



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 February 2021

Original: English

Seventy-fifth session

Agenda item 146

Human resources management

Composition of the Secretariat: gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors

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 and had before it the addendum to the report on gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors ([A/75/591/Add.1](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee was provided with additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 8 December 2020.

2. The Secretary-General indicates that the 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 (*ibid.*) covered the period 2018–2019.

II. Gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors

3. The Secretary-General indicates that, during the 2018–2019 biennium, the Secretariat comprised 5,146 persons engaged as gratis personnel, 1,151 retired staff and 26,226 consultants and individual contractors. The main details pertaining to each category are indicated in paragraph 4 and table 1 of the report and include alignment of the structure of the report with the budgets (*ibid.*).

Gratis personnel

4. Paragraph 6 of the report indicates that gratis personnel are either of type I, comprising interns, associate experts and technical cooperation experts on non-reimbursable loans, or type II, as provided to the Organization by Governments or other entities responsible for the remuneration of their services. The Advisory



Committee notes that the 5,146 gratis personnel engaged in the biennium represent an increase of 7 per cent as compared with the prior biennium. The gratis personnel originated from 148 Member States, a figure which has remained relatively steady over the past three bienniums. Of the 5,424 engagements of gratis personnel, the Committee notes that 84.7 per cent were interns, representing an increase of 5.3 per cent as compared with the 2016–2017 biennium, and that 66 per cent of all gratis personnel engaged were female, representing an increase of 1 per cent as compared with 2016–2017 (*ibid.*, paras. 3 and 4 and summary).

Interns

5. Table 5 of the report of the Secretary-General indicates the engagement of gratis personnel during the past four bienniums by regional grouping of Member State. The Advisory Committee notes that the table indicates that the total number of interns has increased from 4,365 in 2016–2017 to 4,596 in 2018–2019 and that the numbers of interns from three of the five regional groupings, namely, the African, Eastern European and Latin American and Caribbean groups, have remained consistently low. Upon enquiry as to the low participation in the internship programmes from a number of regional groupings, the Committee was informed that the reasons for the lack of applications from particular nationalities were unknown; however, driving factors included the personal expense of relocation, the unpaid nature of internships and the extent of the Secretariat's presence in different regions as factors impacting the number of available internships. The Committee was also informed that outreach initiatives to unrepresented and underrepresented countries and different regions also covered advocacy for internships at the Secretariat and that many opportunities for employment within the Secretariat were presented to audiences, as well as the application process and possible areas for internships.

6. The Advisory Committee was informed that the recent shift to remote working owing to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) might present an opportunity for potential future interns to work remotely and enjoy the experience of a United Nations internship and that, given the shift to remote working owing to COVID-19, some interns had joined the Organization remotely. The Committee was further informed that remote working could present an opportunity to encourage interns to apply from regions that had low or no participation, as well as minimize the personal cost of an internship. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to make further efforts to bolster the future applicant pool for the internship programme, building also upon remote working opportunities, and to attract a greater number of future internship applicants, particularly from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, including developing countries.**

Retired staff

7. Retired staff members employed by the Secretariat during the biennium 2018–2019 fall into three categories: retirees, non-retired former staff members and staff retained beyond the mandatory age of separation. There were 4,349 engagements during the biennium 2018–2019, representing a decrease of 2.9 per cent as compared with 2016–2017, and including a total of 1,043 persons, representing a reduction of 13.3 per cent, who met the definition of retirees and were working in the Secretariat during that period (*ibid.*, paras. 4, 14 and 15 and table 6). Upon request, the Advisory Committee was informed that there were 430 retired staff who had accrued more than one year of cumulative service (irrespective of any breaks between contracts) during the period 1 January 2015–31 December 2019. The Committee was also provided with information relating to the employment of retired staff over the past four bienniums and notes that the total number of engagements increased from 3,051 in

the 2012–2013 biennium, to 3,628 and 5,121 in the 2014–2015 and 2016–2017 bienniums, respectively, with a subsequent decrease to 5,019 in 2018–2019.

8. The Advisory Committee notes that, while the number of engagements carried out by retirees, and the number of retirees engaged, reduced from 4,481 to 4,349, and 1,203 to 1,043 in the 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 bienniums, respectively, the total number of engagements has not diminished significantly. The Committee was also informed that, in the context of the Secretariat, the largest number of engagements of retired staff during the reporting period was in the “language-related” area, given the degree of seasonality, and that it was expected that employing retired persons would be a recurrent operational reality. **The Advisory Committee expresses concerns about the continued reliance on retired staff, which runs contrary to the need to rejuvenate the Secretariat. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to reduce the reliance on retirees, in order to exercise better workforce succession planning (see also [A/73/497](#), para. 47) in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.**

Consultants and individual contractors

9. The report indicates that, during the 2018–2019 biennium, 26,226 persons were engaged as consultants or individual contractors, of whom 11,682 were engaged at departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals and 14,605 at peacekeeping operations and special political missions and other political presences. This represents a reduction from 27,958 persons engaged as consultants or individual contractors during 2016 to 2017. The number of Member States from which they originated remained relatively stable, at 179 ([A/75/591/Add.1](#), para. 4). The Advisory Committee notes that, although there was a decrease in the numbers of persons engaged as consultants or individual contractors in peacekeeping operations and special political missions as compared with the 2016–2017 biennium by 38.8 per cent and 18.7 per cent, respectively, there was an increase with respect to departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals by 22.1 per cent and 4.7 per cent, respectively, (*ibid.*, tables 21 and 22).

10. The total number of engagements of consultants and individual contractors was 74,772. There were 29,729 engagements of consultants and individual contractors recruited by departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals, 14,899 of which were for consultants and 14,830 for individual contractors. With regard to peacekeeping operations and special political missions and other political presences, 45,043 engagements were recorded during the biennium 2018–2019, of which 771 were for consultants and 44,272 for individual contractors (*ibid.*, para. 27 and tables 19 and 20). The Advisory Committee notes once more that there was a decrease in the number of engagements in peacekeeping operations and special political missions as compared with the 2016–2017 biennium by 34.8 per cent and 6.8 per cent, respectively, and an increase with respect to departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals by 25.5 per cent and 4.6 per cent, respectively, for consultants or individual contractors (*ibid.*, tables 21 and 22).

11. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, while there was an overall increase of 17.4 per cent in the numbers of consultants and individual contractors in terms of persons and engagements at departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals, the largest increases from the prior reporting period in terms of both engagements and persons, specifically consultants, were concentrated among the following entities: the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The Committee was also informed of mitigating factors and that, in the implementation of mandates, activities and programmes, the consultants and individual contractors played an important role.

Nevertheless, the Committee notes from information provided, upon request, that there were 22,829 consultants and individual contractors who accrued more than nine months of cumulative service (irrespective of any breaks between contracts) during the period 1 January 2015–31 December 2019.

12. While acknowledging the need for external expertise in specific situations, the Advisory Committee is concerned by the continued use of a significant number of consultants and individual contractors for extended contractual periods. The Committee considers that continued efforts should be made to rely on internal expertise and skills in the Secretariat. The Committee trusts that an in-depth evaluation of the use of consultants and individual contractors in the Organization will be conducted and options for reduction in consultants and efficient use of individual contractors, along with long-term capacity-building alternatives, will be provided in the next overview report on human resources management.

Use of gratis personnel, retired personnel, consultants and individual contractors

13. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, although measures had been taken to limit the employment of non-staff personnel, entities used their delegation of authority to make decisions regarding use of resources, including the employment of non-staff resources, to meet the increasing pressure to deliver results. The Committee was also informed that the use of non-staff modalities such as consultants/individual contractors, interns, type II gratis personnel or experts on non-reimbursable loan was very time limited in nature and did not constitute a long-term commitment by the Organization. The Committee was further informed that the use of non-staff was generally limited to areas where the organization did not have the necessary skills and required time to build a specific expertise, and that the terms of use and, if applicable, compensation for non-staff, would vary and were set out in the relevant administrative instruction or other established policy.

14. The Advisory Committee reiterates its long-standing view that the Secretariat should abide by all the General Assembly resolutions, regulations and rules applicable to these categories of personnel and that any exceptions be applied on a truly exceptional basis. The Committee trusts that further efforts will be made to ensure that greater cohesion in terms of the contractual modalities and entitlements of consultants and individual contractors is achieved across the United Nations system. The Committee further trusts that detailed information on the employment of non-staff resources by entities, including by geographical representation and gender balance, will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.

Gender

15. The Secretary-General indicates that 66 per cent of all gratis personnel (5,146 persons) engaged were female, representing an increase of 1 per cent as compared with 2016–2017. In particular, the numbers of women among type II gratis personnel increased from 39 per cent to 42 per cent, with most type II personnel engaged by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In terms of retirees working in the Secretariat during 2018–2019, the report indicates a total of 1,043 retirees, representing a decrease of 13 per cent as compared with 2016–2017 and of which, during both bienniums, 41 per cent were women. As regards the 26,226 persons engaged as consultants or individual contractors during 2018–2019, 55 per cent of individual contractors and 40 per cent of consultants at departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals were women (of the 11,682 persons engaged), as compared with 18 per cent of all individual contractors and 26 per cent of all consultants in peacekeeping operations and special political missions and other political presences (of the 14,605 persons engaged). The report indicates that the overall numbers are

comparable to 2016–2017. The Advisory Committee notes the increase in female gratis personnel and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to make more efforts to improve gender balance within all categories of gratis personnel of the Secretariat, including in peacekeeping operations and special political missions, in line with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations and with due consideration for equitable geographical representation.

III. Recommendation

16. The General Assembly is requested to take note of the report of the Secretary-General ([A/75/591/Add.1](#), para. 41). **The comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee are contained in the present report.**
