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Human resources management

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

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: gratis personnel, retired staff, consultants and individual contractors, and United Nations Volunteers ([A/77/578](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 22 December 2022.

2. The Secretary-General indicates that the report is submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in its resolutions [61/244](#), [63/250](#), [65/247](#), [67/255](#) and [71/263](#) and that it provides an explanation of trends across all types of non-staff personnel. In addition to information presented on three types of personnel: gratis personnel, retired staff, and consultants and individual contractors, the report includes an overview of United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) engaged by the Secretariat in 2020–2021 (*ibid.*, paras. 1–3).

II. Gratis personnel, retired staff, consultants and individual contractors, and United Nations Volunteers

3. In the report, the Secretary-General indicates that, during the biennium 2020–2021, the Secretariat employed 4,565 gratis personnel, 900 retired staff and 23,913 consultants and individual contractors. UNVs registered 4,270 engagements across United Nations Secretariat entities (*ibid.*, summary and table 1). **The Advisory Committee notes that the indicated total number of non-staff personnel for the biennium amounted to 33,648, including 900 retired staff and 23,913 consultants**



and individual contractors, while the total number of Secretariat staff was 35,762 as at 31 December 2021 (see [A/77/580](#), table 1). The Committee expects that the Secretariat will abide by all the General Assembly resolutions, regulations and rules applicable to these categories of non-staff personnel and that any exceptions, in particular in respect of retired staff and consultants, will be applied on a truly exceptional basis.

4. The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution [71/263](#), underlined the need for a comprehensive and robust workforce-planning system as a key component of human resources management. The Committee also made comments on enhancing workforce-planning management at the Headquarters level in its report on the proposed programme budget for 2023 ([A/77/7](#), para. 44). **The Advisory Committee considers that comprehensive and effective workforce planning should reduce the need to rely on non-staff personnel, and trusts that more efforts will be made to enhance workforce planning in order to restrict the use of non-staff personnel, especially retired staff and consultants, to limited circumstances.** The Committee makes further comments in its reports on the overview of human resources management reform for the period 2021–2022 ([A/77/728/Add.1](#)) and on ways forward in the implementation of human resources management reforms for the period 2023–2026 ([A/77/728](#)).

5. **While the Advisory Committee acknowledges the provision of data and trend analysis on non-staff personnel in the report, it is of the view that future reports, including the proposed programme budget, should also include detailed information and full-time equivalent data, where applicable, broken down by category, entity, functions, source of funding, nationality and geographical group, with a fuller picture of the financial implications of the use of non-staff personnel.**

A. Gratis personnel

6. In the report, the Secretary-General indicates that gratis personnel are the personnel seconded to the United Nations by Governments or other entities at no cost to the Organization. Type I gratis personnel consists of interns, associate experts and technical cooperation experts on non-reimbursable loan. Type II gratis personnel are provided to the Organization by Governments or other entities responsible for the remuneration of their services. They may be accepted for two purposes and on an exceptional basis only: (a) to provide expertise not available within the Organization for very specialized functions; or (b) to provide temporary and urgent assistance in the case of new and/or expanded mandates of the Organization. There were 4,708 engagements of 4,565 persons from 147 Member States as gratis personnel in 2020–2021 (of which 3,904 engagements were of 3,797 interns), with each person engaged rendering services to the Organization for approximately 175 days. The number of engagements of type I gratis personnel decreased by 13.3 per cent in 2020–2021 compared with the previous biennium. Engagements of type II personnel decreased by 8.3 per cent ([A/77/578](#), paras. 6 (a) (i) and 9–11).

Interns

7. It is stated in the report that interns remained the largest group within gratis personnel despite a 14.6 per cent decrease due mainly to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which resulted in the limited posting of internship opportunities during the initial phase of the pandemic, when the work arrangements for interns were evolving, as well as a slow uptake following the introduction of remote internship opportunities. Owing to travel and other limitations imposed by the pandemic, the Organization implemented an exceptional measure allowing interns to

continue their internships beyond six months. The Secretariat implemented a policy that allowed interns to continue to render their services and expertise remotely, which helped prevent the suspension of the internship programme during the period from March to June 2020, when offices relied primarily on alternate working arrangements. During the biennium 2020–2021, 63.5 per cent of intern engagements were conducted remotely (*ibid.*, paras. 6 (a) (i) and 13–15). In the report, it is indicated that nearly four out of five interns were nationals of Western European and other States and Asia-Pacific States. Compared with the previous reporting period, interns from 13 additional countries (Barbados, Djibouti, El Salvador, Fiji, Grenada, Iceland, Libya, Lithuania, Maldives, Mauritania, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe and Somalia) provided their services in 2020–2021 (*ibid.*, para. 6 (a) (iii)). **The Advisory Committee notes that the remote internship option slightly improved the participation of interns from diverse geographical regions. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to consider the remote internship policy as a complement to the in-person internship programme of the Organization. The Committee trusts that the lessons learned from the remote internship option will be consolidated and potential solutions for the improvement of participation of interns from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, and developing countries, will be provided to the Assembly in the next report (see also para. 10 below).**

8. Upon enquiry as to outreach to underrepresented regions, the Advisory Committee was informed that all internship opportunities were published on the United Nations Careers Portal and that the Secretariat was currently updating the workflow for intern recruitments and would incorporate a dashboard for all hiring managers to display geographical distribution and gender to inform their selection decision. Information about the United Nations internship programme was included in outreach efforts with Member States and academic institutions to attract interns from as wide a geographical basis as possible. The Secretariat was exploring additional ways to enhance networking opportunities for remote interns, for example by establishing a dedicated intern network and guest speaker series that allowed interns to participate in briefings from speakers across the Organization. The Committee was also provided with a breakdown of internships by regional commission and regional grouping, as well as data on interns from developing and developed countries.

9. **The Advisory Committee trusts that outreach, including to academic institutions, and the application of best practices from other organizations, would improve geographical representation among interns. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to strengthen efforts to promote equitable geographical representation within the internship applicant pool, including from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, and developing countries (see also paras. 7 above and 10 below).**

10. **The Advisory Committee considers that national and international internships constitute an investment for the Organization and will contribute to rejuvenating the workforce of the Secretariat and attracting the best talent. Taking this into account, and in view also of the continued disparity in geographical representation among interns, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to present in the next report possible funding options for all forms of the internship programme for the consideration of the Assembly.**

11. It is indicated in the report that the top three entities with interns in 2020–2021 were the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, with 397 engagements; the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, with 339 engagements; and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with 281 engagements,

compared with 407, 307 and 363 engagements in 2014–2015 for those entities, respectively (A/77/578, para. 6 (a) (v)). **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretariat will strengthen efforts to increase internships at offices away from Headquarters, across all the regional commissions, and in field missions.**

Associate experts

12. It is indicated in the report that the number of associate experts increased by 7.9 per cent to 545 persons in 2020–2021. The increase may be attributable to successful outreach activities by entities to attract more donor countries to support their respective mandates. Associate experts from Western European and other States were the largest group (68.8 per cent) in 2020–2021, followed by those from the Asia-Pacific States (26.5 per cent). The three entities with the most associate experts in 2020–2021 were the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (68 engagements), the United Nations Environment Programme (60 engagements) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (52 engagements) (*ibid.*, para. 6 (a) (vi)–(viii)).

13. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with a breakdown of Junior Professional Officers by nationality and entity, including in special political missions and peacekeeping operations, for the past five years. The Committee was also provided with information on Junior Professional Officers who encumbered regular budget positions at the P-2, P-3 and P-4 levels after completion of their appointment as Junior Professional Officers. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to enhance outreach efforts with regard to associate experts in order to broaden the participation of Member States.**

Gender

14. In the report, the Secretary-General indicates that 69 per cent of interns were women, representing an increase from 66 per cent in 2014–2015, while 65 per cent of associate experts were women, representing a decrease from 68 per cent in 2014–2015 (*ibid.*, para. 6 (a) (iv) and (ix)). The Advisory Committee notes that, in his report on the overview of human resources management reform for the period 2021–2022, the Secretary-General states that the gender parity strategy defines gender parity as being within the range of 47 to 53 per cent (A/77/590/Add.1, para. 6). **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretariat will make further efforts to ensure gender parity in the Organization within the range approved by the General Assembly** (see also paras. 19, 23 and 33 below). The Committee makes further comments in its report on the overview of human resources management reform for the period 2021–2022.

B. Retired staff

15. There were three different populations of retired staff members employed by the United Nations Secretariat during the biennium 2020–2021: retirees, non-retired former staff members and staff retained beyond the mandatory age of separation. There were 3,126 engagements of 900 retired staff from 114 Member States, a decrease of 37.7 per cent from the previous biennium. These comprise 2,533 engagements of retirees, including a total of 769 persons who met the definition of retirees and were working in the Secretariat during that period; 99 non-retired former staff members working on 561 engagements; and 32 staff members retained beyond the mandatory age of separation working on 32 engagements. Compared with the biennium 2018–2019, the number of engagements by retired staff decreased 37.7 per

cent, the number of persons engaged decreased 22.1 per cent and the number of days worked decreased 24.7 per cent (A/77/578, paras. 6 (b) (i) and 28–32).

16. The number of retired staff members serving at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels was nearly halved in 2020–2021, from 30 in 2018–2019 to 17 in 2020–2021. The number of retired staff members in the General Service and related categories decreased 52 per cent, from 186 in 2018–2019 to 90 in 2020–2021. The number of retirees and non-retired former staff members in decision-making positions also declined in 2020–2021, while the number of staff members retained beyond retirement age increased from 10 to 12 (*ibid.*, paras. 45–46).

17. The decline in the number of engagements and persons engaged was attributable mainly to the impact of the pandemic. Given that the majority of retired staff members are engaged in the areas of language, public information and conference management services, the cancellation of meetings and conferences due to measures aimed at reducing the transmission of COVID-19 led to a lower number of engagements by language personnel and meeting support personnel. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management continued to be the entity with the largest share of retired staff, employing nearly half of the total within the Secretariat. The significantly lower need for language and meeting service personnel during the pandemic led to a 50 per cent reduced employment of retired staff by the Department (*ibid.*, paras. 6 (b) (iv), 34 and 36). **While noting the recent reduction in engagements of retired staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Advisory Committee reiterates its concerns about the continued reliance on retired staff, which may impact the need to rejuvenate the Secretariat. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to limit the reliance on retirees, in order to exercise better workforce succession planning and promote rejuvenation** (see also para. 4 above).

18. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management carried out a dedicated outreach programme directed towards universities and other institutions involved in the training of language professionals. Outreach activities included visits to partner institutions by United Nations language staff, who gave presentations and masterclasses or participated in seminars and workshops. They also included meetings with students and faculty to present the work of United Nations language staff, give more details about the skills required, or provide guidance to teaching staff for classroom activities that would help to prepare candidates for the competitive examinations for language positions.

19. In the report, it is indicated that 37 per cent of retired staff were women, down from 45 per cent in 2014–2015 (see also *ibid.*). Nearly half of retired staff were from Western European and other States, a share that has remained relatively the same since 2014–2015 (A/77/578, para. 6 (b) (iii) and (vii)). Upon enquiry as to retirees from Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, the Advisory Committee was informed that all job openings were advertised online and accessible to everyone and that, as part of the Secretariat's overall efforts on diversity, engaging retirees from as wide a geographical basis as possible was also an objective. With regard to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, this included the recruitment of retirees from global language rosters as short-term staff on temporary appointments or as individual language contractors in order to complement the core staffing table capacity during high-workload seasons. By and large, the former language staff, currently retirees, possessed the required language expertise, had proven track records, maintained performance standards and demonstrated the competencies required by the Organization. Competitive examinations for language positions were presently conducted remotely, which further facilitated participation from any region of the world. The Department also

continued to replenish its language rosters by adding new successful candidates from all geographical regions and to conduct targeted outreach to qualified universities and other educational institutions, in addition to offering language internships. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretariat will strengthen its efforts to ensure equitable geographical representation in the future engagement of retired staff.**

20. The Advisory Committee was also informed upon enquiry that General Assembly decision 51/408 mandated restrictions in the service duration and maximum earning limit and set the earnings limit for the employment of retirees in receipt of a pension from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund at \$22,000 per calendar year (with the exception of language retirees). It also limited the employment of retirees, in all cases, to no more than six months per calendar year. Language services staff may also not be paid more than the monetary equivalent of 125 days per calendar year. In addition, retired staff members may not be contracted at a higher equivalent level than that at which they separated from the organization concerned. The Committee also recalls its previous recommendation against the proposal of the Secretary-General to increase the permissible earnings of retired former United Nations staff members (A/71/557, para. 54, as endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 71/263). **The Advisory Committee trusts that detailed financial information on the engagement of retirees by entities of the Secretariat will be included in future reports of the Secretary-General.**

C. Consultants and individual contractors

21. In the report, the Secretary-General indicates that, in 2020–2021, there were 60,671 engagements of 23,913 consultants and individual contractors from 188 Member States, a decrease of 19 per cent from the previous biennium in the number of engagements: 11,562 consultants (an increase of 28.8 per cent) providing services under 21,120 engagements (an increase of 34.8 per cent); and 12,351 individual contractors (a decrease of 30.4 per cent) providing services under 39,551 engagements (a decrease of 33.1 per cent) (A/77/578, para. 6 (c) (i)). The Advisory Committee was provided, upon enquiry, with a breakdown by job network and regional grouping.

22. At departments/offices, regional commissions and tribunals, there were 34,315 engagements of consultants and individual contractors: 20,370 for consultants, which represents a 27 per cent reduction compared with the previous biennium, and 13,945 for individual contractors, representing a 6 per cent reduction compared with the previous biennium. At peacekeeping operations and special political missions and other political presences, there were 26,356 engagements recorded during the biennium 2020–2021, which represents a 42 per cent reduction compared with the previous biennium (*ibid.*, paras. 53–54).

23. It is indicated in the report that women represented 40.9 per cent of consultants and 27.8 per cent of individual contractors, showing an upward trend since 2014–2015 (see also para. 14 above). Forty-one per cent of consultants were from Western European and other States, which represents a decrease from 43 per cent in 2014–2015. Two thirds of individual contractors were from African States, a decrease of 13 percentage points from 2014–2015, owing to the closure of or the reduction in peacekeeping operations (A/77/578, paras. 6 (c) (iv)–(v) and 72).

24. The increase in the engagements of consultants was attributable to: an increase in special projects requiring specialized knowledge (e.g. data analysis, business improvements, change management) and expertise based on expanding mandates (e.g. introduction of additional sustainability initiatives and field remote infrastructure management) and an increase in available project funding; and the

requirement for locally sourced capacity owing to travel restrictions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decrease in the engagements of individual contractors was attributable to: the closure of field missions (African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti and United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau); reduced requirements for location-dependent services as a result of the increase in remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic; reduced requirements for on-site conference management and translation services; and outsourcing of services to third-party providers (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei) (*ibid.*, paras. 6 (c) (ii)–(iii) and 60 (a)).

25. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the data in the report did not capture consultants and individual contractors engaged via the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or third-party providers. **The Advisory Committee trusts that future reports will include comprehensive information by entity on consultants and individual contractors engaged via UNOPS, UNDP or third-party providers** (see also [A/77/7](#), paras. II.21, VIII.74 and IS2.2). The Committee will make further comments in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2024 and the upcoming reports on peacekeeping missions.

26. The Advisory Committee notes that the General Assembly, in its resolution [71/263](#), reiterated its concern over the increase in the use of consultants, especially in the core activities of the Organization, stressed that the use of consultants should be governed by the relevant resolutions of the Assembly, in particular section VIII of its resolution [53/221](#), and that they should be drawn from the widest possible geographical basis, and requested the Secretary-General to make the greatest possible use of in-house capacity. The Committee and the Board of Auditors have also repeatedly expressed concerns about the increased use of consultants across the Organization (see e.g. the Committee's report on the financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors for the period ended 31 December 2021 ([A/77/574](#))). **While acknowledging the need for specialized external expertise in specific situations, the Advisory Committee notes with concern the continual increase in the use of consultants, and reiterates that every effort should be made to reduce the considerable reliance on consultants and to utilize the internal expertise and skills in the Secretariat.**

27. **The Advisory Committee considers that there is a lack of clarity about the core functions/activities performed by consultants instead of staff owing to the lack of internal expertise in the Secretariat. The Committee trusts that the next report will contain a detailed identification of these core functions/activities, as well as more detailed breakdowns on the related consultants by entities of the Secretariat.** The Advisory Committee intends to review this issue in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2024.

D. United Nations Volunteers

28. It is indicated in the report that the UNV programme offers five contractual categories (expert, specialist, youth, university and community) to respond to the diverse needs of various United Nations entities. UNVs can serve on national or international assignments and contribute to advancing the mandates and principles of the United Nations and foster multilateralism and sustainability through tangible, hands-on work ([A/77/578](#), paras. 84–85). **The Advisory Committee notes the role played by UNVs in advancing the mandates and promoting the principles of the United Nations.**

29. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that data on UNVs had been included in the report with the aim of providing a more comprehensive overview of the Secretariat workforce, including all types of non-staff personnel within the Secretariat. **The Advisory Committee welcomes the inclusion of UNVs as a category of non-staff personnel.**

30. During the 2020–2021 biennium, 4,270 UNVs were hosted by 43 Secretariat entities in 132 locations and/or areas of assignment, with more in the second half of the biennium. During that biennium, 72.6 per cent of all UNVs serving across the Secretariat entities were international UNVs. In peace operations and special political missions, the proportion of international UNVs was higher, representing 91 per cent of all UNVs serving in field operations (*ibid.*, para. 85). Annex IV to the report presents detailed information on UNVs broken down into international and national UNVs and by entity, nationality and location of assignment.

31. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with pro forma estimates of the annual costs of international and national UNVs in four locations as at November 2022, as follows:

(a) In the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, \$14,512.69 for a national UNV and \$61,828.40 for an international UNV;

(b) In the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, \$21,157.65 for a national UNV and \$53,623.77 for an international UNV;

(c) In the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, \$19,570.70 for a national UNV and \$65,208.77 for an international UNV;

(d) In the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, \$26,678.75 for a national UNV and \$65,740.33 for an international UNV.

32. The Advisory Committee recalls that it has repeatedly recommended that more national UNV positions should be included in proposed budgets, as appropriate (see e.g. [A/76/760](#), para. 53, as endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution [76/274](#)). **Taking into account the cost differential between national and international UNVs, and the importance of national capacity-building, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to make further efforts to increase the use of national UNVs, as appropriate.** The Committee intends to review this issue in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2024.

33. Overall, UNVs reached gender parity with regard to the Secretariat in the biennium 2020–2021. Broken down by type of assignment, women represented 49.1 per cent of international engagements and 53.7 per cent of national engagements during the period. The average age for all UNVs engaged in the Secretariat during the 2020–2021 biennium was 37.1 years. The average age for women was 34.5 years – approximately 3 years younger than the average age of men (see also para. 14 above). African States were the largest region of origin of UNVs – representing 45.2 per cent of all UNVs in Secretariat entities, followed by Asia-Pacific States (19.8 per cent), Western European and other States (19.2 per cent), Latin American and Caribbean States (11.9 per cent) and Eastern European States (4.0 per cent) ([A/77/578](#), paras. 87 and 90–91). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to make further efforts to ensure equitable geographical representation among international UNVs. The Committee trusts that an update will be provided in the next report and in the context of the peacekeeping cross-cutting report.**

III. Conclusion

34. Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.
