

Global Shared Services Centre (GSSC)

Update on the context and trends

In 2022, UNICEF's global response focused on addressing the consequences of several new humanitarian crisis (from Ukraine to the Horn of Africa, from Pakistan to Malawi), in addition to continuing the provision of assistance for children affected by other ongoing crisis and natural disasters. Meanwhile, UNICEF country offices kept on scaling up vaccination campaigns worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Year on year, UNICEF continued to grow its programme budget, which last year surpassed USD 10 billion compared to USD 8 billion in 2021.

The significant increase in UNICEF's overall budget has had a direct effect on the GSSC, with some service types experiencing an increase in volumes compared to pre-pandemic levels. Volumes of transactions soared from 980,000 in 2021 to 1,2 million in 2022, representing a 25 per cent increase. This was driven by increases in transactions across sections at the GSSC. In finance-related processes (payments, invoices, general accounting and master data management) there was an increase of 27 per cent in the transactional volume; HR Administration had around 35 per cent increase in Onboarding cases and about 70 per cent increase in Offboarding cases especially with regard to job abolishment.

The number of emergency duty stations more than doubled: from 10 in 2021 to 28 in 2022. The GSSC supported emergency duty stations by prioritizing their requests within tightened SLAs. This included processing urgent requests from Ukraine and neighbouring countries, as well transactions from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Onboarding staff in emergency duty stations within shorter timeframe was a key focus area for the GSSC, in order to enable UNICEF deliver its mission with the right staff on the ground and on time. The number of emergency onboarding cases increased more than twofold, from 549 in 2021 to 1,607 in 2022.

Through all this, the GSSC continued to deliver transactional services to more than 120 UNICEF offices globally. The Centre was able to maintain a satisfaction rate above 94 per cent, achieving an 89 per cent SLA, particularly noteworthy given the increase in transaction volumes and with a limited increase in resources in 2022.

Besides the transactional support, the GSSC also played a key role through surge staff deployment and facilitation of regional deployment, with more than 100 GSSC staff offering to support in different capacities. In consultation with the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) several GSSC staff were allocated to provide temporary support to UNICEF offices in the region, offering their technical expertise and helping local operations.

With the successful vaccination of all staff members and the epidemiological situation improving, the GSSC's workforce returned to work in office premises following a hybrid approach. Several COVID-19 process workarounds remained in place together with the close monitoring of Centre's performance to ensure delivery of results regardless varying regulations and approaches. Some of these workarounds which mainly involve electronic signature and submission of forms, will stay in place and are a positive side effect of the pandemic. The hybrid approach allowed teams to begin to re-connect and rebuild a sense of team and togetherness. Global workshops with hybrid delivery support were hosted in the reporting year, attended by approximately 800 participants counting UNICEF staff, other UN Agencies and external partners. ;

By the end of the year, the Centre had 369 staff members (306 fixed term and 63 temporary assistance). The Centre also facilitated the collocation of outposted colleagues from other HQ divisions including the Division of Human Resources (DHR), Supply Division, Office of Internal Audit and

Investigations, the Hungary Refugee Response Office, and the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), for a total of 53 staff.

Overall, after seven years of operation, the GSSC continues to deliver high-quality services and customer care for all UNICEF staff and offices worldwide – pushing through challenges and seizing on opportunities. The Centre remains focused on achieving efficiency, reducing organizational risk, and delivering value-for-money solutions to support UNICEF efforts towards the universal fulfilment of children's rights.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Performance analysis

During the reporting year, over 1,2 million transactions and service requests were processed in the areas of HR, Payroll, Finance and Customer Care. This represents a volume increase of 25 per cent compared to 2021, attributable to the growth in budget to sustain additional emergencies as well as to the increasing number of transactions triggered by the end of the COVID lockdown.

Overall, the GSSC processed transactions for a value of over USD 10 billion. The GSSC was able to deliver close to its target of processing 90 per cent of transactions within agreed timing – achieving an annual average performance of 89 per cent against Service Level Agreements (SLA) targets.

As the total number of UNICEF staff in 2022 increased to 16,764, the GSSC successfully processed over 5,300 onboarding cases out of which 1,607 were for emergency duty stations. In addition to delivering against agreed performance targets, the Centre continued to drive improvements in line with its key initial business objectives as set out in the Office Management Plan (OMP). Details are provided below.

Increased mission focus

An important initiative that went live in 2022 within the context of increasing mission focus is represented by the direct invoice submission of consultants and individual contractors to the GSSC. The project entails the introduction of a self-service platform for consultants and individual contractors to submit their invoices directly to the GSSC for processing and payment; in this manner, the offices no longer have to receive, circulate, validate and then forward these invoices to the GSSC. This initiative is expected to make invoice submission easier by reducing the number of transactions' steps. In Q1 2022, a pilot was implemented involving the Programme and Partnership Division in HQ (PPD) and few selected country offices; the scope was further expanded in Q4 2022 with additional country offices from South Asia and the Eastern Pacific. The project's global rollout is planned for mid-2023.

During the reporting year, the GSSC continued to deliver new technical solutions to improve overall experience and efficiency across UNICEF and external partners. In Q4 2022, the OASIS - Operations and Administrative Services in Service Gateway - initiative went live in nine countries to address the needs of a standard case management tool for the field offices and other headquarter offices. This tool helps managing facilities and administrative services, with a future goal of supporting UN common back offices and local shared service centres. The initiative, developed jointly by the GSSC, Division of Finance and Administrative Management (DFAM) and Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) is expected to ease the work spent on processing operations and administrative-related requests.

In 2022 - like in earlier years – the GSSC had a constant dialogue with its customers about efficiency and improvements. Quarterly Field Operations Calls were organized for Operations Staff to introduce ongoing change initiatives and gather feedback. The Centre engaged with senior operations staff individually and on senior management events to speak about key efficiency initiatives (e.g. consultant invoices project, OASIS). Our customers were encouraged to submit their evaluation of the received service through the workflow tool. The GSSC reviewed all this input on a regular basis and used it to drive the continuous improvement process. Both Internal and external projects benefitted from customer feedback which helped realize the potential benefits.

In April 2022, the Job Classification function was transitioned from the DHR to the GSSC. This service is an integral part of UNICEF’s Human Resource Management system, which provides the foundation for creating an equitable wage structure and organizational hierarchy. It promotes fairness, equity and ensures appropriate levels of accountability for any given position within the organizational structure to facilitate achievement of organizational strategies. Job classification further facilitates balanced allocation of human resources and efficient structuring of organizational units.

UNICEF introduced the policy around COVID vaccination mandate during the last quarter of 2022. The HR Administration section partnered with DHR, GSSC’s Business Innovation and Support (BIS) and Payroll sections to implement this mandate both sensitively and accurately. The HR Admin team conducted webinars, process simplification, staff queries and worked with the Regional and Country HR Teams to ensure smooth transition and separation of such staff members.

Support to ECARO and the Ukraine Refugee Crisis

Also, in response to the refugees crisis triggered in the region by the war in Ukraine, the GSSC has been working closely with the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia through a strengthened partnership that included co-sharing office premises, support with human resources and the establishment of a dedicated transaction hub. The Centre played a key role in facilitating the discussion with the Government of Hungary to provide UNICEF assistance through them to refugees.

In March 2022, the GSSC announced the prioritization of the regional response to Ukraine by fast-tracking emergency requests coming from the regional office of Europe and Central Asia, Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine country offices. Besides the transactional support, the GSSC has also played a key role through the surge and facilitation of regional deployment preparing country-specific guides for Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and ECAR.

Likewise, the GSSC helped other agencies (including the World Food Programme) in their assistance to Ukraine, offering its premises in central Budapest until receiving the agreement from the Hungarian government. By April 2022, the GSSC established an internal emergency hub to prioritize all transactions and provide logistic and operational support to colleagues in Ukraine CO. The areas of transactions include Human Resources, Payroll, Finance, Master Data Management, travel, procurement, etc. Starting the last quarter of 2022, the hub has been supporting also the refugee response for Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

The main areas of transactional support provided are capacity building, analysis and follow-up on open items and process improvement. In the last quarter of the year, for example, over 200 Infor Risk and Compliance (IRC) requests were processed, to facilitate getting the right roles to colleagues responding to the emergency on stretch as well as to the newly recruited staff members.

Cost savings

The separation process in Service Gateway was further automated and simplified, resulting in shorter processing time and higher user satisfaction. In the new simplified process, the HR and Payroll cases

are now linked, tracked and measured as part of one end-to-end task, designed with efficient and better structure among stakeholders to save time. Process accountability changes were introduced, empowering relevant stakeholders to take action at the right stage of the process without creating bottlenecks. Both HR local focal points and staff members will experience simpler, consolidated tasks, better organized workflows with the aid of helper texts and knowledge articles making the process of submitting or answering requests more user-friendly.

During the reporting year, the GSSC rolled out the creation of funding address for every staff member in compliance with the existing procedural terms. This is the first phase of a holistic approach towards improving the management of funding of staff costs across UNICEF in recognition of their role in fulfilling the mandate for children across the globe. Over the years, the funding of staff costs has been short term, with many offices reserving funds on a monthly or, at most, quarterly basis to cater for staff salaries. These ways of working created lots of inefficiencies at every stage right from planning, budgeting, post management and often not matching to the affordability analysis. In some instances, staff payments have been delayed while some offices have had to abolish posts due to funding shortfalls. As part of the phase one improvement, offices are now required to ensure they have a proper funding address - referred to as cost distribution record - for all post types, irrespective of funding type. To ensure this core principle is followed by all offices, prior to any new appointment, contract extension or re-assignment of a candidate to a post, offices must create a cost distribution record in VISION for all regular and temporary posts covering the specified duration.

Improved service quality

To maintain a high level of service and quality, technical training of processors is regularly revised and aligned with current needs. For example, in 2022 a new training on Ticket Handling Guidelines was launched on Agora. The purpose of this online course is to support GSSC processors who need to learn how to handle cases and requests in Finance, Payroll, HR and Customer Care. Day 1 training for all new processors was also introduced, with the expectation what this will help to shorten time from hire to independent processing of requests.

Another service introduced earlier that kept gaining momentum is the "Call an expert", which is accessible to all UNICEF staff. This service allows to book an appointment with an HR or payroll expert to directly discuss staff questions and it recorded high user experience and customer satisfaction levels.

Reduced risks

As payment fraud attempts against organizations continue to increase, maintaining internal controls and best practices is vital to help protect UNICEF funds and assets. Apart from detective controls – such as sending payment advice notifications to vendors, enabling them to identify unfamiliar transactions – the GSSC kept its focus on preventive controls to avert fraud, thus avoiding any financial loss and other harm to both the organization and its vendors.

Quality control checks continue to be in place for high-risk processes. In line with further improving user experience, the quality assurance teams in the GSSC have expanded their scope to cover client feedback and client complaint escalations. The GSSC will continue to coordinate with relevant stakeholders to ensure quality of service.

In order to ensure staff data protections, the GSSC HR Administration continued to work with UNICEF's data protection team, DHR and ICTD to establish restrictions in the access to data on VISION and WebHRIS. Revised Personnel Action Form (PAF) without staff's family information was introduced and access to such information was limited to HR roles within the organization. Further work in this area is expected to continue through 2023.

Global learning

Early in 2022, the GSSC launched the Global Learning Centre (GLC), UNICEF's new training hub. With the vision to support learning across the organization, GLC is a central point where staff members can find the resources they need to help them update skills and build capacities to succeed in their jobs. The Global Induction, organized in collaboration with regional and HQ offices, is a live broadcast training that ensures all new staff are aware of their place in the UN as an International Civil Servant, of UNICEF's values and global mission, and of how we approach our work carried out in different parts of the world. By the end of the reporting year, more than 800 staff participated in this global induction training through 36 sessions globally.

The GLC is also engaged in development of training on VISION, service gateway, and other global learning topics from across UNICEF. With innovative curriculum design techniques and state-of-the-art distance learning tools, courses developed by the GLC are made available on Agora (UNICEF's online learning platform), allowing staff to access a whole range of training materials. The GLC took over the administration of Agora in 2022, and with the combined support of the GLC and the Customer Care team the GSSC is ensuring access to learning for UNICEF staff and partners. Collaborating with divisional partners and a network of focal points across UNICEF, the GLC is here to support the implementation of the Global Learning Strategy, providing UNICEF with a lower operational cost for the oversight, development and delivery of training. The GLC's goal as we embark upon 2023 is to develop learning paths, focussed upon ensuring staff in various functions and roles have structured access to relevant knowledge and training for their daily work in UNICEF, and for progressing in their careers.

Partnership with stakeholders

In 2022, the GSSC took part in the pilot of the no rating PER, a new initiative by Global HR to improve performance management across UNICEF. This innovative project was rolled out in close partnership with DHR, the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (MENARO) and other offices globally.

The GSSC HR Administration conducted webinars for staff members and Local Focal Points (LFPs) on various pertinent topics such as Education Grant, Dependency, Vaccination mandate, Special Leave policies etc, ahead of peak seasons.

The Onboarding team added more country guides in the Intranet that will help staff members who relocate to understand the duty station better and prepare for servicing in the new assignment.

The GSSC continued to play its leading role in the consolidation and reporting on UNICEF efficiencies. The Centre was also fully engaged and supported interagency fora on Shared Service Centre developments.

In spring 2022, the GSSC launched a new project to help the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) that needed support in human resources. Two dedicated GSSC staff members became responsible for all the ITU contract processes that regard consultants and short-time assignments (temporary appointments). As a next step, UNICEF's case management tool, Service Gateway, added a new entry for ITU's requests, streamlining thus the entire process and making it more efficient by harmonizing and consolidating efforts and resources. Currently, the two teams are working on a long-term Memorandum of Understanding so that the GSSC can fully absorb the administrative services from ITU.

UN Reform

The Centre continued to play a leading role in coordinating UNICEF's contribution to the Business Innovation aspects of the UN Development System reform agenda. As part of the High-Level

Committee on Management (HLCM) meeting in early October 2022, the Mutual Recognition (MR) task force successfully presented the UN Humanitarian Booking Hub highlighting the global benefits and achievements of MR for the implementing agencies. Established in 2000, the HLCM identifies and analyses administrative management reforms with the aim of improving efficiency and simplifying business practices within the UN. The recognition of the Hub at such a high level, provides visibility to the mutual recognition initiative which is among the critical enablers for the implementation of the efficiency agenda under the UN Reform.

The UN Humanitarian Booking Hub is a 24/7 inter-agency booking service supporting humanitarian workers to deliver last mile aid through the pooling and common management of vehicle fleets. The Hub exemplified the benefits of relying on each other's policies, procedures, systems and related operational mechanisms to deliver services as one UN.

Also, the GSSC hosted a meeting of the Business Innovation Group (BIG) reference group of United Nations Agencies based in Budapest to strengthen governance mechanisms and set work plan priorities for the efficiency agenda.

The UN efficiency agenda includes other initiatives such as the Business Operations Strategy (BOS), Common Back Office (CBO), Global Shared Services (GSS) and the common premises. UNICEF continues to participate in several task forces with other implementing agencies to ensure a coordinated effort is made in bringing the gains of this agenda to fruition.

Staff well-being, learning and career development

In 2022 the GSSC continued to promote well-being for its 369 staff members.

Key initiatives included having a dedicated Staff Counsellor, who constantly organized well-being sessions and workshops and made herself available for individual counselling upon request. A total of 273 counselling sessions were delivered in 2022 (182 for national staff and 91 for international staff). A dedicated SharePoint site is available for staff where the Staff Counsellor boosts her presence and shares resources and a pre-planned schedule of events as well as regular meetings.

Also, the Peer Support Volunteer Programme (PSV) continued to organize several initiatives to support colleagues with work-related concerns or personal difficulties and seeking help to cope with stress and hardship. Similarly, the GSSC Staff Association has also been active in organizing several in person events to keep staff connected including a broader initiative for GSSC volunteers who wanted to help Ukraine refugees either at the border of Hungary or in Budapest.

To promote staff awareness of Children's agenda, several major campaigns were organized: International Women's Day, Father's Day, Back-to-School Campaign, on the occasion of World Children Day. The campaigns reached a good level of engagement and the products resulting from these were featured on UNICEF platforms and internal channels.

Career development opportunities continued to be provided for all GSSC staff through a series of learning opportunities tailored to enhance staffs' skills and support their career paths. While maintaining a full calendar of learning opportunities, learning paths were simplified to balance staff time constraints and the opportunity to be fully prepared for their role. A new series of Career Development pages were put together for GSSC colleagues to access resources on recruitment and career development, and online courses aimed to strengthen their skills and competences. Lunch and Learning sessions were also systematically organized during the year to encourage experience and knowledge sharing among staff. In addition, staff exchanges and swap were also organized to provide local staff with the opportunity to be exposed to a different working environment at other UNICEF offices.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Innovations

The GSSC's success has always been grounded on keeping high standards of service delivery for the UNICEF family worldwide. To properly address the demand for GSSC services and ensure that all requests are processed in an effective and efficient manner, the Centre has been working to introduce an innovative approach by automating certain processes with enhanced robotics.

Through automation, the GSSC successfully operationalized several HR-related policy changes (e.g., teleworking outside of duty station, new special leave types, simplified process for vaccine cases). Investing in automation was a key area to continue delivering business process simplification and create efficiencies. The Centre also created a monthly interface of staff pension data to UNJSPF, ensuring timely reconciliations and avoiding yearly filing of returns.

A process to simplify and centralize international travel across UNICEF has been initiated and piloted in 2022, through a phased approach that will be expanded to other HQ Divisions and to all UNICEF offices during 2023. The Centre also promoted a more strategic use of FIORI app and ServiceNow software to incorporate more day-to-day transactions based on user functions.

To support a culture of continuous improvement, the GSSC organized several rounds of training for its staff on the Lean methodology. The core principles of Lean include reducing waste (eliminating unnecessary steps in the process) and creating wealth (increasing production in an efficient manner). A total of 69 staff received this training in two cohorts during 2022, and after this an online training module on Lean was developed and made available for all interested staff in the organization.

In September 2022, the GSSC went live with a dedicated LinkedIn Life tab, establishing the Centre's presence on the most important social media for job seekers globally. This allowed the introduction of our Centre, colleagues and leaders to a global audience. In the future this will help showcasing our goals and achievements, further positioning the Centre as a modern and innovative employer of choice.

The GSSC continued to invest in business process simplification, and a new Business Innovation and Support Section was created and operationalized within the Centre, to focus on timely delivery of business solutions. Also, internal restructuring of the Service Quality Management team resulted in increased focus on driving efficiency and behavioural change in country offices worldwide. The GSSC also focused on addressing the impact of low value procurement by devising both a technical and behavioural solution which is quite innovative in its nature through the use of procurement cards.

During the course of the reporting year, the GSSC has established itself as a client-focused, location-dependent operations hub to increase cost effective and efficient services for other offices (e.g., HQ Support, Ukraine transactional hub).

A further innovation that took place in 2022 was the introduction of a bot to generate payroll reports (there are approximately 3,500 of such reports monthly). This amount of work previously required 15 agents to work simultaneously for 4 hours and 7 days per month. By introducing the bot, processing time has been decreased from 7 days to 14 hours and manual errors have also been reduced.

Lessons learned

As the GSSC was engaged in rolling out the implementation of the policy on the creation of mandatory cost distribution for all staff, a notable challenge was represented by the short-term mentality in the

management of Staff Costs across many UNICEF offices, deeply affecting post management and payroll funding. As a lesson learned from this initiative, the Centre is working on a strategic approach to staff cost funding that prioritizes long term commitment of funds to support sustainable programme implementation while maintaining strong staff engagement. This includes emphasizing the inclusion of staff cost during fundraising negotiations, budgeting, staff post creation, system mapping and payroll administration. Also, the GSSC is working to devise a centralized mechanism that will support long-term staff cost funding for emergency countries that, by nature, have short term funds.