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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/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met online with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 24 February 2022.

2. The Secretary-General indicates that his annual report, which contains data on the staff of the Secretariat for 2020,¹ is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions concerning human resources management, the most recent of which was resolution [72/254](#).

II. Background and general matters

3. The Advisory Committee recalls that the Secretary-General submitted a global human resources strategy covering the period from 2019 to 2021 and that the observations and recommendations of the Committee were contained in its related reports (see [A/73/497](#), paras. 51–65 and 82 and [A/75/765](#), para. 11). The Committee also recalls that those reports, as well as other human resources reports, including on the composition of the Secretariat, submitted since the seventy-third session are before the General Assembly, subsequent to its decision to defer the consideration thereof until the first part of the resumed seventy-sixth session (decision 75/553 B).

4. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit an updated human resources strategy at the**

¹ The report on the composition of the Secretariat is complemented every two years by an addendum focused on gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors. The most recent such addendum covered the period 2018–2019 ([A/75/591/Add.1](#)).



seventy-seventh session of the Assembly. Subject to the approval of the Assembly, the updated strategy should address issues that have consistently proved challenging over time, many of which have been discussed repeatedly by the Committee, including deficiencies in staff selection processes, rejuvenation, equal treatment of external and internal candidates, impediments to achieving equitable geographical distribution and gender balance targets, the need to improve performance appraisal and an appropriate accountability framework for the management of human resources (see also [A/75/765](#), paras. 10–11, and [A/73/497](#), para. 61). In addition, the strategy should include detailed information on the impact of lessons learned during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on human resources management, ongoing reviews of work modalities and any related initiatives and proposals. Furthermore, the strategy should take into account the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors on human resources matters endorsed by the Assembly.

5. The Advisory Committee notes a series of Secretariat policy documents in which broad objectives and strategic actions related to human resources management are set out, including the People Strategy 2021–2025: Our Road Map for the Future, issued in August 2021 by the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Office of Support Operations in the Department of Operational Support. **Considering the number and the scope of initiatives and policy guidance contained in multiple documents on human resources management in recent years, the Advisory Committee stresses, as a general matter, the importance of enhanced clarity regarding the proposals requiring the approval of the General Assembly and the measures within the remit of the Secretary-General as Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization (see Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations), as well as regarding the potential overlapping and reconciliation of different approaches. The Committee also trusts that the Secretary-General will ensure that definitions, objectives, initiatives and strategies contained in different reports and documents are fully aligned with the relevant resolutions of the Assembly.**

6. On a related matter, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the definition of diversity of the Secretariat included identities, backgrounds and characteristics, such as (dis)ability, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, age, gender identity and sexual orientation, that the Secretariat aspires to understand, reflect and fully include among its workforce and across the human resources management system. The Committee notes that the definition is also included in the People Strategy 2021–2025 and in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the overview of human resources management (see [A/75/540](#), para. 50). In its resolution [73/273](#), the General Assembly approved the inclusion of the workforce diversity component in an updated human resources management framework by the International Civil Service Commission, set out in the report of the Commission for the year 2018 (see [A/73/30](#), annex V), as follows:

Staff composition throughout the organizations of the United Nations common system should reflect a workforce that is diverse from a variety of perspectives (including equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, as well as cultural, generational and multilingual perspectives and the perspectives of persons with disabilities), and this diversity should be embraced in decision-making to strengthen the performance of the organizations.

7. **The Advisory Committee recalls the definition of diversity approved by the General Assembly in its resolution [73/273](#). The Committee notes that the scope of the diversity used by the Secretary-General is not fully in line with what is approved in the workforce diversity component by the Assembly and trusts that further clarification will be provided to the Assembly at the time of its**

consideration of the present report (see also [A/75/765](#), paras. 22–24; see also para. 5 above).

III. Staff demographics

8. The Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat comprised 36,827 staff as at 31 December 2020 ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), table 1). In his report, the Secretary-General provides information in five sections (introduction, workforce analytics, all staff of the Secretariat, staff movements, and staff subject to the system of desirable ranges), the last three of which contain data on entity, category, gender, age and, where applicable, appointment type. Information is also provided on the staff demographics in 2020, as well as the demographic trends from 31 December 2016 to 31 December 2020.

A. General matters

1. Presentation and analysis

9. The Secretary-General indicates that his report has undergone substantial upgrades to provide Member States with enhanced workforce analytics throughout sections III to V, including through the inclusion of additional variables, such as age, as well as more time series data, such as an extension of retirement forecasts beyond 10 years. Moreover, section II, on workforce analytics, which was introduced in the report submitted for the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly ([A/75/775](#)), features an in-depth analysis of key recruitment process stages disaggregated by geographical representation, gender and age of applicants ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), paras. 2–4 and 9–10). In order to provide a further level of disaggregation of staff demographics based on the diverse contexts in which the Organization operates, the Secretary-General has included in the report, for the first time, a categorization of staff into seven entity groups (corporate service entities, field-focused entities, Headquarters-based entities, offices away from Headquarters, peace operations, regional economic commissions and resident coordinator system), in addition to the four-entity group categorization (departments/offices, regional commissions, tribunals, and peacekeeping operations and special political missions and other political presences) (*ibid.*, para. 106). **The Advisory Committee has stressed over the years the need for a more extensive trend analysis and greater understanding of the underlying causes of trends, for the purpose of developing corrective measures and policy enhancements (see [A/75/775](#), para. 6, [A/74/696](#), paras. 7–8, and [A/73/497](#), paras. 8–9). The Committee notes that, notwithstanding the extensive amount of information contained therein, the latest report of the Secretary-General continues to present lacunae in terms of statistical information (see, for example, paras. 20, 26, 33 and 34 below), in-depth analysis of trends and underlying causes (see, for example, paras. 12, 28 and 29 below), and a lack of analytical information correlating data and trends with human resources management objectives, persistent and emerging challenges, and proposed actions. The Committee notes, in particular, the absence of an analysis of the opportunity offered by the reported high number of forecasted retirements in the period 2020–2040 to achieve significant progress on multiple human resources objectives, including with respect to equitable geographical distribution, gender balance (in particular in field missions) and the rejuvenation**

of the workforce, in compliance with Article 101, paragraph 3,² and Article 8 of the Charter of the United Nations (see also para. 24 below).

2. Annual reporting cycle

10. The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics is submitted annually. In paragraph 13 of his most recent report, the Secretary-General indicates that biennial reporting is envisioned for detailed and forward-looking analysis, which often requires data triangulation, consultations across different business areas, and iterative data analyses spanning beyond the time horizon currently available under the annual reporting cycle. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the Secretary-General would continue to submit annual reports on the composition of the Secretariat, as mandated by the General Assembly. According to the Secretariat, taking into consideration the burden of preparing the report on the composition of the Secretariat and the alignment of that report with the strategic human resources management reports submitted biennially, a biennial reporting period would enable more analytical, holistic and strategic reporting on the state of the United Nations workforce and would be accompanied by an expansion of demographic data accessible digitally, on a more timely and continuous basis. The Committee recalls that, in his previous report, the Secretary-General had proposed a biennial reporting period, in lieu of the current annual reporting cycle, on the basis of analogous considerations ([A/75/591](#), paras. 12–13). **The Advisory Committee recalls that it had recommended against the biennial reporting period proposed by the Secretary-General in his previous report and reiterates its view that, given the number of ongoing initiatives and pending policy issues, an annual report remains required and will provide an overview of the implementation of such initiatives and an opportunity for the early identification of potential challenges and solutions (see [A/75/775](#), para. 8).**

B. Secretariat staff and trends

11. The report of the Secretary-General provides statistical data on the staff of the Secretariat as at 31 December 2020, and from 31 December 2016 to 31 December 2020 in tables 1 and 2, including the following: (a) the number of staff of the Secretariat and related entities in the United Nations system increased by 4.4 per cent, from 76,234 to 79,605, attributable to increases in staff numbers in the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; (b) the number of Secretariat staff decreased by 7.1 per cent, from 39,651 to 36,827; (c) the proportion of Secretariat staff in the Professional and higher categories relative to total staff increased from 32.4 to 36.8 per cent, while the proportion of staff in the General Service and related categories relative to total staff decreased from 57.8 to 54.0 per cent; (d) the ratio of staff holding permanent or continuing appointments relative to total staff increased from 25.4 to 28.5 per cent, while the proportion of staff holding fixed-term appointments decreased from 67.2 to 64.3 per cent, mainly owing to one continuing appointment exercise concluded in 2018; (e) the overall proportion of female staff relative to total staff increased from 35.1 to 38.6 per cent; (f) the average age of Secretariat staff members increased from 44.8 to 46.8 years; (g) the average length of service within the Secretariat increased

² Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations reads as follows: "The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible."

from 8 to 9.6 years; (h) the number of Secretariat staff with geographical status increased by 4 per cent, from 3,005 to 3,129; and (i) the number of Member States within the desirable range for representation in geographical posts increased from 102 to 109.

12. In table 1, it is indicated that, as at 31 December 2020, the number of staff in the General Service and related categories was 19,878, reflecting an increase of 177 staff (or 0.9 per cent) compared with the previous period. The Advisory Committee notes that this change is inconsistent with the downward trend in the number of staff in those categories observed in previous years. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the increase was due to additional staff in the resident coordinator system (385 staff) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (64 staff), complemented by smaller increases observed in 31 other entities. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to fully capture and explain changes in the staff population in future reports on the composition of the Secretariat.**

1. Geographical representation: system of desirable ranges

13. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, as at 31 December 2020, there were 3,129 Secretariat staff members with geographical status pursuant to paragraph 66 of General Assembly resolution [65/247](#), in which the Assembly decided that staff members were to retain geographical status when serving against a geographical post, except those recruited under the young professionals programme. The difference between the number of posts subject to geographical distribution (3,681) and the number of staff with geographical status serving against a geographical post (3,059) is accounted for by 416 posts that are vacant, 159 posts that are temporarily encumbered by staff without geographical status and 47 personnel with limited appointments. In addition, the total number of staff with geographical status (3,129) includes 70 staff in the young professionals programme serving against non-geographical posts ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), para. 140, and footnote 24). The Advisory Committee notes that the number of vacant geographical posts has increased by 50.7 per cent, compared with 276 geographical posts that were vacant as at 31 December 2019 ([A/75/591](#), footnote 22). **The Advisory Committee expresses concern regarding the significant number of vacant posts subject to geographical distribution, as well as the high number of geographical posts temporarily encumbered by staff without geographical status and with limited appointments. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to take all measures necessary to fill these vacant posts subject to equitable geographical distribution expeditiously and to ensure that the process to temporarily fill geographical posts ensures that geographical representation is fully taken into account and that staff encumbering those positions under limited appointments are accorded geographical status for the duration of their appointment, with a view to introducing further transparency and improving equitable geographical representation. The Committee trusts that an update on those efforts and the status of those posts will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat (see also [A/75/775](#), para. 20).**

14. The table below summarizes the representation of Member States under the system of desirable ranges from 31 December 2016 to 31 December 2020 ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), table 39).

Representation of Member States under the system of desirable ranges as at 31 December for 2016 to 2020

(Population: 193 Member States)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Unrepresented</i>	<i>Underrepresented</i>	<i>Within range</i>	<i>Overrepresented</i>
December 2016	18	44	102	29
December 2017	19	44	103	27
December 2018	21	40	105	27
December 2019	22	34	108	29
December 2020	20	37	109	27

15. The Advisory Committee notes that, in the five-year period between 2016 and 2020, the number of Member States within the desirable range for representation in geographical posts increased from 102 to 109 and the number of Member States in the underrepresented category decreased from 44 to 37. However, the Committee also notes that the number of Member States in the unrepresented category increased from 18 to 20, and the number of Member States in the overrepresented category remained high, fluctuating between 29 and 27 throughout that period.

16. The Secretary-General also provides information on the appointment of 73 Secretariat staff appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution in 2020, as follows: (a) 1 staff member was from an unrepresented Member State; (b) 24 were from underrepresented Member States; (c) 22 were from Member States within range; and (d) 26 were from overrepresented Member States (*ibid.*, table 45). The Advisory Committee notes that, in 2020, only 34 per cent of the initial appointments to Secretariat posts subject to geographical distribution were selected from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States. The Committee also notes that this percentage has remained unchanged since 2018 and represents only a marginal variation from 36 per cent in 2017 and 32 per cent in 2016 (see also [A/75/775](#), para. 13, and [A/74/696](#), para. 12, as well as para. 20 below).

17. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, in view of the number of geographical staff as at 31 December 2020 and expected retirements, in order to reach within-range status by the end of 2030, the Secretariat would need to recruit 717 staff members with geographical status from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, as well as staff members from those Member States that will become unrepresented and underrepresented as a result of the expected retirements of geographical staff ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), para. 164; see also para. 9 above).

(a) Geographical Representation Strategy

18. The Advisory Committee recalls that the Secretary-General introduced the concept of “geographical diversity”, with the term encompassing both equitable geographical distribution and greater regional group diversity, in his Geographical Diversity Strategy issued in January 2020 by the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance ([A/75/765](#), paras. 9 and 19–21). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the Strategy had been revised in 2021 and that the new version was expected to be issued in April 2022, under the name “Geographical Representation Strategy”. The Committee was also informed that the forthcoming Geographical Representation Strategy would:

(a) Provide a structured approach towards: (i) equitable geographical representation for geographical posts, which are subject to the system of desirable

ranges; and (ii) greater geographical diversity for non-geographical posts, which include those funded through the peacekeeping support account budget and voluntary contributions, as well as language posts under the programme budget. According to the Secretariat, the achievement of greater regional group diversity, as envisaged by the Secretary-General, would not divert focus from that of equitable geographical distribution;

(b) Aim to have every unrepresented Member State represented and to bring as many underrepresented Members States as possible within the system of desirable ranges (see [A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), para. 14);

(c) Rest on a three-pronged approach to achieve its goals through three distinct streams: (i) internally steering appointment decisions through direction from the top, increased awareness and knowledge, and a strengthened accountability mechanism; (ii) externally intensifying efforts to attract new talent, with outreach activities conducted both in person and online; and (iii) leveraging partnerships with Member States, the United Nations system and other networks.

19. **The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its resolution 71/263 (paras. 9 and 17), the General Assembly called for the attainment of equitable geographical distribution in the Secretariat. The Committee also recalls its recommendation that the 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 and provide an update in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat ([A/75/775](#), para. 16). The Committee notes that the envisaged Geographical Representation Strategy of the Secretary-General is expected in the near future and trusts that it will set clear time-bound targets, with indicators of achievement beyond the desirable ranges. The Committee further recalls its previous recommendation that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to develop a comprehensive strategy to improve geographical representation, including concrete actions, benchmarks and timelines that should form part of the overall refined human resources strategy to be submitted to the Assembly for its consideration ([A/75/765](#), para. 18, and [A/73/497](#), para. 69). The Committee also trusts that the Secretary-General will make greater efforts to ensure that, in the future, initiatives and proposals are submitted sufficiently in advance to enable full consideration by the Committee and the Assembly. The Committee makes further observations in its report on the eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on accountability ([A/76/728](#)).**

(b) Senior managers' compacts

20. The goals for equitable geographical representation and regional group diversity are also part of the senior managers' compacts with the Secretary-General. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that senior managers were required, inter alia, to: (a) make 50 per cent of appointments to geographical posts from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States; and (b) endeavour to make progress in regional group diversity in each entity by selecting candidates from regions where fewer staff were from and decrease the proportion of staff from the most represented regional group. The Committee notes that one of the most frequent performance issues related to regional diversification ([A/76/728](#), para. 18) and that information on the performance of senior managers with respect to geographical targets was not included in the report of the Secretary-General ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#)). **The Advisory Committee reiterates its previous recommendation that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide annual performance information by each entity, with comparative data in this area, in the context of his future annual reports on the composition of the Secretariat, and trusts that updated information will be provided to the**

Assembly at the time of consideration of the present report (A/75/765, para. 30). The Committee discusses further the matter of the senior managers' compacts in its report on the eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on accountability (A/76/728).

21. On a related matter, the Advisory Committee, upon request, received data on the population of the Secretariat disaggregated by regional groups. The Committee looks forward to receiving updated information and discussing matters related to regional group representation in the context of the next overview report on human resources management.

2. Gender balance

22. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, as at 31 December 2020, the overall percentage of women in the all-staff population of the Secretariat was 38.6 per cent, representing an increase of 0.2 per cent compared with 31 December 2019. The percentage of women in peacekeeping operations and special political missions was 24.3 per cent and that in departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals was 49.3 per cent, thus remaining substantially unchanged compared with the prior period, with an increase of 0.1 per cent each (A/76/570 and A/76/570/Corr.1, table 1). In the report, it is also indicated that of the 73 Secretariat staff appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution in 2020 (see para. 16 above), 41 staff (or 56 per cent) were women, disaggregated as follows: (a) 1 was from an unrepresented Member State; (b) 12 were from underrepresented Member States; (c) 13 were from Member States within range; and (d) 15 were from overrepresented Member States. In addition, 20 women were from developing countries and 21 from developed countries (see A/76/570 and A/76/570/Corr.1, table 45). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in the light of the trend from 2016 to 2021, the Secretariat considered that equal representation of women and men at all levels at the Secretariat was achievable by 2028. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation 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, with due consideration for the principle of equitable geographical representation (A/75/775, para. 17; see also A/75/765, paras. 16–17).**

3. Ageing of staff and rejuvenation of the Secretariat

23. According to the data presented in the report, the average age of the Secretariat staff increased by 2.0 years, from 44.8 to 46.8 years from 31 December 2016 to 31 December 2020 (A/76/570 and A/76/570/Corr.1, table 2). It is indicated in the report that the average age of selected candidates is around three years above that of the average age of applicants, which may suggest a preference for longer work experience over other predictors for future performance, such as skills assessments. Nevertheless, while applicants with more experience move at a higher rate through the recruitment process, more than 60 per cent of selected candidates for job openings in the Director and Professional categories are younger than the current average age for the Secretariat (46.8 years) (ibid., paras. 97–98). **The Advisory Committee expresses concern regarding the increase in the average age of the Secretariat staff and trusts that all the necessary measures will be taken to reverse this trend (see also para. 24 below).**

24. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that measures and efforts to rejuvenate the workforce of the Secretariat included: (a) the need to leverage more than 3,100 retirements expected by 31 December 2028 to acquire young talent; (b) the

consideration of a shift from the current experience-centric approach to job requirements to a skill-centric approach, as well as a strength-based approach to recruitment decisions, in the context of the forthcoming revision of the staff selection process (see para. 35 below); (c) outreach targeted towards younger applicants; (d) the continuation of the young professionals programme as the key talent pipeline to bring young talent from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, contributing to both rejuvenation and geographical diversity; and (e) budget instructions circulated to all entities, articulating the direction for reviewing post structures and identifying opportunities for rejuvenation. **The Advisory Committee stresses the importance of leveraging the retirements expected by 2028 with a view to addressing multiple human resources management goals, including rejuvenation, equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, and considers that this endeavour should be supported by a clear plan, including specific, measurable, time-bound targets, as well as an appropriate accountability mechanism. The Committee trusts that updated information will be provided in the next overview report on human resources management.**

4. High-level staff

25. As at 31 December 2020, 152 Secretariat staff members were serving at the level of Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General (see [A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), table 23), compared with 153 as at 31 December 2019, 150 as at 31 December 2018 and 2017 and 157 as at 31 December 2016. Updated information provided to the Advisory Committee upon request indicates that, as at 31 December 2021, of 159 Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General positions, 145 were encumbered by nationals of 72 Member States. **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 [A/75/775](#), para. 26, [A/74/696](#), para. 20, [A/73/497](#), para. 18, and [A/71/557](#), para. 114; see also para. 26 below).**

26. Data contained in the report also show that, as at 31 December 2020, 504 staff at the level of D-1 and above were funded from the regular budget, 170 from the peacekeeping budget and 251 from extrabudgetary sources ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), annex, table 3). The Advisory Committee requested, but did not receive, a table listing all existing D-1 and higher positions funded from extrabudgetary resources, including their incumbency status and the nationality and gender of the incumbents. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its previous recommendation that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include systematically, in the context of future reports on the composition of the Secretariat, as well as on the proposed programme budget, a detailed breakdown, with the status of incumbency, including the nationality and gender of the incumbent, and duty station of all positions at the D-1 and higher levels, funded through all sources of funding (see also [A/75/775](#), para. 27).**

5. Average length of service and resignations

27. As at 31 December 2020, the average length of service was 9.6 years, reflecting a 0.5-year increase compared with the prior reporting period ([A/76/570](#) and [A/76/570/Corr.1](#), table 1). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the average length of service had seen marginal increases year-on-year, partially

attributable to the extension of the mandatory age of separation to 65 years, which came into effect on 1 January 2018.

28. Data provided in the report of the Secretary-General indicate that a total of 671 Secretariat staff resigned from 1 January to 31 December 2020. Overall, women resigned at a slightly lower rate than men (318 women compared with 353 men). However, resignations by women occurred at a higher proportion than their representation, in particular at the D-2 level. There was also an elevated ratio of resignations to representation for women at the P-3, P-4, FS-5 and FS-6 levels that requires further review (ibid., para. 137 and tables 37 and 38). The average age of staff at the time of resignation was 45.0 years, and the average length of service in the Secretariat was 8.7 years (ibid., para. 139). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that data on the reasons for resignations were not consistently recorded, but that they might include: (a) early retirement, which represented 12 per cent of all resignations in 2020; (b) opportunities for longer-term work for temporary contracts holders; and (c) for staff in the General Service and related categories, applications for positions in other categories or more senior roles at other organizations. **The Advisory Committee stresses that a more systematic and comprehensive data collection on resignations, and the reasons thereof, including through conducting exit interviews, is crucial to enable better trend analysis, identify challenges and strengthen the operational workforce planning of the Organization in support of human resources management objectives. The Committee trusts that statistical data on and an analysis of resignations will be provided in future reports on the composition of the Secretariat.**

C. Other recruitment-related matters

1. Number of applications per selection

29. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the average number of applications per selection was 39 per cent lower than in 2019, decreasing from 309 to 188, which coincided with the introduction of improved pre-screening processes as well as other factors, such as the liquidity crisis and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (A/76/570 and A/76/570/Corr.1, summary and table 4). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that further detailed analysis was required to ascertain the effect of the improved pre-screening tools on the number of applications per vacancy. **The Advisory Committee notes a lack of clarity regarding the drivers of the decreased average number of applications per selection and trusts that an analysis of the impact of each factor will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.**

2. Applications from underrepresented Member States

30. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, overall, the proportion of applications from underrepresented Member States for job openings in the Director and Professional categories for departments/offices, regional economic commissions and tribunals posted in 2016–2020 decreased from 19.9 to 16.8 per cent of applications. Furthermore, given the strong impact of the volume of applications on the subsequent stages of the recruitment process, a slight decrease in the share of applications from underrepresented Member States is also observed in the assessment and selection phases during the five-year period. It is, however, also indicated that, when applicants from underrepresented Member States apply, they are more successful and have the highest rate of selection (ibid., para. 92 and table 16). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the number of applications from underrepresented Member States had increased in 2018 and 2019 (79,023 and 69,557,

respectively) compared with 2016 and 2017 (58,500 and 53,814, respectively), but decreased to 31,202 in 2020, owing to the recruitment freeze in place that year.

3. Language proficiency assessment

31. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the primary reason for rejections for all applications is related to the language proficiency requirement, at a rate of 32.1 per cent (A/76/570 and A/76/570/Corr.1, para. 36). “Language” accounted for 29.6 per cent of rejected applications from African States for job openings posted in 2016–2020 in the Director and Professional categories for departments/offices, regional economic commissions and tribunals, 26.9 per cent of rejected applications from Latin American and Caribbean States, 26.3 per cent of rejected applications from Eastern European States and 23.5 per cent of rejected applications from Asia-Pacific States (ibid., figure 6 and para. 31). It is indicated that, because the level of language proficiency indicated by applicants is based on a self-assessment recorded in the application submission, the subjective judgment of the applicant may be a factor resulting in a number of applications being screened out (ibid. para. 38).³ Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the United Nations Careers portal provided information on language requirements and assessment, and that language requirements were a topic discussed in recruitment outreach activities. However, the Committee was also informed that the Secretariat was currently reviewing both how language requirements were stated in job openings, with the intention to align them with the descriptors contained in the United Nations Language Framework, and the information provided to applicants while preparing the application. In addition, the Secretariat is exploring options for language assessment modalities, including the use of internationally recognized external language tests. The determination of language proficiency assessment and requirements is also part of its forthcoming review of all the steps of the selection process (see para. 35 below). **The Advisory Committee notes the high level of rejections due to language proficiency requirements, which currently rest on the inherently subjective self-assessment of the applicants. The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will ensure that language requirements are clearly defined in job openings and will explore appropriate assessment modalities. The Committee looks forward to receiving updated information on those efforts in the context of the next overview report on human resources management.**

4. Outreach

32. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat will intensify its efforts to increase the number of qualified applications from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States so as to achieve a higher volume and proportion of such applications at the beginning of the process, which will have an impact on how many applications from these geographical representation groups advance to the selection stage (A/75/570 and A/76/570/Corr.1, para. 75). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that outreach efforts focused on: (a) attracting a larger volume of applicants, such as employer branding exercises for unrepresented and underrepresented groups of applicants, who represent a small volume of applications; and (b) information sessions and training on how to best prepare for specific steps in the application process and evaluation process for unrepresented and

³ Applicants indicate in their application their language proficiency levels as “mother tongue”, “fluent”, “confident” or “basic” for four areas (speaking, reading, writing and understanding). Fluency in either English or French, the two working languages of the United Nations Secretariat, is required for any job opening. Applicants indicating any other level than “mother tongue” or “fluent” for the language listed as a requirement in the job opening are automatically screened out.

underrepresented groups of applicants with a large volume of applications but a comparatively low selection rate. The Committee was also informed that, in 2021, a total of 17 outreach activities had targeted unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, six had targeted gender, six had targeted persons with disabilities, three had targeted young people, four had been related to multilingualism, five had been aimed at expanding networks and enhancing employer branding, and seven had been job-specific outreach events. In 2022, outreach events will include: a biannual outreach round table to connect unrepresented and underrepresented Member States with United Nations entities with the highest current and forthcoming number of vacancies; and a biannual University United Nations Careers livestream webinar intended to deliver information and training to students proactively, in particular those from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States. Information provided to the Committee indicates that, of the number of Member States that were unrepresented as at 31 December 2016 and unrepresented or underrepresented as at 31 December 2019, seven saw an increase in the number of applications for job openings posted in 2016 and 2019, two saw no change and nine saw a decrease. **The Advisory Committee trusts that an analysis of the impact of the targeted outreach activities undertaken by the Secretariat will be provided in the context of the next overview report on human resources management.**

5. Internal and external recruitment

33. The Advisory Committee notes the lack of statistical information in the report of the Secretary-General relating to the recruitment of external and internal candidates. Upon request, the Committee was provided with data on selections for job openings, promotions and transfers, reassignments and reappointments of staff in the Director, Professional and Field Service categories and in the General service and related categories from 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2020. The information provided indicates that external candidates are selected at a lower average rate for job openings in the Director and Field Service categories and the General service and related categories compared with internal candidates, at 41.4 per cent, 23.3 per cent and 35.8 per cent, respectively. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation that the Secretary-General provide equal treatment and opportunities with regard to the recruitment of internal and external candidates, as well as an update, in the next overview report on human resources management (see [A/75/775](#), para. 23). The Committee also recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to systematically include detailed disaggregated information on internal and external appointments, as well as internal movements, in his future reports on the composition of the Secretariat.**

6. Recruitment timelines

34. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the average duration that posts remained vacant from a budgetary perspective for established posts, general temporary assistance and temporary posts in the Professional and higher categories had amounted to 241 days in 2021, reflecting an increase of 27 days compared with 2020 and an increase of 83 days over the five-year period 2017–2021. The Committee was also informed that the average duration of the recruitment process had decreased from 161 days in 2017 to 148 days in 2018 and 149 days in 2019; however, it had increased to 163 days in 2020. Furthermore, the average recruitment timeline from posting to selection had been 191 days in 2020 and had remained essentially at the same level since 2018. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its concern regarding the lengthy recruitment timelines and again trusts that corrective measures will be undertaken and that comprehensive information will be provided in the next overview report on human resources management. The Committee also stresses that future reports on the composition of the Secretariat should include**

complete, clear and comparable statistical information regarding vacant posts, including their duration, recruitment timelines, including with respect to each recruitment phase, as well as an analysis of the variation of recruitment timelines from year to year (see also [A/75/775](#), para. 21, and [A/75/765](#), para. 31).

7. Forthcoming review of the staff selection process

35. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the analysis in section II of the report had revealed a number of findings that called for a detailed review of and further revisions to the staff selection process, with a view to supporting ongoing efforts towards rejuvenation and a more diverse workforce, equipped with the skills required to deliver the evolving mandates of the Organization in changing operating environments. The review, which is to commence in 2022, is envisioned as a multi-year project, as it will cover all steps of the selection process and entail possible revisions to roles and responsibilities, processes, policies, technology and tools. It will consider, inter alia, a revision of the requirements in job descriptions, including a possible shift in approach from experience-centric to skills-centric requirements, as well as of language proficiency requirements and assessment. **The Advisory Committee trusts that further information will be presented to the General Assembly at the time of consideration of the present report and that detailed information will be included for consideration in the next overview report on human resources management.**

IV. Other matters

A. Persons with disabilities

36. The Secretary-General launched the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy for the United Nations system in 2019 to provide a road map for the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities into the workforce. In line with the accountability framework of the Strategy, entities are required to make provisions to attract, recruit, retain and promote the career development of persons with disabilities. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the Secretariat was, inter alia, conducting targeted outreach activities, partnering with recruitment platforms and institutions to attract candidates with disabilities, making the recruitment portal fully accessible, providing reasonable accommodation, and training hiring managers on inclusive hiring. The Committee was, however, also informed that there were currently no comprehensive data on the number and location of persons with disabilities employed by the Organization, and that a data collection mechanism was expected to be incorporated in the enterprise resource planning system by the second quarter of 2022. **The Advisory Committee trusts that further efforts will be made to promote workforce diversity for persons with disabilities and that related statistical information will be provided in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.** The Committee makes related comments in its report on the report of the Secretary-General on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system.

B. Performance appraisal

37. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee received information on staff performance ratings for the five cycles from 2016/17 to 2020/21. For the previous five cycles, only 0.30 per cent of staff were rated in the category “partially meets expectations” and 0.10 per cent in the category “does not meet expectations”, while 99.60 per cent of staff were rated as “exceed expectations” and “meets expectations”.

This trend was also reflected in the previous performance cycle (2020/21), with 99.61 per cent of staff rated in the categories “exceed expectations” and “meets expectations”. **Taking into consideration its observations on the deficiencies of the staff selection system, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to assess whether the standards of efficiency, competency and integrity are fully taken into consideration in the selection process, and to provide an update in the next overview report on human resources management.** The Committee makes related observations and recommendations in its report on the eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on accountability ([A/76/728](#)) and in its report on the overview of human resources management reform for the period 2019–2020 and an outlook beyond ([A/75/765](#)).

C. Review of work modalities

38. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, under the overall coordination of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the High-level Committee on Management had established in 2019 the Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce, which had prepared an interim report outlining a framework of a new approach to remote working and the principles underlying the need for agile contractual arrangements. The Advisory Committee was also informed that non-location-specific working arrangements, which would require new contractual modalities, were being considered in coordination with relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, the International Civil Service Commission and the staff federations. Furthermore, any potential proposal developed by the Secretary-General could include an analysis of its impact on the gender and geographical diversity of the Secretariat and would require prior consideration and approval by the intergovernmental bodies. **The Advisory Committee looks forward to receiving comprehensive updated information on the review of work modalities in the context of the next report on human resources management, taking into account lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.** The Committee makes related observations in its report on the final report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters.

D. Non-staff personnel

39. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that data collection for the next biennial report of the Secretary-General on gratis personnel, to be submitted at the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, had started, as it entailed a global manual data collection effort to obtain, consolidate and validate the information that was yet to be fully available in the enterprise resource planning system. The Committee was also informed that the next report would include the United Nations Volunteers, as a first expansion of the report to cover all non-staff modalities in future.

V. Conclusion

40. The action requested of the General Assembly is contained in paragraph 165 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.**