

1. Background

UNOPS project-based delivery model has contributed to the long-term growth and cost efficiency of the organization. It has facilitated flexibility, agility, and access to specialized skills. Our operating structures must be capable of continuously reforming around emerging priorities. The requirements of our workforce therefore differ by the type and context of the work performed:



However over time, the boundary between the core organization structure and project roles has blurred, creating a number of workforce management challenges, including:

- Over reliance on Individual Contractor Agreements (ICA) to engage personnel;
- Uncertainty for personnel engaged on ICA contracts, contributing to organizational cultural issues; and
- Talent management challenges, including barriers to mobility that limit the organization’s ability to fill key positions quickly; and retain high performing talent.

Recognizing these challenges, in its report A/77/5/Add.11, the United Nations Board of Auditors (UNBOA) recommended that UNOPS:

‘list clearly in its rules, the positions that entail ‘inherently UN activities’ and must be filled by staff members to ensure that staff members remain the core human resources of the organization’ (para 206).

2. Project objectives

To address these concerns, in late 2022, the People and Culture Group (PCG) established a dedicated project team to ensure the appropriate application of Fixed Term (Staff) and Individual Contractors (ICA) across the organization, in compliance with UNOPS policy.

This project's mandate is to facilitate the movement of personnel to the places most needed, with reduced burden on our people. This is of particular benefit in improving perspectives between Headquarters and field locations, and also in facilitating our Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Workforce Strategy.

Specific objectives of the project include:

- To convert identified personnel to FTA in compliance with audit recommendations.
- To ensure minimal operational disruption and smooth transition of impacted personnel.
- To prioritize a people centered approach that considers individual situations, without compromising organizational priorities.
- To manage conversion consistently and fairly.

3. Identification of Fixed Term Appointment (FTA) posts

UNOPS policy stipulates that for a post to be established as FTA, the activities associated with it, require the exercise of substantial discretion in applying UN authority and/or in making decisions for the UN.

This means the activities in the relevant Job Description are:

- Requiring a significant fiduciary responsibility, committing the organization either directly, or through the provision of strategic or specialist advice on UN policy and oversight to take (or not to take) action by contract, public pronouncement or otherwise¹;

¹ Other than the selection of a supplier on reasonable terms pursuant to UNOPS procurement policies

- Determining, protecting, and advancing the interests of the United Nations, by diplomatic means or political means or otherwise;
- Significantly affecting the safety and security or property or persons;
- Exerting ultimate control over the acquisition, use, or disposition of United Nations property (real or personal, tangible or intangible), including establishing policies or procedures for the collection, control, or disbursement of funds;
- Acting as internal control custodian of the organization; or
- Deciding on rules to be reflected in the corporate manuals and policies, including making exceptions to such policies.

The full list of posts that are currently approved as Fixed Term Appointment (FTA) in UNOPS are available at [this link](#).

4. Transition approach

When considering how to approach the conversion from Individual Contractor Agreements (ICA) to Fixed Term (Staff) UNOPS sought an approach that ensured minimal operational disruption and smooth transition of impacted personnel. The organization is committed to prioritizing a people centered approach that considers individual situations, strengthens UNOPS leadership capability and demonstrates consistency and fairness.

In consultation with the Legal Group and the Staff Council, the Executive Director has decided to use direct appointments for the conversion process, noting that all posts in UNOPS are competitively recruited and that internal talent assessment mechanisms are already in place for leadership roles. A HR review process will also confirm satisfactory performance for the last two years; and that no action has been taken against the individual as a result of a grievance claim.

Incumbents that were directly appointed as IICA without any assessment, will be required to undergo an assessment process. These positions will be advertised for internal candidates in the first instance.

5. Phased implementation

The project is structured into two phases.

Phase One: December 2022 to December 2023

All field leadership roles will be addressed in Phase One. This includes Country Managers, Head of Programme, Head of Support Services and lead security positions in hardship duty stations. This phase will also include some Group and senior technical leadership roles in Headquarters. In the event that other identified posts have become vacant in 2023, we have already been advertising them as UN staff posts and have been filled as such.

At the end of Phase One, UNOPS will have aligned our organization structure with the UN Board of Auditors recommendation that our core organization structure is composed of personnel on FTA posts.

Phase Two: October 2023 onward

Once Phase One is complete the project will review other positions in Headquarters and Regions.

6. Timeline

All positions identified for Phase One conversion will be completed by January 2024. We are carefully planning our implementation to ensure minimal operational disruption and smooth transition of impacted personnel.

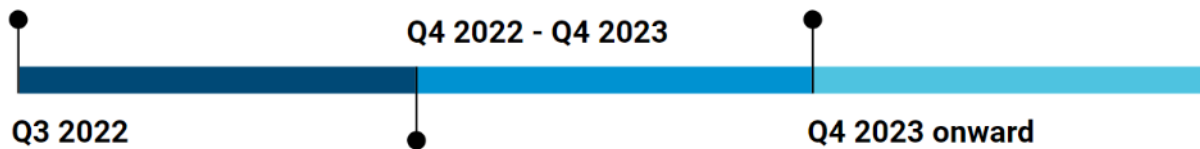
Phase Two will begin in Q4 2023 and implementation will begin soon after.

Project planning

- Review requirements
- Propose approach
- Define risks
- Establish review board
- Stakeholder consultation, including regions

Phase 2

- Other positions in HQ and Regions
- Impact assessment
- Consultation and communication
- Assessment process (if required)
- Contract issue



Phase 1

- High impact positions, planned and budgeted in 2023 budget
- Impact assessment
- Consultation and communication
- Assessment process (if required)
- Contract issue

7. Progress to date

A dedicated project team is now in place in PCG to implement this project.

The project embeds key change management principles and will include significant engagement with key stakeholders and affected personnel. The cross functional project structure will include ongoing consultation and involvement of Regional Offices, IPAS HR, the Bangkok Shared Service Centre, the Change and Transformation Unit.

Regular status updates are being provided to the Executive Director and Management Team on progress toward conversion.

Progress is on track toward target on all key milestones as outlined below:

Key Milestones	Date	Status
Approval of positions in Phase One	December 2022	Complete
Regional consultations on proposed approach	January 2023	Complete
Impact analysis	March 2023	Complete
Update of policies and online resources for communication	May 2023	Complete
ED approval of conversion approach	May 2023	Complete
Organization wide communication on approach	June 2023	Complete
Implementation planning with regions	July 2023	In progress
One to one discussions with personnel	July 2023 onward	In progress
Letters of Appointment sent	August 2023 onward	In progress
Phase Two review begins	October 2023	Planned

8. Future considerations

The Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system (JIU) has included in their 2022 programme of work, a review of the use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities in the United Nations system. The purpose of the review is to apprise the status of policies, as well as the actual practices in the use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities in the United Nations system.

Related contractual modalities of non-staff personnel across the 28 JIU participating organizations will be assessed. The review is expected to make recommendations on the adequacy and effectiveness of the above-mentioned policies and practices. It will also capture challenges, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the use of non-staff personnel, to guide United Nations system organizations.

UNOPS provided input into this review in January 2023. The outcome of this report is also expected to impact future phases of this work.

At the same time, PCG is continually working to ensure the ICA offers competitive benefits and entitlements; and is fully aligned internationally recognized labor standards and principles.