraged the finalization of Standard Operating Procedures on data sharing of personnel information.*

V. Restructuring, downsizing and realignment experiences in the Network, incl their impact on workforce composition

17. The HRN exchanged recent organizational experiences with restructuring, downsizing, relocation and workforce realignment. Discussions reflected the scale and complexity of workforce adjustments undertaken across the system in response to financial constraints, changing priorities and the need to improve organizational efficiency.
18. Participants highlighted several common lessons, including the importance of clear policy frameworks, early engagement with legal and finance functions, transparent governance, disciplined management of exceptions, and sustained engagement with staff representatives. The discussion also underscored the significant operational and well-being impact of repeated restructuring processes on staff, managers and HR teams.
19. The exchange further highlighted the need to consider total workforce composition, including both staff and affiliate personnel, when assessing organizational capacity and cost structures. Participants noted that terminology and approaches to affiliate modalities vary across organizations, while interest from governing bodies and Member States in greater transparency is increasing.
20. *Conclusion: The HR Network requested the HRN Focus Group on Contractual Modalities to*
    a. *organize a separate briefing to discuss the high-level draft United Nations System Guidance Note on Staff and Affiliate Roles.*
    b. *continue its exchange on organization-specific efforts to review affiliate contract modalities and provisions.*
    c. *continue its internal assessment of good practices and challenges for total workforce reporting and analysis.*

VI. Open Mic session

21. The session provided an opportunity for participants to raise recent operational challenges and identify areas where peer exchange could be useful. The discussion reaffirmed the value of open dialogue, peer learning and mutual support among HR leaders, particularly in the context of ongoing organizational pressures, restructuring and workforce-related challenges.

VII. HR Service Delivery and Shared Services Centers

22. The presentations and related panel discussions showcased current practical experiences of Shared Service Centers currently present in Budapest and examined how shared service models can strengthen HR delivery by improving efficiency, consistency, service quality and cost effectiveness. Participants considered experiences from established and emerging shared service arrangements, including centralized case management, service-level monitoring, customer satisfaction tracking and structured links between service centers and policy functions.
23. It was also noted that shared service centers are increasingly moving beyond transactional processing into opportunities for continuous realization of process efficiencies. Automation and AI-enabled tools were discussed as important enablers for high-volume and first-line services, while complex HR matters continue to require policy expertise, judgement and coordinated human support.
24. The Network concluded that collective action should be concentrated on areas with a clearly defined business case, drawing on lessons learnt from recognized good examples for inter-agency service delivery such as UN Volunteers, joint JPO service delivery, the Pension Fund or joint health insurance providers. Opportunities for further collaboration were suggested in areas such as health insurance or administration of affiliate personnel.
25. *Conclusion: The HR Network agreed to continue its exchange on further opportunities for joint service delivery and key learnings in organization-specific and inter-agency service delivery.*

VIII. Medical topics and management of sick leave

26. The session was a follow up to challenges raised by a number of agencies around the topic of sick leave management at the previous session. The objective was to identify shared challenges, compare maturity levels, and agree on practical risk-mitigation priorities for extended sick leave, return-to-work, and contested medical cases across UN agencies. The Network was briefed by the Chair of the UNMD on their deliberations at the recent meeting on adjacent topics. Presentations by UNHCR and WIPO Occupational Health Units were followed by three thematic group discussions informed by a pre-session questionnaire completed by 13 UN agencies. The session confirmed the need to move from reactive case management toward earlier detection, clearer governance, and shared system-wide tools. Participants noted the importance of addressing underlying causes of absence and distinguishing between illness, incapacity and functionality when managing complex cases.
27. The discussion also highlighted the need for more comparable sick leave data across organizations, given differences in policies, systems and recording practices. It also confirmed that good practices should be exchanged more systematically across sick leave management, return-to-work, and contested medical cases.
28. *Conclusion: The HR Network agreed to further collaborate with the UNMD to*
    a. *compile a roster for external psychiatrists and doctors.*
    b. *prepare an inventory of tools, SOPs, templates and examples of good practices and policies.*

c. Support development of common definitions, terminology, KPIs and reporting methodologies for sick leave and RTW management.
d. Develop non-binding interagency guidance on management of long-term sick leave, return-to-work and contested medical determinations.
e. Explore graduated medical escalation mechanisms for contested medical determinations, including second opinions, specialist review and medical expert panels before litigation.
f. Clarify governance, roles, escalation thresholds, and delegated medical authority.

29. The Network received an update from the Mental Health Strategy Implementation Board on implementation of the strategy for 2024 and beyond, including work on psychosocial risk, mental health literacy, family support, stigma reduction and service consolidation. It was noted that the current agreement for cost-shared funding of the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy Implementation was scheduled to conclude at the end of 2026. The need for a financially and operationally sustainable approach was highlighted.

30. *Conclusion: The HR Network requested the Mental Health Strategy Implementation Board to*
    a. prepare a report for HLCM, to be shared with the Network for review and endorsement before finalization.
    b. *Organize a separate session on psychological risk assessment.*

IX. Briefing by ICSC (Secretariat) on upcoming ICSC session

31. The HRN received a briefing on key items expected to be considered at the upcoming ICSC session.
32. The discussion supported early organizational preparation for the session, including the development of inputs on efficiency measures, recruitment challenges and potential operational implications of significant compensation changes.

X. Alignment on approaches for staff compensation (Part 2, international staff)

33. The HRN continued its discussion on compensation for international staff in preparation for the forthcoming ICSC session.
34. Participants underlined the need to base communications on evidence, including total compensation comparisons, recruitment and retention challenges, and the relationship between compensation competitiveness and the ability of organizations to deliver mandates.
35. The HRN also recognized the broader financial pressures facing organizations and the need to demonstrate the ongoing efficiency, restructuring and cost-containment efforts in more detail. Participants stressed that compensation reductions do not address system-wide budgetary pressures and could adversely affect organizational attractiveness, reform implementation, and business continuity.

XI. Strengthening collaboration through enhanced Inter-Agency Mobility

36. The HRN reviewed progress made by the HRN working group (WG) on Inter-Agency Mobility and considered draft recommendations aimed at reducing barriers to staff movement across organizations.
37. The discussion identified several practical constraints in the current framework, including the existing two-year cost recovery window, inconsistencies in administrative arrangements, the absence of standardized templates, and unresolved questions related to financial liabilities, including after-service health insurance and separation-related costs.
38. Two possible approaches were presented for further consideration: extending the cost recovery period from two to five years or introducing a simplified financial package to accompany staff members upon transfer, limited to predictable liabilities such as unused annual leave and applicable repatriation grant. It was clarified that these options would be alternatives, not cumulative measures.
39. Participants expressed broad support for strengthening mobility as a tool for collaboration, skills transfer, career development, and more strategic talent management across the system. Particular interest was also noted in exploring structured mobility arrangements with non-UN common system organizations, including international financial institutions, particularly through loan-based modalities.
40. Participants noted that further work will also benefit from seeking expertise on the financial, legal and implementation implications of any revised approach.
41. *Conclusion: The HR Network welcomed the progress of the Working Group and agreed that further engagement of the WG with the FBN and the Network of International Financial Institutions would be the appropriate avenue for advancing the work.*

XII. Recruitment practices and collaboration, including AI-related aspects

42. Under the HLCM Far-Reaching Efficiency Measures workstream HR1, the discussion led by UNDP focused on practical areas in which inter-agency cooperation could improve recruitment efficiency. Three priorities were considered: common procurement of recruitment-related services, development of a complementary shared job board, and collaboration on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in recruitment.
43. Experiences shared on the use of AI in recruitment covered both its application in screening and assessment as well as its use by candidates. Participants exchanged practices for identifying possible AI-assisted submissions and highlighted the importance of safeguarding process integrity through approaches that are transparent, proportionate and practical for recruiters and hiring managers.
44. The discussion highlighted the potential of AI to improve recruitment efficiency and consistency, including by supporting job-description drafting, candidate screening and assessment design.

Participants noted that AI-generated content cannot be reliably detected and emphasized a shift towards clear candidate guidance, robust assessment design and proportionate integrity controls, with human oversight retained throughout the process.

45. *Conclusion: The HR Network*
    a. *agreed to support the pragmatic reorientation of HR1 to include, in a first step:*
        i. *Common Procurement*
        ii. *Shared Job Board*
        iii. *High level guidelines for AI in Recruitment and sharing information on the successful use of AI tools within individual organizations*
    b. *Invited UNDP as the lead agency, with support by the CEB Secretariat, to further reflect on suitable mechanisms for involvement of interested agencies, including through the CoP Recruitment as warranted.*
    c. *Agreed for interested agencies to coordinate response to JIU recommendations on recruitment that relate to the implementation of the abovementioned three workstreams of HR1.*

XIII. Any other business

46. The additional discussion covered policy and workforce-support matters, including model guidance on the arrest and detention of personnel and family members, approaches to employability, a suggestion for a possible future unemployment insurance, and operational concerns relating to an insurance provider.
47. *Conclusion: The HR Network*
    a. *endorsed the UN Common System Model Guidelines on Arrest and Detention of UNSMS Personnel and their Family Members and agreed to transmit the guidelines to the Legal Network for review and endorsement.*
    b. *requested the HRN CoP on Learning and Development to initiate work on a recent HLCM request to explore current practices and possible avenues to ensure long-term employability of UN personnel.*
    c. *requested the CEB Secretariat to share with the HRN relevant documentation on the current proposal for an unemployment insurance as developed by CCISUA, following the briefing by ILO.*
    d. *agreed to further share experiences on operational concerns regarding insurance providers with the CEB Secretariat.*

ANNEX I List of Participants

Organization	Name and title
UN Secretariat	Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources
FAO	Serge Nakouzi, HR Director
IAEA	Peter Frobel, Director of Human Resources
IAEA	Thomas Abraham, Head of HR Policy
ICAO	Tolulope Agiri, Deputy Director, HR
IFAD	Stella Atela , PCD Director
ILO	Danielle Guiho, Director, Human Resources Development Department
IMO	Liya Dominic, Head, HRS
IOM	Michael Emery, Director, Department of Human Resources
ITC	Hele Kwon-Karaul, Chief of HR
ITU	Maria Traficanti, Chief HRMD
PAHO	Paul De La Croix-Vaubois, Human Ressources Advisor
UN Tourism	Paolo Velasco, Chief, Human Resources
UNDP	Irina Stavenscaia-Botezatu, OHR Director, ai
UNEP	Carlos Barragan, Chief of Human Resources
UNFPA	Mayra De La Garza, Chief, Policy and Staff Relations
UNHCR	Catty Bennet Sattler, Director - Division of People Management
UNHCR	Diego Ruiz Proano, Deputy Director - Division of People Management
UNICEF	Filiz Aktas, Chief, Policy, Social Benefits and Compensation
UNICEF	Margaret Moreblessing Chitondo, Deputy Director of Division of People and Culture
UNIDO	Micheal Conneely, Director, Human Resource Management
UNOPS	Valerie Kushata, Director for People and Culture Group
UNRWA	Paolo Bernasconi, Director of Human Resources
UNRWA	Jonathan Porter, Chief, HR Operational Services
UNU	Ken Okamoto, Chief of HR
UPU	Amboko Buhozozo, Human Resources Policies and Well-Being Programme Manager
WFP	Robosa Gbinoba, Director Human Resources
WHO	Patrick Nicollier, Director, Human Resources and Talent Management
WHO	Patrick Cronin, Coordinator, HR Policy and Internal Justice
WIPO	Adelaide Barbier, Director HRMD
WMO	Johannes Kratzheller, Chief, HR
WTO	Alison Holmes, Director HRD
CDB	Warren Hokan, Director (Ag.), HR & Administration
ICC	Stefanie Küfner, Acting Head HR legal and policy unit
ICGEB	Margaret Otukile, HR Officer
IDLO	Cornelia Moussa, Director of Human Resources and Office Services
UNICC	Frederic Laval, Chief, Human Resources Section

OAS	Daniel Freitas, HR Director
OPCW	Kate Hummel, Head, Human Resources
OSCE	Mariam Kakkar, Director for Human Resources
CEB Secretariat	Michael Rosetz, Senior Inter-Agency Adviser on Human Resources / Coordinator, Human Resources Network

ANNEX II CEB HR Network Comments re: the Proposed Merger of UNSSC into UNITAR under the UN80 Initiative (24 June 2026)

The HR Network, at its 49th session held at FAO SSC in Budapest, welcomed the opportunity of a high-level discussion with the Executive Director of UNITAR, assigned lead for the UN80 WP 17 action item 68, proposed merger of UNSSC and UNITAR.

The HR Network noted with concern that the expectation of HLCM for a consultation on the concrete design merger with the Committee has not been met. Today's discussion cannot be seen as a replacement for such consultations, in particular given that no concrete proposal document has been shared with the HRN constituency.

In the absence of the concrete proposal to review, the HR Network shared the following considerations for the design of the proposed merged entity. It is deemed essential that these considerations be properly considered in order to ensure the UN Secretary-General's vision as expressed in UN80 is adequately translated into the future structures and operations supporting the UN System of the future.

Overall assessment

The proposed merger presents, in principle, a significant opportunity to strengthen the coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of the United Nations learning and capability-development architecture, in line with the overall vision of the UN 80 initiative. At the same time, the success of this effort will depend on the extent to which the final design of the merged entity as well as the quality of its implementation demonstrably strengthen the effectiveness of the system-wide workforce capacity building, deliver measurable efficiencies, and maintain the confidence of the diverse entities expected to participate in and fund the future model in the longer term.

Governance and system ownership

Further consideration should be given to the governance arrangements to ensure that the merged entity is clearly positioned as a trusted and client-focused partner for the entire United Nations system, including Specialized Agencies, Funds, and Programmes. Relevant good practices from the current governance arrangements should be taken into account.
While the legal adequacy of the proposed governance model is essential, it will not be sufficient on its own. The governance framework should ensure meaningful and balanced representation of both external and internal clients, so that priority-setting, accountability, financial arrangements and quality assurance mechanisms reflect the needs of the organizations expected to use and fund the future service provider.

Drawing on lessons learned from the current arrangements, it is essential that key internal clients of the new entity, in particular Specialized Agencies with independent governance structures, are represented on the Board in their own right and are able to determine their representation in a

manner aligned with their internal management responsibilities. Given the close link between learning and development and broader human resources policies and processes, a dedicated role for HLCM and the HR Network in the governance of the merged entity—**beyond a purely technical advisory function**—would provide an important institutional safeguard and stakeholder buy in.
In addition, given the current proposed composition of the Board as it is understood, it will be important to ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent potential actual or perceived conflicts of interest, especially with regard, for example, to the key investment decisions.

Protection of the workforce learning mandate

The proposal appropriately emphasizes integration without reducing the mandate. However, prior to any decision on dissolving UNSSC as a separate legal entity, greater clarity is needed on ownership, funding, organizational structure, and accountability for services supporting internal, system-wide workforce learning and development.
The effectiveness of the future model will ultimately be measured by the relevance of its services to the operational needs of UN entities. Internal clients will also expect clearly defined organizational structures dedicated specifically to delivering the internal mandate.

The merger should aim not only to preserve but to strengthen the original value proposition of providing high-quality learning and development services at scale. In a context of constrained resources, priority should be given to fully safeguarding and enhancing the internal workforce learning mandate. The expansion into new service lines should be considered only where driven by clearly articulated and demonstrated client demand.

Funding arrangements and realization of efficiencies

The current core financial contributions from participating UN organizations are based on Article VII, paragraph 2, of the UNSSC Statute, which will cease to apply upon the dissolution of UNSSC. The continuation of this funding arrangement is therefore neither automatic nor transferable. Future engagement will depend on a compelling value proposition, transparent and competitive pricing, and clearly defined service delivery arrangements.
In this context, a final proposal would benefit from a detailed cost–benefit analysis, including clearer assumptions on efficiency gains, staffing implications, implementation costs, and anticipated savings. It should also explicitly distinguish between system-wide public goods, subscription-based services, transaction-based services, and bespoke cost-recovery activities.

Preliminary observations from analysis of the current staffing structure suggest that UNSSC's current organizational structure, geographical footprint, and cost profile may compare more favourably to those of UNITAR. This appears to reflect a stronger presence in lower-cost locations, a comparatively leaner grading structure, and a smaller proportion of senior leadership positions.

The HRN would expect that a comprehensive review of structures, grades, obsolete functions and operating location(s) would be paramount in establishing a lean, efficient and cost-effective new entity.

Continuity of critical learning services

The transition should not disrupt critical learning programmes at a time when the system requires strengthened leadership, management, digital, and transformation capabilities. While a dedicated risk mitigation plan should provide assurance on the protection of ongoing programmes, existing commitments, client relationships, and institutional knowledge throughout implementation, several conditions **at the merger design stage** are essential to ensure business continuity.

These include the need to adjust the organizational structure and geographic footprint of UNITAR prior to merger with UNSSC implementation, to ensure that the new entity operates with a competitive cost base from the outset. In addition, the full scope of transition costs and planned initial investments should be clearly quantified in advance, and implementation should only proceed once these costs are fully secured through dedicated contributions.

Existing financial reserves at UNSSC — beyond their role in covering ASHI liabilities — constitute a critical safeguard for the continued delivery of internal learning services, particularly in periods of financial volatility such as the current one. Any proposal to use these reserves to co-finance merger costs risks undermining service continuity and, as such, cannot be supported.

Conclusion

The observations provided by the HR Network are intended as constructive contributions to help ensure that the UN80 vision for Workstream 17 is fully realized. They aim to maximize merger benefits, strengthen the strategic positioning of UN system workforce development, and proactively manage the associated implementation and transition risks.
A well-designed and professionally executed merger has the potential to create a stronger, more coherent, and more sustainable UN learning and capability platform. Realizing this strategic value will depend not only on effective implementation but, critically, **on sound design choices from the outset**. It is therefore essential that a risk-informed and value-driven approach ensures clarity on how key requirements—particularly those related to governance, funding, system ownership, and safeguards for internal learning services—are addressed in the merger design before final, irreversible decisions are taken.

Failure to adequately incorporate these elements at the design stage could increase the risk of inadvertently weakening the UN system’s collective workforce learning and organizational capability agenda. It may also result in missed opportunities for cost-efficient integration and enhanced collaboration across agencies.

Looking ahead, the design and implementation of the merger would benefit from stronger, structured engagement with HLCM and its relevant networks—particularly the HR Network and the FB Network—as the natural coordination bodies representing internal system clients.

The HR Network remains ready to engage further as needed, including in the coming days while still in session, and looks forward to continued consultation through the appropriate CEB mechanisms.