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Human resources management

Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics ([A/75/591](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee was provided with additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 14 December 2020.
2. The Secretary-General indicates that his annual report, which contains demographic data on the staff of the Secretariat for 2019, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions concerning human resources management, the most recent of which are resolutions [66/234](#), [67/255](#), [68/252](#), [71/263](#) and [72/254](#).

II. Staff demographics

3. The Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat comprised 36,574 staff as at 31 December 2019 ([A/75/591](#), para. 5). In his report, he provides information in five sections (introduction, workforce analytics, all staff of the Secretariat, staff appointments and separations, and staff subject to the system of desirable ranges), with the latter three containing data under population, entity, category, gender and age, and appointment type, where applicable. In the report, information is also provided on the staff demographics in 2019, as well as the demographic trends from 30 June 2016 to 31 December 2019.

Presentation and analysis

4. The Secretary-General indicates that the in-depth analysis in the report focuses on key challenges and opportunities to achieve the gender parity and geographical diversity objectives, the latter with its two components regarding geographical representation and regional group diversity, in line with the targets established in the



system-wide gender parity strategy and the Secretariat's Geographical Diversity Strategy. Section II of the report provides information on gender parity (*ibid.*, paras. 17 and 18 and sect. II.C) and geographical diversity (*ibid.*, paras. 19 to 24 and sect. II.D).

5. In the report, the Secretary-General indicates that a new section II is introduced to cover enhanced workforce analytics and focuses on core diversity elements of the human resources strategy: gender parity and geographical diversity, as well as providing a detailed analysis of factors having an impact on these human resources priorities and a better understanding of progress. It is also indicated that the workforce analytics focus on opportunities to make further progress on gender parity and geographical diversity through retirements and the trends observed throughout the application process, including the retirement of male staff and geographical staff, the selection of female candidates and of applicants from the African and the Latin American and Caribbean regional groups (*ibid.*, paras. 10 and 11). The Advisory Committee makes further comments and recommendations in the paragraphs below and in its report on the Secretary-General's overview report on human resources management ([A/75/765](#)).

6. The Secretary-General indicates that he intends to focus part of future reports on the composition of the Secretariat on workforce analytics, such as the one presented in section II of the report. He further indicates that the focus may vary from report to report to align the analysis with strategic priorities and variables of the human resources reform outcomes. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts to present analytical information in the current report as well as identify trends and persistent or emerging challenges. Nevertheless, the Committee recalls its previous recommendations regarding the need for a more extensive trend analysis and the need to understand their underlying causes with a view to developing corrective measures and policy enhancements. The Committee also recalls its recommendations regarding the need for a refined global human resources strategy of the Organization, including prioritization of the most persistent issues, and the inclusion of measurable, deliverable and specific targets and timelines (see [A/74/696](#), paras. 7 to 9, and [A/73/497](#), para. 9).**

7. The Secretary-General indicates that efforts will be made to transition the contents of the report on the composition of the Secretariat gradually to an online platform starting in 2021, and that most of the standard demographic information contained in the current report will be made available to all Member States through expanded online reporting ([A/75/591](#), para. 13). **Although the Advisory Committee notes the transition of the contents of the report on the composition of the Secretariat to an online platform, it also notes that Member States already have access to information relating to the composition of the Secretariat. The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide detailed analytical information in the context of the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.**

8. The Secretary-General proposes a biennial reporting period instead of the current annual reporting cycle, given that such reporting requires a deep-dive analysis, strategic consultations across the Organization and additional time for iteration between data sources (*ibid.*, para. 12). **The Advisory Committee is of the view that owing to the number of ongoing initiatives and pending human resources policy issues, an annual report remains required and will provide an overview of the implementation of such initiatives and an opportunity for early identification of potential challenges and solutions (see also [A/73/497](#)). The Committee also recalls that a prior change in the reporting cycle to an annual calendar cycle had already taken place for the alignment of the reporting periods (see also [A/73/79](#)). The Committee is, therefore, of the view that the proposed biennial reporting, instead of the current annual reporting cycle, is not justified and recommends against the change proposed.**

Secretariat staff demographics and trends

9. In the report, the Secretary-General provides statistical data on the staff of the Secretariat from June 2016 to December 2019 in tables 1 and 2, including the following trends: (a) the number of staff of the Secretariat and related entities in the United Nations system increased by 2.2 per cent, from 75,934 to 77,620, attributable to increases in staff numbers in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); (b) the number of Secretariat staff decreased by 8.9 per cent, from 40,131 to 36,574, mostly owing to reductions in staffing levels in field operations that have downsized or closed, mainly the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH); (c) the proportion of Secretariat staff in the Professional and higher categories relative to total staff increased from 32.0 to 36.7 per cent, while the proportion of staff in the General Service and related categories to total staff decreased from 58.1 to 53.9 per cent; (d) the ratio of staff holding permanent or continuing appointments relative to total staff increased from 22.3 to 29.1 per cent, while the proportion of staff with fixed-term appointments to total staff decreased from 70.3 to 62.3 per cent; (e) the overall proportion of female staff relative to total staff increased from 34.8 to 38.4 per cent, (f) the average age of Secretariat staff members increased from 44.6 to 46.2 years; (g) the average length of service within the Secretariat increased from 7.9 years to 9.1 years (see [A/71/360](#), table 11, and [A/75/591](#), table 16); (h) the number of Secretariat staff with geographical status increased by 6 per cent, from 2,982 to 3,158; and (i) the number of Member States within the desirable range for representation in geographical posts increased from 104 to 108.

Geographical representation

10. In the report, it is indicated that as at 31 December 2019, there were 3,158 Secretariat staff with geographical status pursuant to paragraph 66 of General Assembly resolution [65/247](#), in which the Assembly decided that staff members should retain geographical status only when serving against a post subject to geographical distribution, except those recruited under the young professionals programme. It is also indicated that the number of posts subject to geographical distribution was 3,611 and that the difference between the number of posts subject to geographical distribution (3,611) and the number of staff with geographical status serving against a geographical post (3,110) is accounted for by 276 posts that are vacant, 174 posts that are temporarily encumbered by staff without geographical status and 51 personnel with limited appointments. In addition, the total number of staff with geographical status (3,158) includes 48 staff in the young professionals programme serving against non-geographical posts ([A/75/591](#), para. 101 and footnote 22).

11. The table below indicates the representation of Member States under the system of desirable ranges from 30 June 2016 to 31 December 2019 ([A/75/591](#), table 24).

(Population: 193 Member States)

	<i>Unrepresented</i>	<i>Underrepresented</i>	<i>Within range</i>	<i>Overrepresented</i>
June 2016	19	42	104	28
December 2016	18	44	102	29
December 2017	19	44	103	27
December 2018	21	40	105	27
December 2019	22	34	108	29

12. The Advisory Committee notes that the number of Member States within the range increased from 102 as at 31 December 2016 to 108 as at 31 December 2019 and the number in the underrepresented category decreased from 44 to 34 during the same period (see [A/75/591](#), table 2, [A/73/79](#), table 2, and [A/72/123](#), table 2). However, the Committee notes with concern that, during the same period, the number of Member States in the unrepresented category continued to increase, from 18 to 22, and that the number of overrepresented Member States continued to remain high.

13. The Secretary-General also provides information on the appointment of 141 Secretariat staff to posts subject to geographical distribution in 2019: (a) 3 staff members were from unrepresented Member States; (b) 46 staff members were from underrepresented Member States; (c) 47 staff members were from Member States within range; and (d) 45 were from overrepresented Member States ([A/75/591](#), table 30). The Advisory Committee notes the essentially unchanged nature of the percentages, where in 2018 only 34 per cent of the initial appointments to Secretariat posts subject to geographical distribution were selected from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, compared with 36 per cent in 2017 and 32 per cent in 2016 (see [A/73/79](#), table 26, and [A/72/123](#), table 26). Upon enquiry, the Committee was provided with the table below indicating the number of appointments needed for underrepresented Member States to reach the lower limit and the midpoint of the ranges for the posts subject to geographical distribution.

Number of appointments needed for underrepresented Member States to reach the lower limit and the midpoint of the ranges

	<i>Total number of appointments</i>				
	<i>30 June 2016</i>	<i>31 December 2016</i>	<i>31 December 2017</i>	<i>31 December 2018</i>	<i>31 December 2019</i>
For underrepresented Member States to reach lower limit	320	314	341	329	339
For underrepresented Member States to reach midpoint	623	631	655	627	615

14. The Advisory Committee notes that the number of appointments needed for underrepresented Member States to reach the lower limit and the midpoint of the ranges has not changed significantly. The Committee further notes that analysis regarding the reasons relating to the levels of appointments to Secretariat posts subject to geographical distribution is largely absent from the report. The Committee discusses further key performance indicators in the senior managers' compacts on the appointments from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States in its report on the Secretary-General's report on the overview of human resources management.

15. As regards geographical diversity, it is indicated in the report of the Secretary-General that the Geographical Diversity Strategy is operationalized in the diversity toolkits, with the review and analysis of retirement forecasts that are indicated in the report being built into a strategic approach and designed to have a positive impact on geographical representation. It is further indicated in the report that the Office of Human Resources aims to provide entity-specific reviews of retirement projections for geographical staff so that entities can direct their targeted outreach efforts on the basis of these opportunities ([A/75/591](#), para. 19, and [A/75/540](#), paras. 41 to 46). In paragraph 11 of the report, the key trends and retirements are indicated. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the strategy introduces a systematic, deliberate and multi-pronged effort towards equitable greater geographical diversity

and that the strategy aims to better target outreach efforts towards qualified candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States and regions, including by: exploring more effective use of online platforms and new tools; deliberately linking the insights from strategic workforce planning about recruitment opportunities from forecasted retirements, which provide opportunities for improving geographical diversity and gender parity, through proactive recruitment planning and targeted outreach; and developing Member State-specific outreach profiles for all unrepresented and underrepresented Member States. The Committee was also informed that continuous improvement in recruitment and assessment methods is one of the strategic pillars of the strategy.

16. The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to improve the geographical representation of staff from Member States in accordance with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations and provide an update in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat. The Committee makes further comments and recommendations regarding equitable geographical representation and geographical diversity in its report on the Secretary-General's report on the overview of human resources management.

Gender

17. The Secretary-General indicates that 38.4 per cent of staff members are female, representing an increase of 1.6 per cent compared to the prior period, with 24.2 per cent in peacekeeping operations and special political missions and 49.2 per cent in departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals, representing an increase of 1.1 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively ([A/75/591](#), table 1). Of the 141 Secretariat staff appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution in 2019 (see para. 13 above, and [A/75/591](#), table 30), 83 staff, or 59 per cent, were women, disaggregated as follows: (a) 2 were from unrepresented Member States; (b) 27 were from underrepresented Member States; (c) 28 were from Member States within range; and (d) 26 were from overrepresented Member States. In addition, 42 originated from developing countries and 41 from developed countries (see [A/75/591](#), table 30). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information regarding the appointment of Secretariat staff to posts subject to geographical distribution by gender, representation status and economic grouping from 1 January to 31 December 2019 and notes that 42 women from developing countries were appointed as compared to 27 men, and 41 women from developed countries were appointed as compared to 31 men. **The Advisory Committee notes the overall increase in the number of female staff members and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to make more efforts to improve gender balance at all levels within the Secretariat, including in peacekeeping operations and special political missions, in particular from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States and, in line with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, with due consideration for the principle of equitable geographical representation (see also para. 16 above).** The Committee makes further comments and recommendations in its report on the Secretary-General's report on the overview of human resources management.

Nationalization strategy

18. The report provides a breakdown of all staff by category, grade and entity as at 31 December 2019, including the category of National Professional Officers ([A/75/591](#), table 11). The Advisory Committee notes that in the General Service and related categories, National Professional Officers make up only 11 per cent of national staff and 6 per cent of total staff. As regards the national staffing strategy of the Organization, the Committee was informed upon enquiry that the objective of

nationalization is to implement the General Assembly mandates for optimizing the use of locally recruited staff and building more local capacity to contribute directly to the goals of the United Nations in the host country. This objective is pursued through the nationalization guidelines that are aimed at creating an appropriate balance of internationally and locally recruited staff, based on the local context, capacity-building in the host country and the operational requirements of the entity.

19. The Advisory Committee was informed that each entity has a unique mandate and varying skills are needed depending on the phase it has reached in its life cycle and that given the diverse needs and varying availability of local talent from duty station to duty station, each entity's potential to nationalize functions will differ. The Committee was informed that each entity would set a goal to review its workforce on at least an annual basis so as to ensure it is aligned with the requirements of the entity, and would include as part of the review such specific considerations as mandate, strategic priorities, entity life cycle, the local labour market and the operational environment. **The Advisory Committee trusts that more efforts will be made to nationalize positions in accordance with General Assembly resolutions, and that detailed statistics by relevant entities will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.** The Committee makes further comments and recommendations regarding nationalization in its report on the Secretary-General's report on the overview of human resources management.

Vacant posts and recruitment timelines

20. The Advisory Committee was provided with information, upon enquiry, indicating the number of encumbered and vacant posts subject to geographical distribution as at 31 December 2017, 2018 and 2019 and as at 31 October 2020, and was informed that the posts subject to geographical distribution include posts in the Professional and higher categories in the Secretariat, with the exclusion of certain posts funded under the regular budget comprising: language, mission, jointly financed activities, general temporary assistance and temporary assistance for meetings. The Committee notes that the number of vacant posts has increased from 300 in 2017 to 333 in 2018, 367 in 2019 and 548 as at 31 October 2020. **The Advisory Committee is concerned that a significant number of posts subject to geographical distribution are vacant and trusts that every effort will be made to fill them expeditiously and that an update will be provided in the context of the next report on the composition of the Secretariat (see para. 13 above).**

21. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that according to the Secretariat, based on an analysis of posts and positions that have been vacant at any point in time since 2017, the average number of days from a post becoming vacant to being encumbered is 186 days. **The Advisory Committee is concerned at the lengthy recruitment timelines and trusts that corrective measures will be undertaken in the context of the refined global human resources strategy and that complete statistical information regarding vacant posts, including their duration, will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.** The Committee makes further comments and recommendations regarding recruitment timelines in its report on the Secretary-General's report on the overview of human resources management.

External and internal recruitment

22. The Secretary-General indicates that the population used in reporting on staff appointments and separations was 34,471 as at 31 December 2019 and includes only staff members administered in Umoja. The number is 2,103 staff members smaller than that reported in section II of the report on the all-staff population (36,574), given that the staff not included in the appointments and separations population are UNDP

administered staff of the Secretariat and some senior staff who are not yet administered in Umoja ([A/75/591](#), para. 92, table 19 and footnote 21). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that table 19 of the report provides a summary of staff appointments and separations where the total number of 5,064 appointments includes initial appointments and reappointments, which by nature are considered “external” and that at the time of the appointment, the appointees were not staff members but were considered “external”. Upon further enquiry, the Committee was informed that of the 5,064 appointments, 2,186 staff are categorized as being upon initial appointment, 2,834 upon appointment and 44 are under other categorizations, including the placement of Secretariat staff who were successful in the examination for the young professionals programme.

23. The Advisory Committee notes the lack of statistical information in the report relating to the recruitment of external and internal candidates. The Committee also notes that greater clarity is required in terms of the definitions of “internal” and “external” appointments, the concept of new appointments and reappointments and the relative numbers of “internal” and “external” candidates. **The Advisory Committee trusts that detailed disaggregated statistical information on “internal” and “external” appointments will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat and that further clarity in terms of the policy basis for categorizing appointments, between staff as upon initial appointment and reappointment, will be included in the refined global human resources strategy. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide equal treatment and opportunities with regard to the recruitment of internal and external candidates and an update in the context of the next overview report on human resources management.** The Committee makes further comments and recommendations regarding external recruitment in its report on the Secretary-General’s report on the new approach to staff mobility: building an agile Organization by providing opportunities for on-the-job learning and skills development.

Ageing of staff and rejuvenation of the Secretariat

24. According to the data presented in the report, the average age of Secretariat staff increased from 44.6 to 46.2 years from 30 June 2016 to 31 December 2019 ([A/75/591](#), figure 31). The Advisory Committee recalls that the Secretary-General provided an initial analysis of the ageing trend of the Secretariat staff profile (see [A/71/557](#), paras. 106–108), another analysis in his report to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session ([A/73/372/Add.1](#), paras. 46–48 and annex II) and another in his report to the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session, in which it was indicated that the number of entry-level staff decreased by 101, from 1,393 to 1,292, between 2015 and 2018 ([A/74/82](#), table 8, and [A/70/605](#), table 8). The Committee notes that although the number of entry-level staff has increased to 1,328 according to the most recent report (see [A/75/591](#), table 11), it nonetheless notes once more that efforts to rejuvenate the Organization have been hampered by the repeated reductions in the number of entry-level posts (P-1 and P-2) over the years and the general upward shift in the grade structure of the Secretariat, with an increasing number of posts at the D-1 and D-2 levels (see [A/75/591](#), table 12). **The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation that further analysis of the increase in the number of high-level posts in the Secretariat be undertaken and that proposals relating to specific long-term solutions be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration ([A/75/7](#), para. 49).**

25. In the context of the proposed programme budget for 2021, the General Assembly, in its resolution [75/252](#), endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee regarding the inclusion of more junior-level posts in the context of future budget submissions and the inclusion of further details on the rejuvenation strategy

and upcoming retirements in the context of the next human resources management report (see [A/75/7](#), chap. I, paras. 47–49). **The Advisory Committee recalls once more its comments and recommendations in successive budget proposals and reports on human resources management regarding the detrimental effect that the reduction in the number of entry-level Professional posts has on the ability of the Organization to attract and develop young talent in its rejuvenation efforts.**¹ **The Committee looks forward to the inclusion of more junior-level posts in the context of future budget submissions. The Committee also trusts that the rejuvenation strategy and upcoming retirement plan will be provided in the context of the next human resources management report.**

High-level staff

26. As at 31 December 2019, 153 Secretariat staff members were serving at the level of Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General (see [A/75/591](#), table 11), compared with 159 as at 30 June 2016 and 150 in 2017 and 2018. The Advisory Committee continues to consider that the trend in the number of high-level staff should be viewed in the context of the continued decrease in Secretariat staff, from 40,131 to 36,574, or 8.9 per cent, between 2016 and 2019. The Committee notes the reduction during the 12-month reporting period from 37,505 in 2018 to 36,574 in 2019 (*ibid.*, table 2; and [A/74/82](#), tables 2 and 8). From information provided upon request, the Committee notes that 150 high-level staff, 69 at the Under-Secretary-General level and 81 at the Assistant Secretary-General level, were on board as at 31 October 2020, originating from 72 Member States, compared with 69 Member States in the prior period. **While the number of high-level staff has remained relatively stable in recent reporting periods, the Advisory Committee stresses the continued need to monitor the overall top-heaviness of the Organization and to ensure that any future proposals for the establishment of high-level positions entail a thorough review of existing functions and structures so as to minimize any possible overlap in the functional responsibilities at the higher levels of the Organization (see also [A/74/696](#), para. 20; [A/73/497](#), para. 18, and [A/71/557](#), para. 114).**

27. In the report, the Secretary-General indicates the number of Secretariat staff by category, grade and funding source as at 31 December 2019, of whom 515 staff at the level of D-1 and above are funded from the regular budget, 175 from the peacekeeping budget and 258 from extrabudgetary sources ([A/75/591](#), annex, table 3). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with the information relating to the appointments made at the grade of D-1 level and above by nationality and duty station grouping during the years 2017, 2018 and 2019. The Committee notes that in 2017, 33 staff were appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution and 91 staff to all posts and positions on a permanent/continuing or fixed-term appointment. In 2018, the numbers of staff appointed were 25 and 86, respectively, and 21 and 159, respectively, in 2019. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include systematically, in the context of future reports on the composition of the Secretariat, a detailed breakdown, with the status of incumbency, of all positions at the D-1 and higher levels, funded through all sources of funding (see also [A/75/7/Add.8](#), para. 15).**

High-level appointments

28. In table 14 of the report, details are provided pertaining to the 12 high-level appointments with one-dollar-per-year contracts. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that there were also 14 high-level appointments on when-

¹ See [A/74/7](#), chap. I, paras. 87 and 88; [A/73/497](#), paras. 14 and 15; [A/72/558](#), para. 13; [A/71/557](#), para. 41; [A/69/572](#), para. 105; [A/68/7](#), paras. 86 and 87; and [A/66/7](#), para. 86.

actually-employed contracts and that the various policies on these contractual modalities, including one-dollar-per-year and when-actually-employed contracts, part-time employment and gratis personnel, were devised to meet the evolving mandates and needs of the Organization upon request of the Member States through various General Assembly resolutions. The Committee was also provided with information regarding the resolutions and contractual modalities. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the appropriate contractual modalities are being used and that an update will be provided in the next overview report on human resources management.**

Other matters

29. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information relating to the number of applications per selection for vacancies with job openings posted during the period 2013–2019 for all entities within the Secretariat. The Committee notes that the data show an increase in the number of applications per job opening over time.

III. Recommendation

30. The General Assembly is requested to take note of the report of the Secretary-General ([A/75/591](#), para. 121). **The comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee are contained in the present report.**
