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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/74/82](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 26 November 2019.
2. The Secretary-General indicates that his annual report, which contains demographic data of the staff of the Secretariat for 2018,¹ 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](#).
3. The Advisory Committee recalls that the reports of the Secretary-General giving an overview of human resources management are submitted biennially, most recently at the seventy-third session ([A/73/372](#) and [A/73/372/Add.1](#)). In its report on human resources management ([A/73/497](#)), the Committee pointed out persistent challenges experienced by the Organization, including: (a) deficiencies in staff selection processes; (b) rejuvenation through external recruitment; (c) equal treatment of external and internal candidates; (d) the need to improve performance appraisal and management; (e) the number of persons holding temporary appointments, including those in receipt of special post allowance; (f) impediments to achieving equitable geographical distribution and gender balance targets; and (g) employment of retired staff members. The Committee recalls that the Assembly decided to defer, initially until the first part of its resumed seventy-third session and subsequently until the first part of its resumed seventy-fourth session, its consideration of the related reports on human resources management (decisions [73/547 B](#) and [74/540 A](#)).

¹ An addendum to the composition report, on gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors, is submitted biennially by the Secretary-General. The most recent report ([A/73/79/Add.1](#)) covered the period 2016–2017.



II. Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics

4. The Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat comprised 37,505 staff as at 31 December 2018 (A/74/82, para. 2). His report provides information in four sections (overview, Secretariat staff, staff movements (appointments and separations) and staff subject to the system of desirable ranges), each of which contains data under population, entity, category, gender and age, and appointment type, where applicable. The report also provides information on the staff demographics in 2018, as well as the demographic trends of the 3.5 years from 30 June 2015 to 31 December 2018.

Presentation and analysis

5. The Secretary-General indicates that, as requested by the Advisory Committee (see A/73/497, para. 19), information is provided on the sources of funding of Secretariat staff by category and grade as at 31 December 2018 (see A/74/82, annex, table 3). **The Advisory Committee welcomes the inclusion of the information on the sources of funding of Secretariat staff in the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat.**

6. The Advisory Committee has noted that, following the approval by the General Assembly, in paragraph 3 of its resolution 71/263, of the change in reporting cycle (see para. 4 above), the first reports of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/73/79 and A/73/79/Add.1) contained limited analysis regarding trends and the need to understand their underlying causes with a view to developing corrective measures and policy enhancements (see A/73/497, para. 9). The Committee notes that the most recent report (A/74/82), which is the second following the change of reporting cycle, remains essentially the same as the previous reports in terms of its content and presentation.

7. In paragraph 6 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that more detailed trend analysis will be provided in his future reports giving an overview of human resources management, such as updates on the information presented in paragraphs 46 to 48 of and annex II to his previous report on the subject (A/73/372/Add.1). However, the Advisory Committee recalls that the analysis provided in that report was focused only on the trends relating to the age of Secretariat staff, without further analysis and recommendations relating to long-term solutions (see A/73/497, paras. 13–15). **The Advisory Committee reiterates its concern at the absence of analytical information that it considers useful in order to address the correlation among the trends identified, the persistent or emerging challenges and the specific actions proposed (see also A/73/497, para. 8).**

8. **The Advisory Committee has stressed over the years the need for a more extensive trend analysis, including identification of the reasons for different staff demographic patterns to help the General Assembly to interpret the information underlying the statistical data and tables presented.² The Committee continues to be of the view that a trend analysis should in turn lead to the development of policy enhancements and that there is a need to present a comprehensive, detailed and in-depth analysis of the persistent problems and challenges experienced by the Organization under each of the subject areas of human resources management (see A/73/497, para. 60, and A/71/557, para. 108).**

9. **The Advisory Committee recalls its observations and recommendations with respect to the need for a refined global human resources strategy of the Organization, including prioritization of the most persistent issues, and the**

² See A/67/545, para. 138; A/68/523, para. 5; A/69/572, para. 128; A/70/764, para. 8; A/72/558, para. 6; and A/73/497, para. 6.

inclusion of measurable, deliverable and specific targets and timelines (see [A/73/497](#), paras. 51–82), with due regard to Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations (see para. 15 below). The Committee reiterates that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to submit a refined global human resources strategy, with specific corrective policy measures, during the seventy-fifth session of the Assembly, with an analysis of the challenges in meeting the mandates set by the Assembly with respect to, inter alia: (a) achieving equitable geographical distribution; (b) gender parity; (c) balance in the selection of internal and external candidates; and (d) career development opportunities for staff (see also para. 3 above and para. 15 below).

Secretariat staff demographics and trends

10. The report of the Secretary-General provides statistical data on the staff of the Secretariat from 30 June 2015 to 31 December 2018 in tables 1 and 2. The Advisory Committee notes the following trends: (a) the number of staff of the Secretariat and related entities in the United Nations system increased by 0.6 per cent, from 76,115 to 76,590; (b) the number of Secretariat staff decreased by 8.7 per cent, from 41,081 to 37,505, mostly owing to reductions in staffing levels in field operations that have downsized or closed; (c) the proportion of Secretariat staff in the Professional and higher categories relative to total staff increased from 30.6 to 34.8 per cent, while the proportion of staff in the General Service and related categories decreased from 59.3 to 55.6 per cent; (d) the ratio of staff holding permanent or continuing appointments relative to total staff increased from 22.6 to 29.1 per cent, while the proportion of staff holding fixed-term appointments decreased from 71.2 to 62.9 per cent, mainly owing to the two continuing appointment exercises; (e) the overall proportion of female staff relative to total staff increased from 34.4 to 36.8 per cent, with a significantly lower proportion of women serving in field operations (23.1 per cent) than in non-field operations (48.7 per cent); (f) the average age of Secretariat staff members increased from 44.2 to 45.7 years (see also paras. 16–18 below); (g) the average length of service within the Secretariat increased from 7.6 years to 8.7 years (see [A/70/605](#), table 11, and [A/74/82](#), table 13); (h) the number of Secretariat staff with geographical status increased by 4 per cent, from 3,001 to 3,107; and (i) the number of Member States within the desirable range for representation in geographical posts decreased by 9 per cent, from 116 to 105 (see also paras. 11–15 below).

Geographical representation

11. According to the Secretary-General, between 2015 and 2018, the number of Member States within the desirable range for representation in geographical posts decreased by 9 per cent, from 116 to 105 (see [A/74/82](#), tables 2 and 20). The Advisory Committee recalls that this decrease is consistent with the downward trend observed in previous years: the number of such Member States decreased by 14 per cent, from 120 to 103, between 2014 and 2017 and by 18 per cent, from 125 to 102, between 2013 and 2016, while the number of Member States in the unrepresented and underrepresented categories increased, from 15 to 21 and from 32 to 40, respectively (see [A/73/79](#), table 2, and [A/72/123](#), table 2). The Committee also notes that the number of Member States in the overrepresented category increased, from 22 to 27, between 30 June 2015 and 31 December 2018 (*ibid.*, table 20).

12. The Secretary-General also provides information on the appointment of 142 Secretariat staff to posts subject to geographical distribution in 2018, as follows: (a) 1 staff member was from an unrepresented Member State; (b) 47 staff members were from underrepresented Member States; (c) 49 staff members were from Member States within range; and (d) 45 were from overrepresented Member States ([A/74/82](#),

table 26). The Advisory Committee notes that, 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, a percentage that is essentially unchanged from 2017 (36 per cent) and 2016 (32 per cent) (see [A/73/79](#), table 26, and [A/72/123](#), table 26). Upon enquiry, the Committee was provided with a table showing data extracted from senior managers' compacts concerning geographical appointments from unrepresented or underrepresented Member States in 2018 (see annex). The Committee notes that those compacts stipulate a target of appointing at least 50 per cent of staff from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States to all posts subject to geographical distribution. However, according to the table, of 23 departments and offices at and away from Headquarters, only 2 met the target in 2018: the Ethics Office and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

13. The Secretary-General also indicates that, of the aforementioned 142 Secretariat staff appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution, 96 (68 per cent) were women, disaggregated as follows: (a) none were from unrepresented Member States; (b) 33 were from underrepresented Member States; (c) 36 were from Member States within range; and (d) 27 were from overrepresented Member States. In addition, 37 (26 per cent) originated from developing countries and 59 (42 per cent) from developed countries (see [A/74/82](#), table 26).

14. The Advisory Committee notes with concern the renewed downward trend in the number of Member States within the desirable range and the related increase in the number of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States (see para. 11 above; see also [A/72/558](#), para. 9, and [A/73/497](#), para. 12). The Committee regrets that, nonetheless, the Secretary-General has not provided any meaningful analysis of the underlying reasons and related corrective actions and/or policy proposals in order to reverse this trend. Furthermore, the Committee notes with concern that senior managers of Secretariat departments and offices have not met the target of appointing at least 50 per cent of staff from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States to posts subject to geographical distribution, as stipulated in their compacts. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to report compliance thereon in future reports on the accountability system and, furthermore, to ensure that appropriate accountability measures are taken in the future in cases of non-compliance.

15. The Advisory Committee recalls the statement in Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter that due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible. Moreover, the Committee also recalls that the system of desirable ranges was established in 1960 in order to measure progress towards achieving a wide equitable geographical distribution of the staff of the Secretariat (see General Assembly resolution [1559 \(XV\)](#), para. 1). The Committee further recalls that the Assembly, in paragraphs 9 and 17 of its resolution [71/263](#), called for the attainment of equitable geographical distribution in the Secretariat. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to develop a strategy with concrete measures and related actions to achieve equitable geographical representation in the Secretariat and to submit information on the progress made to the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session (see paras. 7–9 above).**

Ageing of staff and rejuvenation of the Secretariat

16. According to the data presented in the report, the average age of Secretariat staff increased from 44.2 to 45.7 years from 30 June 2015 to 31 December 2018 (see

para. 10 above). The Advisory Committee recalls that, having provided an initial analysis of the aging trend of the Secretariat staff profile (see [A/71/557](#), paras. 106–108), the Secretary-General provided another analysis in his report to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session (see para. 7 above and [A/73/372/Add.1](#), paras. 46–48 and annex II). It was indicated therein that the average age in the Secretariat could be expected to continue to increase given the increase in the mandatory retirement age. The analysis suggested, moreover, that the Secretariat was recruiting staff with significantly more years of work experience compared with the minimum requirement, which was also consistent with the previous analysis by the Joint Inspection Unit ([JIU/REP/2007/4](#)), in which it was noted that the average age upon entry on duty was relatively high owing to the low number of junior posts.

17. The most recent data show 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). While the Advisory Committee understands the increase in the average age of Secretariat staff owing to the increase in the mandatory age of separation, it nonetheless notes that efforts to rejuvenate the Organization have been hampered by the repeated reductions in the number of the entry-level posts (P-1 and P-2) over the years. In the context of the proposed programme budget for 2020, the General Assembly, in its resolution [74/251](#), endorsed the Committee's recommendation against the proposed abolishment of six P-2 posts for 2020 (see [A/74/7](#), chap. I, paras. 87–88). **The Advisory Committee recalls its comments and recommendations on 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.**³

18. **The Advisory Committee again stresses its concern about the reduced number of entry-level Professional posts and the impact that this will have in terms of the achievement of important human resources targets, including rejuvenation and opportunities for career advancement (see also [A/71/557](#), para. 41). The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include further analysis and recommendations for long-term solutions, using existing resources, to the persistent challenges of improving geographical distribution and rejuvenation of the Secretariat, to be incorporated into the refined global human resources strategy and the overview of human resources management to be submitted for the consideration of the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, as well as into future reports, including relevant budget proposals, as applicable (see also para. 9 above and [A/73/497](#), para. 15).**

High-level staff

19. As at 31 December 2018, 150 Secretariat staff members were serving at the level of Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General⁴ (see [A/74/82](#), table 8), just as in 2017, compared with 159 and 166 staff members as at 30 June 2016 and 30 June 2015, respectively. The Advisory Committee continues to consider that the trend in the number of high-level staff should be viewed in the context of the 8.7 per cent decrease in Secretariat staff, from 41,081 to 37,505, between 2015 and 2018 (*ibid.*, table 2). From information provided upon request, the Committee notes that 154 high-level staff, 73 at the Under-Secretary-General level and 81 at the Assistant

³ See [A/66/7](#), para. 86; [A/68/7](#), paras. 86–87; [A/69/572](#), para. 105; [A/71/557](#), para. 41; [A/72/558](#), para. 13; and [A/73/497](#), paras. 14–15.

⁴ Of the 37,505 staff from all sources of funding.

Secretary-General level, were on board as at 31 August 2019, originating from 69 Member States.

20. **While noting the reduction in the number of high-level staff in comparison with two earlier reporting periods, the Advisory Committee stresses, once again, 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 high level of the Organization (see also [A/73/497](#), para. 18, and [A/71/557](#), para. 114).**

21. On a related matter, the Advisory Committee recalls that, in the proposed programme budget for 2020, the Secretary-General proposed a net increase of nine posts at the D-1 level and above and that, in its comments thereon, the Committee reiterated its concern over the number of senior-level and high-level posts in the overall proposed Secretariat staffing profile (see also [A/68/7](#), para. 102; [A/70/7](#), para. 88; and [A/72/7](#), para. 93). Furthermore, the Committee regretted that the budget proposal contained no information concerning the measures taken by the Secretary-General to reverse that trend, despite the specific requests of the General Assembly contained in its resolutions [70/247](#) and [71/263](#) (see [A/74/7](#), chap. I, paras. 84–86).

III. Recommendation

22. The action required of the General Assembly is set out in paragraph 56 of the report of the Secretary-General. **Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**

Annex

Share of geographical appointments from unrepresented or underrepresented Member States by department, office or entity

<i>Department, office or entity</i>	<i>Number of geographical appointments from unrepresented or underrepresented Member States</i>	<i>Total number of geographical appointments</i>	<i>Percentage of geographical appointments from unrepresented or underrepresented Member States</i>
DESA	18	40	45
DFS	–	3	–
DGACM	5	12	42
DM	8	27	30
DPA	3	13	23
DPI	7	22	32
DSS	–	5	–
ECA	–	3	–
ECE	2	10	20
ECLAC	4	13	31
ESCWA	1	7	14
ETHICS	1	2	50
ODA	2	6	33
OHCHR	5	34	15
OHRLLS	1	2	50
OIOS	2	8	25
OLA	3	10	30
UNCTAD	3	26	12
UNEP	2	11	18
UN-Habitat	–	3	–
UNODC	1	7	14
UNOG	1	10	10
UNON	3	12	25

Source: Senior managers compacts performance assessment for 2018.

Abbreviations: DESA, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; DFS, Department of Field Support; DGACM, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management; DM, Department of Management; DPA, Department of Political Affairs; DPI, Department of Public Information; DSS, Department for Safety and Security; ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; ETHICS, Ethics Office; ODA, Office for Disarmament Affairs; OHCHR, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; OHRLLS, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States; OIOS, Office of Internal Oversight Services; OLA, Office of Legal Affairs; UNCTAD, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; UNEP, United Nations Environment Programme; UN-Habitat, United Nations Human Settlements Programme; UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; UNOG, United Nations Office at Geneva; UNON, United Nations Office at Nairobi.