

RESUMEN DEL AÑO

**OFICINA DEL OMBUDSMAN Y
MEDIADOR**

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Agradecimientos

La Oficina desea expresar su sincero agradecimiento a colegas, representantes del personal, directivos y altos cargos que colaboraron con la Oficina durante el año y apoyaron nuestro mandato. Estamos agradecidos por la confianza depositada en la Oficina y por la participación constructiva en todo nuestro trabajo, incluyendo los servicios de mediación, las actividades de divulgación y aprendizaje y los eventos globales de Ombuds, como los Ubuntu Community Cafés.

Expresamos nuestro agradecimiento especialmente al Alto Comisionado, al Equipo Ejecutivo Superior, al Consejo Global de Personal, a los Directores de la Oficina Regional y sus equipos directivos, así como al liderazgo y al personal de las operaciones y oficinas con las que la Oficina colaboró. La participación constructiva con el liderazgo sigue siendo esencial para garantizar que las experiencias individuales, elevadas con confianza, informen la comprensión organizativa más amplia.

La Oficina valora su estrecha colaboración con las funciones de apoyo y de rendición de cuentas del personal, incluyendo el Consejo Global de Personal y las Asociaciones de Personal, los Asesores entre Pares, el Servicio de Asuntos Jurídicos, la División de Recursos Humanos, la Oficina del Inspector General, la Oficina de Ética, los Servicios de Bienestar del Personal y colegas de Comunicación Interna y de las regiones. Estas relaciones contribuyen al diálogo, la coordinación y el aprendizaje, especialmente en periodos de estrés institucional.

También reconocemos con agradecimiento a los socios externos de la Oficina, incluyendo el programa suizo SYNI, la Asociación Internacional de Ombudsman, la Junta Ejecutiva Principal de los Ombudsman y Mediadores de la ONU, y la Red de Ombudsman y Mediadores de Organizaciones Multilaterales. Su colaboración fortalece la práctica profesional de la Oficina y su capacidad para atender a colegas en todo el mundo.

CONTÁCTANOS

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Mensaje del Defensor del Pueblo y Mediador

Estimados Colegas,

El año pasado fue de transición profunda para ACNUR. Las limitaciones de financiación, la reestructuración y el rápido cambio organizativo han remodelado no solo las estructuras y los puestos, sino también la realidad diaria de los colegas en distintas regiones, funciones y niveles.

En mi rol como Ombudsman y Mediador, tuve el privilegio de escuchar a colegas que atravesaban este periodo de incertidumbre. Lo que escuchaba constantemente no era simplemente conflicto, sino la necesidad de un espacio confidencial e imparcial: un lugar para dar sentido al cambio, reflexionar sobre experiencias difíciles y recuperar el equilibrio en un momento en el que todo se sentía inestable.

Durante 2025, la Oficina experimentó un aumento significativo de la demanda. Los colegas se dirigieron a consultas individuales, mediación, diálogos facilitados y espacios comunitarios para la reflexión. Este aumento no se limitó a la discordia interpersonal, sino que también se extendió a la tensión generada cuando las decisiones organizativas se toman rápidamente y bajo presión, con oportunidades limitadas de diálogo. En respuesta, la Oficina adaptó sus modalidades y amplió su alcance para hacer accesible, a gran escala, un apoyo informal y neutral.

Esta demanda creciente no fue percibida por la Oficina del Ombudsman de manera aislada. Otras funciones de apoyo y supervisión del personal también se enfrentaron a una mayor complejidad mientras operaban con capacidad reducida. En conjunto, estas presiones pusieron de manifiesto la importancia de la claridad en los roles, la coordinación entre funciones y la atención sostenida a los sistemas que apoyan a los colegas durante los periodos de transición.

Lo que los colegas compartieron a lo largo del año también reveló la profunda importancia del proceso. Muchos describieron una ruptura de la confianza y del contrato psicológico con la organización, moldeada no solo por la crisis en sí, sino también por la forma en que el cambio se comunicaba y se experimentaba a lo largo del tiempo. Estos patrones sirvieron de base para el Informe Especial de diciembre de 2025 de la Oficina y contribuyeron al Plan de Acción de Integridad 2026 del Alto Comisionado. Sirven como recordatorio de que las conversaciones confidenciales, cuando se consideran en su conjunto, pueden tener un significado más allá del encuentro individual.

De cara al futuro, el enfoque de la Oficina se centra en apoyar la recuperación. Esto incluye ayudar a los equipos a restablecer la estabilidad en nuevas estructuras, fortalecer el acceso a la resolución temprana e informal y continuar ofreciendo espacios donde puedan plantearse preocupaciones de forma segura y constructiva. Iniciativas como Ubuntu Community Cafés 2.0 en 2026 seguirán siendo una parte importante de ese esfuerzo, proporcionando oportunidades estructuradas para el diálogo, la reflexión y la retroalimentación hacia el futuro.

Quiero expresar mi profundo agradecimiento al equipo de Ombuds, cuya profesionalidad, cuidado y constancia fueron especialmente evidentes durante un año exigente. Y a cada colega que depositó su confianza en la Oficina, gracias. Es un honor para mi equipo y para mí acompañarlos en momentos de cambio y una responsabilidad que abordamos con humildad y cuidado.

Con agradecimiento por su compromiso continuo con el diálogo,

"A quien mucho se le da, mucho se espera." Proverbio africano



Dr. Youssoupha Niang

Qué sucede cuando se pone en contacto con nuestra oficina



Imparcial
El enfoque se centra en un proceso justo.



Independiente
La Oficina actúa libre de injerencias o control por parte de otras áreas de la organización.

Los principios que seguimos



Confidencial
Salvo en casos de riesgo inminente de daño grave, todas las interacciones permanecen estrictamente confidenciales.



Informal
Un espacio seguro y flexible para abordar inquietudes y soluciones en una etapa temprana.



Dos lados de la misma tormenta

Las siguientes narraciones son relatos compuestos que reflejan patrones recurrentes observados por la Oficina a lo largo de 2025. No describen a ningún individuo concreto y, en cambio, ilustran cómo se experimentó el cambio organizativo desde diferentes posiciones institucionales durante un periodo de incertidumbre sostenida.

La perspectiva de un gestor

Cuando comenzaron los anuncios de reestructuración, "Sara", una directora de oficina P3, supo que su equipo se reduciría poco antes de que sus compañeros afectados recibieran las notificaciones. Tenía información previa limitada y ningún papel en la toma de decisiones que afectaban a su oficina, pero se convirtió de inmediato en el punto focal de preguntas que no podía responder.

LA PERSPECTIVA DEL GERENTE (SARA)



Atrapada entre la rendición de cuentas y la autoridad limitada, navegando orientaciones cambiantes mientras intenta mantener la confianza y el desempeño.



Apoyo para navegar los límites del rol, comunicar sin prometer de más y liderar con claridad en medio de decisiones en constante evolución.

En las semanas siguientes, las directrices continuaron cambiando. Se revisaron los plazos, se ajustaron las cifras y se aclararon las expectativas poco a poco. Sara seguía siendo responsable de mantener su desempeño y confianza, aunque dudaba sobre los límites de su autoridad y discreción. Le costaba saber cómo comunicarse con transparencia sin especular ni asumir la responsabilidad de las decisiones tomadas en otro lugar.

Sara contactó con la Oficina del Ombudsman para buscar un espacio confidencial e imparcial en el que reflexionar sobre su papel de liderazgo. La conversación se centró en la claridad de los roles. El Ombudsman le ayudó a distinguir entre la autoridad que mantenía como gestora y las restricciones impuestas en otros niveles, apoyándola a identificar dónde podía ejercer juicio y dónde no.

La conversación también abordó la importancia de mantener límites: saber reconocer la incertidumbre identificando la fuente de la preocupación, estructurar las conversaciones para que las preocupaciones sean escuchadas de forma constructiva y encontrar cómo evitar aumentar las expectativas en un entorno inestable. La discusión no cambió las decisiones que afectaban a la oficina y, en cambio, ayudó a Sara a afrontar sus responsabilidades de liderazgo con mayor claridad y firmeza.

Perspectiva de un miembro del equipo

Cuando la reestructuración llegó a su equipo, "Omar" recibió una notificación en la que se le informó que su puesto sería discontinuado. El mensaje proporcionaba información limitada sobre plazos, disposiciones de transición o puntos de contacto. Los intentos de aclarar la información dieron lugar a respuestas fragmentadas, lo que dejó a Omar sin saber cómo se desarrollaría el proceso ni cómo involucrarse sin escalar la situación.

A medida que persistía la incertidumbre, Omar se encontró atrapado entre esperar y actuar. Se mostraba reacio a recurrir a canales formales, pero cada vez era más incierto cómo obtener información fiable o expresar preocupaciones de manera productiva. Su responsable, que enfrentaba lagunas de información similares, parecía igualmente limitado.

LA PERSPECTIVA DEL MIEMBRO DEL EQUIPO ('OMAR')



Después de la discontinuación:
Recibió notificación con plazos limitados, información de transición o puntos de contacto.





Opacidad en los procesos:
Respuestas fragmentadas que generan confusión. Incertidumbre sobre cómo participar. Renuencia a utilizar los canales formales. Factores que impulsan el desinvolucramiento.

Omar contactó con la Oficina del Ombudsman para solicitar ayuda no con la decisión en sí, sino con las condiciones que rodean el proceso. En la discusión, los Ombuds le ayudaron a identificar cómo la opacidad del proceso —y no solo el resultado— estaba generando desinterés y frustración.

Más allá de la consulta individual, los Ombuds intervinieron a nivel sistémico de contención. Sin nombrar a Omar, la Oficina planteó comentarios anónimos y en tiempo real- con las partes interesadas relevantes sobre mensajes inconsistentes, puntos de contacto poco claros y lagunas en la comunicación durante el proceso posterior a la abolición. Esta intervención no tenía como objetivo revisar decisiones, sino interrumpir un patrón que contribuye a la confusión en varios casos.

A medida que se aclaraban los parámetros de comunicación, Omar experimentó el proceso como más estructurado y legible. Aunque el resultado respecto de su puesto no cambió, la intervención ayudó a restaurar canales de comunicación viables, lo que le permitió afrontar los siguientes pasos con mayor previsibilidad durante una transición difícil.

En conjunto, estas explicaciones reflejan un patrón observado en 2025: cuando la incertidumbre se agravaba por la ambigüedad en los roles o procesos, las intervenciones del ombudsman operaban en diferentes niveles, apoyando, por un lado, el mantenimiento de los límites gerenciales y, por otro, la estabilización de la forma en que se involucraban los procesos organizativos.

Lo que nos dicen los números de 2025

2025 en cifras

1,806 personas participaron en la gestión de casos
19,051 interacciones en 2025



En un año de crisis organizacional, la Oficina registró un aumento del **72 % en el número de visitantes** y amplió su alcance a decenas de miles de miembros más del personal, lo que refleja la **creciente necesidad de la organización de orientación neutral y apoyo constructivo**.

OBSERVACIONES SISTÉMICAS



Inequidad percibida

El personal percibió que la retención y la selección estaban impulsadas por la **cercanía con la dirección** y el **favoritismo**, más que por **criterios objetivos**.



Predominio del 'modo supervivencia'

La respuesta a la crisis desencadenó un retraimiento organizacional generalizado; el personal priorizó su **seguridad personal**, lo que condujo al **agotamiento** y a un "contrato psicológico" deteriorado con el liderazgo.



Presión sobre el sistema de apoyo

Las funciones críticas (Ética, Ombudsman, PWS, Consejo del Personal) se vieron debilitadas por la **reducción de recursos**, pese al **fuerte aumento de la demanda**.



Amplificado por la cultura

Dinámicas de larga data, como el **control jerárquico**, la **evitación del conflicto** y el **poder reservado** de los niveles superiores, agravaron el impacto de la crisis.



Comunicación unidireccional

A pesar de los esfuerzos iniciales, el personal percibió cada vez más la comunicación como **poco transparente**, **contradictoria** y carente de **claridad en la toma de decisiones**.

LAS 5 PRINCIPALES PREOCUPACIONES PLANTEADAS



PERFIL DE LOS VISITANTES



PORCENTAJE DE CASOS POR REGIÓN



PANORAMA GENERAL



*La cifra representa un promedio ponderado de los tipos de interacción

*Al 1 de octubre de 2025, África Austral fue disuelta y dividida entre África Occidental/Central y África Oriental y de los Grandes Lagos.

Los datos de 2025 cuentan una historia que va más allá del volumen. Aunque la demanda de los servicios de la Oficina aumentó significativamente, el cambio más relevante fue el que presentaron los colegas. Las preocupaciones a menudo se estratificaban e interconectaban, surgiendo en un contexto en el que la certeza era limitada y la confianza estaba bajo presión. Las cifras presentadas aquí reflejan cómo se experimentó esa presión en toda la organización.

Cinco categorías de preocupación dominaron el trabajo de casos durante el año: trabajo y carrera, relaciones evaluativas, liderazgo y gestión organizacional, relaciones entre iguales y colegas, y asuntos legales y de cumplimiento. Estas preocupaciones rara vez se experimentaban de forma aislada. Los colegas describían típicamente situaciones en las que la incertidumbre sobre los roles o contratos coincidía con relaciones de supervisión tensas, lagunas en la comunicación o la sensación de que las decisiones que les afectaban se habían tomado con una transparencia insuficiente. La concentración de preocupaciones en las tres primeras categorías refleja cómo la reestructuración afectó no solo a las estructuras, sino también a las relaciones y la confianza que mantienen unidos a los equipos.

Los compañeros que buscaban apoyo provenían de todas las categorías de personal, tipos de contrato, regiones y niveles. Esta amplia distribución subraya que las presiones de 2025 no se limitaron a funciones o ubicaciones específicas, sino que se sintieron en toda la institución. Dentro de ese ancho, varios patrones resultaban especialmente visibles.

Las compañeras representaban la mayoría de las visitantes de la oficina, en consonancia con las tendencias observadas en años anteriores. Los colegas con nombramientos de duración determinada representaron la mayor parte del trabajo de casos, lo que pone de manifiesto la vulnerabilidad particular asociada a la precariedad laboral durante periodos de cambio organizativo.

Observamos un uso relativamente similar de los servicios de la Oficina en todas las Regiones. La mayoría de los casos estaban relacionados con el proceso de reducción de personal.

En el trabajo de casos individuales, el coaching de conflictos fue la modalidad más frecuente, aplicada en aproximadamente el cuarenta y cinco por ciento de los casos. Esto refleja el énfasis de la Oficina en la participación temprana e informal. A través de estas conversaciones, se apoyó a los colegas para aclarar lo que estaba ocurriendo en su situación, reflexionar sobre sus intereses y considerar opciones constructivas antes de que las preocupaciones se endurecieran en disputas arraigadas o escalaran a procesos formales. En muchos casos, una sola conversación bien sincronizada era suficiente para cambiar una dinámica que se había ido construyendo con el tiempo.

En conjunto, estos patrones ilustran cómo las presiones de 2025 se tradujeron en preocupaciones concretas en el lugar de trabajo. También subrayan el papel de la resolución temprana e informal para ayudar a los colegas a navegar la complejidad en un momento en el que las condiciones organizativas dificultaban especialmente la claridad y el diálogo.

Del estancamiento al diálogo: la mediación en acción

DIPLOMACIA ITINERANTE



DIPLOMACIA ITINERANTE: La persona mediadora actúa como intermediaria confidencial, comunicando propuestas en privado con cada parte sin un encuentro directo cara a cara. Se utiliza cuando una reunión directa no es productiva o no es segura.

DISCUSIÓN FACILITADA



DISCUSIÓN FACILITADA: Un diálogo estructurado, pero menos formal, en el que la persona mediadora apoya la conversación directa para aclarar inquietudes, fomentar la comprensión y resolver conflictos de baja intensidad sin dirigir el resultado.

MEDIACIÓN ENTRE DOS PARTES



El proceso estructurado clásico en el que una persona mediadora ayuda a dos personas (p. ej., colegas o supervisor/a y miembro del personal) a negociar directamente, identificar soluciones y alcanzar un acuerdo voluntario.

MEDIACIÓN DE EQUIPO



MEDIACIÓN DE EQUIPO: Aborda conflictos que afectan a un equipo o a un departamento entero, involucrando a todas las personas integrantes. Se centra en las relaciones del grupo, la clarificación de las normas grupales y la mejora del entorno colectivo.

Donde la comunicación se había roto o la confianza entre las partes se había erosionado más allá de lo que el coaching individual de conflictos podía abordar, la mediación ofrecía un marco más estructurado para la participación. Durante el periodo del informe, la Oficina facilitó 316 procesos de mediación, incluidos casos de diplomacia pendular, que involucraban situaciones que ya no podían abordarse únicamente mediante la consulta de una sola parte.

La mayoría de las mediaciones implicaban disputas entre compañeros o entre miembros del personal y sus supervisores. Estos casos suelen surgir tras desacuerdos prolongados no resueltos, presión sostenida sobre la carga de trabajo o incertidumbre persistente sobre roles y contratos que afectaron las relaciones laborales. A través de un proceso confidencial y voluntario, apoyado por un tercero neutral, la mediación creó condiciones para la participación directa que de otro modo no estaban disponibles, permitiendo a las partes aclarar preocupaciones, probar suposiciones y, cuando fuera posible, identificar un camino a seguir.

En todos los casos de mediación, el acceso oportuno a la facilitación neutral propició una mayor implicación constructiva y contribuyó a evitar un mayor deterioro de las relaciones laborales. Los temas que surgieron de la mediación, incluyendo el impacto de la incertidumbre, la tensión en las relaciones evaluativas y la desalineación entre las expectativas individuales y los procesos organizativos, reflejaron de manera consistente los observados en el trabajo de casos individuales. En conjunto, estos casos ofrecieron una visión no solo de disputas discretas, sino también de las condiciones organizativas en las que se arraigó el conflicto, las cuales se examinan en la siguiente sección con mayor profundidad.

Observaciones Sistémicas: Temas emergentes

En diciembre de 2025, la Oficina emitió un [Informe Especial](#) que consolidaba la dinámica sistémica observada en miles de compromisos durante el proceso de reestructuración y reducción de personal. La visión general a continuación se basa en ese informe y en patrones que surgieron con mayor fuerza hacia finales de año. El informe completo está disponible en el Anexo A.

El tema definitorio de 2025 fue la ruptura de la confianza y del contrato psicológico entre los colegas y la institución. Muchos empleados describieron sentirse desconectados de las decisiones que afectan a sus equipos y a su trabajo, no solo por la crisis financiera en sí, sino también por la forma en que se desarrolló el proceso. Los anuncios rápidos, la consulta limitada y la comunicación desigual erosionaron la confianza en la equidad de los procesos de retención y selección. Los colegas enfatizaron repetidamente que fueron la experiencia del proceso, su ritmo, su secuenciación y la ausencia de diálogo los que más contribuyeron a la incertidumbre, el miedo y el desacuerdo. La crisis fue el terremoto; el proceso se convirtió en su repercusión.

A medida que avanzaba la reestructuración, muchos colegas pasaron a lo que describieron como un "estado de supervivencia", caracterizado por una mayor vigilancia, una reducción de la colaboración y una mayor sensibilidad ante las inequidades percibidas. Estas presiones contribuyeron a malentendidos, a relaciones tensas y a la disminución de la cohesión del equipo. Las brechas de comunicación, combinadas con la amplia dependencia de canales informales como los grupos de WhatsApp, intensificaron aún más la incertidumbre y ampliaron las brechas de percepción respecto de las decisiones, los roles y las expectativas.

Los siguientes temas se hicieron más visibles a medida que avanzaba el año:

Condiciones sistémicas que configuran el conflicto y la confianza en el lugar de trabajo en 2025



Condiciones que reducen los espacios seguros para expresarse

La inestabilidad prolongada ha reducido la percepción de seguridad para plantear inquietudes.



Condiciones que contribuyen a evitar conflictos y a la dependencia excesiva de los mecanismos formales

La incertidumbre redujo el diálogo temprano, lo que llevó a la escalada y a un mayor uso de los procesos formales.



Condiciones que afectan la independencia y la eficacia de los mecanismos de recurso

La capacidad reducida y los cambios estructurales en las funciones independientes de recurso limitaron el acceso oportuno a apoyo imparcial en un momento de mayor necesidad organizacional.



Condiciones que afectan la transparencia y la confianza del personal en los procesos de selección

Los procesos de selección se percibieron ampliamente como poco claros y insuficientemente transparentes.



Condiciones que afectan la equidad procedimental en la toma de decisiones médicas

La claridad y la revisión limitada redujeron la confianza en la equidad de las decisiones médicas.



Condiciones que limitan la representación significativa del personal y el diálogo

La consulta limitada debilitó la representación del personal en decisiones con gran impacto.



Condiciones que contribuyen a relaciones abrasivas y a una mayor vulnerabilidad del personal femenino

La presión y la reducción de la seguridad intensificaron comportamientos abrasivos, afectando desproporcionadamente al personal femenino.



Condiciones que afectan la capacidad del personal debido a la presión laboral sostenida y la fatiga

La reducción de personal y la presión sostenida deterioraron la capacidad individual y del equipo.

Condiciones que reducen los espacios seguros para alzar la VOZ

En el contexto de una inestabilidad sostenida, la Oficina observó una creciente reticencia entre los colegas a expresar sus preocupaciones o a hablar abiertamente sobre los problemas laborales. Muchos describieron que eligieron el silencio no porque no hubiera preocupaciones, sino porque ya no se sentían seguros o porque no valía la pena hacerlo. La incertidumbre persistente sobre la dirección organizativa, junto con experiencias recientes de disrupción y pérdida, pareció reducir el espacio percibido para plantear cuestiones, ofrecer opiniones disidentes o iniciar conversaciones difíciles.

Esta contracción de un espacio seguro para alzar la voz tuvo consecuencias tangibles. Problemas que antes podrían haberse puesto a la luz y abordado pronto tenían más probabilidades de permanecer sin expresarse, lo que permitía que la frustración y la desconfianza se acumularan con el tiempo. La Oficina observó que, en este contexto, la erosión de la seguridad psicológica fue menos un cambio repentino que una adaptación gradual a una inestabilidad prolongada, con los colegas recalibrando su compromiso para minimizar el riesgo percibido. Estas dinámicas subrayan la importancia de restaurar canales de diálogo predecibles y seguros si la intervención temprana y la resolución informal quieren seguir siendo viables.

Condiciones que contribuyen a la evitación de conflictos y a la excesiva dependencia de mecanismos formales

Las presiones de la reestructuración amplificaron una tendencia de larga data a evitar conflictos en toda la organización. La Oficina observó que muchas preocupaciones planteadas durante el periodo de informe podían abordarse antes a nivel de equipo o de supervisión, pero quedaban sin expresar o sin resolver. La reticencia a interactuar directamente se asociaba comúnmente con el miedo a las repercusiones, la incertidumbre sobre cómo iniciar conversaciones difíciles o la preferencia por esperar a que la inestabilidad organizativa disminuyera. Como resultado, los problemas tenían más probabilidades de acumularse y escalar, lo que limitaba la oportunidad de una resolución temprana e informal.

Al mismo tiempo, la Oficina observó una creciente dependencia de mecanismos formales de recursos, incluida la Revisión de Evaluación de la Gestión (MER), sin una exploración previa de vías informales. Esta dinámica contribuyó a un aumento en el número de casos que llegaron a procesos formales que de otro modo podrían haberse beneficiado de un diálogo anterior, y desvió la atención de situaciones en las que un apoyo neutral oportuno podría haber ayudado a evitar una mayor escalada.

Los directivos y las estructuras internas de apoyo operaron bajo una presión significativa durante todo este periodo. Muchos supervisores informaron sentirse desinformados sobre las decisiones que afectan a sus equipos, inseguros respecto del alcance de su autoridad y limitados en su capacidad para orientar a sus equipos mientras estos navegan por su propia incertidumbre profesional. Los equipos que sufrían cambios estructurales frecuentes experimentaban una cohesión disminuida y expresaban la necesidad de espacios estructurados para sacar a la luz preocupaciones, realinear expectativas y restablecer normas de trabajo compartidas.

En un pequeño número de situaciones especialmente sensibles, estas dinámicas se extendieron más allá de las relaciones laborales individuales e involucraron directamente a la organización como parte. Durante el periodo de informe, la Oficina facilitó cinco procesos de mediación entre el personal y la Administración/Dirección tras las Solicitudes de Evaluación de la Dirección. Estos casos se trataron como excepcionales y requirieron una atención cuidadosa a las dinámicas de poder y una clara articulación de la naturaleza voluntaria del proceso. Aunque la mediación no sustituye a los mecanismos formales de rendición de cuentas, estos casos limitados demuestran cómo un diálogo estructurado e imparcial puede complementar los procesos existentes al permitir una comprensión más clara de las opciones, apoyar transiciones dignas y ayudar tanto a la organización como a los colegas afectados a avanzar sin mayores escalas. Estas muy limitadas mediaciones posteriores a la MER ponen de manifiesto la necesidad de que la Administración/Dirección haga un mayor uso de la mediación en situaciones en las que las decisiones administrativas se disputan a través de la MER.

Condiciones que afectan la independencia y eficacia de los mecanismos de recurso

La Oficina observó una creciente tensión en los mecanismos independientes de apoyo y recursos de la institución durante un periodo de mayor presión organizativa. Funciones como Recursos Humanos, Asuntos Jurídicos, Servicios de Bienestar del Personal, la Oficina del Ombudsman y Mediador, y la Oficina de Ética experimentaron un aumento significativo en la demanda al mismo tiempo que se redujo su propia capacidad, personal o representación. En conjunto, estas funciones sirven como puntos de acceso temprano para el personal que busca orientación, aclaración o apoyo. Las limitaciones en su disponibilidad y alcance crearon brechas observables en un momento en que la dependencia de servicios independientes e imparciales era especialmente alta.

Como se refleja en [JIU/REP/2025/5](#), la eficacia de la función de ombudsman y mediación se basa en su independencia y en la disponibilidad de recursos humanos y financieros adecuados. Principios similares se aplican a otras funciones independientes de supervisión y de apoyo. La Oficina observó que las reducciones o cambios estructurales que afectan a estos mecanismos limitan la capacidad de la organización para responder de manera informal y proactiva ante preocupaciones emergentes. Los ajustes administrativos, incluidos cambios que afectan la antigüedad o la posición de cargos imparciales, también corren el riesgo de indicar una disminución del énfasis institucional en la independencia. En conjunto, estas dinámicas redujeron la confianza del personal en los mecanismos de recurso y limitaron la capacidad global de la organización para gestionar de manera resiliente los conflictos y el estrés organizativo.

Condiciones que afectan a la transparencia y la confianza del personal en los procesos de selección y reclutamiento

La reestructuración sometió a un mayor escrutinio los procesos de reclutamiento y selección. En todos los compromisos, la Oficina observó una preocupación persistente entre el personal por la transparencia y la equidad en la forma en que se tomaron y se comunicaron las decisiones de reclutamiento. Aunque la Oficina no evalúa los méritos de las decisiones individuales, sus colegas planteaban con frecuencia preguntas sobre cómo se aplicaban los procesos de selección en la práctica, especialmente respecto del alcance de la discreción gerencial y de la coherencia de los criterios utilizados.

Las preocupaciones reportadas fueron las siguientes: (a) la retroalimentación tras los ejercicios de reclutamiento era de carácter general y no explicaba de manera significativa la base de los resultados de la selección; (b) los colegas en las listas de consideración prioritaria expresaron incertidumbre sobre por qué no habían sido seleccionados para puestos para los que cumplían los requisitos; (c) en varios casos, la Oficina también señaló confusión cuando los puestos abolidos durante la reestructuración fueron posteriormente-reanunciados, lo que, independientemente de la razón subyacente, contribuyó a dudas sobre la previsibilidad e integridad del proceso.

En conjunto, estas experiencias señalan una brecha entre cómo se diseñan e implementan los procesos de selección y cómo los experimenta el personal durante periodos de cambio organizacional. Subrayan la importancia de una comunicación clara, una retroalimentación significativa y específica para cada puesto-, y la aplicación coherente de los criterios de reclutamiento para mantener la confianza del personal en la equidad de los mecanismos de selección y reclutamiento.

Condiciones que afectan a la equidad procesal en la -toma de decisiones relacionadas con el ámbito médico

La Oficina observó un patrón de preocupaciones relacionadas con la aplicación de los marcos de baja médica del ACNUR. Las preocupaciones abarcan la puntualidad y transparencia de las determinaciones médicas, la coherencia de la comunicación respecto a las decisiones que afectan al estado de la baja por enfermedad y la accesibilidad de mecanismos de revisión independientes cuando dichas decisiones fueron impugnadas. La Oficina observó incertidumbre respecto de los criterios aplicados a los casos y oportunidades limitadas para implicarse de manera significativa en el proceso.

En conjunto, estas observaciones plantean cuestiones estructurales sobre cómo se ejerce, se comunica y se revisa la discreción médica, y sobre si los marcos actuales proporcionan al personal suficiente claridad y acceso a procesos procedimentalmente justos. La Oficina ha compartido estas

preocupaciones con las partes interesadas pertinentes y continuará supervisando los avances en esta área.

Condiciones que limitan la representación significativa y el diálogo del personal

Durante el periodo de informe, la Oficina observó una creciente preocupación por el espacio limitado para una representación significativa del personal y para el diálogo en los procesos de toma de decisiones, con un profundo impacto en el personal. Colegas y representantes del personal describieron situaciones en las que la consulta se sentía limitada o superficial, con escasas oportunidades de participación independiente antes de tomar decisiones. En el contexto de la inestabilidad continua, esto redujo el papel percibido de la representación del personal y debilitó la confianza en que las perspectivas del personal pudieran influir de manera significativa en los resultados.

Al mismo tiempo, los representantes del personal manifestaban a la Oficina una mayor sensación de vulnerabilidad al desempeñar sus funciones representativas. Muchos estaban y siguen operando en entornos donde las tensiones son altas, las apuestas son significativas y la exposición personal se siente mayor. También operan en burocracias altamente jerárquicas (operaciones, despachos, etc.). Esto limita su capacidad para plantear preocupaciones de manera contundente o para actuar como interlocutores eficaces entre el personal y la dirección. La Oficina observó que cuando los propios representantes se sienten insuficientemente protegidos o escuchados, el espacio para el diálogo constructivo se reduce aún más, lo que aumenta el riesgo de que las preocupaciones queden sin ser abordadas o surjan únicamente a través de canales escalatorios.

Las condiciones que contribuyen a relaciones abrasivas y a una mayor vulnerabilidad para el personal femenino

A lo largo del año, la Oficina observó un aumento de las preocupaciones relacionadas con relaciones laborales abrasivas o tensas, especialmente en entornos caracterizados por una presión sostenida y una menor tolerancia al desafío. Aunque estas dinámicas afectaban a los compañeros en distintos roles y niveles, el personal femenino parecía experimentar una mayor vulnerabilidad en dichas interacciones. Los compañeros describieron patrones de comunicación despectiva, escrutinio desproporcionado o respuestas directivas abruptas, que resultaban más difíciles de abordar abiertamente en un contexto de inestabilidad continua.

Estas dinámicas estuvieron estrechamente vinculadas a la contracción más amplia de la seguridad psicológica observada durante el año. La Oficina señaló que en entornos donde el espacio para alzar la voz se había reducido, el comportamiento abrasivo era más probable que no fuera cuestionado y persistiera con el tiempo. El personal femenino describió reticencia a expresar preocupaciones o a establecer límites, citando el temor a repercusiones negativas en un entorno profesional ya de por sí incierto. En conjunto, estas observaciones ponen de manifiesto cómo la inestabilidad prolongada puede agravar el daño relacional y afectar de manera desigual al personal cuando las dinámicas de poder y género se entrelazan, lo que refuerza el silencio y limita la intervención temprana.

Condiciones que afectan a la capacidad del personal debido a la presión sostenida de carga de trabajo y la fatiga

La Oficina también observó una fatiga generalizada, vinculada a la presión sostenida de la carga de trabajo y a la disminución de la capacidad del equipo. Tras la reducción de personal, muchos compañeros describieron que operaban con menos recursos mientras asumían responsabilidades más amplias durante periodos prolongados. Esta combinación de demandas crecientes y capacidad reducida contribuyó al agotamiento, a una menor resiliencia y a la limitación de la capacidad para abordar de manera temprana las preocupaciones emergentes.

La Oficina señaló que la fatiga en este contexto no era simplemente un problema de bienestar individual, sino una condición sistémica que afectaba cómo funcionaban los equipos, se tomaban decisiones y gestionaban los conflictos. Tanto colegas como responsables describieron un espacio reducido para la reflexión, una comunicación más reactiva y menor tolerancia a la incertidumbre o al desacuerdo. Estas dinámicas aumentaron el riesgo de que los malentendidos escalaran y de que las preocupaciones que requerían un compromiso reflexivo fueran pospuestas, formalizadas o no abordadas.

En conjunto, las observaciones anteriores reflejan cómo las condiciones organizativas pueden moldear profundamente la forma en que los colegas experimentaron el conflicto en 2025. Constituyen la base de las prioridades de la Oficina para 2026.

Mirando hacia el futuro: Nuestros compromisos para 2026

Los acontecimientos de 2025 dejaron una huella duradera en la confianza, el sentido de seguridad y la confianza de sus colegas en la institución. A medida que ACNUR entra en un periodo de relativa estabilización, las prioridades de la Oficina para 2026 reflejan lo que los colegas han destacado de forma constante en los compromisos: la necesidad de una comunicación más clara, de un apoyo más temprano y de espacios donde se puedan plantear preocupaciones sin temor a represalias. Los compromisos que se describen a continuación se basan en lo que la Oficina observó a lo largo de miles de interacciones confidenciales y en los problemas sistémicos que siguen sin ser abordados.

Reconstruyendo la confianza y apoyando la recuperación del equipo

Muchos colegas enfatizaron la importancia de una comunicación más clara, de un espacio para hacer preguntas y de comportamientos de liderazgo que modelen la equidad y la rendición de cuentas. A medida que se formen nuevas estructuras, los equipos necesitarán oportunidades para restablecer normas compartidas, reconstruir la cohesión y reconectar tras largos periodos de incertidumbre. La Oficina seguirá ofreciendo espacios individuales y grupales que fomenten la reflexión, el diálogo y la confianza en los procesos institucionales, especialmente cuando los equipos navegan por las secuelas de cambios rápidos.

En 2026, la Oficina organizará una renovada serie de Ubuntu Community Cafés 2026, diseñados como foros estructurados y confidenciales para el diálogo y la retroalimentación orientados al futuro. Estas sesiones ofrecerán oportunidades para la reflexión colectiva y el compromiso en torno a valores compartidos, incluidos los expresados en el Plan de Acción de Integridad del Alto Comisionado. Al crear

espacios previsible e imparciales para el diálogo, la Oficina pretende apoyar condiciones que permitan reconstruir la confianza con el tiempo y fortalecer la seguridad psicológica en los equipos.

Profundización de las vías de intervención temprana y resolución informal

Una de las lecciones más claras de 2025 fue el coste de esperar. Las preocupaciones que podrían haberse resuelto mediante una conversación directa se intensificaron porque no existían las condiciones para un diálogo temprano. En 2026, la Oficina continuará promoviendo enfoques informales en las respuestas de la dirección a las quejas laborales. En otros ámbitos, los enfoques informales de primer curso se promoverán mediante coaching en conflictos, formación en conversaciones difíciles y apoyo personalizado para los gestores que navegan por problemas en sus fases iniciales. Desarrollar la competencia en la gestión de conflictos en toda la plantilla sigue siendo una inversión a largo plazo y resultará en climas de equipo más saludables, una reducción de la escalada y una organización mejor preparada para afrontar el próximo periodo de cambio.

Garantizar el acceso a los servicios del ombudsman en todas las regiones

El acceso a la resolución informal sigue siendo desigual, y 2025 hizo que esa brecha fuera más visible. La Oficina reforzó su presencia en Asia y el Pacífico a través de su centro en Bangkok, mientras que las presiones financieras exigieron reducir su presencia en Nairobi y en Pretoria. Los colegas de esas regiones continuaron recibiendo apoyo a través de centros operativos y modalidades remotas, pero el acceso equitativo sigue siendo un compromiso inconcluso. La Oficina continuará fortaleciendo la divulgación y trabajando para lograr una cobertura más consistente según lo permitan los recursos.

Fortalecimiento de los mecanismos de independencia y sostenibilidad de los recursos

Un compromiso principal para 2026 es defender las condiciones institucionales que permitan a las oficinas independientes operar de manera eficaz. Como se refleja en JIU/REP/2025/5, la eficacia de la función del Ombudsman y Mediación —y, por extensión, de la Oficina de Ética y otros órganos de supervisión— depende fundamentalmente de la independencia y de la disponibilidad de recursos humanos y financieros adecuados.

En el próximo año, la Oficina se comunicará con la dirección para asegurar que los cambios administrativos o estructurales no indiquen inadvertidamente una disminución del énfasis institucional en la independencia o en la antigüedad. Proteger el alcance y la capacidad de estos "puntos de acceso temprano" no es solo una cuestión de cumplimiento administrativo, sino también un requisito previo para gestionar el estrés organizativo de manera resiliente. Sin mecanismos de recurso robustos, visibles y bien financiados, la organización corre el riesgo de una reducción permanente de la confianza del personal y de la incapacidad para abordar las preocupaciones emergentes antes de que se transformen en crisis.

Preocupación emergente: Colegas en acuerdos de la fuerza laboral afiliada

A medida que la organización amplía el uso de arreglos de plantilla afiliados y reduce los nombramientos de duración fija, la Oficina observó una creciente incertidumbre entre los colegas

respecto a los marcos administrativos aplicables, los derechos, los procesos de gestión del desempeño y las vías para expresar sus preocupaciones. Estas observaciones apuntan a una brecha creciente entre el alcance de los servicios de resolución informal y la diversidad de la disposición laboral en el ACNUR. La Oficina se implicará con las partes interesadas relevantes para fomentar una mayor claridad sobre las vías de apoyo disponibles y ayudar a garantizar que los colegas, independientemente de su estatus contractual, puedan acceder a vías de resolución informal.

En conjunto, estas prioridades reflejan el papel de la Oficina del Ombudsman como un espacio en el que las experiencias individuales, compartidas con confianza, pueden informar una comprensión organizativa más amplia. Las ideas de este informe pertenecen a los colegas que depositaron su confianza en la Oficina y se ofrecen como una contribución a la reflexión continua sobre lo que necesita el personal de ACNUR y sobre cómo las condiciones institucionales pueden apoyarlos mejor. El año que viene requerirá una atención sostenida a los colegas que aún sufren los efectos del reciente cambio organizativo, a los equipos que se adaptan a nuevas realidades y a las condiciones que permiten plantear preocupaciones a tiempo, antes de cristalizarse en crisis.

La Oficina sigue comprometida a acompañar a colegas y directivos en este trabajo y a apoyar al ACNUR en la creación de un entorno interno en el que su personal se sienta tan protegido y respetado como aquellos a quienes presta servicio externamente.

Anexo I

Ombuds Special Report: Systemic Observations on UNHCR's 2025 Downsizing and Restructuring Process

December 2025

**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
AND MEDIATOR**



Executive Summary

The 2025 funding freeze by the United States, combined with additional donor reductions, constituted an unprecedented shock to UNHCR's operations, financial stability, and workforce. Following this turn, the organization undertook a rapid coping response with restructuring and downsizing process ("the process") to preserve operational viability, resulting in approximately 5,400 staff departures and widespread office reductions or closures between late 2024 and September 2025. Staff who engaged with the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator consistently acknowledged the scale and immediacy of the crisis and understood that leadership had to take urgent, painful decisions to safeguard the organization. Many colleagues expressed appreciation for early communication efforts, town halls, videos and visible engagement from several senior leaders including the Global Staff Council, which contributed to initial feelings of solidarity and shared purpose.

As the crisis evolved, however, staff repeatedly reported that this early goodwill was difficult to sustain. Across categories and levels, colleagues described perceptions of very limited transparency, unclear decision-making criteria and opacity, and restricted opportunities to engage in collective problem-solving. Managers and Representatives—who themselves felt insufficiently informed—reported difficulty supporting their teams. These perceptions were shaped not only by the crisis itself and its management, but also by long-standing cultural patterns of hierarchical decision-making, conflict avoidance, and guarded power at senior levels, with decision-making largely centralized and fewer opportunities for dialogue and social negotiation that are typically needed in large-scale crisis management and transitions.

A consistent theme in staff feedback was the emergence of a pervasive "survival mode" or "survival state." Staff described withdrawing from organizational processes, focusing on personal security, and experiencing heightened anxiety and fatigue as restructuring and downsizing expanded from initially affected groups to the broader workforce without seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Messages intended to convey fairness—such as "no one will be immune" or "we are all in the same boat"—were often experienced as increasing uncertainty and fueling competition among staff categories. Colleagues expressed that this survival dynamic had tangible impacts on morale, psychological safety, collaboration, productivity, and organizational functioning, and contributed to what many experienced as a rupture in the "psychological contract": the unwritten mutual expectations that support trust and engagement.

Staff repeatedly noted that while the funding cuts were an undeniable and unavoidable shock, the way the crisis was managed created an internal crisis – much like an earthquake and its aftershocks. This led to a prolonged survival state with consequential impact on UNHCR's short-, medium-, and long-term resilience, effectiveness, and reputation. Many expressed concern that the absence of a sustained crisis management mechanism and participatory engagement after the initial shock contributed to a loss of direction, diminished belonging, and weakened cohesion across the organization.

This Special Report, authored by the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, does not evaluate or review the decisions made by leadership. Rather, it consolidates the themes, perceptions, and systemic patterns consistently raised by colleagues through the Office's confidential channels and through its broader engagement, including case work, dialogues, stakeholders' engagements, workshops, surveys, ethnographic observations and Ubuntu Community Cafés. These individual and collective (teams) realities have real impacts on organizational functioning and are offered for leadership reflection.

In keeping with the Ombudsman's mandate as an independent, neutral, and informal resource within the UN internal justice system, this report is to support organizational health without prescribing

binding solutions or attributing responsibility. Additionally, the report identifies critical areas for reflection to help the organization transition from survival to recovery. It presents options for consideration—such as the potential establishment of a standing cross-functional crisis response mechanism and the safeguarding of independent and oversight bodies—to strengthen communication, rebuild trust, foster inclusion, and support the organization’s recovery and renewed collective purpose.

I seize this opportunity to extend my profound gratitude to the UNHCR leadership and managers; the Global Staff Council and Staff Association; our dedicated colleagues around the world; our key stakeholders; and the invaluable Ombudsman and Mediation team.

With appreciation,



Dr Youssoupha Niang

Ombudsman and Mediator

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Mandate and Purpose of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator

The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator (the Office) is a confidential, neutral, independent, and informal resource available to all UNHCR personnel. As part of the United Nations internal justice system, its mandate is to support the resolution of workplace concerns, enable constructive dialogue, and surface systemic insights that may help strengthen organizational health.

The Office provides a safe and impartial avenue for staff and managers to explore concerns, clarify issues, consider options, and reflect on challenges occurring at individual, team, or organizational levels. Engagement with the Office is voluntary and informal; it is not a channel for formal investigations or determinations of wrongdoing. However, the Office uses informal fact findings to triangulate information.

Through its work at these different levels, ranging from individual case work to operational support, the Office has access to multiple perspectives on how organizational dynamics are experienced across the institution. Supporting staff globally, facilitating dialogue, engaging line managers, observing systemic patterns, and reviewing organizational dynamics gives the Office a unique vantage point on how policies, decisions, and internal processes are experienced by the workforce. These experiences are important indicators of organizational health.

When widespread, recurring issues emerge, the Ombuds function may consolidate those observations into a Special Report, with the aim of assisting leadership in understanding the human and organizational dynamics at stake. This Special Report is issued in that spirit. It does not assign blame or judge decisions made during a moment of extraordinary constraint. Rather, it documents how the restructuring and downsizing process was experienced by staff across grades, contract types, and duty stations, and what these experiences reveal about the organization's culture, governance, and resilience.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide senior leadership with an integrated, organization-wide view of systemic dynamics observed since the onset of the 2025 funding crisis.
- Highlight factors that contributed to staff perceptions, reactions, and challenges.
- Support informed reflection during the current transition and recovery phase; and
- Offer non-prescriptive options for strengthening organizational trust, cohesion, and resilience.

The Office remains committed to supporting both staff and leadership in navigating this challenging period and supporting a healthier, more sustainable organizational future

Methodology, Scope and Limitations

The observations presented in this report are derived from aggregated and anonymized insights from:

- Ombudsman and Mediator consultations and case trends
- Facilitated dialogues
- Stakeholders' engagements
- Staff feedback, notably the Design and Development Service (DDS) survey at the outset of the process, Pigeonhole inputs, and the Global Staff Council (GSC) survey on workplace well-being and dignity
- Internal communications, including town halls, official notices, HR communications, policy updates, and video messages
- Review of administrative information, including data from Workday and Power BI
- Global and regional workshops delivered by the Office, including delivering difficult news and supporting organizational transformation
- Ubuntu Community Cafés facilitated by the Office
- Informal fact finding and triangulation to validate recurring themes
- Upward feedback and systemic conversations with managers, teams, and oversight and integrity entities

The findings are qualitative and reflect the experiences of more than 4,000 colleagues across all regions and operations who engaged directly or indirectly with the Office during the period from February to November 2025. Inputs include perspectives from both separated and remaining staff, collected with full respect for confidentiality, and span headquarters, regional bureaus, and operations. This report aims to complement other internal reviews, evaluations, and audits covering the same period and should be read as a reflection of how the restructuring and downsizing were experienced across the organization.

Several limitations should be noted, including that travel constraints during the reporting period limited the extent of direct, in-person field engagement by the Office, as well as the participation in dialogues, surveys, and other inputs was voluntary and self-selecting rather than randomized, which may introduce memory, and information biases, thereby preventing the statistical analysis of the findings.

The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator was itself affected by the downsizing and restructuring processes, which influenced its capacity to fully implement all aspects of its mandate during this period. Other departments were also undergoing changes, which may have affected their ability to respond to requests for information and to engage with the Office in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Context: Organizational Crisis and Funding Cuts

The organizational crisis that unfolded in 2025 did not emerge in isolation. The period leading into 2025 was shaped by significant global and internal pressures.

Pre-existing Financial Strain (2023–2024) and transformation fatigue

The 2025 crisis was not an isolated event but a culmination of pre-existing pressures. For the two years preceding the shock (2023–2024), UNHCR was already navigating a period of significant financial strain, driven by global dynamics such as inflationary shocks, economic contraction, and the redirection of donor priorities toward other contexts. These continuous budget shortfalls had already necessitated progressive reductions in available funding, leading to early post cuts, persistent calls for efficiency measures, and internal discussions on reshaping the organization's viability. This context of uncertainty, combined with the consequences of long-running transformation processes, had already begun to strain staff morale and contribute to widespread fatigue, prompting colleagues to question the organizational model. This established a foundation of anxiety and disillusionment, encapsulated by the recurring sentiment, "I don't recognize my organization anymore," long before the deeper rupture of the "psychological contract" in 2025.

Shock of the 2025 US Funding Freeze

The freeze of US funding in late January/early February 2025 triggered an unprecedented crisis. Funding that had already been approved for the fiscal year was suddenly withdrawn or frozen, creating a seismic financial shock. While some degree of reduction had been anticipated due to the political context, the immediacy, scale, and retroactive nature of the freeze, affecting already-approved allocations, were not foreseen.

The impact was further compounded by additional cuts from other major donors, particularly from the European Union and the United Kingdom, creating a sudden and severe liquidity shock. Within days, the organization was forced to take measures previously unimaginable in timeframe or scope. Many staff described the situation as "seismic," "destabilizing," or "unprecedented," both in terms of financial magnitude and the speed with which the organization had to react.

This event fundamentally altered the organization's operational and financial viability and accelerated restructuring and downsizing measures. At the time of writing, elements of this organizational change are still ongoing, and structures, roles, and workloads continue to evolve in many parts of the organization.

As colleagues brought their experiences of this prolonged period of financial strain, restructuring, and downsizing to the Office, recurring patterns and systemic themes began to emerge. This Special Report was prepared in that context to consolidate those observations, situate them within a broader organizational perspective, and contribute to learning and preparedness for current and future periods of crisis and transition.

Culture as an Amplifier of Crisis

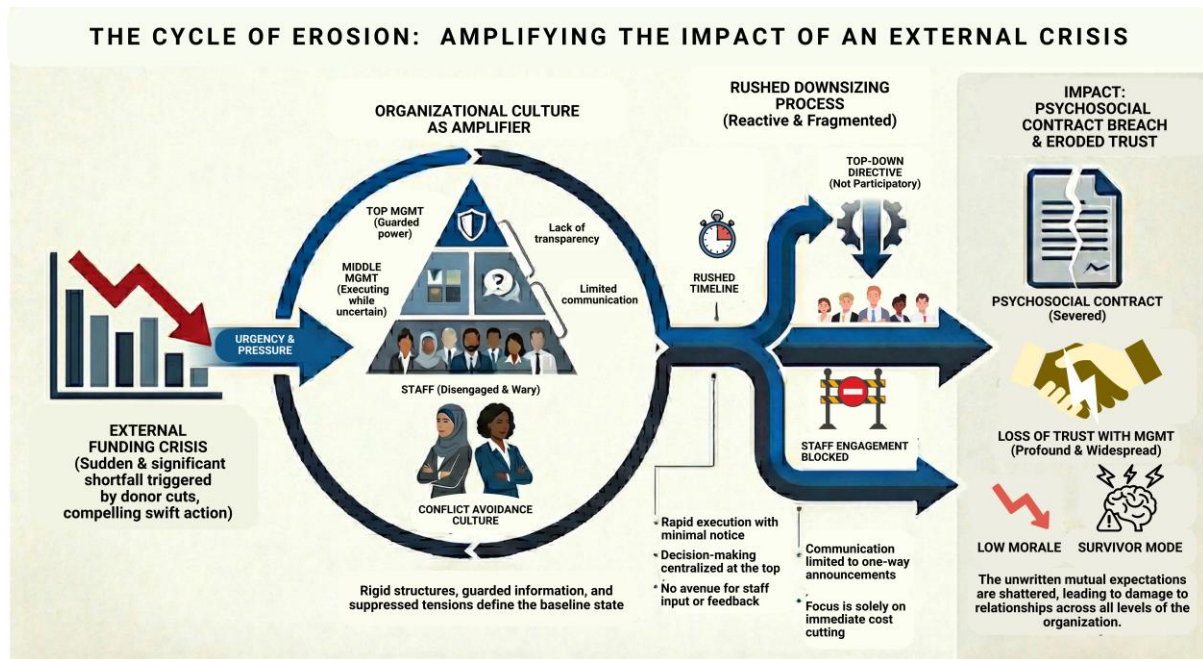


Figure 1. The cycle of erosion; how pre-existing cultural dynamics in UNHCR amplified the impact of the external funding crisis.

Prior to and during the 2025 crisis, several pre-existing cultural patterns within the organization acted as amplifiers of the crisis rather than buffers against it. These dynamics were consistently visible in both staff cases brought to the Office and in broader organizational processes.

Colleagues frequently described a long-standing tendency towards conflict avoidance and guarded power at senior levels, coupled with an extremely hierarchical organizational structure and significant opacity in its functioning. This culture severely limited open dialogue on difficult issues, resulting in decision-making that felt highly centralized. Staff reported few opportunities for either genuine consultation or social negotiation, both of which are essential during major organizational changes. In a time of crisis, these patterns led people to experience decision making processes as solely top-down, which naturally increased feelings of disempowerment, frustration, and a weakening of trust.

The crisis also acutely surfaced signs of what many described as “friction” in the organizational culture: energy was diverted away from core mandate implementation towards internal, survival-oriented behaviors. Even before the restructuring began, many colleagues expressed reluctance and fear to raise concerns openly, signaling limited psychological safety. As the restructuring and downsizing unfolded, this led to staff spending more time and effort navigating internal dynamics, protecting positions, and competing for posts and resources rather than focusing primarily on operational delivery.

This sustained pressure contributed to what many staff referred to as a “survival state”: a climate in which competition and self-protection overshadowed collaboration. Messages intended to convey fairness—such as “no one will be immune,” “we are all in the same boat,” or “it is not you, it is the post”—were often experienced as inconsistent with the uneven impacts on different groups and levels, eroding confidence in organizational fairness and illustrating a deeper culture of conflict avoidance.

Taken together, these cultural dynamics—conflict avoidance, guarded decision-making, fear-based, and survival-oriented competition—created the very conditions in which the external funding crisis

and internal restructuring were experienced as significantly more destabilizing than they might have been in a more open, dialogic, and trust-rich environment.

Finally, it is essential to note that other elements also shaped the context: a strong commitment to the mandate and an expectation of organizational growth comparable to mandate needs. However, the organizational culture was defined by staff vulnerability and rigid hierarchy that precipitated the formal escalation of workplace grievances. Notably, while leadership was perceived as benefitting from a sense of ‘esprit de corps’, the wider staff body remained deeply fractured.

The Institutional Response

In response to the financial shock and associated budgetary constraints described above, UNHCR leadership implemented wide-ranging emergency measures to ensure operational viability, continuity of protection and assistance, and compliance with financial responsibilities. The primary purpose of these measures was to slow expenditure quickly and enable the organization to meet its financial obligations in the face of a severe liquidity shock.

Many staff who contacted the Office indicated that they understood these early decisions as necessary, given the severity and immediacy of the situation. Several described the initial phase as one of solidarity and collective resolve, despite shock, fear, and sadness.

Early actions focused on rapid cost containment and structural adjustment. These included freezing non-essential travel, implementing operation-level budget reductions (OL), increasing energy efficiencies in UNHCR facilities, adjusting cleaning, maintenance and local expenditure arrangements, revising parking arrangements, and initiating wider post reductions. In parallel, the organization accelerated restructuring efforts that had already been under discussion, including adjustments to contractual arrangements, suspension or non-renewal of certain temporary assignments and other non-staff contracts, and, over time, the reconfiguration, downsizing, or closure of some field offices.

Leadership and DHR (now DPM) also activated a series of measures to communicate with staff and create spaces for interaction. These included three global town halls convened by the High Commissioner, targeted HR webinars (including PWS) tailored to different contract types, meetings between the High Commissioner and Representatives, regional briefings, Ubuntu Community Cafés facilitated by the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Rapid-Response Line managed by the Global Staff Council and increased written communication through official notices and intranet updates. These efforts were generally appreciated and well attended, particularly in the early stages, and contributed to a sense of shared concern for the organization’s future.

Over time, however, many colleagues reported that these engagements were experienced more as one-way information-sharing than as opportunities for dialogue, influence, or joint problem-solving. Staff frequently described uncertainty regarding the broader strategy, the timeline, and how various decisions and measures were connected. From the perspective of those who contacted the Office, the overall response increasingly appeared fragmented, opaque and reactive rather than part of a clearly articulated, coordinated crisis-management approach.

Staff accounts also indicate that the scope, pace, and perceived timing of downsizing and restructuring measures varied considerably across operations, regions, and headquarters. Some operations received earlier, clearer direction while others reported receiving rapidly shifting or contradictory instructions. In several incidences, managers themselves learned about changes only at the point of implementation, which limited their ability to support their teams and to contextualize decisions locally. These variations shaped how staff interpreted the fairness, coherence, and rationale of the

overall

process.

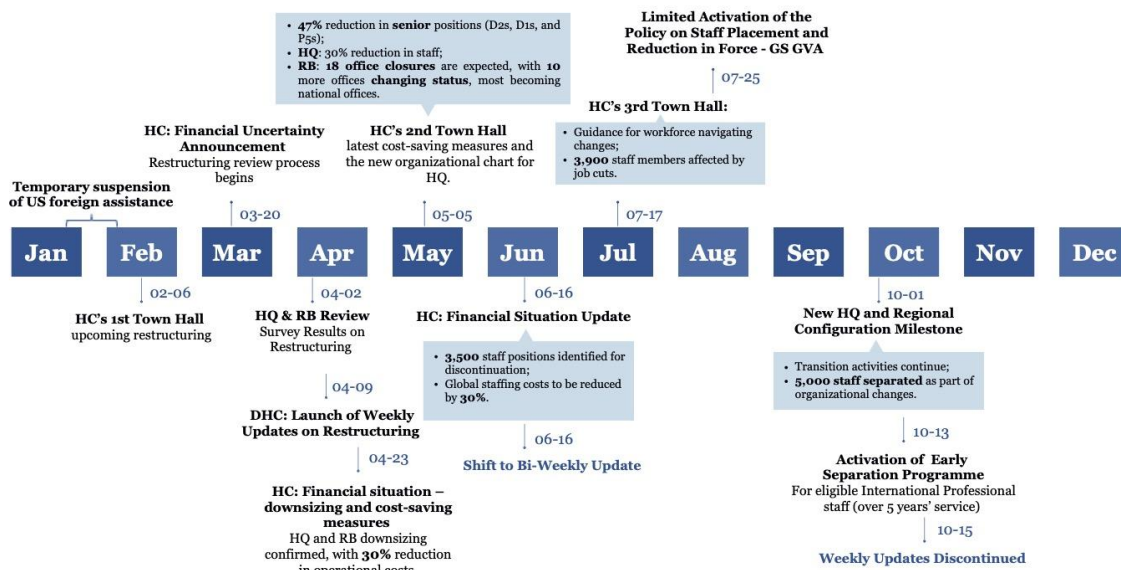


Figure 2. Timeline of the 2025 Funding Crisis and Restructuring Milestones in UNHCR.

This figure illustrates the institutional response to the funding crisis. It highlights also two different moments of institutional communication, before August and after August where the institution became quite silent in terms of communication.

A more detailed timeline with key dates and events is provided in Annex.

The Community Reaction

In the early stages of the crisis response, staff demonstrated a strong awareness of the external nature of the shock and expressed solidarity and empathy with one another. Many mobilized informal support structures such as peer networks, ad hoc check-ins, and other channels of care, —reflecting both resilience and a shared commitment to the organization’s mandate.

As the situation evolved, and as uncertainty and perception of fairness and transparency over the restructuring and downsizing measures persisted over time, this initial cohesion and solidarity devolved into feelings of fatigue, anxiety, disillusion and disengagement. Prolonged exposure to uncertainty, perceived lack of direction in addressing the crisis and concerns about the organization’s future direction as well as the ability of its workplace grievance mechanisms to fully operate contributed to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and powerlessness of personnel about how the restructuring and downsizing process were being carried out.

Many colleagues described a growing mistrust in both the decision-making process and in those perceived as key decision-makers. For some managers and teams, this was experienced as disempowerment and disengagement. These dynamics were further reflected in heightened interpersonal and organizational conflicts brought to the attention of the Office, indicating that the strain was being felt not only at structural levels but also in day-to-day working relationships.

From the perspective of staff who contacted the Office, the crisis response did not always appear to be guided by a clear, centralized crisis-management structure. Many decisions were perceived as having been made and implemented in silos, and communication gaps were reported to have widened over time. From an Ombuds perspective, the absence of a visible, holistic response mechanism that could integrate perspectives from the administration, the Ethics office, the Global Staff Council, Medical Services, the Inspector General's Office, and the Ombudsman and Mediator's Office, and others, may have limited the extent to which the transition could be experienced as coherent, empathetic, and well-coordinated. In the same vein, process design and coordination from inside the organization introduced several biases (status quo bias, in-group bias, procedural bias, implicit bias, parochial empathy), and thereby suspicion of the outcomes and recommendations.

Systemic observations on the Process

The process unfolded under extraordinary circumstances. Faced with a sudden and significant funding shortfall, the organization was compelled to act swiftly to preserve operational viability. This urgency shaped a response that many staff experienced as reactive, fragmented, and at times lacking overall coherence.

Perception gaps

From the accounts brought to the Office, three main perception gaps emerged in how the process was understood:

- **Rationale and objectives.** Staff reported receiving differing messages as to whether the process was driven by a pre-existing three-year plan or by the financial crisis only.
- **Geneva G staff with indefinite contract and staff in between assignments:** Similar to the rationale gap, deeply held assumptions prevailed that these two specific groups of staff were the perceived target to “get rid of” during the restructuring. These perceptions were not only circulating informally but were, in some instances, validated by their own managers or reinforced by the significant and valid questions raised about the fairness of the selection processes in which they were compelled to participate. This dynamic amplified their anxiety and fueled the sense that the process was driven by hidden agendas rather than objective, needs-based criteria, further contributing to the fundamental shift in the psychological and social contract between personnel and the institution.
- **Retention and selection processes:** In many instances, colleagues consistently reported a perception that the decision to retain post/personnel or to be selected for a new position was solely driven by the proximity with the manager rather than by objective, clear criteria aligned with the mandate needs. This perceived manipulation of the selection system severely undermined confidence in organizational fairness, amplifying anxiety and fueling the sense that decisions were based on favoritism rather than merit, further corroding institutional trust and the psychological contract.
- **Differences across locations and levels:** Experiences varied significantly between field offices, regional bureaus, and Headquarters, as well as across personnel categories. For many, these disparities appeared to contradict institutional values of unity, raising serious questions regarding leadership accountability.
- **Unspoken assumptions and perceived parallel agendas:** Colleagues described assumptions about anticipated leadership changes or a return to 2017 staffing levels, which influenced how they interpreted the process.

Taken together, these perception gaps contributed to a sense, among many staff that the organization's engagement in the change process was not always clearly articulated or consistently understood, and that responses were sometimes experienced as piecemeal. This, in turn, generated additional uncertainty, mistrust in the process and fundamental shift in the psychological and social contract between personnel and the institution.

Lack of pause and reflect

Staff repeatedly noted that decisions were made and implemented at a rapid, non-negotiable pace, leaving virtually limited space to process the seismic situation and its short- and long-term implications, to consult and negotiate, or to engage in adaptation and inclusive planning. The predominantly top-down nature of the organization and its crisis response severely disrupted the kind of social negotiation that is often necessary for a large-scale transition, thereby increasing feelings of imposition and powerlessness.

Managers and frontline entities, including the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Ethics Office, Psychosocial Wellbeing Service and other integrity and accountability offices, were frequently disempowered despite their critical relevance to organizational resilience and integrity. They were nonetheless expected to provide critical support to staff while they themselves were learning in real-time about decisions affecting personnel and operations. This created a dynamic that strained their capacity and undermined their effectiveness as frontline responders.

Any potential for a "pause and reflect" period was severely limited by the DDS questionnaire, which was experienced as creating significant disturbances, fueling competition rather than collaboration and the facilitation of thoughtful input. Critically, while this exercise was underway, the downsizing process continued apace in several operations, further eliminating any true space for reflection. This unrelenting urgency mirrors a response dynamic where a crisis pushes organizations and communities into fight-fright-freeze response modalities expressed as rapid, reactive decisions, increasingly with narrow focus, and resulting in emotional overload. This prevents the necessary cognitive reset that is fundamental in order to shift from short-term reactivity towards a purposeful and more sustainable recovery strategy.

Limited two-way communication and dialogue

The organization's bureaucratic and hierarchical structure reinforced the top-down approach. Initiatives designed to promote two-way communication, such as the Ubuntu Cafés, Psychosocial Wellbeing hosted webinars could not be sustained due to operational and staffing reductions. Town halls from the High Commissioner, while appreciated, were infrequent and tended to function more as one-way information sharing than as a dialogue in which staff could ask questions and receive answers to diffuse or cope with anxiety.

In operations and in many teams at headquarters, staff reported being notified of decisions affecting them or their teams with limited room for discussion. In many instances, the way notifications were done was perceived as impersonal and not dignifying. There were, however, some exceptions where managers, HR staff, and PWS met individually with staff members to communicate decisions in a more personal and respectful way. Unfortunately, colleagues also reported instances where they were notified of abolishment of the post they encumbered during all staff meetings, or they discovered that their position was discontinued from Workday.

Communication inconsistencies

Communication during the process was at times experienced as inconsistent or contradictory. Staff reported receiving conflicting messages from headquarters and field leadership—sometimes within hours—undermining confidence in the process and in those tasked with implementing it. For example, the head of an office was instructed to reduce their team by a certain number. Thirty minutes after informing the staff, they were told that the reduction had almost tripled. As formal communication faltered or silenced, individuals increasingly relied on informal channels, including organizational gossip, to fill information gaps.

In parallel, some policies were introduced without broad communication and socialization, and HR, administrative services, and senior leadership were often perceived as inaccessible or unresponsive during critical moments, particularly when individuals were in distress about their personal situation and unable to receive a definitive answer on how the policies affected them. Internal information, such as organigrams or staff appointments, was at times reported to have been leaked before meetings had concluded, creating confusion and further eroding trust.

Perceived gaps in holistic crisis management

The Design and Delivery Structure (DDS), while intended to guide the reorganization, was experienced by many as focusing primarily on structural design and not providing the holistic crisis management coordination needed to accompany the process with the anticipation and the readjustments needed as the organization navigated the crisis. From an Ombuds perspective, the absence of a visible cross-functional crisis response team—one that could have integrated perspectives from HR, the “Integrity Family”, the Staff Council, regional bureaus, and operations—limited the extent to which the process could be experienced as empathetic, transparent, accountable, and collaborative.

Fragmentation and weakening of services and support mechanisms

DHR, PWS, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Staff Council and Staff Associations, the Peer Advisors, and the Ethics Office faced increased demand for services and support at the same time as their own resources and representation were reduced. This occurred at a time when their support was most needed. These functions serve as an early warning system for the organization, as frontline responders for colleagues seeking support and help reinforce engagement between the institution and staff. With lessened support from these entities, staff described this as leaving gaps in support at a time of heightened need.

Workload and needs-based analysis

Many colleagues reported difficulties in understanding and accepting structural decisions in the absence of a clear workload and needs-based analysis on which restructuring decisions were explicitly based. From their perspective, the lack of visible criteria or explanation for how workloads and needs were assessed made it more difficult to see the overall logic of the new structures and to trust that the changes were aligned with operational realities.

Systemic observations on Process Impact:

Impact on the Organization

The restructuring process reshaped the organizational fabric in profound ways. One of the most visible consequences, as described by many colleagues, has been a rupture in the psychological and social contract between the institution and its personnel. This unwritten set of mutual expectations and obligations underpins trust, engagement, and a sense of reciprocity. Research on psychological contracts indicates that when staff perceive organizational promises as broken, job satisfaction, commitment, and trust tend to decline, while intentions to leave and resentment increase; breach is often followed by an emotional “violation” phase, marked by anger, frustration, and a sense of betrayal, particularly in periods of organizational change.¹ These patterns are consistent with what the Office observed during this period: when people experience a rupture in the psychological contract, morale and engagement erode over time.

Within this rupture, a fundamental component was weakened: trust in the institution and in its leadership. Many colleagues reported losing confidence that leadership would act consistently, advocate for the mandate, and apply principles of fairness when decisions were made and implemented.

The crisis and its management also aggravated pre-existing schisms within the organization. Antagonisms were reported between different groups and levels: leadership and staff; operations and headquarters; national and international staff; colleagues from the global North and global South; and between staff on different types of contracts. Lines of division that existed before the crisis were perceived to have widened and, in some areas, hardened.

As the restructuring unfolded, many colleagues described entering a “survival mode” in which they felt compelled to focus on preserving their own positions and immediate interests. Externally, this was reflected in patterns such as increased LinkedIn activity, and intensified competition for increasingly limited posts and recruitment processes. Internally, the tone in forums like Ubuntu Cafés shifted over time—from initial denial or cautious optimism to anxiety, fatigue, and, in some instances, resignation. Other symptoms such as presenteeism, survival guilt, decreased moral and engagement, and the Office observed an increase in gossip and the spreading of rumors.

The combination of resource scarcity, conflict avoidance, and declining trust in the fairness and consistency of decisions contributed to a broader survival state. In such an environment, collaboration tends to give way to competition. Research on social interdependence suggests that when goals are experienced as competitive rather than cooperative, information sharing and joint problem-solving

¹ Psychological contract breach, violation, and change

- Zhao, H., Wayne, S. J., Glibkowski, B. C., & Bravo, J. (2007). *The impact of psychological contract breach on work-related outcomes: A meta-analysis*. *Personnel Psychology*, 60(3), 647–680.
- Cassar, V., & Briner, R. B. (2011). *The relationship between psychological contract breach and organizational commitment: Exchange imbalance as a moderator of the mediating role of violation*. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(2), 283–289.
- Topa, G., Aranda-Carmena, M., & de-Maria, B. (2022). *Psychological contract breach and outcomes: A systematic review of reviews*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(13), 8080.

deteriorate while friction increases.² Under these conditions, staff are more likely to withhold or ration information, and knowledge-hiding becomes more common.³ Studies also associate such competitive climates with higher levels of relationship conflict⁴ and “office politics”, including subtle forms of sabotage and rivalry.⁵ These findings align with patterns described to the Office during this period.

The perceived lack of transparency is a significant contributor to the decline in collaboration and trust. According to the Global Staff Council survey, out of more than 2,500 respondents, only 3 per cent indicated that they believed the process was transparent.⁶ This finding echoes the observations brought to the Ombudsman and Mediator’s Office. Multiple policy changes, reduced access to information and decision-makers, limited two-way communication, and the perceived weakening of oversight and integrity mechanisms all reinforced a sense of opacity.

The erosion of collaboration had a cascading effect. As departments and units began to operate more in isolation, the organization’s ability to function as a cohesive whole diminished. The restructuring disrupted established workflows, severed interdependent relationships, and weakened informal networks that typically sustain institutional resilience. Research on intra-organizational networks suggests that when inter-unit competition increases and lateral ties are not deliberately maintained, cross-unit knowledge sharing falls and “siloeing” deepens,⁷ as observed in many of the situations brought to the Office.

² Competition vs. cooperation and information sharing

- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). *An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning*. *Educational Psychologist*, 44(1), 15–29.

³ Knowledge hiding in competitive climates

- Černe, M., Nerstad, C. G. L., Dysvik, A., & Škerlavaj, M. (2014). *What goes around comes around: Knowledge hiding, perceived motivational climate, and creativity*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(1), 172–192.

⁴ Relationship conflict and performance

- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). *Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(4), 741–749.

⁵ Internal competition, sabotage, and office politics

- Carpenter, J., Matthews, P. H., & Schirm, J. (2010). *Tournaments and office politics: Evidence from a real effort experiment*. *American Economic Review (Papers & Proceedings)*, 100(2), 504–507.
- Harbring, C., & Irlenbusch, B. (2011). *Sabotage in tournaments: Evidence from a laboratory experiment*. *Management Science*, 57(4), 611–627.

⁶ Internal staff perceptions of transparency, fear of speaking up, anger, and discrimination

- UNHCR Global Staff Council. (2025). *Survey on workplace issues affecting staff wellbeing and dignity*. Internal UNHCR survey report.

⁷ Siloeing, inter-unit competition, and knowledge sharing

- Tsai, W. (2002). *Social structure of “coopetition” within a multiunit organization: Coordination, competition, and intraorganizational knowledge sharing*. *Organization Science*, 13(2), 179–190.

As uncertainty and distrust rose, psychological safety fell. Staff reported becoming more cautious about speaking up, particularly on sensitive issues related to the restructuring and its implementation. This was reflected both in cases brought to the Office and in the GSC survey, where 31 per cent of respondents reported being afraid to speak up.⁶ Many described an environment they perceived as toxic or fear driven. Research on psychological safety and organizational silence shows that, in such climates, people are more likely to withhold concerns, ideas, and feedback, undermining learning, adaptation, and collective problem-solving.⁸ Over time, this contributes to disengagement and an erosion of collective trust. In the organization, the result was a reported breakdown in synergy: departments that once complemented one another became more siloed, defensive, and, in some areas, disengaged. While limited “coopetition” can sometimes be productive, the evidence suggests that this requires strong lateral ties and shared governance. Absent these, competitive pressures tend to overwhelm collaboration.⁷

Disengagement and capacity constraints were particularly acute among support services and administrative entities. Administrative services dealing with workplace concerns were frequently cited to the Office as unresponsive, absent, or insufficient during critical phases of the restructuring. Most of them were overwhelmed. This created a perceived vacuum in which staff were left without guidance, reassurance, or procedural clarity at moments of high personal and professional stress. Other services, similarly, exposed and under-resourced, struggled to maintain their functions. In some cases, they were perceived as unable to fully perform their roles—not due to lack of will, but due to lack of resources and support.

Accountability and oversight functions were also affected. A spike in workplace grievances, coupled with reduction of resources, placed additional strain and resulted in weakened internal controls, and the capacity to detect emerging risks. Errors and omissions from staff also increase and can affect the organization’s reputation if not addressed in a timely and coherent manner. These concerning dynamics were brought to the attention of the Office from a range of colleagues.

Managers were in a particularly difficult position. Evidence from organizational research suggests that managers account for a substantial share of staff engagement.⁹ During this crisis, many reported feeling disempowered in the decision-making process and struggled to act as drivers of engagement for their teams and operations. They were asked to implement decisions in which they had not been meaningfully consulted, and that, in some instances, affected them personally. This limited their ability to provide clear direction, reassurance, and a sense of fairness to their teams. When they were in position to make decisions (selection per instance or retention), they were perceived to manipulate the process in favor of their candidate.

The crisis and how it was managed simultaneously affected the organization at both individual and structural levels. This meant there were few, if any, pockets of normalcy to maintain routine and predictability, which are critical for resilience and recovery. On a structural level, successive waves of restructuring created a loss of continuity and normalcy. Service lines were reconfigured, then

⁸ Psychological safety and organizational silence

- Edmondson, A. (1999). *Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams*. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.
- Morrison, E. W., & Milliken, F. J. (2000). *Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world*. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 706–725.

⁹ Managers’ influence on staff engagement

- Gallup, Inc. (2015). *State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders*. Gallup.

reconfigured again, producing breakdowns in service continuity and institutional memory. The combined impact on individuals and structures added “a crisis within the crisis”: staff were coping not only with the external funding shock and its consequences, but also with an internal environment marked by instability and fragmentation.

The long-term impact is still unfolding. Early signs point to weakened institutional memory and talent, fractured internal relationships, and diminished trust in organizational processes. The restructuring did not only change structures; it altered how the organization sees itself, how it communicates, and how it responds to crises. Without deliberate efforts to rebuild collaboration, restore functionality, and re-establish trust, these impacts may persist well beyond the immediate transition period.

Impact on People

The human impact of the 2025 restructuring was profound and complex and was felt across all levels of the organization. While the process was framed as affecting everyone equally, the lived experience was perceived as far more uneven.

An approach rooted in conflict avoidance created conditions in which confusion and resentment could grow. Unanswered questions and limited explanations invited rumor and conjecture,¹⁰ while the absence of transparent, respectful process cues was experienced as procedurally unfair—an established driver of anger toward decision-makers.¹¹

Anger was a salient reaction for many staff members in cases brought to the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator. The GSC survey found that 36 per cent of the remaining staff reported feeling angry.¹² Over time, colleagues described that leaving disparities unaddressed did not dissipate tensions but hardened them, which is consistent with evidence that conflict avoidance tends to escalate rather than resolve conflict.¹³

¹⁰ Rumour and conjecture in low-transparency contexts

- DiFonzo, N., & Bordia, P. (2006). *Rumor psychology: Social and organizational approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

¹¹ Procedural justice and anger toward decision-makers

- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). *On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 386–400.
- Bobocel, D. R. (2013). *Coping with unfair events constructively or destructively: The effects of overall justice and self-other orientation*. In S. W. Gilliland, D. D. Steiner, & D. P. Skarlicki (Eds.), *Social justice in organizations* (pp. 149–170). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

¹² Misconduct, discrimination, and under-reporting

- UNHCR Global Staff Council. (2025). *Survey on workplace issues affecting staff wellbeing and dignity*. Internal UNHCR survey report.

¹³ Conflict avoidance and escalation

- Pruitt, D. G., & Kim, S. H. (2004). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Glasl, F. (2000). *Conflict escalation model*. In G. B. J. Bomers & R. B. Peterson (Eds.), *Conflict management and industrial relations* (reprinted discussions of the nine-stage model).

This erosion of perceived procedural fairness was particularly visible in key management processes, including decisions on post reductions and selections for vacant positions. During this period, the downsizing methodology and selection system were, in several instances, perceived as unfair and open to manipulation, allowing managers to remove or retain staff based on preference rather than clear, consistently applied criteria. Whether accurate or not, the perception that selection depended on proximity to a manager rather than on performance had a corrosive effect on trust. Research on procedural and distributive justice indicates that perceived manipulation of performance and selection systems is a strong predictor of cynicism and disengagement.¹⁴ For many staff, what should have been a feedback and development process became, in effect, a proxy for selection, amplifying anxiety and reinforcing the belief that fairness was contingent on personal relationships.

Competition for survival became a dominant theme in many accounts. Instead of fostering collaboration or merging roles in a spirit of shared purpose, staff often found themselves competing for rebranded posts. This dynamic not only created interpersonal tensions but also undermined team cohesion and trust. As attention shifted toward internal competition, energy was diverted from mandate delivery to political navigation and protection of positions. Colleagues described higher perceptions of organizational politics, knowledge hiding, and weakening lateral ties—patterns that research associates with reduced trust, diminished cohesion, and lower performance.¹⁵

Managers and other stakeholders were frequently left with limited clarity or authority to support their teams. The absence of adequate emotional, procedural, and structural support was felt acutely by those on the frontlines. Many staff reported feeling abandoned, unheard, and unprotected. The organization's perceived silence in the face of distress, coupled with perceptions of inaccessible leadership, contributed to widespread disengagement.

The conflict-avoidance mantra “nobody is immune” became emblematic of the process. While intended to signal fairness, it was perceived as inconsistent when some leadership roles appeared insulated from the sacrifices being asked of others. Some examples include perceived extensions of posts for some and not others, maintaining position levels for some positions, or maintaining travel privileges. This happened during a period of limited validation of staff experiences and a vacuum of visible gestures of solidarity. This perceived double standard further eroded trust and deepened cynicism.

The restructuring also exacerbated existing divides and highlighted concerns related to discrimination, echoing the organizational impacts described earlier. Differences in separation arrangements and perceived disparities between groups (for instance, between G and P staff) further entrenched a sense

¹⁴ **Procedural and distributive justice, manipulation, and cynicism**

- Greenberg, J. (1990). *Employee theft as a reaction to underpayment inequity: The hidden cost of pay cuts*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(5), 561–568.
- Cropanzano, R., & Folger, R. (1989). *Referent cognitions and task decision autonomy: Beyond equity theory*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(2), 293–299.

¹⁵ **Organizational politics, knowledge hiding, and performance**

- Bedi, A., & Schat, A. C. H. (2013). *Perceptions of organizational politics: A meta-analysis of its attitudinal, health, and behavioural consequences*. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 54(4), 246–259.
- Černe, M., Nerstad, C. G. L., Dysvik, A., & Škerlavaj, M. (2014). *What goes around comes around: Knowledge hiding, perceived motivational climate, and creativity*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(1), 172–192.

of inequality. Many staff perceived that decisions about who left and who was selected for open positions were influenced by favoritism rather than merit.

The GSC survey found that around one third of respondents reported having witnessed or experienced discrimination, with the most frequently reported grounds including nationality, grade, contract type, and gender identity.¹² In a context of heightened fear, more than half of those who experienced misconduct did not report it, citing fear of retaliation, lack of confidence that action would be taken, fear of losing their job, and distrust in internal mechanisms.

Disillusion and disengagement spread not only among staff but also among managers. Many reported losing faith in the organization's values and leadership. The psychological toll was significant: staff described feeling deflated, exhausted, and emotionally drained.

The Office observed an increase in fear and a sense of futility about speaking up through existing escalation mechanisms. Mental health concerns—including anticipated burnout, anxiety, stress, and depressive moods—were brought to the Office from the early stages of the process, including during Ubuntu Cafés, and appeared to gain momentum over time.

Survivors are now facing heavier workloads with fewer resources, often without adequate acknowledgment or support. The Office has observed that this consequence falls particularly on G-staff, who are being asked to assume tasks previously handled by P-staff.

From April onwards, the Office observed clearer signs of “survivor syndrome,” a pattern described in the literature on organizational downsizing. Survivors frequently report guilt, anxiety, and uncertainty alongside lower morale, fatigue, trust, and commitment.¹⁶ These reactions are shaped by whether the downsizing is seen as procedurally fair and by whether leadership signals trustworthiness and care. Where these cues are weak, survivors' engagement, citizenship behavior, and retention tend to decline.¹⁶

The perceived optics of the restructuring also mattered. Changes that appeared to weaken independent oversight were reported as eroding fairness and institutional legitimacy; research on procedural justice shows that such signals are central to cooperation and confidence in authorities.¹⁷ Governance research similarly underscores that oversight capacity is a pillar of accountability and that reducing it can undermine confidence in decision-making even when the underlying intent is benign.

Taken together, both the evidence and our observations support the description of survivor-era emotions of guilt, anxiety, isolation, and their downstream consequences, including disengagement, lower morale, and increased turnover intention. At the same time, research points to factors associated with more constructive survivor responses: transparent procedures, respectful treatment,

¹⁶ Survivor syndrome and downsizing

- Brockner, J. (1992). *Managing the effects of layoffs on survivors*. *California Management Review*, 34(2), 9–28.
- van Dick, R., Ullrich, J., & Tissington, P. A. (2016). *Working under a black cloud: How to sustain organizational identification after downsizing*. *British Journal of Management*, 27(1), 5–20.
- Mishra, A. K., & Spreitzer, G. M. (1998). *Explaining how survivors respond to downsizing: The roles of trust, empowerment, justice, and work redesign*. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), 567–588.

¹⁷ Procedural justice, legitimacy, and cooperation

- Tyler, T. R., & Blader, S. L. (2003). *The group engagement model: Procedural justice, social identity, and cooperative behavior*. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 7(4), 349–361.

clear communication about criteria, and visible protection of oversight, Ethics and internal justice functions.^{16 17 18}

Based on our observations, survivor syndrome remains pronounced among many of the remaining staff and is associated with exhaustion, disengagement, burnout, anxiety, and loss of motivation. It is therefore important to rebuild trust and psychological safety, to communicate clearly and transparently about decisions and future directions, and to validate staff experiences to better support them. Finally, it is crucial that the organization explains how processes and goals are being adapted to match the reduced workforce.

Options for the Way Forward

In keeping with the methodology of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, this report does not offer prescriptive recommendations. Instead, it presents a series of options generated through systemic reflection and grounded in staff experience that may support the organization's recovery and future resilience.

These options are intended to provoke dialogue, invite innovation, and encourage inclusive decision-making. They are not exhaustive nor definitive; rather, they reflect themes and patterns observed during this period of crisis and transition.

1. Establish a Standing Crisis Response Mechanism

A critical option for future resilience is to establish a Standing Crisis Response Mechanism. This involves the creation of a cross-functional team in a designated crisis management model that can be rapidly and formally convened at the onset of any significant organizational crisis. Such a group is vital to overcome the "perceived gaps in holistic crisis management" observed during the 2025 financial shock. It should be structured to ensure an integrated and inclusive coordination of all responses, comprising high-level representatives from DPM-relevant stakeholders, the Internal Justice and Ethics offices, the oversight offices, the Staff Council, Regional bureaus, and operational representatives. The mechanism's primary role would be to ensure that all strategic and operational decisions are informed by multiple perspectives, fully inclusive of all constituent groups, and demonstrably sustainable, thereby preventing the reactive, fragmented, and siloed approach that contributed to the internal crisis and weakened institutional trust.

2. Ensure Transparent and Inclusive Communication

Rebuilding trust will require a sustained commitment to dialogue, transparency, and authentic two-way communication to counter the perceptions of "very limited transparency, unclear decision-making criteria and opacity" reported during the crisis. Communication protocols must be urgently reformed to prioritize clarity, consistency, and timeliness, moving beyond one-way information sharing. Crucially, this involves explicitly sharing the rationale behind decisions in addition to the decisions themselves, as providing a clear justification is essential for staff to "buy into the decision" and restore confidence in organizational fairness. Mechanisms for genuine feedback and dialogue—including structured Q&A opportunities, regular, consistent updates, and safe channels for staff "voice"—could be fully

¹⁸ **Oversight, accountability, and governance capacity**

- Drolc, C. A., & Keiser, L. R. (2021). *The importance of oversight and agency capacity in enhancing performance in public service delivery*. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(4), 773–789.

integrated into every stage of organizational change to ensure communication is not merely top-down, but truly responsive, inclusive, and capable of preventing the spread of rumor and conjecture that eroded trust.

3. Protect Independent Offices

Safeguarding and strengthening the integrity and operational independence of internal justice and oversight bodies—specifically the offices of the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Ethics Office, and the Inspector General—is a non-negotiable step for maintaining trust, restoring accountability, and reinforcing institutional legitimacy, particularly during and after periods of significant upheaval. The report noted that the crisis resulted in the "Fragmentation and weakening of services and support mechanisms" which undermined staff confidence. Therefore, ensuring that these entities have sufficient access, visibility, and resources is critical. This investment will not only support the early detection of emerging risks and a spike in workplace grievances but, most importantly, it will provide staff with credible, impartial avenues for support and redress, serving as a vital confidence-builder and a necessary check against the erosion of perceived fairness and the "survival state" in the organization.

4. Rebuild Trust Through Behavioral Consistency

Rebuilding trust through behavioral consistency is fundamentally dependent on visible alignment between leadership's words and their actions to overcome the pervasive cynicism and erosion of confidence reported in the process. Leadership must actively work to model the values the organization espouses through demonstrably transparent communication, inclusive decision-making, and meaningful, sustained engagement with those most affected by change, directly addressing the perceived inconsistencies and "double standards" that severely weakened the "psychological contract".

To embed this consistency, options must include strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure leaders are visibly and consistently held responsible for any misconduct or misaligned behavior that undermines fairness. This must be complemented by equipping all staff and managers with essential tools for constructive conflict resolution and building healthy team dynamics, directly challenging the organization's long-standing pattern of conflict avoidance and the perceived "guarded power at senior levels." Existing training programs could be significantly strengthened and complemented through joint, holistic initiatives creating a unified front to restore a trust-rich environment.

5. Support Survivors

After a year dominated by heavy, process-driven restructuring and a pervasive "survival state," the organization's next phase must pivot from structural imperatives to a resolute focus on its people. Recovery will have to concentrate far more on human capital—re-establishing trust, repairing the ruptured "psychological contract," and rebuilding psychological safety. Ultimately, it is the dedicated staff who will drive the transition from crisis-induced fragmentation to renewed cohesion and resilience, thereby securing the organization's long-term effectiveness and collective purpose.

Strengthening psychological and peer support mechanisms is paramount to ensuring staff have access to comprehensive care, not just during a crisis, but also throughout the prolonged recovery phase, as the psychological impact and "survivor syndrome" persist well beyond the formal transition. Support structures must evolve to reflect this extended duration of need. Beyond technical mental health expertise, a core element of recovery requires the wide infusion of empathy throughout the organization, positioning managers as "chief empathy officers" to actively rebuild psychological safety, restore the "psychological contract," and foster the trust essential for renewed organizational cohesion.

Supporting survivors will also require a deliberate, multi-faceted approach. This includes immediately addressing the acute workload imbalances that are disproportionately burdening the remaining workforce, particularly G-staff. Furthermore, leaders must consciously and proactively tackle the various schisms and internal divisions in teams, including those stemming from the perceived unfair or unequal distribution of managerial attention and support, to move beyond the current competitive, "survival state." Finally, and critically, achieving organizational and individual emotional closure necessitates acknowledging the profound emotional toll of the restructuring and downsizing process, and visibly honoring those who departed from the teams as an essential step in rebuilding trust and restoring the organization's sense of shared humanity (ubuntu) and protection of dignity.

6. Document Lessons Learned

Creating a deliberate and sustained space for reflection and institutional learning is essential to ensure the profound and disruptive experience of the 2025 crisis actively informs future planning, directly countering the initial "lack of pause and reflect" that contributed to the crisis's internal escalation. This imperative involves systematically capturing, analyzing, and consolidating staff experiences, both what worked (initial solidarity) and, more critically, what did not (fragmented response, communication inconsistencies). Integrating these systemic insights into core policies and crisis procedures is essential. A genuine culture of learning could be cultivated, where managerial and organizational mistakes are examined constructively rather than being hidden or fueling fear. This shift will strengthen long-term resilience, help the organization move beyond the reactive "fight-fright-freeze response modalities", support individual closure and significantly reduce the risk of repeating similar patterns of cultural dynamics, such as conflict avoidance and guarded decision-making, in future periods of upheaval.

7. Reaffirm Human-Centered Values and Dignity

Reaffirming human-centered values and the UN Charter to protect human dignity is a fundamental imperative, as the crisis caused a perceived rupture in the "psychological contract" and a sense of powerlessness among staff. Ensuring that all future decisions reflect UNHCR's humanitarian ethos internally as well as externally is central to restoring confidence and overcoming the current cynicism. Staff must be consistently and visibly seen and treated as people, not merely as abstract "positions or budget lines", to counter the transactional, fear-driven atmosphere that dominated the restructuring.

This human-centered principle must be deliberately embedded across policy, practice, and leadership culture to rebuild trust. Concrete actions could include establishing people-centered decision criteria, clearly defining leadership expectations that prioritize staff well-being, and fundamentally overhauling how difficult news is communicated and followed up to ensure it is both respectful and dignifying. The path forward demands courage, humility, and a willingness to listen at all levels to transition from the "survival state" to recovery, a journey which the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator remains committed to supporting with its confidential avenues for dialogue and systemic insight.

Conclusion

This Special Report has sought to capture the systemic dynamics, organizational impacts, and human consequences of UNHCR's 2025 restructuring and downsizing process. Through the lens of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator, it documents not only what occurred, but how it was perceived and experienced by colleagues across grades, contract types, and duty stations, and what these experiences reveal about the organization's culture, governance, and resilience.

The observations presented here are not intended to assign blame or to evaluate specific decisions. They reflect patterns and themes raised through confidential channels and other informal engagements, offered as upward feedback to support reflection and learning. The crisis was unprecedented in scale and speed, and the response—while imperfect—was shaped by urgency, pressure, and extraordinary constraints. At the same time, staff accounts show that the ways in which decisions were communicated, implemented, and experienced have lasting effects on trust, cohesion, and wellbeing.

Recovery will require more than structural adjustments. It will call for a renewed commitment to transparency, empathy, and integrity; for leadership that listens and engages and models the values it espouses; and for systems to adapt in ways that are inclusive and fair. It will also require sustained attention to the needs of those who remain, and to the conditions that enable them to feel safe, respected, and able to contribute.

The options outlined in this report are offered in a constructive spirit, as possible avenues to rebuild trust, restore collaboration, and strengthen organizational resilience. The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator remain committed to supporting both staff and leadership in navigating this period and contributing to a healthier, more sustainable organizational future, one in which people are valued not only for the roles they occupy, but as individuals with dignity, voice, and purpose.

The path to recovery lies in bridging the distance between decisions and those impacted by them. In the words of the Secretary-General, we must strive to *'move from fear of each other, to trust in each other'*, a trust grounded in transparency, empathy, and the values that bind this organization together.

Annex

Detailed Timeline of Communication

Date	Event	Impact
2025-Jan ~ 2025-Feb	<u>Temporary Suspension of US Foreign Assistance</u>	Immediate cost-containment measures and scenario planning initiated.
2025-02-06	<u>HC's 1st Town Hall</u>	Funding freeze due to US contributions, impact on operations, and announcement of upcoming restructuring.
2025-03-20	<u>HC's Message: Financial Uncertainty Announcement</u>	HC addresses funding shortfall due to US freeze. Restructuring review process begins.
2025-04-02	<u>Headquarters and Regional Bureaus review</u>	1,200 colleagues provide feedback, guiding the restructuring process.
2025-04-09	<u>Launch of Weekly Updates</u>	Regular updates on restructuring, shared

		services model, and operational footprint review.
2025-04-23	<u>Financial situation – downsizing and cost-saving measures</u>	HQ and RB downsizing confirmed, with 30% reduction in operational costs.
2025-05-05	<u>HC’s 2nd Global Town Hall</u>	Announcement of latest cost-saving measures and the new organizational chart for HQ.
2025-06-16	<u>HC’s Message – Financial Situation Update</u>	3,500 staff positions identified for discontinuation. Global staffing costs to be reduced by 30%.
2025-06-16 ~ 2025-07-17	Shift to Bi-Weekly Update	After a brief pause in June 2025, the updates are back on a bi-weekly basis.
2025-07-17	<u>HC’s 3rd Town Hall</u>	Guidance for workforce navigating changes. 3,900 staff members affected by job cuts.
2025-07-25	<u>Limited Activation of the Policy on Staff Placement and Reduction in Force - GS GVA</u>	Policy activated for GS Staff in Geneva.
2025-10-01	<u>New HQ and Regional Configuration Milestone</u>	Transition activities continue; 5,000 staff separated as part of organizational changes.
2025-10-13	<u>Activation of the Early Separation Programme</u>	Launch of a voluntary Early Separation Programme for eligible International Professional staff (over five years’ service) to help mitigate the impact of organizational realignment.
Since 2025-10-15	Weekly Updates discontinued	Regular Weekly Updates on restructuring and the financial situation ends.

