People before Process: Humanizing the HR System for UN Peace Operations

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Abbreviations

ACABQ	Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
CivCap	Civilian Capacity
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DSRSG	Deputy special representative of the secretary-general
e-PAS	Electronic performance assessment system
FPD	Field Personnel Division
HIPPO	High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
HR	Human resources
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
OHRM	Office of Human Resources Management
SPC	Standing Police Capacity
SRSG	Special representative of the secretary-general
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMEER	UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response
UNOPS	UN Office for Project Services

Executive Summary

As it evolved from an organization dedicated to conference services to a complex machine deploying multidimensional peace operations, the UN has had to tackle essential human resources (HR) challenges. Staffing missions operating in conflict zones—within timeframes and conditions adapted to changing needs on the ground—as well as managing and retaining people in hardship duty stations, have proven difficult and have been the object of multiple attempts at organizational reform.

With the Global Field Support Strategy, Civilian Capacity initiative, streamlining of contracts, harmonization of conditions of service, Umoja, and managed mobility framework, the UN has tried to rationalize and expedite processes, make conditions of service fairer, and share the burden of field work. However, past reforms have had limited, counterproductive, or controversial effects. At times, they have increased administrative burdens and red tape instead of contributing to the flexibility needed in challenging peacekeeping environments. As outlined in the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), the gap between reforms largely designed and driven by UN headquarters and actual needs in the field has yet to be filled, and existing rules, regulations, and policy frameworks are not always fit for enabling the appropriate support called for by dynamics on the ground.

HR processes remain opaque, lengthy, and largely inefficient. Reforms related to the management of personnel have been overly focused on the reduction of vacancy rates, the standardization of conditions of service, and the rationalization of HR tools and processes. Despite positive effects, these have failed to create the HR system needed to enable field missions to fulfill their mandates, especially because they created cumbersome procedures for recruitment, performance management, and mobility. Recruitment, in particular, suffers from complex administrative rules and procedures and the limitations of standardized recruitment techniques. Policies in place have contributed to disheartening both hiring managers and candidates trying to navigate burdensome processes and restrictions. The new staffing system, which started to be implemented in 2016, has appeared to be a missed opportunity to simplify procedures and has instead further centralized recruitment decisions.

These challenges are linked to a wide range of interrelated (and sometimes competing) dynamics: the inherent political struggles playing out in the organization; the disempowerment of HR teams in field missions; the cumbersome bureaucracy and rigid attachment to compliance with rules, regulations, and policies; and an organizational culture based on a narrow vision of the staff profiles needed for peace operations, the sacred principle of competitiveness, and a lack of accountability when it comes to performance. Human resources at the UN are influenced by and dependent on a wide range of constraints, including diplomatic negotiations and dynamics among member states, limitations of automated systems and tools available to the Secretariat, and restrictive procedures and principles.

This study therefore recommends four directions to move in to make human resources fit for the purpose of peace operations:

- Get the right people for field missions by putting in place more efficient principles and systems for recruitment of quality staff, making working conditions more flexible and acceptable to better retain staff, and improving performance management systems to make it easier to terminate underperforming staff.

- Reduce bureaucracy by decentralizing decisions on and control over recruitment to field missions and streamlining rules and procedures for the field, including by lifting restrictions, relaxing the principle of competitiveness, and facilitating internal movement and promotion.

- Empower HR teams in the field by ending the culture of hostility between HR staff and hiring managers, reducing the clerical duties of HR teams in the field, moving from a culture of rule-compliance to a culture of service-delivery, and encouraging HR staff to become strategic partners in finding solutions to recruitment and management problems.

- Depoliticize human resources by building confidence between member states and the Secretariat and reducing the Fifth Committee's micromanagement of human resources.

For each of these challenges, political, organiza-

tional, and cultural changes are needed. Member states should address the political dynamics undermining attempts at HR reform by refraining from micromanaging human resources and giving the Secretariat sufficient leeway in identifying and implementing necessary reforms. The Secretariat should handle organizational challenges by revising its processes, rules, and regulations. Finally, the secretary-general should define a new vision for the UN's organizational culture.

While Secretary-General António Guterres has recognized these challenges and stressed management reform from the inception of his term, several questions still need to be answered. He will need to develop an HR system that balances efficiency and competitiveness, control and flexibility, standardization and tailored responses, centralization and decentralization, risk of nepotism and paralyzing oversight, systemic reform and incremental improvements to processes, and organizational and political interests.

Any new reform, however, should avoid further bureaucratization and politicization and seek to place people before processes. HR policies and systems have for too long been a question of procedures, rules, and mechanistic tools and have been too heavily based on technical considerations. Beyond these technicalities, it is urgent to humanize the UN's HR system and to make it a positive enabler for those who serve in the name of peace in the most challenging and complex field operations.

Introduction

Human resources (HR) have been a long-standing issue for the UN. In the first years after the creation of the organization, staffing was largely improvised through ad hoc recruitment, personal relationships,

and spontaneous phone calls. The first secretary-general had to establish a very small group of UN staff members from scratch and basically operated on the basis of member states' recommendations to manage an international balance and maintain consensus around the newly established Secretariat.[1]

Since then, the changing nature of the UN and its growth in size, role, and mandate have made the restructuring of its HR system a pressing necessity. In 2016 the UN Secretariat employed more than 40,000 personnel, with more than half of them serving in field operations around the world, many in increasingly complex conditions.[2] Countless HR reforms have been undertaken to better manage this enormous workforce.

Reforming the UN to make staffing and HR management more efficient and adequate has proven even more essential for peace operations, which were marked by an "organizational culture of constant improvisation" until the 1990s.[3] In 1992 Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali created the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to rationalize and professionalize their management. In 2007 the Department of Field Support (DFS) was created as a separate entity "with the full responsibility, authority and resources necessary to ensure that missions have what they need, when they need, to succeed in their mandates," including in the field of human resources.[4] Progressively, the UN had to adapt its HR framework to make the transition from an organization designed to provide conference services[5] to a complex machine deploying fifteen peacekeeping missions composed of more than 95,000 uniformed and 15,000 civilian personnel, and another thirteen field-based special political missions consisting of about 2,800 civilian staff.[6]

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1 Thant Myint-U and Amy Scott, *The UN Secretariat: A Brief History (1945–2006)* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).

2 In addition to peace operations, UN field operations include regional service centers and field missions such as special envoys in the field. For the sake of comparison, the European Commission has 32,646 staff (as of January 1, 2017), and NATO employs 6,000 civilians in its agencies and strategic and regional commands. The US Department of State has a foreign service corps of 13,000, in addition to 11,000 employees in its civil service and 45,000 locally recruited staff. Apple employs 80,000 people, Exxon Mobile 71,000, and Total 102,000. For UN figures, see UN General Assembly, *Composition of the Secretariat: Staff Demographics—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/71/360, August 31, 2016.

3 Thorsten Benner, Stephan Mergenthaler, and Philipp Rotmann, "The Evolution of Organizational Learning in the UN Peace Operations Bureaucracy," Global Public Policy Institute, 2011, available at www.bundesstiftung-friedensforschung.de/images/pdf/forschung/berichtbenner2.pdf .

4 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People—Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, June 16, 2015.

5 Rahul Chandran and Sebastian von Einsiedel, "New Ideas for a New Secretary-General: Fixing the UN's Human Resources System," UN University Centre for Policy Research, November 2016, available at https://cpr.unu.edu/new-ideas-for-a-new-secretary-general-fixing-the-uns-human-resources-system.html .

6 Current peacekeeping operations include MONUSCO, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, UNAMID, UNMISS, UNISFA, UNIFIL, UNMIL, MINUSTAH, MINURSO, UNFICYP, UNMOGIP, UNTSO, UNDOF, and UNMIK. Current special political missions include UNAMI, UNAMA, CNMC, UNIOGBIS, UNOAU, UNOCA, UNOWAS, UNRCCA, UNSCO, UNSCOL, UNSOM, UNSMIL, and the UN Mission in Colombia. For the number of civilian staff in each mission, see UN General Assembly, *Composition of the Secretariat*.

Despite multiple attempts at organizational reform, HR processes remain opaque, lengthy, and largely inefficient. Recruitment and staffing are still considered major challenges to making peace operations "fit for purpose," and many hiring managers in the field continue to spend considerable time and effort to circumvent rules and procedures they resent and a system they do not trust to get the staff they need.

Past UN system-wide reforms, although designed to streamline processes, have tended to increase administrative burdens and red tape instead of contributing to the flexibility needed in challenging peacekeeping environments. The Global Field Support Strategy was a five-year agenda initiated by DFS in 2010 to reshape and strengthen support to peace operations. Despite its achievements, including the establishment of the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe to improve missions' access to resources and streamline delivery of support services, further improvement in the quality, responsiveness, and efficiency of this support is needed.[7]

Other reform efforts have had similarly limited or controversial effects. These have included the Civilian Capacity (CivCap) initiative in 2011 to improve the deployment of civilian capacities in the field (see Box 1); progressive compliance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards; and the establishment of Umoja, new software expected to streamline UN business processes (see Box 4).[8] The impact of the streamlining of contractual arrangements in 2009 and of the harmonization of conditions of service for staff in 2011 is still being debated (see Box 3), and, most recently, the managed mobility framework adopted in 2015 has been greatly criticized (see Box 5).[9]

The gap between HR reforms largely designed and driven by UN headquarters and actual needs on the ground remains critical. The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) outlined serious systemic issues related to HR policies and their impact on UN peace operations:

> UN administrative procedures—and particularly in the field of human resources—are failing missions and their mandates…. There is no topic that elicits greater frustration in the field across all levels of staff…. In operating environments that demand more tailored and more flexible UN peace operations, it appears that human resources policies may be moving in the opposite direction.

The report highlighted that the Secretariat's administrative procedures have not been reviewed to take into account the demands of the field, despite the fact that field missions account for over 80 percent of its spending, 55 percent of its staff, and 90 percent of its procurement.[10] At the same time, DFS does not have the delegated authority to deliver the required support; the HIPPO report recommended that the secretary-general empowers DFS "with the full delegated authorities required to support the efficient administration of field-focused policies and procedures and to expedite service delivery and recruitment."[11]

In his speech when taking the oath of office, Secretary-General António Guterres recognized human resources challenges:

> Looking at UN staff and budgetary rules and regulations, one might think that some of them were designed to prevent, rather than enable, the effective delivery of our mandates. We need to create a consensus around simplification, decentralization and flexibility. It benefits no one if it takes nine months to deploy a staff member to the field. The United Nations needs to be nimble, efficient and effective. It must focus more on delivery and less on process; more on people and less on bureaucracy.[12]

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7   The Global Field Support Strategy aimed to address some of the key challenges field missions face, including broad mandates that did not consider the demands of complex environments, impediments to rapidly raising resources, inadequate capacity to deploy peacekeepers, and high vacancy rates and turnover among civilian staff. This strategy removed some HR functions from field missions and regionalized them in Entebbe. The continued need for improvements was summarized by a representative from the US mission to the UN: "We have seen many positive benefits and achievements from [the Global Field Support Strategy], resulting in expedited and streamlined service delivery, strengthened accountability, and improved safety and quality of life. At the same time, we recognize that, in some areas, the strategy has not yet fully delivered and that there is continued need to improve the quality, responsiveness, accountability, transparency, cost effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery in peacekeeping missions." Cherith Norman Chalet, remarks before the Fifth Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Aspects of UN Peacekeeping Operations, New York, May 9, 2016, available at https://2009-2017-usun.state.gov/remarks/7267 .

8   Colum Lynch, "At the United Nations, Umoja Translates as Bureaucratic Chaos," *Foreign Policy*, May 6, 2016, available at http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/06/at-the-united-nations-umoja-translates-as-bureaucratic-chaos/ .

9   The first global town hall meeting held by António Guterres, on January 9, 2017, demonstrated the frustration of staff across the system with these reforms. See http://webtv.un.org/watch/ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-un-secretary-general-holds-first-global-townhall-with-staff/5275603651001 .

10   UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, pp. 83–84.

11   Ibid., p. 86.

12   António Guterres, remarks to the General Assembly, New York, December 12, 2016, available at www.un.org/press/en/2016/sg2235.doc.htm .

Guterres has stressed "management reform" from the inception of his term. He made a point of meeting with staff unions his very first day in office and of quickly organizing a global town hall meeting to answer the frustrations of Secretariat staff around the world. Even if he confirmed that he would proceed with current reforms like Umoja and the mobility framework, he committed to work toward decentralization, to ensure accountability, and to address low staff morale. He also called for a change of institutional culture among UN staff.

The appointment of an internal review team on management reform in April 2017, co-chaired by the under-secretaries-general for field support and management, indicated Guterres's readiness to seriously pursue this change.[13] The directions outlined during a later global town hall meeting in July 2017 confirmed his intention to deeply reform the administration of human resources to make the UN more field-focused.[14]

This report focuses on HR issues related to recruitment, staffing, and management of personnel in UN peace operations, drawing on the conclusions and recommendations of the HIPPO report and lessons from past efforts at HR reform. It looks at key areas of reform needed to ensure a more effective HR system for field missions—both special political missions and peacekeeping operations.

How can the Secretariat attract and retain the best and most relevant personnel for its peace operations while letting go underperforming staff? How can HR procedures be better adapted to the realities and needs of field missions? How can they balance flexibility with standardization and decentralization with accountability? In light of the politicized nature of UN staffing, what organizational changes can be achieved? Are there any lessons to be learned from past reform efforts at the Secretariat or from other actors, including UN agencies, funds, and programs?

This report is based on interviews with the UN Secretariat, including former and current senior UN managers working at headquarters and in field missions, as well as HR experts from inside and outside the UN, including DFS's Field Personnel Division (FPD), the Department of Management's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), HR personnel in field missions, members of the General Assembly's Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and representatives of staff unions and member states.

On the basis of these consultations, the report makes recommendations that aim to be not only forward-looking but also realistic and workable. Getting the right people, reducing bureaucracy, empowering HR staff, and depoliticizing human resources are the main areas that need to be addressed to ensure that human resources can become more fit for the purpose of field missions.

The Existing HR System for UN Peace Operations

Field missions are composed of three different categories of personnel:

1. **The military component** includes contingents and seconded military officers provided by troop-contributing countries.

2. **The police component** includes formed police units and individual police officers, generally provided by police-contributing countries.

3. **The civilian component** includes the following:

   - **Senior leadership** consists of special representatives of the secretary-general (SRSGs) and deputy special representatives of the secretary-general (DSRSGs), mostly at the level of under-secretary-general or assistant secretary-general, who are appointed by the secretary-general.

   - **Professional categories** of personnel (P2–P5 and D1–D2 levels) are recruited internationally. Professional and higher categories represent more than a third of Secretariat staff, with 12,837 people as of June 2016.[15] There were 2,987 staff members of professional and higher categories in field operations in 2016, representing less than 15

13 The under-secretary-general for field support, Atul Khare, and under-secretary-general for management, Alicia Bárcena, co-chair this team in their individual capacities.

14 Guterres, remarks at global town hall meeting, July 26, 2017.

15 UN General Assembly, *Composition of the Secretariat*.

percent of field staff.

- **Field service categories** of personnel (FS4–FS7 levels) are also recruited internationally and perform tasks specific to field operations. They represent around 10 percent of Secretariat staff and 19 percent of field staff.

- **UN volunteers** are recruited locally or internationally by the UN Volunteer program in Bonn, Germany, which is administered by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). In 2015, 2,524 volunteers served for DPKO and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). They are not considered UN staff and have separate conditions of service.[16] The UN Volunteer program was initially designed to enable professionals such as doctors and engineers to volunteer for the UN for a short period of time to contribute their expertise. In recent years, however, the program has increasingly targeted younger individuals and is often perceived as an entry point to start a career at the UN; in 2015 more than a quarter of volunteers were under 29 years old. It has also increasingly been a career path in itself, with some volunteers staying in missions for several years.[17]

- **National staff** are locally recruited in the field. They include national professional officers, who perform work that typically requires knowledge of the local laws, culture, and traditions, and general service staff, who conduct procedural, operational, or technical work. They represent the bulk of field missions' workforce, with 13,268 staff, representing 65 percent of field staff.

This study focuses on the civilian categories. Deployment of military and police personnel largely depends on force generation services or secondments, with structures and processes that are distinct from civilian recruitment.[18]

The UN Secretariat uses three types of contracts to recruit civilian staff:

1. **Continuing contracts** are open-ended contracts. Before the 2009 reform streamlining contractual arrangements (see Box 2), staff could get "permanent" contracts basically guaranteeing employment until retirement.[19] A continuing contract may be terminated by the secretary-general but is meant to be indefinite. UN staff members who have completed five years of continuous service are eligible for continuing contracts, but the number of available contracts is limited each year by the General Assembly. In 2016, 1,618 people were serving in field operations under a continuing or permanent contract, of whom 1,228 were in peacekeeping operations (7.8 percent of civilian peacekeeping staff).[20]

2. **Fixed-term contracts** are concluded for a finite period, from one to five years, and are renewable. The vast majority of staff serving in field operations have a fixed-term contract (17,848 people in 2016, including 13,858 in peacekeeping operations, representing 88.8 percent of civilian peacekeeping staff).[21]

3. **Temporary contracts** are used for short-term needs of less than one year. According to General Assembly Resolution 63/250, "Temporary appointments are to be used to appoint staff for seasonal or peak workloads and specific short-term requirements for less than one year but could be renewed for up to one additional year when warranted by surge requirements and operational needs related to field operations and special projects with finite mandates." In 2016, 679 staff were serving in field operations under a temporary contract, including 513 in peacekeeping operations (3.3 percent of civilian peacekeeping staff).[22]

The use of consultants remains limited in UN field missions; 8,082 consultants were engaged in non-field entities in 2014/2015, while only 1,134

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16 See UN Volunteers, *International UN Volunteer Handbook: Conditions of Service*, 2015, available at www.unv.org/sites/default/files/International_UN_Volunteers_Conditions_of_Service_0.pdf .

17 Ibid. A recent reform of the conditions of service for UN volunteers reduced the maximum time of volunteering to four years.

18 See Adam C. Smith and Arthur Boutellis, "Rethinking Force Generation: Filling the Capability Gaps in UN Peacekeeping," International Peace Institute, May 2013, available at www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_rpt_rethinking_force_gen.pdf .

19 Staff on permanent contracts could be separated for cause, including if the post was abolished. A general clause was added to continuing contracts allowing the secretary-general to terminate them if it is in the interest of the organization.

20 UN General Assembly, *Composition of the Secretariat*.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

served in field operations during the same period.[23]

The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) in the Department of Management is vested with the authority to establish organization-wide policies and standards governing human resources for the Secretariat. However, OHRM delegated the authority to recruit and administer field staff to the Field Personnel Division (FPD) in the Department of Field Support (DFS). The FPD provides field-focused support for human resources in peacekeeping operations and special political missions, including through policy advice, workforce planning, roster management, outreach for mission positions, and rapid deployment. While the FPD is involved in some aspects of staff recruitment for field operations, it has delegated authority to field missions to fulfill specific needs, such as recruitment through position-specific and temporary job openings. Management of personnel is also delegated to HR teams in the field.

However, even though program managers in the field have the delegated authority to initiate recruitment, they often have to go through a vetting process or get final approval from FPD or OHRM teams in New York.[24] With the new staffing system launched in 2016, OHRM now oversees recruitment and internal mobility processes in the job networks for which the new system has been rolled out. Perhaps most importantly, OHRM remains in charge of HR policies throughout the UN system. FPD and field missions therefore have to implement rules and regulations that were defined by the Department of Management within a framework authorized by the General Assembly.[25]

PAST EFFORTS TO REFORM THE MANAGEMENT OF FIELD PERSONNEL

The UN Charter states that "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."[26] None-

theless, the UN's HR system has been famously criticized for its lack of transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness. Among external applicants aspiring to work for the UN, perceptions of widespread nepotism and inefficiency are common.

There have been continuous efforts to reform HR systems at the UN since the 1960s, but commentators, including inside the UN, describe them as a "chronic policy failure."[27] In 1968 a panel of experts working on the reform and reorganization of the UN identified HR challenges that, to date, remain major issues.[28] The panel recommended putting in place a recruitment plan and urged the Secretariat "to obtain qualified staff members and not permit its standards to deteriorate." It suggested alternate methods of recruitment beyond bureaucratic HR processes, like "a talent search on university campuses to find gifted young people." It also pointed out the "sense of malaise, of dissatisfaction, within the staff" and advocated strategies that have been used in the private sector, such as on-the-job training and mid-career refresher courses, including by external parties like universities and foundations. It controversially recommended that key senior officials be rotated in their posts and advocated for "greater 'transferability' between officials serving in New York and in overseas posts" with a limit of ten years in the same post for directors and senior administrators.[29] Today, all these challenges remain, even if several reforms have since been conducted.

Reduction of Vacancy Rates

One long-standing challenge for the Secretariat has been the growth of peace operations and the resulting need for a massive increase in staffing. This requires not only getting people on the ground but also reducing the vacancy rates and turnover affecting field operations. In 2009 the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services outlined the main issues with recruitment: high vacancy rates (up to

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23 Ibid.

24 They need approval to issue position-specific job openings and to recruit in the job networks for which the new staff selection and managed mobility framework launched in 2016 has been rolled out (POLNET and ITECNET; see Box 5).

25 FPD is consulted on policies, but the final decision is made by OHRM.

26 Charter of the United Nations, Art. 101.

27 Interview with former UN official, New York, February 16, 2016.

28 The committee was composed of seven experts appointed on a geographical basis. "U.N. Study Urges Recruiting Drive; Experts Stress Need for Qualified Personnel," *New York Times*, December 3, 1968.

29 Ibid.

40 percent for international and national professional officers), long outstanding vacancies (with some posts not being filled for up to five years), and insufficient equipment to process the high volume of applications (with an automated system lacking capabilities to filter and screen applications automatically).[30]

Several reform efforts such as the Global Field Support Strategy and CivCap initiative (see Box 1) tried to address vacancy rates in field missions. The establishment of Inspira and the creation of rosters of pre-approved candidates were supposed to rationalize recruitment and screen candidates more effectively and rapidly. While vacancy rates have since improved, including through the abolishment of long-lasting vacant posts, they remain significant: in December 2015 vacancy rates in UN missions stood at 27.2 percent in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), 20.6 percent in Abyei (UNISFA), 17.8 percent in Darfur (UNAMID) and Mali (MINUSMA), 15 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and 14.9 percent in South Sudan (UNMISS).[31]

Box 1. Civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict (2010)

In 2010 Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a senior advisory group to review how civilian assistance is provided in the aftermath of conflict. Its report resulted in the CivCap initiative, which advocated for a new global approach to identifying and sharing civilian capacities that could be deployed to crisis environments, including conflict and post-conflict settings.

CivCap was an attempt to enhance and centralize UN support to capacity building and institutional development in conflict-affected states and to reduce vacancy rates in UN missions by speeding up deployment of civilian staff to the field.[32] It recommended a "corporate emergency model" using networks of rapidly deployable experts from the UN, member-state governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or think tanks, particularly from the Global South. This required improving the interoperability of the crisis-response systems of UN entities with a significant field presence, including by developing a standardized instrument to deploy staff from across the UN system.

Although the initiative was not a reform of UN human resources per se, it outlined several challenges faced by the UN in deploying civilian capacities to the field. In his report on the initiative, the secretary-general confirmed the need to draw on a greater variety of sources of civilian capacity to meet specialized needs and to complement the UN workforce with additional capacities from external partners.[33]

The project was shut down in 2013 due in part to a lack of capacity and participation as well as structural issues related to centralizing diverse needs, posts, and modalities of recruitment. Most importantly, member states provided little support to the initiative, preferring the "on request" model rather than a structured system coordinated by the UN.[34]

Nonetheless, the initiative drew attention to a crucial issue faced by peace operations, and such a mechanism could solve many issues related to short-term needs for civilian capacities. For instance, the UN recently needed an Arabic-speaking legal expert on short notice to support the constitution-drafting process in Libya for a few months and did not have someone with this profile in its rosters;[35] getting such specific short-term expertise from a member state could have been the best option.

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30 Of the over 250,000 applications received in the Galaxy system in 2007/2008, 58 percent were not reviewed. Because the system lacked automated controls for the beginning of the selection process, applications had to be processed manually by FPD's Recruitment and Outreach Unit, which had only ten staff members at that time. UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, *Human Resources Management for Peacekeeping Operations: Recruitment, Placement and Retention of Staff*, June 10, 2009.

31 There is a budgeted range of vacancy rates missions are supposed to achieve.

32 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict—Independent Report of the Senior Advisory Group*, UN Doc. A/65/747–S/2011/85, February 22, 2011.

33 Ibid.

34 Paul Keating and Sharon Wiharta, "Synthesis Report of the Baseline Study on Civilian Capacity: A CivCap Network Joint Research Project," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2012; International Peace Institute, "Assessing CAPMATCH: 'A Global Marketplace for Civilian Capacities,'" internal document, July 2013.

35 Interview with former UN official, February 2, 2017.

Standardization of Contracts and Conditions of Service

In the spirit of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's "One UN" principle, reform efforts have also aimed to streamline contractual arrangements and harmonize conditions of service across the UN. The streamlining of contracts in 2009 reduced the number of types of contracts to three: continuing, fixed-term, and temporary (see Box 2). The harmonization of conditions of service in 2011 aimed to standardize the benefits of staff working for the Secretariat and for UN agencies, funds, and programs in the field (see Box 3).[36]

However, some in field missions and DFS saw these harmonized standards as unfit for peace operations and as counter to the need for flexibility and special procedures in the field. The HIPPO report pinpointed the flaws of harmonization

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Box 2. Streamlining of contracts (2009)

The contractual reform in 2009 following General Assembly Resolution 63/250 aimed at improving job security and career paths for field staff:[37]

Prior to 1 July 2009, there were three different series of the Staff Rules (100, 200 and 300 series), with nine different contract types. While the 100 and 200 series of the Staff Rules provided generally for similar conditions of service, the 300-series appointments of limited duration used in field operations provided a more limited compensation package and were strictly limited to service in a particular mission.[38]

The reform thus focused on streamlining the types of contracts for the whole UN system to make it fairer, reducing the previous system to three categories: continuing appointment (or open-ended), fixed-term appointment (from one to five years and renewable), and temporary appointment (less than one year, renewable for one additional year or, in exceptional cases, up to 729 days). Temporary appointments were meant to help address short-term needs. A single set of rules became the reference for all personnel, with uniform conditions of employment for both headquarters and field staff.

Box 3. Harmonization of conditions of service (2011)[39]

The harmonization of conditions of service in 2011 mostly aimed to standardize conditions of service between field and headquarters staff and to harmonize benefits between field staff deployed by the Secretariat and UN agencies, funds, and programs. Reform efforts culminated in General Assembly Resolution 65/248.[40] The reform established:

- Designation of family and non-family duty stations across the UN system on the basis of security conditions as determined by the International Civil Service Commission (previously, field missions were categorized as either "established" [family] or "special" [non-family] missions, largely for administrative and operational rather than security reasons);

- Rest and recuperation travel entitlements for field staff; and

- Hardship allowances for staff serving in non-family duty stations.

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36 For earlier efforts, see UN General Assembly, *Staffing of Field Missions, Including the Use of 300 and 100-Series Appointments—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/61/732, February 7, 2007; and *Human Resources Management: Fifteenth Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the Proposed Programme Budget for the Biennium 2008–2009*, UN Doc. A/62/7/Add.14, November 16, 2007.

37 UN General Assembly Resolution 63/250 (December 24, 2008), UN Doc. A/RES/63/250.

38 UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Towards a Global, Dynamic, Adaptable and Engaged Workforce for the United Nations*, UN Doc. A/71/323, August 23, 2016.

39 The reflection on harmonization took several years. The secretary-general issued a report on harmonization in April 2007 (UN Doc. A/61/861). In December 2008 the General Assembly aligned the allowances and benefits of field staff with the rest of the Secretariat (until then, they were placed on temporary travel status). In December 2010 it adopted proposals made by the International Civil Service Commission, "including common designation of family and non-family duty stations across the UN common system; additional hardship allowance for staff serving in non-family duty stations; [and] entitlement for rest and recuperation travel of field staff." The harmonization package took effect in July 2011. United Nations, "Strengthening the UN: Human Resources," available at www.un.org/en/strengtheningtheun/humanresources.shtml .

40 UN General Assembly Resolution 65/248 (January 31, 2011), UN Doc. A/RES/65/248.

attempts:

> In operating environments that demand more tailored and more flexible UN peace operations, it appears that human resources policies may be moving in the opposite direction.… Increasingly standardized human resources solutions—benchmarked to meet common denominator needs of the UN in Headquarters environments—are limiting the possibilities for more flexible staffing to respond to evolving needs on the ground.[41]

For example, many describe the three types of contracts as far too limited for the diversity of profiles, needs, and environments in the field. The fact that the Secretariat's recruitment is location-specific is also problematic for field missions: staff members are assigned to a specific duty station and cannot be moved, including within the same mission, without going through a long and costly administrative process. This impedes missions from deploying staff quickly to fill short-term needs in different locations that arise due to the unpredictable and volatile nature of conflict environments.

In the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), for example, staff members assigned to the mission's headquarters in Bangui can only be sent to regional hotspots such as Kaga-Bandoro, Bambari, or Bangassou on travel status, which is costly (due to the payment of daily subsistence allowances) and limited in time (due to HR rules).[42] The UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) faced similar constraints: staff assigned to the mission's headquarters in Accra, Ghana, or offices in the capitals of the three affected countries could not easily be reassigned to regional locations in response to new outbreaks and changing needs.[43]

Rationalization of HR Processes

Efforts to streamline contracts and standardize conditions of service were complemented by efforts to homogenize HR tools and mechanisms. These

efforts included the adoption of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards,[44] the use of Inspira for recruitment, and the transition to Umoja for all other HR processes, including payroll, travel, and staff management (see Box 4). All these reforms built a common HR system for UN staff across the Secretariat, both at headquarters and in the field, and had some positive impact. They gave direction and strategic vision to human resources at the UN and generally rationalized, standardized, centralized, and bureaucratized HR processes.

However, as for harmonization, attempts at rationalization often overlooked specific needs in the field. Many reforms were designed to fit a headquarters-driven institution and are perceived as protecting the interests of headquarters staff rather than field staff. Even the latest reform on mobility, supposedly designed to share the burden of hardship work among all Secretariat staff by making mobility mandatory, has been perceived as advantaging headquarters.

Management of Mobility

Several reforms have aimed to increase the mobility of UN staff. The first mobility initiative, in 2005, was so bureaucratic that it ultimately moved nobody, after a year of work and half a million dollars in expenditures.[45] In 2007 more resources were invested to make up for the failure of the previous reform, with the launching of the Galaxy information technology system, costing $750,000. Of the 1,400 P4 staff targeted, only 2 were actually moved thanks to this attempt, even though, according to one HR officer at UN headquarters, "two dozen people were working full-time on the project" and "150 persons would have moved naturally without the project."[46]

A new managed mobility framework was defined in 2015 and started to be implemented in 2016 (see Box 5). The first exercise of this mobility program in 2016 led to a total of 38 placement decisions entailing the movement of staff members, out of

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41 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, p. 85.

42 Interview with former senior representative of MINUSCA, New York, January 26, 2017.

43 "We had staff assigned to HQ, which was problematic. The cost of moving staff should not dictate how you respond to needs in such missions." Interview with former representative of UNMEER, New York, May 18, 2017.

44 The UN adopted the International Public Sector Accounting Standards in 2014. These accounting standards, designed to enhance accounting for public sector entities and intergovernmental organizations, were adopted to improve the quality, comparability, and credibility of the UN's financial reporting. These standards increased the transparency of HR management by requiring the disclosure and accounting of employee benefits.

45 Interview with UN official, New York, February 6, 2017.

46 Phone interview with MINUSMA staff member, July 19, 2017.

Box 4. Umoja

Umoja is enterprise resource planning software that was introduced in 2013 to streamline recordkeeping, workflow, and communications across the UN system. It manages everything from staff profiles, payroll, and travel and leave requests to leasing of aircraft and management of equipment. Umoja made it possible to ensure that all administrative processes were compliant with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards and is presented as an important tool to improve accountability and fight corruption.

However, the software has been reported to make processes more bureaucratic, to increase the time and steps needed to fulfill administrative requests, and to overburden substantive staff, who are now expected to take over some of the tasks previously handled by administrative staff. The unstable and cumbersome nature of the system, its slow implementation, the lack of operative compatibility between the two coexisting information technology systems (Inspira and Umoja), and the diversity of systems storing HR information have also been significant issues.[47]

All of these challenges are felt more acutely in the field. While Umoja was implemented more smoothly at headquarters, it has raised much frustration on the ground for being ill-adapted to bad Internet connections and failing to address the need to streamline and expedite processes in the missions. For example, while a staff member in New York can quickly request leave by making a single entry in the system, a field staff member needs to make multiple entries due to the different types of days off applicable to the field, such as rest and recuperation, travel days, and annual leave, making such a simple request long and laborious. As a substantive staff member from MINUSMA explained, "We basically spend one full day every week on Umoja, to make travel requests, expense reports, calculation of [daily subsistence allowance]…. Everything has to be entered manually."[48]

Field staff face similar challenges with other electronic systems, which are generally perceived as making processes longer and more burdensome. Hiring managers have to specify reasons for selection and non-selection and to provide comments for each candidate on Inspira, a labor-intensive activity for chiefs of sections who have to deal with crises in the field. e-PAS, the electronic performance assessment system, does not accept electronic signatures, and the process of manually signing, scanning, and sending e-PAS pages to the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe can be a heavy burden for staff deployed in hardship duty stations. This appears to be a self-inflicted bureaucratic hurdle that could easily be abandoned.

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360 staff members who opted in to the program.[49]

The mobility program suffered from inherent limitations and is largely perceived as unfair and ineffective, both at headquarters and in the field. At headquarters, some personnel who are not willing to serve in hardship duty stations do not look forward to such a mandatory mobility system. In the field, rumors of the program's dysfunction have circulated among field staff, who hear stories of people moving from Bangui to El-Fasher or from Juba to Kabul but rarely from Juba or Kabul to New York. Indeed, when it was voluntary, positions in hardship duty stations (made available by staff members holding these positions opting in to the program) were far more numerous than positions in family duty stations.[50] As a result, some staff members were recommended for moves from one hardship duty station to another, raising dissatisfaction among staff and significantly decreasing the popularity of the initiative.

In addition, the fact that mobility is understood as both functional and geographic has been seen as

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47 "POLNET staff members are located in various departments, offices and field missions worldwide and, since all functionalities of Umoja are not fully deployed across the global Secretariat, the human resources and other data required to verify eligibility for managed mobility are stored in a variety of different, and mostly location-specific, systems. It took longer than anticipated to obtain the required information, as the network staffing officers had to contact individual executive and local human resources offices to request data on each potential participant and his or her position, which often had to be retrieved manually from a variety of historical records." UN General Assembly, *Human Resources Management: Mobility—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/71/323/Add.1, August 12, 2016.

48 Phone interview with MINUSMA staff member, July 19, 2017.

49 UN General Assembly, *Mobility*.

50 Because of the nature of jobs in hardship duty stations, more staff from the field opt into the mobility program, and more vacancies therefore exist in non-family postings than in headquarters locations.

Box 5. Managed mobility framework (2016)

The current managed mobility framework was set up as part of a new staffing system, with implementation beginning in 2016—one of Ban Ki-moon's last reform initiatives.[51] It aimed to create and maintain a dynamic, mobile, and adaptable workforce by promoting mobility, defined as functional or geographic moves among UN posts. Mobility can involve a change in role, function, department, or duty station or a move to or from an agency, fund, or program. The objective was to share the burden of hardship work among all Secretariat staff by providing interesting opportunities for career development.[52]

The reform established nine job networks that group together jobs in common or related fields of work and with similar functions across the Secretariat: MAGNET (management and administration), POLNET (political, peace, and humanitarian), DEVNET (economic, social, and development), SAFETYNET (internal security and safety), ITECNET (information and telecommunication technology), INFONET (public information and conference management), LOGNET (logistics, transportation, and supply chain), SCINET (science), and LEGALNET (legal). So far, only POLNET and ITECNET have been rolled out. Staff can move between positions within the same job network, which means a human rights officer can become a political affairs, civil affairs, or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) officer.

There are two components to the new staffing system:

1. **Managing mobility for UN staff:** The mobility framework was initially implemented on a voluntary basis in 2016 and became mandatory in 2017 for all POLNET staff. Positions available for mobility include those held by staff opting into the system voluntarily and by staff who have reached the maximum number of years before their mandatory move (seven years for headquarters and family duty stations and three years for hardship duty stations).[53] Job network boards make recommendations on how to reassign staff within this pool of openings.

2. **Filling vacant posts through semi-annual staffing exercises by job network:** Vacant posts are available for both internal and external applicants and are advertised on Inspira.

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defeating the purpose of the program and has impaired its credibility. Although all staff members have to move after a certain number of years in the same position, they can stay in the same duty station and just move from one office to another in New York or change functional titles in the same compound in Juba.

Since the first mandatory mobility exercise involving headquarters staff is taking place in 2017 and is limited to POLNET, it is still too early to gauge its long-term effectiveness. Nonetheless, field staff have grown increasingly skeptical of such reforms. The fact that years spent in non-Secretariat entities are not taken into account in the calculation of mobility requirements and that headquarters staff were given seven years before a mandatory move (instead of three for staff in

hardship duty stations) has fueled perceptions that the program favors headquarters. Field staff will judge this reform on the basis of whether longtime headquarters staff end up going to the field—rather than to other positions in New York or other headquarters offices—and whether longtime field staff serving in hardship duty stations are given opportunities in headquarters or family duty stations.

So far, therefore, a real rotation scheme that rewards years spent in the field is still lacking. Moreover, the system does not incorporate mechanisms for career development and promotion, and staff willing to move do not receive preferential treatment over external candidates when applying for vacant positions.

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51 UN Secretariat, *Introduction of a New Staff Selection and Managed Mobility System—Secretary-General's Bulletin*, UN Doc. ST/SGB/2016/2, December 28, 2015.

52 From 2010 to 2014, only 11 percent of staff leaving an H duty station (headquarters locations) went to an E duty station (the most difficult hardship locations), and only 6 percent of staff leaving an E duty station went to an H duty station. UN General Assembly, *Mobility*.

53 Staff can stay in their position a maximum of seven years for A and H duty stations, four years for B and C duty stations, and three years for D and E duty stations. H duty stations are headquarters locations, and the classification from A to E is applied according to the level of hardship of the location.

Performance Management and Accountability

Many staff in DFS and in field missions point out poor staff performance as a serious issue, and it has been highlighted many times by the secretary-general and addressed by several reform attempts. The Performance Appraisal System was initiated in 1995, and the e-PAS electronic tool was created in 2003 (see Box 6). In 2010 the Performance Appraisal System became the Performance Management and Development System.

RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES FOR FIELD PERSONNEL

The UN is well-known for its cumbersome bureaucratic system and complex and opaque processes. Recruitment and staffing are no exception. The fact that the UN applicant's manual is 174 pages long, the recruiter's manual 239 pages, and the hiring manager's manual 242 pages demonstrates this complexity of these processes.[54] It is perceived as challenging, if not impossible, for individuals seeking employment with UN field missions to

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Box 6. e-PAS

The UN's Performance Management and Development System is supported by an electronic application, e-PAS (electronic Performance Appraisal System). e-PAS captures the main stages of the performance process, including the individual work plan, the midpoint review, and the end-of-year performance appraisal. Staff members are rated for core values and competencies required for the job and can receive four different performance ratings: "exceeds performance expectations"; "successfully meets performance expectations"; "partially meets performance expectations"; or "does not meet performance expectations."[55]

For personnel who use e-PAS,[56] the tool is widely disregarded as non-indicative of real performance.[57] "There are staff who are close to supervisors who are permanently exceeding performance without any justification," explained a respondent to the 2017 staff satisfaction survey. Even when ratings are poor, there is little accountability attached to them, making them largely meaningless in the eyes of many.

In theory, a report of underperformance through e-PAS can justify the termination or non-renewal of a contract or the non-payment of an incremental portion of salary.[58] The process is cumbersome, however, and many managers do not comply with it.

OHRM policies require managers to document examples of underperformance, put in place performance improvement plans "initiated not less than three months before the end of the performance cycle," review progress against these plans, and take remedial actions. This twelve-step process is often perceived by field staff as too heavy and time-consuming. Concrete outputs, deadlines, and deliverables need to be defined in the performance improvement plan to give a chance to the underperforming staff to improve his or her performance, and management also has to demonstrate it undertook supporting measures to help the staff member improve.

Staff members can also contest their assessment on e-PAS through rebuttal panels that can overturn ratings, delaying the process. As a result, managers often report being scared of complaints and of the internal justice system, which explains the low level of reporting of underperformance.

In addition, the limitations of e-PAS have raised questions when it comes to the evaluation of managers' performance. Despite past pilot attempts, 360-degree evaluations have not yet been systematized. Since staff members are only rated by their supervisors, and not by their peers or their supervisees, it is often difficult to address cases of underperforming managers.

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54 United Nations, *The Applicant's Manual: Manual for the Applicant on the Staff Selection System (Inspira)*, 2015; *The Recruiter's Manual: Instructional Manual for the Recruiter on the Staff Selection System (Inspira)*, 2015; *Hiring Manager's Manual: Manual for the Hiring Manager on the Staff Selection System (Inspira)*, 2015.

55 UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/69/190/Add.2, August 7, 2014.

56 e-PAS is not used for UN volunteers or temporary staff; they are assessed only through a performance form to be completed at the end of their appointment, making it difficult to track their record, and exposing the system to re-hiring of poorly performing staff.

57 Interviews with representatives of OHRM and managers, New York and Goma, April–June 2017.

58 Interview with OHRM representative, New York, June 16, 2017.

understand recruitment rules and procedures. UN staff generally also perceive these as lacking in transparency and clarity, and even HR staff in the Secretariat tend to convey different interpretations and understandings of roles, regulations, and policies.

Types of Recruitment Processes

There are several types of processes for recruiting civilian field personnel. For professional levels, the bureaucratic procedure depends on the type of post. Fixed-term positions involve position-specific job openings or recruit-from-roster openings. The latter is an expedited process allowing recruitment from a database of pre-screened candidates. This has become the main recruitment channel for the field, since position-specific openings can only be used if the recruit-from-roster process fails. Positions of less than one year use temporary job openings.

Layers of complexity are added according to the type of contract being offered. These can involve interventions both from headquarters and from the field, and from both hiring managers and HR teams, with back and forth exchanges between several departments.[59] Different types of review bodies control the process at different stages, with multiple panels involved in validating candidates, including central review bodies, network staffing teams, and job network boards. The multiplicity of actors involved makes most recruitment processes cumbersome and opaque. As a result, in 2015/2016 recruitment for field operations took an average of 189 days for position-specific job openings and 69 days for recruit-from-roster openings.[60]

This study cannot give an extensive description and explanation of the steps and bureaucracy involved in recruitment, but Figures 1–4 offer a partial overview.

Position-Specific Recruitment

The first step of recruiting for position-specific

jobs—creating the job opening—already involves five different parties in its review and approval (the hiring manager, staffing table manager, senior recruiter, primary recruiter, and central review body; see Figure 1).[61] Once a job is created, it is advertised on Inspira, the online platform used by hiring managers and applicants, which replaced the cumbersome and inefficient Galaxy system in March 2010. Jobs have to be posted on Inspira for a minimum period, from seven days up to thirty days for field positions.[62]

The automated pre-screening done by Inspira aims to reduce the large pool of applicants before the review by the HR recruiter and hiring manager. Inspira automatically verifies eligibility require-ments such as age, criminal record, years of experi-ence, academic qualifications, knowledge of languages, and positive answers to initial pre-screening questions. Through this process, applicants are determined as eligible or ineligible, or they are forwarded to an HR officer for further review. In the eyes of many, however, Inspira is not client-friendly or flexible enough to sort and filter applications in a nuanced way (see below).

After pre-screening, candidate profiles are released to the hiring manager, who conducts substantive assessments of candidates to create a long list for further consideration. Candidates on this list undergo one or more written tests, and a smaller number are short-listed for a competency-based interview. The short list of candidates goes to the staffing table manager and recruiter (HR staff), who check that procedures were followed and that comparative analysis reports and appropriate memos were completed (hiring managers have to justify their decision regarding each candidate).

If these HR staff confirm that the process complied with procedures, the list is submitted to a central review body to be verified against the evaluation criteria and endorsed. For peace operations, field central review bodies are

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59 At headquarters, job network boards and network staffing teams for recruitment and mobility within the POLNET network include representatives from OHRM, DPKO, DPA, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

60 UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management.*

61 The hiring manager prepares a job request to create a job opening. The staffing table manager confirms availability of funding, verifies the classification of the job opening, reviews the names of staff members who have held temporary appointments to this post within the last six months (who cannot be recruited), confirms the accuracy of the job details, and assigns a senior recruiter (HR officer) and primary hiring manager. The senior recruiter reviews and approves or rejects the job request and assigns a primary recruiter to the job opening. The recruiter advises the hiring manager and determines whether the job opening needs to be reviewed by a central review body, which can approve or reject it. The recruiter finally sets the posting deadline and publishes the job opening.

62 The minimum posting period is 30 days, or 15 days in exceptional cases, for position-specific job openings in field missions or project-funded positions; 30 days for general services job openings; 30 days for generic job openings; 7 days for temporary job openings; and 7 days for recruit-from-roster openings.

Figure 1. Recruitment for position-specific job openings

HEADQUARTERS PROCESS	FIELD PROCESS	COMPUTER PROCESS	APPLICANT PROCESS

JOB POSTING

- HIRING MANAGER — drafts job request
- STAFFING TABLE MANAGER — reviews & approves job
- SENIOR RECRUITER — reviews & approves job
- HIRING MANAGER — approves reviewed posting
- RECRUITER — approves reviewed posting
- CENTRAL REVIEW BODY — reviews posting and evaluation criteria
- JOB PUBLISHED ON INSPIRA

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- APPLICANTS — apply through Inspira
- INSPIRA — pre-screens applicants
- RECRUITER — reviews applicants requiring manual screening
- HIRING MANAGER — shortlists candidates for assessment
- APPLICANTS — write assessment(s)
- HIRING MANAGER — grades assessment & shortlists candidates for interview
- HIRING MANAGER — creates panel to conduct interviews
- PANEL — interviews applicants
- APPLICANTS — are interviewed
- HIRING MANAGER — ranks candidates

REVIEW AND SELECTION

- RECRUITER — reviews references and credentials
- SENIOR RECRUITER — reviews process
- CENTRAL REVIEW BODY — reviews process
- DEPARTMENT HEAD — validates selection
- BEST APPLICANTS — are rostered
- HIRING MANAGER — makes job offer
- SELECTED APPLICANT — accepts job offer
- RECRUITER — initiates on-boarding process
- RECRUITER — completes on-boarding process
- SELECTED APPLICANT — deploys to mission

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established in DFS to vet candidates for inclusion in rosters and for position-specific job openings.[63] If the central review body does not return the list to the hiring manager for further comments, the list is then submitted to the head of mission or department to make the final selection.

Even after the selection, the process of bringing staff on board, including issuance of medical and security clearances, computer-based courses and tests, and enrollment in administrative systems, adds an extra layer of length and complexity and can take up to several months.[64] Once new hires arrive to the field mission, deploying them to their respective offices and duty stations can also take a long time, depending on the efficiency of the check-in process in Entebbe or the mission headquarters. This check-in process can include the issuance of chairs, desks, computers, radios, body armor, and helmets, for which some staff have waited several weeks. In Mali, for example, staff have waited up to sixty-eight days in Bamako before being deployed to their assigned field locations.[65]

Temporary Recruitment

Recruitment processes can be slightly expedited if the hiring manager uses temporary job openings (for contracts of less than one year; see Figure 2). This is essentially a fast-track version of the process for position-specific job openings, since the mandatory posting period on Inspira is reduced to one week, and contracts of less than one year do not have to be validated by a central review body. By being more decentralized, this procedure gives managers more autonomy to bring on board an individual of their choosing for a limited period of time. However, reduced entitlements (including 1.5 days of annual leave per month instead of 2.5 on fixed-term contracts) make temporary job openings less attractive to candidates and have raised questions over fairness for staff continuously working under temporary contracts.

Roster-Based Recruitment

Beyond temporary job openings, recruit-from-roster mechanisms were introduced to facilitate recruitment for field missions (see Figure 3). Rosters of pre-approved candidates were established for specific profiles in each job family. For example, there are dedicated rosters for political affairs, civil affairs, human rights, child protection, rule of law, and DDR officers, as well as rosters for support job families like security, supply, or logistics officers. The process of populating rosters is centralized in New York and managed by DFS's Field Personnel Division (FPD). The FPD advertises generic job openings and undertakes a competitive screening process including assessments, interviews, and endorsement by a central review body (similar to the recruitment process for position-specific job openings except that the outcome is to be placed on a roster).

The rosters are supposed to offer a pool of available candidates ready for deployment, and recruiting somebody from a roster therefore takes less time than ordinary recruitment. Indeed, since candidates in the rosters are pre-screened and have already been assessed, interviewed, and endorsed by a central review body, the hiring manager can basically offer a position to anybody in a roster after a mandatory posting period of fifteen days, which can be reduced to seven days. Therefore, recruiting from rosters can considerably shorten the recruitment process. Currently, about 85 percent of job openings for fixed-term appointments in UN peace operations are filled through the recruit-from-roster modality.

However, rosters have not had the expected results. As the HIPPO report explained, "Tools for accelerating recruitment such as rosters have not delivered sufficient results; they work only when quality candidates are on the roster and are willing and able to deploy."[66] The pools of candidates are

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63 Field central review bodies include central review boards (P5 and D1), central review committees (for professional positions up to P4), and central review panels (FS).

64 The former assistant secretary-general for field support has reflected on these frustrations: "During the Ebola epidemic, I was desperate to get qualified people on the ground, and yet I was told that a staff member working in South Sudan could not travel to our headquarters in Accra, Ghana, until she received a new medical clearance. We were fighting a disease that killed many thousands and risked spinning out of control and yet we spent weeks waiting for a healthy colleague to get her forms processed." Anthony Banbury, "I Love the U.N., but It Is Failing," *New York Times*, March 18, 2016.

65 Interview with representative of the permanent mission of a troop-contributing country of MINUSMA, New York, May 12, 2017.

66 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, p. 85.

Figure 2. Recruitment for temporary job openings

HEADQUARTERS PROCESS	UN FIELD PROCESS	🖥 COMPUTER PROCESS	⚲ APPLICANT PROCESS

JOB POSTING

HIRING MANAGER
drafts job request

STAFFING TABLE MANAGER
reviews & approves job

SENIOR RECRUITER
reviews & approves job

HIRING MANAGER
approves reviewed posting

RECRUITER
approves reviewed posting

Gray boxes are skipped.

CENTRAL REVIEW BODY
reviews posting and evaluation criteria

JOB PUBLISHED ON INSPIRA

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

APPLICANTS
apply through Inspira

INSPIRA
pre-screens applicants

RECRUITER
reviews applicants requiring manual screening

Dashed boxes are optional.

HIRING MANAGER
shortlists candidates for assessment

APPLICANTS
write assesment(s)

HIRING MANAGER
grades assessment & shortlists candidates for interview

HIRING MANAGER
creates panel to conduct interviews

PANEL
interviews applicants

APPLICANT
is interviewed

HIRING MANAGER
ranks candidates

REVIEW AND SELECTION

RECRUITER
reviews references and credentials

SENIOR RECRUITER
reviews process

CENTRAL REVIEW BODY
reviews process

DEPARTMENT HEAD
validates selection

BEST APPLICANTS
are rostered

HIRING MANAGER
makes job offer

SELECTED APPLICANT
accepts job offer

RECRUITER
initiates on-boarding process

RECRUITER
completes on-boarding process

SELECTED APPLICANT
deploys to mission

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Figure 3. Recruitment from rosters

HEADQUARTERS PROCESS	FIELD PROCESS	COMPUTER PROCESS	APPLICANT PROCESS

JOB POSTING

HIRING MANAGER — drafts job request

STAFFING TABLE MANAGER — reviews & approves job

SENIOR RECRUITER — reviews & approves job

HIRING MANAGER — approves reviewed posting

RECRUITER — approves reviewed posting

Gray boxes are skipped.

CENTRAL REVIEW BODY — reviews posting and evaluation criteria

JOB PUBLISHED ON INSPIRA

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

ROSTERED APPLICANTS — apply through Inspira

INSPIRA — pre-screens applicants

RECRUITER — reviews applicants requiring manual screening

HIRING MANAGER — shortlists candidates for assessment

APPLICANTS — write assesment(s)

HIRING MANAGER — grades assessment & shortlists candidates for interview

HIRING MANAGER — creates panel to conduct interviews

Dashed boxes are optional.

PANEL — interviews applicants

APPLICANTS — are interviewed

HIRING MANAGER — ranks/selects candidates

REVIEW AND SELECTION

RECRUITER — reviews references and credentials

SENIOR RECRUITER — reviews process

CENTRAL REVIEW BODY — reviews process

DEPARTMENT HEAD — validates selection

BEST APPLICANTS — are rostered

HIRING MANAGER — makes job offer

SELECTED APPLICANT — accepts job offer

RECRUITER — initiates on-boarding process

RECRUITER — completes on-boarding process

SELECTED APPLICANT — deploys to mission

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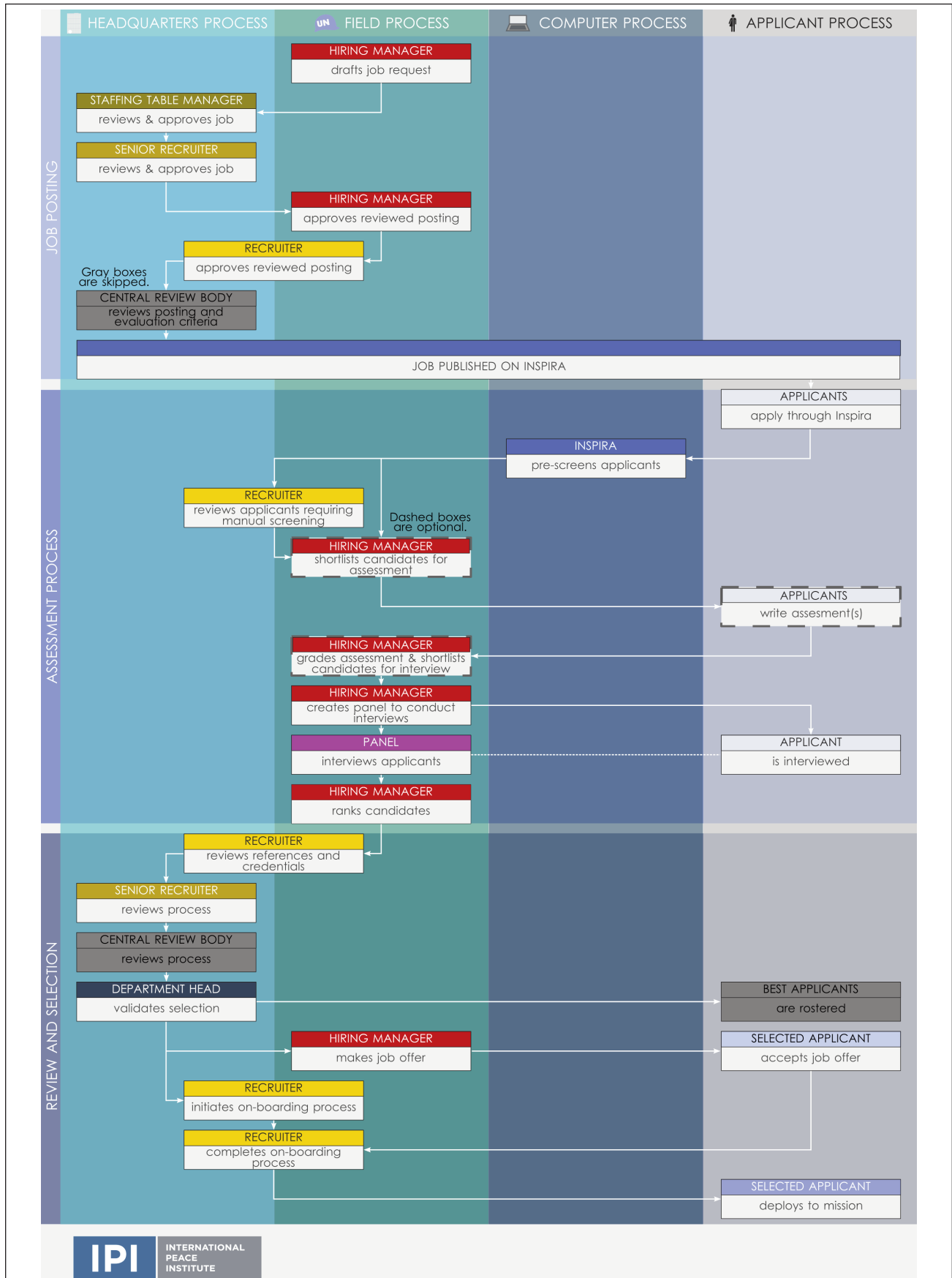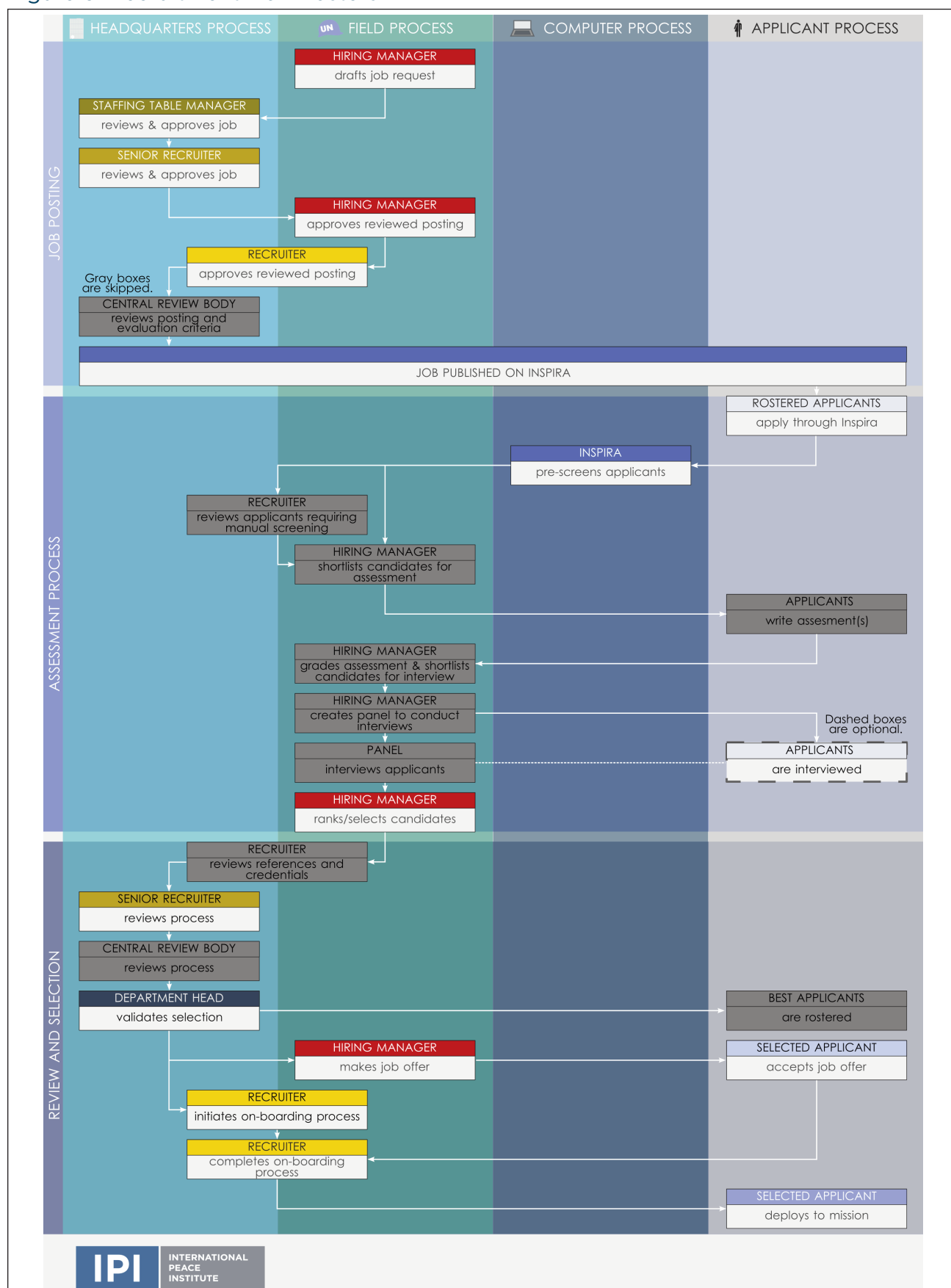
sometimes too limited and can be rapidly exhausted, with candidates already holding a job, not interested in the specific position or duty station, or not having the right profile.

Frustration with these rosters is common among hiring managers, and many criticize their quality. As one UN representative described, "It should have been a good system, but we filled [it] with dirty water."[67] Hiring managers often mention how limiting rosters are and how they rarely match their requirements. As explained by a former hiring manager, "There were 133 P3 [logistics officers] on the roster; not one was good enough for the job."[68] "Rosters are better than the regular job opening process, but [they are] still terrible," stated a UN official from DFS.[69] Moreover, hiring managers cannot question the suitability of rostered candidates, since they have already been cleared by a central review body. As a result, some hiring managers distrust the rosters and typically just consider rostered people they already know without even looking at the profiles of other rostered candidates, preventing the injection of new blood into the system.

From the perspective of applicants, many are discouraged by the uncertain calendar for the generic job openings used to populate rosters. There are sometimes several years between windows of opportunity to apply to be included in a specific roster. Some hiring managers complain they could not recruit qualified people willing to join the mission "because they are not on the roster."[70] As shared by a respondent to the 2017 UN global staff satisfaction survey, "I believe the roster system is the worst reform that [the] UN ever put in place.… There are many who are performing their assignment with excellence and are not on the roster and others who know nothing about a specific discipline and are rostered in that area."

The rigidity of roster categories also undermines their effectiveness. With nine job networks, forty-

seven job families, and multiple grade levels, many rosters have been established. Program managers can normally consult only the roster corresponding to the job category of the vacancy they created unless they go through exceptional request processes. For example, the roster for protection of civilians officers is not associated with other functional titles like human rights officer or civil affairs officer. Also, a candidate rostered for a certain level cannot be considered for a lower one, so candidates on a P4 roster cannot be considered for jobs at the P3 level; they would have to be on the P3 roster.

Since rosters have proven so difficult to get onto, candidates have started exploiting exceptions to the rules. The UN introduced the possibility for a limited number of the best candidates short-listed for position-specific job openings to be placed on rosters because they had gone through a long, competitive process. Now that this practice is well-known, some people apply to massive numbers of position-specific job openings in field missions not because they want that particular post but in the hope of being rostered. This has led to missions receiving hundreds of applications for specific jobs they need to fill, the vast majority from candidates not actually interested in the job.

Rosters have even become counterproductive in terms of expediting recruitment processes—their original purpose. Managers in the field cannot open position-specific job openings unless they prove that the recruit-from-roster process failed.[71] In the end, this adds time to field recruitment. As a senior UN officer recalled, "I had to provide justification for every single person in the roster and explain why they were not fit for the position. I didn't have time, so I ended up picking somebody from the roster."[72] Using rosters is often the least bad solution for program managers, who find themselves more constrained than helped by this system.

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67 Interview with former director in a UN field office, New York, February 10, 2017.

68 Ibid.

69 Interview with representative from DFS, New York, February 6, 2017.

70 Interview with hiring managers, New York, January 2017.

71 Hiring managers can only open a position-specific job opening if they went through the process of proving that all candidates on the rosters are unfit for the position. According to DPA guidelines, "When there is difficulty in attracting qualified applicants to a specific duty station or to fill positions that require very specific skills for which rosters do not exist, DPA should consult with DFS/FPD on the possibility of issuing position specific job openings." DPA, *Special Political Missions Start-up Guide*, 2012, p. 73, available at http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SPMStartupGuide_UNDPA2012.pdf .

72 Interview with former director in a UN field office, New York, February 10, 2017.

The New Staffing System: The Example of POLNET

Beyond increasing the mobility of UN staff, the new staffing system adopted in 2015 aimed to revamp the management of vacancies for internal and external candidates. Among the nine job networks in place, POLNET is the only one that is well-established, having undergone three rounds of advertisements over the last eighteen months.[73] From now on, all POLNET position-specific and recruit-from-roster job openings will be advertised on Inspira at the same time during the semi-annual staffing exercises and will be subject to a new recruitment process (see Figure 4). Recruitment timelines, aiming at 180 days for the whole process, have been improved, with more transparent and reliable calendars advertised in advance. The assessment processes have also been rationalized and standardized. A standard pre-selection test is sent to all candidates screened by Inspira, as well as a drafting skills test for some POLNET jobs at certain levels (since 2017) and substantive tests reviewed by relevant staff members in each network.

However, the reform also centralized HR processes in New York and significantly reduced the authority and involvement of field managers and heads of missions in the assessment and selection of candidates. Network staffing teams based in New York, which are composed of HR practitioners and subject-matter experts from the different departments, determine the eligibility of candidates who passed the standard pre-selection test and coordinate and conduct the suitability assessments, including the written tests. Job network boards, made up mostly of staff members from headquarters and only a few from the field,[74] review and validate the whole process and make the final recommendation.[75]

This has led to the selection and deployment of people who were not chosen by program managers, triggering great dissatisfaction in field missions.[76]

For example, the job network board can recommend the selection of candidates who were not necessarily first on the preference lists provided by field managers, for the sake of gender or geographic balance (defined as HR imperatives for the UN). Similarly, some internal candidates have been placed in field missions through the mobility program without the assent of program managers.[77] The new system also includes recruit-from-roster job openings, which are now managed centrally by OHRM and are no longer under the authority of field missions.

This practice has led to a feeling of disempowerment in field missions receiving staff they have never assessed, interviewed, or selected and who, according to some managers, do not have the needed skills.[78] Even the terminology used by OHRM, which now uses the term "programme manager" instead of "hiring manager," demonstrates this intended change of responsibilities and the centralization of hiring powers in New York. In the end, the new staffing system and the mobility reform, while meant to support field missions and alleviate the weight of hardship work among all Secretariat staff, have limited the authority of missions to make recruitment decisions and increased resentment among field managers.

Standardized Recruitment Techniques

Beyond the limitations of the various types of recruitment processes due to their complexity and centralization, the recruitment techniques used by the UN Secretariat are also a constraint. Candidates have to successfully complete a personal history profile (the UN résumé template), written assessments, and a competency-based interview. While staff and senior representatives of the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) appear to be convinced that the methodologies used reflect "a scientific way of doing it, with the right sequence," and are the best tools to ensure efficient screening and objective selection,[79] in practice these

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73 The new system started to be rolled out for ITECNET jobs in March 2017.

74 Of nineteen members total, the job network board for POLNET included two staff members from peace operations. UN Secretariat, *Membership of the Job Network Board for the Political, Peace and Humanitarian Network*, UN Doc. ST/IC/2016/16, August 1, 2016.

75 For the role of network staffing teams and job network boards, see UN Secretariat, *Administrative Instruction: Staff Selection and Managed Mobility System*, UN Doc. ST/AI/2016/1, December 28, 2015.
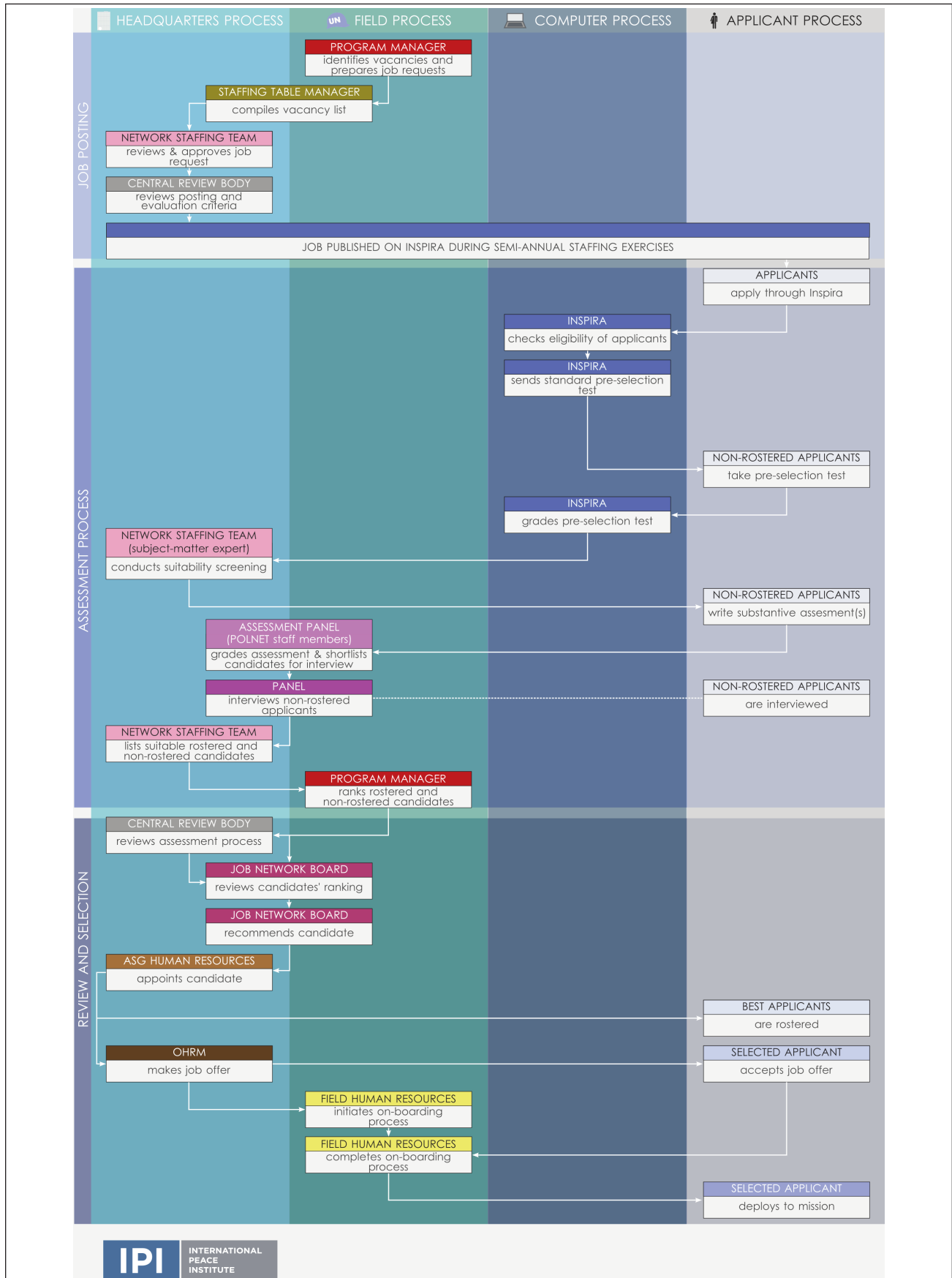
76 The list of suitable candidates is prepared by the network staffing team and sent to program managers for their written input and preferences, in ranking order.

77 Interviews with chefs of section and managers in UN peacekeeping operations, Goma and Juba, April 2017.

78 Ibid.

79 Interview with UN official, New York, May 18, 2017.

Figure 4. Recruitment for a POLNET position-specific job opening

HEADQUARTERS PROCESS	FIELD PROCESS	COMPUTER PROCESS	APPLICANT PROCESS

JOB POSTING

- PROGRAM MANAGER — identifies vacancies and prepares job requests
- STAFFING TABLE MANAGER — compiles vacancy list
- NETWORK STAFFING TEAM — reviews & approves job request
- CENTRAL REVIEW BODY — reviews posting and evaluation criteria
- JOB PUBLISHED ON INSPIRA DURING SEMI-ANNUAL STAFFING EXERCISES

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- APPLICANTS — apply through Inspira
- INSPIRA — checks eligibility of applicants
- INSPIRA — sends standard pre-selection test
- NON-ROSTERED APPLICANTS — take pre-selection test
- INSPIRA — grades pre-selection test
- NETWORK STAFFING TEAM (subject-matter expert) — conducts suitability screening
- NON-ROSTERED APPLICANTS — write substantive assesment(s)
- ASSESSMENT PANEL (POLNET staff members) — grades assessment & shortlists candidates for interview
- PANEL — interviews non-rostered applicants
- NON-ROSTERED APPLICANTS — are interviewed
- NETWORK STAFFING TEAM — lists suitable rostered and non-rostered candidates
- PROGRAM MANAGER — ranks rostered and non-rostered candidates

REVIEW AND SELECTION

- CENTRAL REVIEW BODY — reviews assessment process
- JOB NETWORK BOARD — reviews candidates' ranking
- JOB NETWORK BOARD — recommends candidate
- ASG HUMAN RESOURCES — appoints candidate
- BEST APPLICANTS — are rostered
- OHRM — makes job offer
- SELECTED APPLICANT — accepts job offer
- FIELD HUMAN RESOURCES — initiates on-boarding process
- FIELD HUMAN RESOURCES — completes on-boarding process
- SELECTED APPLICANT — deploys to mission

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techniques present a number of limitations. Although supposedly centered on testing values and competencies, in practice they do not effectively test the principles and motivations of staff. They also tend to reduce space for creativity and originality and can be challenging for external candidates who are not familiar with the UN's HR standards and systems.

The personal history profile that candidates fill out on the Inspira online system is first subject to automated screening based on the candidate's educational background, years of experience, and answers to suitability questions. The automated screening reduces the pool of candidates to be reviewed by HR officers and hiring managers. However, Inspira's interface is so client-unfriendly, inflexible, and limited that it cannot process nuances. For example, when candidates create two separate entries in the system for two jobs they held during the same period of time, that period of time is not counted in the calculation of their years of experience because the system cannot deal with two concurrent entries.

The written assessments, also intended to reduce the pool of candidates to be reviewed by hiring managers, tend to be burdensome, cumbersome, and repetitive and to deter external applicants. For the last staffing exercise for POLNET jobs, candidates had to take three different written assessments: a standard pre-selection test (formerly called a general ability test), a drafting skills test, and a substantive test specific to the job. Despite efforts to make it objective, the general ability test is likely to favor people experienced in "UN language" and familiar with the UN's organizational culture.[80] Moreover, candidates have to take the substantive tests again (typically two to three hours of exams for P3 or P4 positions) for each round of staffing exercises, even if they already passed them several times.

Despite official OHRM statistics showing that the majority of survey respondents found the general ability test objective, the differential grading put in place by OHRM and the lack of transparency in the grading of substantive tests has raised questions

about the assessment's fairness. To pass the standard pre-selection test, applicants are required to obtain different scores, depending on the grade, level, or duty station of the job to which they applied. Even if two applicants get the same number of correct answers in the standard pre-selection process, they will not necessarily both be called back for the next phase of assessments if they applied for different jobs.

Competency-based interviews are now systematically used as the last phase of assessing the suitability of candidates and seem to be the sacred method to interview short-listed candidates for a post and to assess their competencies. The UN core and technical competencies for which candidates are assessed have been defined according to a rigid scheme and formal template. All professional staff have to share core values (such as professionalism, integrity, and respect for diversity) and core competencies (such as teamwork, communication, planning, and organizing), which are defined in a formal, institutionalized, and mechanistic way. The rationale underlying the use of competency-based interviews is that past behavior is an indicator of future behavior in similar situations. UN recruiters typically have to ask how the candidate dealt with past situations related to the competencies listed in the job vacancy announcement.

While competency-based interviews have the advantage of assessing candidates against a list of objective criteria, they are widely criticized by both candidates and hiring managers. Interviews are reduced to preformed questions such as: "Tell us about a time you had to work with a team," or "Explain a situation where you had to deal with competing priorities." As a result, all the questions are easily predictable on the basis of the terms of reference in the vacancy note and answers can be prepared in advance. Candidates who are familiar with this interview practice know they have to study the competencies listed in the vacancy announcement and use "CARL stories" (context, action, result, and learning) for each of the competencies listed in the job description.[81] The resulting process can be artificial, leaving little

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80 For example, some questions assessing textual skills use UN reports or resolutions. They often include four answers that can all be true statements, but the candidate should select the one that is more reflective of UN policies. The questions on social skills typically break down situations and ask what is "appropriate," "somewhat appropriate," "somewhat inappropriate," or "inappropriate," which has proven to be vague and subjective.

81 Michael Emery, "Competency-Based Interviewing," Global Careers Fair, May 1, 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3-WKWpNl3I .

room to assess candidates by discussing substantive questions or what they would provide to the team.[82]

Criticism of the "inflexible use of competency models in organizations" is not new and goes beyond the UN. As noted in a report by two HR professionals, "Many competency models are not sufficiently clear or dynamic for effective use in constantly changing organizations. Competency-based interviewing per se is an overly restrictive and increasingly blunt selection instrument."[83] Such critics argue that, while competency-based interviewing can have value, it needs to be used less strictly and less exclusively. Interviewers should not only focus on ticking boxes but should also add other dimensions to the interview, asking forward-looking questions, discussing proposals for practical solutions on the ground in particular settings, and gauging the motivation of candidates.

As one UN official stated, recruitment techniques such as the competency-based interview lead the UN to "hire good talkers…at the expense of good workers."[84] The candidates most likely to succeed are those who intimately know the system and who had the time and exposure to figure out the methods for building applications according to the UN's HR culture. Those "expert UN candidates" who have learned to master such techniques are not necessarily the best and most competent professionals. As pointed out by a UN staff member in a special political mission, "The most competent and dedicated staff in the missions are not the ones who can spend one day a week applying on Inspira. In the end, they are not the ones who finally get on the rosters."[85]

As a consequence, external applicants often perceive themselves as discriminated against by such recruitment tools.[86] Paradoxically, while the UN developed these techniques to make its HR system irreproachably competitive and fair, they have discouraged good candidates who are not familiar with them and do not have time to study how to crack the UN recruitment system. External applicants often run out of patience when they realize that their profile does not even get through the pre-screening process because they did not fill out their personal history profile in the right way. The most qualified candidates may be insulted rather than honored when called for a UN drafting skills assessment in which they have to transform a basic chronology into written text. Many tire of going through the same types of spiritless interviews, answering the same questions, and undertaking the same time-consuming written assessments.[87]

The UN's assessment methodology is similar to that used by other international organizations like the European Union (EU) and NATO. The EU, for example, also administers computer-based multiple-choice tests and places candidates on reserve lists from which all EU institutions can pick candidates to interview and recruit.[88] However, both the EU and NATO supplement these methods with assessment centers where candidates are assessed on the basis of case study exercises or group discussions (used for higher categories of positions at NATO and for the second round of substantive assessment at the EU). The feedback provided to candidates is also more substantial than at the UN and less likely to discourage external applicants.

Competency-based assessment centers are also used by some UN agencies, funds, and programs, including by UNICEF, as well as to recruit resident coordinators "using a variety of testing methods, including interviews, role plays and group exercises

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82 Managers have only recently been given the option to include a substantive question to assess the candidate's knowledge of the job.

83 The authors of the report provide a "critique of the inflexible use of competency models in organisations" and "explore the limitations of competency based interviews." They stress "the need for alternative approaches, e.g. wider use of job sampling, biographically based interviews and ability tests at the recruitment stage" and note that the ubiquity of the competency-based approach "may be counterproductive in an exponential world where constant reappraisals of skills, attributes and behaviours are required." Paul Derek Martin and John Pope, "Competency-Based Interviewing: Has It Gone Too Far?," *Industrial and Commercial Training* 40, no. 2 (March 2008).

84 At Guterres's first global town hall in January 2017, a UN representative in Beirut called for "a comprehensive review of the organization hiring process" and stated that the "competency-based process is flawed and has created a culture in which good talkers are hired at the expense of good workers who may not be as articulate during interviews."

85 Phone interview with UN official in a special political mission, August 17, 2017.

86 The number of external appointments has been decreasing from 808 (32.8 percent of the total) in 2011 to 568 (24.5 percent of the total) in 2015. United Nations, *Composition of the Secretariat*.

87 Interviews with applicants to POLNET jobs during the last vacancy exercise, New York, April 2017.

88 Both the EU and NATO outsource parts of the assessment process. NATO assessment centers, for example, are organized by outside companies in coordination with the hiring manager and HR staff.

over a 3 day period."[89] However, this type of serious and extensive assessment of candidates tends to be used only for positions at the D1 level and above due to the cost involved.

Administrative Rules and Procedures for Recruitment

Besides the number of steps and people involved, there also are many administrative rules that complicate the recruitment process and contribute to disheartening both managers and candidates. A senior representative in charge of personnel explained that it is impossible to know, understand, and master the countless administrative instructions, policies, and rules in place for human resources "even after studying all the circulars and policies for months."[90] Indeed, the different takes on the existence and contents of some rules among those interviewed for this study were indicative of the lack of common understanding of all the HR rules and regulations.

Numerous cumbersome rules and restrictions make recruitment inefficient and sometimes prevent the UN from hiring the right person. UN volunteers and consultants, for example, cannot apply to or be recruited for UN staff positions for six months after the end of their service with the UN. This can prevent the promotion of knowledgeable, deserving, and competent people who are familiar with field missions. Similarly, while "74 per cent of staff in the General Service [G] and related categories who had participated in the [global staff satisfaction] survey met the educational requirements for entry into the Professional [P] category," general service staff cannot apply to professional positions without undergoing a cumbersome "G-to-P" examination process.[91] This prevents staff who might be both competent and familiar with the system from growing within missions and contributing their expertise.

The obligation to advertise all positions also constrains field missions. For example, if a staff member moves into a higher-level position to fill a gap in the mission and asks for compensation reflecting his or her new functions, he or she must request a "special post allowance" from OHRM and the assistant secretary-general for human resources in New York, which can take several months. "For the sake of competitiveness,"[92] such a request entails a mandatory vacancy advertisement.[93] This means that internal promotion is virtually impossible: all positions have to be advertised and subjected to a competitive recruitment process. The same goes for temporary staff who missions want to keep beyond the two-year limit. To retain such staff by hiring them on fixed-term contracts, the mission has to advertise the posts as position-specific job openings. This opens the mission to thousands of applications and a lengthy competitive process for positions already assigned to current staff.[94]

Requirements related to geographic distribution, gender balance, and representation for troop- and police-contributing countries also complicate recruitment. Gender and geographic representation have been defined as basic principles and objectives in HR decisions.[95] This balance has to be reached at each level of staff (P2/P3, P4/P5, and D1 and above) in each mission. SRSGs and hiring managers are therefore pushed to strive toward this balance during the recruitment process. As described above, job network boards in New York that participate in the recruitment process can also choose candidates from the short list who are not the first choice of hiring managers to ensure gender or geographic balance.

Such top-down efforts to ensure balance have

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89 RC Online, "Become an RC/HC/DO," available at https://rconline.undg.org/?page_id=2 .

90 Interview with UN official, New York, February 16, 2017.

91 There is a cap of 10 percent of all posts available for appointments from G to P. UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management*.

92 Interview with UN official, April 2017.

93 The General Assembly requested the secretary-general "to take effective measures to prevent the placement of staff members against higher-level unencumbered posts for periods longer than three months" and "to issue vacancy announcements within a three-month period." UN General Assembly Resolution 51/226 (April 25, 1997), UN Doc. A/RES/51/226.

94 One position-specific job opening in MINUSCA took sixteen months to fill. For another position-specific job opening in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) candidates were interviewed eleven months after the advertisement and were still waiting for feedback six months after their interview. Interview with candidates for UN jobs, New York, June 2017.

95 As Article 103 of the UN Charter states, "Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible." See also UN Secretariat, *Special Measures for the Achievement of Gender Equality*, UN Doc. ST/AI/1999/9, September 21, 1999; and General Assembly Resolution 71/263 (January 10, 2017), UN Doc. A/RES/71/263, with specific guidance on geographic distribution (paras. 9, 14, 17), gender balance (paras. 19–20), and representation of troop- and police-contributing countries (para. 18).

had limited, if not counterproductive, effects. For example, one past attempt to improve the gender balance of selected candidates required the assistant secretary-general for human resources to sign off on any selection of a male candidate if women were included in the short list. This further aggravated the gender imbalance by pushing recruiters to leave women off the short lists to avoid the complication.[96]

This rigid system has led to the ad hoc management of staff in the field and abuse of the system to get around cumbersome rules, including by using other categories of personnel easier to get on board.[97] For example, UN volunteers are often used as "saviors" when recruiting professional staff is too complicated and ineffective. The UN Volunteer program ensures quicker deployment, within several weeks, of candidates more tailored to specific positions, and managers can hire them after reviewing several CVs and conducting substantive interviews. Volunteers are thus perceived as convenient, cheap labor. They are also often perceived as motivated and competent personnel due to the program's solid database of candidates and screening capabilities. As a consequence, while they are supposed to provide support in specific areas of expertise, they are often tasked with core functions that should be assigned to professional staff members. Conditions of service for volunteers are also more flexible, with the possibility to relocate them easily to new duty stations within the same mission. However, such a use of volunteers fuels frustration and a sense that people doing such substantive work deserve a better status.

Making HR Systems Fit for Purpose in the Field

Many of the past reform efforts described above have been perceived as senseless attempts to make changes without a proper understanding of what was actually wrong and without being sure that reforms were effectively moving toward a better

system. The over-rationalization and bureaucratization of human resources often led reforms to become box-ticking exercises that did not achieve the expected outcomes. In many instances, reforms arguably triggered unforeseen, counterproductive results, especially in field missions.

In considering future reforms, the UN faces four systemic challenges to making the management and recruitment of personnel more fit for the purposes of field missions:

1. Improving the quality and performance of field staff by attracting and retaining the right people;

2. Reducing bureaucratic constraints and making HR processes more flexible in the field;

3. Empowering HR personnel in the field as strategic partners in the implementation of mission mandates; and

4. Depoliticizing human resources and reducing micromanagement from member states, especially of technical HR issues.

GETTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Peacekeeping operations and political missions require highly qualified staff to deal with the socioeconomic, political, and legal challenges they face. This is particularly true in hardship duty stations, which many people view as the least desirable workplaces.[98] Finding and retaining staff who not only have the right expertise but who are also willing to live in conflict zones under harsh conditions is extremely challenging.

The challenge has become more acute in recent years as peacekeeping environments have changed for the civilian staff posted there. Some civilians are now permanently deployed to remote duty stations where they have to live in small military bases with minimal comforts. They are also more often targets of attacks and victims of collateral damage, since some peacekeeping missions have become active parties to conflicts or are engaged in settings characterized by violent extremism.[99] Most well-established lawyers, negotiators, analysts, investigators, journalists, economists, sociologists, or

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96 Interview with DFS official, New York, February 6, 2017.

97 FPD advocates for clearer lines between each category of staff since professional staff, national professional officers, field service staff, and UN volunteers should be assigned to specific purposes.

98 A former representative of UNMEER mentioned the "fear factor": "People didn't want to come. There was no guarantee of medevac, no blanket agreements with countries for evacuations." Interview, New York, May 18, 2017.

99 Arthur Boutellis and Naureen Chowdhury Fink, "Waging Peace: UN Peace Operations Confronting Terrorism and Violent Extremism," International Peace Institute, October 2016, available at www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/1610_Waging-Peace.pdf .

anthropologists are not willing to live in a container or tent for months with limited access to recreational activities while being systematically exposed to malaria and other illnesses as well as attacks, shelling, or crossfire.

Recruiting People with the Right Capabilities

Prioritizing Capabilities over Numbers

Past UN reforms tended to focus on getting the right number of people on board and on getting them quickly rather than on getting people with the right capabilities (i.e., the education, skills, motivation, resilience, and values needed to work in the field). As a highly process-oriented and output-focused institution, the UN has developed a culture of numbers. HR has often been thought of in terms of the number of posts, the length of recruitment processes, the number of female candidates, the number of nationalities represented, and the financial resources that could be justified.

This quantitative focus has led to mechanistic responses. The numerous reforms and administrative circulars have mainly been dedicated to reducing vacancy rates and ensuring diversity. For example, an important objective has typically been to fill rosters, without sufficient attention to the quality of candidates included in the pools.

Similarly, recruitment in field missions is often so urgent that both HR personnel and hiring managers might overlook quality. For example, the recruitment of community liaison assistants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (national staff supposed to help with community engagement, especially for the protection of civilians) suffered in the initial years from a lack of reference and background checks. This led to people with the wrong profiles being placed in the wrong areas.[100] Transfer of personnel from previous missions in order to launch new missions quickly with the right numbers on the ground can also lead to inappropriate staffing. In the Central African Republic, for example, MINUSCA has been described as having initially received unqualified staff from the AU

mission (MISCA), the UN political mission (BINUCA), and other missions seeking to get rid of their worst personnel.[101]

As a result, UN missions often have the wrong set of skills on the ground. The 2017 UN global staff satisfaction survey revealed that the majority of UN mission staff disagree with the statements "My department appoints the right people for the right jobs" and "I think my department is doing a good job of retaining its most talented people."[102] There is a widespread perception among peacekeeping staff that missions lack capable and competent people. As one mission staff member explained, "You typically have ten persons doing nothing and one person doing the job of ten people."[103]

As financial pressure will likely decrease the number of civilian staff on the ground in the coming years, quality will need to prevail over quantity more than ever. Instead of simply deploying more UN staff, a significant shift is needed from a number-driven approach to a capability-driven approach. This requires the UN Secretariat to shift its mindset and processes to make management of human resources more "people-centric," with a focus on people's expertise, knowledge, motivation, principles, and capability to deliver. Recruitment techniques and tools will also need to be adapted to help identify staff with the right profiles—not only good talkers capable of ticking boxes during competency-based interviews.

Expanding the Pool from Generalists to Specialists

UN peace operations face complex conflict dynamics that can make it difficult to transfer practices from one mission to another. Supporting the government of Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia is different than tackling violent extremism in Mali or keeping the peace in South Sudan as the government obstructs the UN and threatens its own population.

Nonetheless, the UN has largely focused on hiring generalists classified in standardized job families that serve as the basis for rosters: political, civil, judicial, or human rights affairs, for example.

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100 For example, the ethnic background of some community liaison assistants proved problematic in some areas marked by ethnic tensions. The proximity of others to leaders of armed group or political stakeholders was overlooked in other instances.

101 Interviews with former staff members from MINUSCA, New York, 2017.

102 UN Staff Coordinating Council, *UN Global Staff Survey 2017*, available at www.staffcoordinatingcouncil.org/attachments/article/440/UN%20Global%20Staff%20Satisfaction%20Survey%202017.pdf .

103 Interview with UN official, New York, June 2, 2017.

The classification of posts is rigidly fixed, and this taxonomy underlies the vast majority of vacancies: according to UN regulations, job openings "shall be based on generic job profiles approved by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), a previously published job opening or a previously classified individual job description."[104] As a result, rosters are filled with generalists rather than the specialists often needed to address the specific, unique, and unexpected needs of field missions.

For example, in the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), the rosters proved largely unhelpful or irrelevant since specialists (such as epidemiologists or anthropologists) could not be found in these pre-approved pools.[105] Similarly, missions sometimes require very context-specific profiles, including language skills or expertise in the host country, local dynamics, and specific social issues. For example, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) could benefit from jurists and sociologists knowledgeable in sharia law, MINUSCA from judges able to advise the Special Criminal Court, and the UN Mission in Colombia from Spanish-speaking demobilization experts and support staff.

Rosters are not equipped for such needs. While UN personnel are supposed to be multi-skilled and versatile in their job families, they can lack specific expertise. When a mission needs a judge to support the drafting of a new constitution, the UN system tends to consider "judicial affairs officers, P5," who are not necessarily fit for the purpose.[106] The UN has no systems or mechanisms to find and deploy specialists who are not on the rosters or among the regular applicants to UN jobs. The UN does not have partnerships with think tanks, academic institutions, or NGOs to outsource such analysis

and advisory needs, and specialists can be difficult to bring on board to a specific mission on short notice and for a limited duration.[107] While maintaining a pool of generalists for large job families, the Secretariat needs to increase its efforts to attract tailored profiles for specific needs faced by field missions.[108]

Similarly, since the harmonization of conditions of service between the field and headquarters and the advancement of the idea of "One UN," the Secretariat has made efforts to bring headquarters and field staff closer together. The establishment of the managed mobility framework to share the burden of field responsibilities between all Secretariat staff proved again that UN staff are considered to be versatile—equally able to deliver in New York and a remote village in South Sudan. The mobility program starts with the assumption that a political affairs officer working in Bentiu should at some point have an opportunity to work in a headquarters office, and that a political affairs officer working in New York should go to hardship duty stations.

The UN has not considered that political affairs officers in Bentiu and New York have very different jobs requiring different profiles, skills, and attributes; not all Secretariat staff would be able to deal with the diplomatic, political, and strategic challenges of working in the field or with the risk of violence and hardship conditions. The mobility program needs to analyze staff profiles to ensure it provides field missions with people adapted to their conditions.

Reaching Out to New Sources of Applicants

The UN is not a competitive employer for everybody. It is competitive from a financial perspective, with good compensation packages and salaries, especially for people from developing

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104 United Nations, *Staff Rules and Staff Regulations of the United Nations—Secretary-General's Bulletin*, UN Doc. ST/SGB/2016/1, July 1, 2016.

105 Interview with former representative of UNMEER, New York, May 18, 2017. According to the interviewee, peacekeeping missions were used as a model for launching UNMEER to benefit from their efficient logistics, funding, and transport systems. However, if peacekeeping missions are perceived as a model for quick and robust deployment of materials, they are not seen as having the same advantage for human resources: "We looked at DFS rosters, where you can't find an epidemiologist."

106 Interview with former senior UN official, New York, February 2, 2017.

107 One positive example of such a partnership was the agreement between the UN Mission in Colombia and the German civil crisis response team, which was set up by an exchange of letters. Partnerships could also be considered with other UN funds, agencies, and programs such as UNDP and UNICEF to share rosters or with NGOs to use their rosters (as inspired by the CivCap initiative).

108 Political affairs officers are actually doing a lot of different things, and this title cover a wide range of jobs, profiles, and skills. Some political affairs officers are assigned to reporting, preparing daily, weekly, and monthly reports on the political dynamics behind a desk in the capitals of host countries. Others are liaising closely with national or local government representatives, mediating between parties, or communicating with armed groups to find a political solution to the conflict. Similarly, some civil affairs officers are working with local communities to facilitate community dialogue and reconciliation, while others are doing polling on perceptions of security and protection, and others are working closely with the host country to build its capacity.

countries. However, due to insufficient transparency and outreach, the UN may not appeal to talented young professionals who doubt the openness of the system. In addition, the UN does not systematically recruit through visits to university campuses, job fairs, or other outside fora.

The EU, on the contrary, regularly reaches out to attract talent from its twenty-eight member states, including through EU career student ambassadors on campuses and by participating in career events and job fairs. The UN typically focuses more on the selection than the sourcing phase of recruitment due to the already massive amount of applications it receives for each job. Reaching out to the right places could lead to a higher-quality pool of applicants.

Attracting and Retaining Good Staff

The lack of quality and tailored recruitment is not the only reason UN field missions are struggling to staff themselves with the right people; the conditions of service and living conditions in conflict and post-conflict areas also discourage professionals from working for the UN on the ground—especially those with options outside UN field missions. Because the UN system has been focused for so long on getting the right numbers, it has overlooked the human aspect of human resources. To attract and retain staff in peace operations, the UN needs to make its HR system more people-centric by better considering people's needs on the ground. It needs to focus not only on recruiting but also on better managing, supporting, and providing for the welfare of existing staff.

Fostering Pride in the UN

Partly due to a screening and recruitment system that fails to thoroughly assess the values and motivations of candidates, too many people join the UN "for the wrong reasons" (e.g., a good compensation package), particularly in hardship duty stations.[109] Even when people join "for the right reasons," they sometimes end up staying with

the organization "for the wrong reasons" (e.g., education grants for children). As a result, there can be a substantial disconnect between the principles of the organization and the factors motivating some UN staff. Many interviewees evoked frustration, cynicism, and resentment as common traits of UN personnel.

To refresh and remobilize mindsets around the core objectives of the UN and to incentivize staff working in demanding environments, the Secretariat needs to address this disconnect and recreate a sense of purpose among UN staff. Historically, many have considered working for the UN as a way to contribute to peace, protect human rights, and alleviate human suffering in the world, as well as an opportunity to work in a multicultural and stimulating environment.[110] An effective branding strategy is needed to renew and sustain such pride for UN field missions, both for new staff and for existing staff losing faith and confidence in the organization. According to one UN representative, "UNICEF [and the International Committee of the Red Cross] have higher ideals. We have to get the UN pride, the passion back."[111]

To that end, at the beginning of his term Secretary-General Guterres explicitly identified low staff morale as one of the major issues to be addressed.[112] This could be done by promoting success stories and better disseminating information on the positive impact of peace operations. Strong leadership by the most senior civilian officials in missions could also help motivate staff to follow them to hardship locations.

Improving Working Conditions

As another way to improve staff morale, the UN needs to demonstrate it cares for its field staff and improve working conditions in the field. The UN system cannot change the fact that the war and atrocities often occurring in the environments where missions operate take a toll on any individual. It is not missions as entities but the

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109 According to the Noblemaire principle, salaries for international staff are set in reference to the highest-paying national civil service in the world. The Flemming principle is applied for national staff, ensuring that "the conditions of service for locally recruited staff should reflect the best prevailing conditions found locally for similar work." OHRM, "Salaries & Post Adjustment," available at www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/salaries_allowances/salary.htm . For reference, someone at the P4 level with a dependent spouse and deployed to Kaga Bandoro in the Central African Republic would receive a monthly salary starting at $14,113 for the first step, and someone at the P5 level would receive almost $16,000. For information on salary scales, UNDP developed a calculator available at https://info.undp.org/gssu/onlinetools/SalCalcInt/SalCalcInt.aspx . In addition, the rest and recuperation cycle allows staff to leave their duty station regularly (every four weeks for the most difficult hardship duty station).

110 Exchange of emails with UN official, July 18, 2017.

111 Interview with UN representative, New York, March 6, 2017.

112 Guterres, remarks at global town hall meeting, January 9, 2017.

individuals working in these missions who experience the challenge of protecting civilians in conflict zones, interview and support victims of atrocities, and face daily frustrations working with armed groups, hostile government representatives, or communities experiencing violence.

Conditions in the field make it difficult to attract and retain good staff and decrease the motivation, morale, and efficiency of even the most dedicated staff. A mental health survey the UN conducted in 2015 flagged 18 percent of respondents for generalized anxiety disorder, 22 percent for major depressive disorder, 19 percent for post-traumatic stress disorder, and 23 percent for hazardous drinking.[113] Despite the prevalence of such issues, people suffering from depression, substance abuse, and chronic stress rarely find psychological support in missions.[114]

To improve staff morale, retention, and efficiency, the UN needs to improve the quality of life for field staff. This requires reducing disparities in the comfort of accommodations among duty stations, such as by providing minimum standards of accommodation in D and E duty stations (e.g., a container with a private bathroom and Internet connection instead of tents). This could particularly help attract women to hardship locations and make them more likely to stay.

Improving safety and healthcare in missions is also essential. Many interviewees in missions confessed that they do not trust the UN to ensure their safety and security, to evacuate them, or to provide them medical support. National staff members, in particular, expressed feeling abandoned by the organization, especially in areas where they are at risk because of their work for the UN.[115] They are often perceived as second-class personnel receiving less attention in terms of

security and fewer opportunities in terms of career growth, despite equal or higher education and professional experience.[116]

Changing working arrangements to attract and retain staff is also important. For example, a judge who already has a job in his country will not be attracted to a UN peacekeeping mission if the recruitment takes a long time, he has to commit for one year, and the living conditions are harsh. Some professionals are also unlikely to be attracted to careers in the field if they are not offered more flexible working arrangements that could allow them to have families. As a former chief of a UN mission deplored, instead of nurturing its staff, "It is like the UN is in the business of breaking families apart."

The CivCap initiative in 2011 already identified welfare as a high priority, recommending support for relocation or tandem deployments for couples, but this has yet to be systematized. Flexible working arrangements were introduced in 2003, including staggered working hours, the option to work remotely, and compressed work schedules to accrue compensatory time, but these are rarely implemented in peace operations.[117] If further developed and implemented for missions, these arrangements could help attract people with more diverse profiles to the field.[118]

Promoting Professional Development

In order to retain staff, the UN also needs to promote their career development. On average, UN staff rate their career development negatively.[119] Officers who have contributed their expertise in the field for years often cannot envision any prospects for career advancement. The lack of promotion and reward mechanisms reduces staff morale and contributes to increasingly unprofessional attitudes. In missions, "people

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113 Almost 20,000 UN system staff members participated in the survey. UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management*.

114 Interview with UN official, New York, August 17, 2017.

115 Some community liaison assistants were threatened by armed groups, others by their national government. Examples of national staff members being arrested because of their work were raised in interviews conducted in the field. In addition, national staff members pointed out their reduced access to career-development opportunities, including training.

116 Interview with national staff union representatives in peacekeeping operations, April 15, 2017; with staff union representative in New York, March 30, 2017; and with UN official, New York, August 17, 2017.

117 UN Secretariat, *Flexible Working Arrangements—Secretary-General's Bulletin*, UN Doc. ST/SGB/2003/4A/69/190/Add.2, January 24, 2003.

118 For example, the "special operations approach" used by other UN agencies allowed staff to be formally assigned to an administrative post outside of the hardship duty station that was more secure and close enough to the workplace where they could bring their dependents. However, the Secretariat "found that [the special operations] approach was not suitable for its purposes," and the UN system moved toward a system of compensation. See UN General Assembly, *Report of the International Civil Service Commission for 2010*, UN Doc. A/65/30, August 30, 2010.

119 UN Staff Coordinating Council, *UN Global Staff Survey 2017*.

are constantly referred to by their contract types or their grades," contributing to an unhealthy working environment.[120] Some staff in the field spend significant amounts of time applying for better positions, signaling a lack of ownership of, dedication to, and pride in their current positions. The resulting rapid turnover causes missions to lack deep situational and institutional knowledge and delays their substantive work as vacancies remain unfilled for months.

The UN could increase staff retention by improving prospects for career growth and undertaking creative workforce planning based on sound and bold talent management. The UN needs to allow for and encourage internal promotion. While most organizations favor internal applicants when filling a vacancy, the UN's strict rules place internal and external applicants on equal footing. The Secretariat could consider putting in place procedures that recognize internal applicants, such as placing staff on rosters corresponding to the position they have held for a substantial amount of time or offering fixed-term contracts to deserving temporary staff.

The UN could also consider a point system allowing staff to advance their career and position themselves for higher or better positions. This could allow good performers in hardship locations to be given priority consideration for family duty stations or headquarters offices. People might be more readily willing to go to field missions knowing they will eventually be promoted if they perform well, thereby increasing natural mobility.

The UN could also make promotion flexible. There is no reason to restrict promotion to one level up if an excellent staff member at the P3 level has all the requirements, attributes, and capacities to move up to D1. Similarly, it could consider allowing competent UN volunteers, national staff, or consultants who have dedicated years to the organization to be recruited as professional staff without any restrictions as long as they meet the

requirements and pass the assessments.

Better training and mentorship, which the UN's HR system is perceived as neglecting, could also foster professional development.[121] Management training in particular appears to be needed but remains undervalued. Managers in the field do not always have the right managerial skills to identify strengths and weaknesses in their teams, assign relevant tasks to the best-equipped staff, and ensure an effective division of labor. At the highest levels, SRSGs and DSRSGs usually have political backgrounds as former diplomats, ambassadors, or ministers, which does not necessarily make them good managers. The same applies to the chiefs of sections in missions from the P5 to the D2 levels: some of these staff are new to the UN system or are UN managers for the first time, and they often struggle to make sense of the UN bureaucratic system and to manage teams in the framework of UN field missions.[122] More self-teaching and pre-deployment and on-the-job managerial training is crucial to help them gain familiarity with the UN system and the skills to effectively lead teams.[123]

Managing Staff Performance and Accountability

Beyond the recruitment and retention of good staff, addressing the dysfunction of UN performance management and accountability mechanisms is essential to improving the quality of field personnel. The most common thing people hear about human resources at the UN is that it is impossible to fire underperforming or incompetent staff. As noted by the former assistant secretary-general for field support:

> There is today a chief of staff in a large peacekeeping mission who is manifestly incompetent. Many have tried to get rid of him, but short of a serious crime, it is virtually impossible to fire someone in the United Nations. In the past six years, I am not aware of a single international field staff member being fired, or even sanctioned, for poor performance.[124]

A significant number of field staff are chronically

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120 Interview with UNOPS official, New York, February 16, 2017.

121 There are no career advisers or established mentoring programs with the exception of the Young Professionals Programme for junior P2 staff, who are rarely appointed to field positions. A mandatory field tour in a hardship duty stations for staff in the Young Professionals Programme followed by a posting to a headquarters location could fill a major staffing gap in missions.

122 "Few other organizations so consistently recruit for the top positions from the outside." Fabrizio Hochschild, *In and above Conflict: A Study on Leadership in the United Nations*, July 2010, available at www.hdcentre.org/publications/in-and-above-conflict-a-study-on-leadership-in-the-united-nations/ .

123 See, for instance, Adam C. Smith and Arthur Boutellis, "The Management Handbook for UN Field Missions," International Peace Institute, July 2012, available at www.ipinst.org/2012/07/the-management-handbook-for-un-field-missions .

124 Banbury, "I Love the U.N., but It Is Failing."

and systematically underperforming due to lack of skills, competence, or motivation. Yet people who need to be moved or terminated often stay in missions or are sent to other missions, including by being promoted to higher ranks. There is a widely shared perception among staff that the only way to get rid of underperforming staff is to promote them to a new position or send them to a new location, especially for staff holding continuing contracts.[125] As they tend to do for contingents, missions end up relying on certain personnel over others for critical tasks and sidelining the ones known to be underperforming.[126] This reduces both the morale and the quality of staff and strains the UN's budget.

Despite existing performance assessment tools such as e-PAS (see Box 6), a culture of not reporting underperforming staff has persisted and contributes to the continuing prevalence of underperformance. In 2014 only 1 percent of Secretariat staff received a rating of "does not meet" or "partially meets" performance expectations (this went up to 3 percent in 2017), while about 30 percent received a rating of "exceeding expectations."[127]

A major factor contributing to this culture is the internal justice system, which deters managers and supervisors from terminating underperforming staff. As noted in a 2016 report from the secretary-general, "Many managers have indicated that they fear complaints and accusations of harassment, investigation, rebuttal panels and the justice system, which may induce them to avoid addressing underperformance issues in the evalua-tions."[128] Previously, the 2010 report leading to the CivCap initiative had pointed out that the unwieldy internal justice system and the prospect of years of litigation make people risk-averse at the UN.[129]

At the same time, the noncompliance of staff, especially managers, with the performance management system explains why the justice system tends to favor plaintiffs contesting their termination for underperformance. Only a small fraction of managers follow the steps of the performance review process, which they perceive as time-consuming and burdensome.[130] Because most managers do not follow this process, they are not in a position to fill in a negative e-PAS at the end of the cycle or to justify non-renewal of contracts or terminations.

Many senior managers, including chiefs of mission, DSRSGs, and chiefs of staff, also fail to constructively contribute to the performance management system by not questioning the lack of individual performance plans for all staff or making managers accountable for them. Senior managers are also responsible for reviewing e-PAS evaluations and could push back against the high proportion of staff "exceeding expectations" without justification.[131]

The risk-averse organizational culture resulting from this lack of accountability also impacts recruitment. Managers are aware that they will be stuck with the staff they recruit, so they might be less tempted to take risks hiring an unknown external candidate instead of an internal candidate who is known to be "good enough." With greater accountability would come greater audacity, flexibility, and adaptability, which could improve the quality of personnel working in missions.

The methodology of the performance reviews is also flawed. Supervisors and chiefs of sections in the field are themselves rated by their high-level supervisors who are not always aware of their management skills, behaviors, and efficiency. There is no mechanism in place to give staff opportunities to rate their managers. This lack of accountability is compounded by the isolation of field staff, who are often far from other mechanisms that could protect them, such as ombudspersons, who are only present in a few headquarters offices and regional duty stations. In addition, the performance management system is largely based on quantitative assessments, and performance improvement plans are defined according to quantitative criteria and outputs.

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125 For fixed-term contracts it is easier to use the end date of the contract as a reason for non-renewal.

126 See Smith and Boutellis, "Rethinking Force Generation."

127 UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management*; Interview with official from OHRM, New York, June 16, 2017.

128 UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management*.

129 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict*.

130 Interview with official from OHRM, New York, June 16, 2017.

131 Ibid.

Not only does the performance management system make it difficult to sanction underperforming staff, but the UN also cannot easily reward those performing well through promotions, raises, or bonuses. OHRM has yet to find effective mechanisms to incentivize good performance. In the current climate of budget restrictions, nonfinancial rewards could be envisaged. According to one UN official, "The reward that many staff seek is recognition."[132] OHRM could consider awarding a few exceptional staff members every year with a certificate of achievement, a UN exceptional performance award, or an excellence prize for work recognized by their peers.

REDUCING BUREAUCRACY

The quest to recruit and retain good staff—and to let go of bad staff—has to be coupled with a review of bureaucratic processes. The HR procedures in the Secretariat designed by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) make HR management less effective and are perceived as incompatible with the needs of field operations.

The origins of the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) are telling in this regard. The operations division of UNDP, which provided field support to UNDP country offices, was supposed to be merged in 1994 with the Department for Development Support and Management Services in the Secretariat. Staff, however, resisted the idea, arguing that UNDP's operations division "would cease to exist if it adopted Secretariat procedures and functioning."[133] Instead, UNOPS was created as a separate entity.[134] While operating under the same UN rules and regulations, UNOPS, along with other UN entities such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), is able to define its own administrative policies and procedures. This seems to allow it to operate in a more flexible and nimble manner, outside of the Secretariat's cumbersome bureaucratic system. This is a lesson for DFS: an entity supposed to deliver for field operations is better off operating outside the policies and procedures of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat's administrative policies and procedures were designed to meet the needs of a career civil service. Civil servants were initially in fixed locations and dedicated to conference support, so "the scope, numbers of staff and the required skills [were] predictable."[135] The HR system, largely designed by the Department of Management, therefore appears ill-suited to field operations, which present a different set of challenges. In trying to reconcile the needs of headquarters and field operations, this system is marked by inherent contradictions and tensions between different HR objectives and imperatives— between competitiveness and internal career development (see Box 7); standardization of rules and the dynamic needs of field missions; and central control and delegated authority.

Facilitating the Movement of Staff to Hardship Duty Stations

Because of rules and procedures designed to make recruitment more competitive (see Box 7), internal moves are extremely constricted within the Secretariat. The promotion of internal mobility, however, has the potential to strengthen capacities in missions. To this end, the following options could be explored:

- **Identifying an internal talent pool:** The Secretariat could create an internal roster of its workforce of 40,000 people, indicating which staff members are willing to be deployed on short notice to the field and their skills, expertise, and experience. This internal talent pool could be the first layer of experts to be deployed in case of surge needs, before turning to rosters and position-specific job openings. It could also be used as a promotion tool by allowing people to take higher-level positions in the field.

- **Increasing in-mission mobility:** Internal mobility within the same mission is largely prevented by location-specific recruitment that rigidly assigns staff to a specific duty station. This rigidity impairs adequate responses to crises erupting in different locations and prohibits effective burden sharing among staff from different duty stations marked by different levels

132 Exchange of emails with UN official, New York, July 18, 2017.

133 Interview with UNOPS official, New York, February 16, 2017.

134 The speech by the staff council chairperson of UNDP and the UN Population Fund to the ACABQ in December 1993 outlined how such a merger would impact the operational flexibility of UNOPS and undermine its activities. See Dennis Dijkzeul, *Reforming for Results in the UN System: A Study of UNOPS* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

135 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict*.

Box 7. The principle of competitiveness as a constraint on recruitment

One of the reasons the UN adopted such cumbersome bureaucratic processes for staffing was to maximize competitiveness and fight against nepotism in the face of a massive number of applicants. The rules have been defined to protect the UN from accusations of unfairness and corruption and to prevent "pockets of buddies" and particular nationalities from dominating certain offices. Typically, both HR staff and hiring managers tend to apply these rules strictly and literally out of fear of the Office of Administration of Justice, to which internal candidates can complain about their non-selection for a post. When they write a job opening, hiring managers have to find the right balance between general requirements (to attract enough candidates) and narrow requirements (to avoid complaint processes from internal candidates who have not been selected even though they meet these requirements).

However, certain processes put in place to promote competitiveness have been emptied of any real meaning and become mechanistic, making the system even less transparent, rational, and fair. One example is the mandatory advertisement of posts, even if people already occupy them and just need to have their contracts renewed (for staff on temporary appointments being recruited to fixed-term appointments) or their status recognized (for special post allowance requests).[136] As one chief of human resources in a peace operation noted:

> We have to create an illusion of competitiveness even if it doesn't exist. The idea of competitive recruitment just adds processes to tick boxes, but in reality the pre-selection is already done. All these people apply, and it is clearly unethical. We shouldn't have to advertise the position if it is not a real recruitment but just a recognition action. We force ourselves into dishonesty.[137]

These rules eventually become counterproductive, decreasing the interest of external candidates who have lost trust in the transparency and fairness of the system, always having to ask themselves if there is already someone "sitting on" the advertised job.

Several interviewees, including HR personnel, shared the opinion that the UN has gone too far in promoting competitiveness in HR processes. As an HR chief from a UN field mission stated, "We fostered this expectation of competitiveness. We created this culture that you have rights to be considered and selected, but it is not possible."[138]

The secretary-general needs to review the principle of competitiveness to better balance it with efficiency. As a UN official pointed out, "[Recruitment] doesn't have to be absolutely fair or competitive; it will never be." Competitiveness and fairness can both guide recruitment: "the problem," noted a UNOPS official, "is when guiding principles become absolute rules."[139]

of safety and comfort (as in Mali, for example). Assigning personnel to a specific mission instead of a specific duty station would increase flexibility; instead of being assigned to Obo or Bambari, a civilian staff member could be assigned to MINUSCA as a whole, with the possibility of moving between several duty stations in the Central African Republic. Extending the maximum duration of travel status in a field operation could also be helpful,

allowing staff to move within the mission area as circumstances change.

- **Making temporary duty assignments more flexible:** Temporary duty assignments enable missions or other UN entities to loan staff to each other in order to rapidly use in-house expertise for critical operational requirements.[140] However, because these loans cannot exceed three months, they are used in limited ways, and the turnover resulting from this restriction raises issues of

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136 Special post allowance requests are made by staff who temporarily left their regular position to take a higher-level vacant position in the mission. After three months they can request a special post allowance to be paid according to the salary scale of the post they temporarily occupy.

137 Interview with chief of human resources in a peace operation, April 13, 2017.

138 Ibid.

139 Interview with UNOPS official, New York, February 16, 2017.

140 A temporary duty assignment is "a temporary loan of a staff member from a field operation, headquarters, offices away from headquarters or the regional commission to another United Nations entity for the purpose of rapidly providing the receiving entity with highly qualified and experienced staff for urgent, time-bound surge capacity needs." UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management.*

business continuity.[141] Moreover, the involvement of DFS's Field Personnel Division (FPD) in New York adds length and complexity to temporary duty assignments. This mechanism could be more effective if further decentralized and if time limits were extended.

- **Incentivizing voluntary mobility:** Instead of simply imposing mobility on all staff, the UN could also incentivize voluntary mobility, which could improve staff morale. For example, having a certain number of years of experience in field operations could be a precondition for being promoted to the P4 or P5 level. Having performed well in several peace missions for a certain amount of time could also be defined as a reason for being given a continuing contract. In addition, job openings in headquarters could require previous field experience (and, conversely, headquarters experience could be required for relevant job openings in the field). Such changes could progressively instill a culture of mobility and promote geographic moves without complicated and slow bureaucratic reforms. Appointing senior staff who have a proven diversity of geographic experience could be particularly helpful in instilling this culture of mobility, as they might be more likely to encourage mobility among their staff.

- **Establishing standing civilian capacities within the Secretariat:** A standing civilian capacity could be modeled after the Standing Police Capacity based in Brindisi, Italy (see Box 8) or the Standby Team of Mediation Experts managed by DPA. It could provide missions with elite teams in different fields of expertise. These teams would be composed of the best staff with substantial experience in both headquarters and the field. They could provide backstopping and coaching for field operations, including through temporary deployment to fill gaps and respond to surge needs.

Decentralizing Recruitment to Field Missions

Calls for more flexibility, delegation of authority, and decentralization of HR decisions have been made by HIPPO and recently endorsed by the secretary-general, who vowed to make the UN more field-focused. Mission representatives often voice their desire to receive this authority; as a chief of human resources from a field mission stated, "We, the field, we are the UN. Don't control or manage us. Support us."[142]

This requires closing the gap between authority and responsibility that exists both between the Department of Management and DFS and between DFS and missions. Past efforts to delegate powers have yet to bring real autonomy. The Department of Management's delegation of authority to DFS has mostly focused on execution (such as the classification of posts or management of rosters) rather than on policymaking. For essential reforms, the Department of Management has only "consulted" DFS along with other stakeholders while remaining in charge of designing policies. As the source of the Secretariat's policies and processes, the Department of Management tends to do this from the angle of headquarters.

Some missions' staff members also indicated that the delegation of authority to DFS only moved parts of human resources from one department in New York to another, leaving in place the disconnect between headquarters and field missions. Heads of mission, including SRSGs with the grade of under-secretary-general (which means they are peers of, not subordinate to, the under-secretaries-general for peace operations, political affairs, and field support based in New York), do not always know or use the full extent of their delegated authority in the areas of management and human resources. Overall, there is a lack of clarity regarding who has power over which processes within the system, which leads to defective decision making.

The proper balance between centralization in New York, to ensure more control and fight against nepotism and abuse, and decentralization to the field, to allow heads of missions and sections more room to maneuver, is an eternal debate. Both present advantages and drawbacks, and finding the right balance will likely require regular adjustments. However, the UN system is not prone to quick and flexible adjustments, and any movement toward either centralization or decentralization will have

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141 The limit established by the General Assembly in Resolution 63/250 is three months for staff from headquarters assigned to missions. However, OHRM has applied this limit to all staff in implementing the resolution.

142 Interview with UN official, April 13, 2017.

Box 8. Standing Police Capacity

Established in 2006, the Standing Police Capacity (SPC) is composed of up to forty officers with specialist knowledge and experience, including in "police reform and restructuring, public order, transnational organized crime, community oriented policing, legal affairs, analysis, training, planning, logistics, budget and funds management, human resources, information and communication technology, investigations and gender advisory services."[143] These officers can be rapidly deployed to field missions to provide policing expertise. Notably, they can provide start-up capability for new police components, assist existing police components in specific areas, conduct evaluations, and offer training support. In Mali, for example, the SPC helped MINUSMA establish a transnational organized crime unit to support the Malian security forces. An SPC member also temporarily acted as the police commissioner for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) for several months.

Nonetheless, some processes could be decentralized and simplified to improve the effectiveness of the SPC.[144] Currently, requests for deploying an SPC officer go through a cumbersome process: approval by the director of mission support; a code cable from the SRSG to DPKO in New York; approval by the assistant secretary-general for the rule of law and security institutions, the police adviser, and the under-secretary-general for peacekeeping operations in New York; and an official response from the SPC in Brindisi. One option would be to give the SPC more authority to deploy its own staff in coordination with the missions.

Even once SPC officers are deployed, rules and regulations undermine their flexibility. The mission has to appoint SPC staff on a temporary duty assignment, with mandatory breaks after every three months, which increases costs (per diem is paid at a higher rate during the first sixty days of each deployment). Similarly, the mandatory period of twenty-one days between the submission of a travel request and the actual travel day further delays deployment. Finally, for SPC officers who are seconded, the policy does not allow secondments to be extended beyond three years, which leads the team to "spend so much time in recruitment, in correcting written assessments, and sitting in interview panels" for recruitment processes, "taking no less than six months."[145]

long-lasting effects and take time to reverse.

Past UN reforms illustrate the back-and-forth between centralization and decentralization. The harmonization of conditions of service contributed to centralization. The delegation of authority to DFS to manage rosters and to missions to manage temporary job openings put processes closer to the field. Position-specific job openings, however, are still managed both in the field and in headquarters, and the Department of Management has recently taken back substantial control over the recruitment process with the new staffing system and managed mobility framework. In many cases, reform

attempts have created more processes, added bureaucracy, and ended up further reducing the flexibility and autonomy that field missions need.

A more field-focused approach requires delegating real authority over recruitment to the field. This would echo the recommendations of the HIPPO report and the intentions the secretary-general laid down during his global town hall meeting in July 2017.[146] Selection processes in particular would benefit from a more decentralized approach. As described by the former assistant secretary-general for field support, "The heads of billion-dollar peace operations, with enormous

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143 Currently, the SPC includes thirty-six officers, including twenty seconded police officers and sixteen civilian staff. UN Police, "Standing Police Capacity," available at www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/sites/police/capacity.shtml .

144 Interview with UN official from the police division, New York, July 24, 2017.

145 Ibid.

146 Guterres, remarks at global town hall meeting, July 26, 2017. The HIPPO report recommended the following: "Centralized approaches to policy making must recognize that the field has needs distinct from those of Headquarters and offices away from headquarters.… Presently, field perspectives and field needs are not adequately reflected in the development of human resources and other policies, and the voice of field practitioners is too often not heard by legislative bodies during deliberations on policy matters. At present, field missions are not represented in the UN's Human Resources Network, despite requests to that effect. In many other advisory bodies, the field is but one voice among many, despite its overwhelming size and the distinct nature of its needs. Assessments of the potential impact of proposed policy changes on field operations should be an obligatory step in any policy review, and the results of such assessments should be presented to the Secretary-General and Member States for consideration." UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, p. 85.

responsibilities for ending wars, are not able to hire their immediate staff, or to reassign underperforming staff away from critical roles. It is a sign of how perversely twisted the bureaucracy is that personnel decisions are considered more dangerous than the responsibility to lead a mission on which the fate of a country depends." The Secretariat could consider giving program managers more authority to make recruitment decisions, with accountability measures ensuring competitive processes and gender and geographic balance.

Making Procedures More Flexible for the Field

Many rules and processes are unfit for the needs of field missions. Some past efforts have aimed to address this. Some rules applicable to headquarters are not applicable to field missions, such as a provision restricting the recruitment of staff holding temporary appointments to fixed-term positions.[147] Field missions can also use the recruit-from-roster track to hire more quickly.

However, establishing a specific set of rules and procedures for the field goes against the Secretariat's recent efforts to bring everything under one system in the interest of efficiency and consistency. On the one hand, these harmonization reforms were positive in the sense that they extended entitlements to all peacekeeping staff ("what we had before was criminal," stated a representative of the Field Personnel Division).[148] It also created a sense of belonging to the same organization, with the idea that everybody working for the UN had the same status.

On the other hand, the streamlined set of new rules reduced the number of possible contracting arrangements to only three and left no space for discretion or flexibility. "We generalized too much because of threats of litigation," noted someone from the Field Personnel Division.[149] In its 2011 report, the Special Advisory Group on CivCap warned that "if the Secretary-General's vision of a unified global Secretariat is to be realized, the

Group sees a need for differentiated approaches that cater to the operational tempo of the United Nations in the field as well as to the requirements of Headquarters."[150]

Again, both harmonization and differentiation have positive and negative sides. If the UN develops a separate set of rules and contracts for the field, it could create a "second class" of UN staff working in harsher locations. At the same time, the field and headquarters have different needs, and some flexibility could be reintroduced without disadvantaging field staff in terms of entitlements and benefits. In many cases the Secretariat does not have to create two sets of rules but could allow for more flexible interpretation of what already exists. Several initiatives could go in this direction:

- **Simplifying procedures:** Certain steps in processes could be skipped for field missions, such as the central review body for recruitment for position-specific job openings. Review boards mostly assess whether all the bureaucratic steps have been followed, not necessarily that the candidates recommended are the best available, so they do not help ensure that the right people are recruited at the right time. Suppressing the possibility of being placed on rosters through position-specific job openings (and limiting this possibility to generic job openings only) would enable skipping the validation of central review bodies for field jobs. It would also prevent position-specific job openings from being cluttered by candidates only interested in being rostered.

- **Using standing administrative measures to expedite hiring in certain circumstances:** DFS recently worked with OHRM, DPKO, DPA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to establish "standing administrative measures," as recommended by HIPPO. Field missions have been able to use these since March 2016 during surges, downsiz-

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147 "A staff member who holds a temporary appointment in the Professional and higher categories for a period of less than one year for a position authorized for one year or more may not apply for or be reappointed to that position within six months of the end of his/her current service on the temporary appointment, if the position is advertised through the established procedures and will result in a fixed-term appointment following review by the central review bodies. This provision does not apply to…peacekeeping operations or special political missions." UN Secretariat, *Administration of Temporary Appointments*, UN Doc. ST/AI/2010/4/Rev.1, October 26, 2011.

148 Interview with representative of FPD, New York, February 6, 2017.

149 Ibid.

150 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict*.

ings, or emergencies. DPKO, DFS, and DPA provided flexible definitions of "surge" and "emergency," making these measures potentially applicable during changes of mandate or crises. They are based on exceptions to staffing rules that DFS used to request and that the Department of Management generally approved, which were codified to become standard practice.[151] Standing administrative measures give missions the flexibility to hire candidates on a non-competitive basis for contracts of up to twelve months. Consultants, for example, could be hired directly without the review of a minimum of three candidates. The UN Mission in Colombia has benefitted from these measures, which allowed it to rapidly recruit staff at the P3 level and consultants with specialized profiles (such as female Spanish-speaking experts in disarmament agreements and DDR programs). However, many missions are not aware of such dispositions other than the ninety-day contracts that can be given non-competitively but have to go through a competitive process to be extended.[152] Moreover, because they allow room for nepotism and abuse, standing administrative measures cannot be considered a panacea.

- **Expanding the types of contracts to allow for short-term contractors:** More flexible working arrangements and different types of contracts would help missions bring on experts for short-term contracts or consultancies during emergencies or to meet particular needs or circumstances.[153] Even if hiring consultants is currently possible, the option is little used. Policies on consultants are not always fit for peacekeeping missions; according to UN rules and regulations, consultants are not provided health insurance, for example. Missions would benefit from a category of experts for the field, such as the external contractors hired by UNOPS, who could

be sent for short-term deployments.[154] This would make it easier to deploy external specialists such as forensic experts, judges, or high-level mediators under favorable terms of employment.

- **Outsourcing activities:** Instead of having UN staff do everything, missions could also consider outsourcing activities "that don't require this 'UN-ness,'" as they already do for some technical functions. Some tasks could even be done better by partners, including NGOs. Such a model could help bring on board certain competencies not available in the mission, such as project management in the case of UNOPS. However, this would require careful cost analysis, and while UN entities such as UNOPS offer a certain level of interoperability (allowing sharing of accommodations for instance), non-UN partners may pose additional challenges.

- **Using conditional contracts and project-specific posts:** Conditional contracts that do not involve a competitive process could be considered, despite the harmonization of conditions of service. Some special assistant positions, for example, have been removed from POLNET to allow SRSGs and DSRSGs to recruit at their discretion, with the contract attached to that particular SRSG and without possibility of renewal.[155] Similarly, missions could have a limited number of one-year project-specific posts for non-core mandated activities with streamlined and decentralized recruitment processes.

All these options for increased flexibility in the field require the UN to balance contradictory requirements. The secretary-general needs to break down his vision on these inherent tensions by addressing:

- How to reconcile control for headquarters (centralization) and autonomy for the field (decentralization);

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151 UN internal document.

152 The Department of Management did not formally promulgate the tool in an administrative instruction.

153 According to the former assistant secretary-general for field support, "Too often, the only way to speed things up is to break the rules. That's what I did in Accra when I hired an anthropologist as an independent contractor. She turned out to be worth her weight in gold. Unsafe burial practices were responsible for about half of new Ebola cases in some areas. We had to understand these traditions before we could persuade people to change them. As far as I know, no United Nations mission had ever had an anthropologist on staff before; shortly after I left the mission, she was let go." Banbury, "I Love the U.N., but It Is Failing."

154 UNOPS contractors are recruited for one of three functions: implementation (project-based), advisory (national capacity building), or transactional (one-time services). The majority of UNOPS contracts use the individual contractor agreement modality and are further divided into three classes—international, local specialist, and local support—which is not so different from the professional, national, and field support categories. However, UNOPS sets contract grades with sliding fee ranges for each based on the nature of the work, specialization, living costs, and hardship, which are adjusted based on market rates. Fees are then negotiated with individual contractors within that range. Contracts can also be regular, retainer-based, or lump-sum-based and can range from one hour to two years, which gives significant flexibility. See www.unops.org/english/Services/hr-services/Pages/default.aspx .

155 Interview with member of a job network board, New York, February 2, 2017.

- How to reconcile the need for mobility with the bureaucratic nature of headquarters and the need for specialists in the field; and

- How to promote UN standards and create a common institutional culture while leaving room for missions to be agile and reactive with tailored procedures.

EMPOWERING HR STAFF

Despite concerns about a lack of flexibility in HR procedures, several UN representatives interviewed for this study also voiced another point: there might already be enough flexibility in the organization, with the problem being lack of familiarity with the system and lack of support from HR teams to efficiently navigate rules and regulations. Rather than major HR reforms, the UN system might be more in need of better implementation of existing measures and dissemination of rules and regulations. Flexibility can be gained when rules are better understood and staff are better supported to play by the rules.

Field HR teams could make a real difference in this regard if they were empowered to become strategic partners to hiring managers and staff. To end the culture of mutual hostility, mistrust, and frustration prevailing between HR teams and other staff in missions, HR staff could be sensitized to the mandates, objectives, and values of missions in order to understand the whole picture of the UN presence in the country and be empowered as strategic actors in implementing missions' mandates. If the system starts to "let human resources people do human resources"[156]—in other words, helping to manage people, not only implementing regulations—missions could progressively acquire the flexibility needed to operate better.

Reducing Clerical Duties

HR staff do not have a good reputation across the UN system, and in missions there is often a culture of hostility between HR personnel and the rest of the staff. HR teams are often seen as "enemies" who make recruitment, performance management, and termination difficult by enforcing opaque, nonsensical rules. As a senior representative of the Field Personnel Division (FPD) described, overseeing

human resources at the UN is very different than in other organizations: it is less about people than about implementing and complying with a complex and indecipherable set of rules that nobody else seems to understand.[157]

As a result, HR staff mainly play a clerical role in field missions, focusing on following administrative processes, processing requests, and executing policies in accordance with the rules. Due to the nature of bureaucracy, they tend to undertake tasks mechanically and in silos while losing sight of the bigger picture. This clerical focus in the field can be traced back to headquarters, where HR teams are often more focused on quantitative outputs and ticking boxes than on qualitative outputs: job network boards move people and work to get the right gender and geographic balance, performance management teams ensure that individual plans and performance assessments are filled out, and review boards verify that recruitment procedures were respected. As long as procedures are followed, clearances are obtained, with less focus on the quality and substance of placements or performance.

The culture of human resources at the UN needs to change from rule compliance to service delivery, from policing to enabling, and from implementing procedures to finding creative solutions tailored to each context. As noted by HIPPO, "Too often, the choice is between what makes sense for the mission or what is compliant with unwieldy procedures, and usually the choice is to do what is compliant."[158]

For example, a number of hiring managers reported how recruiting a new staff member could become a battle with the HR team.[159] Instead of opposing and policing managers for the sake of the rules, HR officers could work hand in hand with staff, sensitizing and coaching them on the rules. Instead of focusing on compliance, outputs, and processes, HR chiefs could shift their attention to service, outcomes, and people. HR teams could also change their mindset to build an environment conducive to risk taking and innovation.

More globally, the UN could shift its approach to

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156 Interview with DFS representatives, New York, March 6, 2017.

157 Interview with FPD representative, New York, February 14, 2017.

158 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, p. 83.

accountability from control to empowerment. The goal of accountability should be to empower people to make good decisions for optimal implementation of mission mandates, not to blame staff. Moreover, instead of focusing on compliance with procedures by multiplying the number of clearances and reviews, accountability measures could focus on the impact at the end of processes.

There is therefore a need to separate the clerical functions and the strategic functions of HR staff. The main clerical tasks could be automated in Umoja, outsourced, or moved to a regional service center like Entebbe (which has already been done for some missions). UNHCR, for example, moved transactional functions from Geneva to Budapest, which saved money—though unlike Entebbe, Budapest is a stable place with solid infrastructure and substantial human capacity. UNOPS processes recruitment through a system in Bangkok, which makes it possible to review hundreds of applications in a day.

Outsourcing massive selection processes to expert companies would not only ensure the anonymity of applicants but could also increase competitiveness, fight nepotism, and improve efficiency, as long as an auditing system is in place. This would allow HR staff remaining in missions to focus on substantive and strategic HR support, including accompanying hiring managers during the recruitment processes and developing creative solutions to challenges within the framework of the rules.

Delegating Authority to HR Teams in the Field

Delegating authority to HR teams in the field is also essential to empowering them. HR chiefs in missions could be given control over recruitment and movement of personnel, including management of the staffing table. Without such authority, HR teams in the field might as well either be reduced to only technical staff, with strategic decisions being made from New York, or outsourced.

So far, New York has kept substantial authority in making core HR decisions for field missions.

The mobility reform and harmonization of the classification of posts were perceived as removing all operative leeway from HR teams in the field. For example, missions are authorized to recruit for temporary job openings while waiting for the recruitment of staff through the new staffing system based on semi-annual exercises, but they have to dismiss these temporary staff as soon as the people recruited by New York arrive. As noted by one mission's chief of human resources, "My job should be to manage staffing so that they can implement the mandate. You can make me accountable for that. But if I am a P5, it should be a strategic job. You can't have flexibility and dictatorial control at the same time."[160] Several other interviewees also called for letting HR staff "do HR."

The management of staffing tables would notably benefit from decentralizing authority to HR teams in the field. As recommended in the HIPPO report, "Heads of missions should have greater authority to move personnel within the mission to meet changing demands as they arise. Peace operations also need the flexibility to bring on board for a specified period, and then release, individuals with specific skills and experiences relevant to a particular mandate or situation."[161]

However, HR teams in the field do not have control over the staffing tables of missions (including the number, categories, levels, and functional titles of posts). Even if the Secretariat provides inputs and makes recommendations based on the mission's mandate, staffing tables are approved every year by the General Assembly on the basis of the recommendations of its Fifth Committee. This means that during the year missions can only "conditionally" change their staffing tables to adapt to their changing needs.

The General Assembly could consider giving the Secretariat and its HR teams in the field more latitude to manage staffing tables. If field missions have a pool of positions they can shift according to priorities and a dedicated budget for special needs and surges, they could also be more willing to give up posts, which they are currently reluctant to do, fearing it will be harder to get them back if needed.

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159 Interview with hiring managers, New York, Goma, and Juba, January–May 2017.
160 Interview with chief of human resources in a peacekeeping operation, April 2017.
161 Ibid.

Instead of a rigid staffing table, they should be able to navigate and amend a bank of jobs and be able to change functional titles and distribution of posts, as long as they respect the budget approved by the General Assembly.

Moreover, field HR teams need to have access to the necessary data, systems, and resources to regain oversight of field recruitment, staff management, and performance tracking. Changing the placement of HR staff within missions could also give them more authority. HR staff in missions report to the director of mission support. As a result, they are relegated to the "support side," being sidelined from substantive decision making and generally not involved in senior management meetings. HR staff should be perceived as strategic partners who could help implement the mission's mandate rather than back-office administrators. In UNOPS, for example, "HR practitioners" work not for management but for country teams, advising them, helping them filter candidates, and interacting strategically with staff and managers. In UN field missions, this kind of client-oriented relationship has yet to be fostered. Having HR personnel embedded in substantive pillars or sections could enhance the support they provide and foster symbiosis between HR efforts and hiring managers.

Increasing Awareness of Rules and Procedures

Managers often complain about the lack of autonomy and flexibility in HR rules and procedures. Many interlocutors in New York, however, noted that managers "actually already have a lot of flexibility, they just don't know it."[162] SRSGs, for example, have extraordinary flexibility. According to one senior UN representative, "There are only two rules that are completely binding: having a [bachelor's degree] and being less than 65 years old. But otherwise, an SRSG can recruit whoever he wants—any nationality, any gender, qualified or unqualified, through any process. Peacekeeping budgets also allow to recruit consult-

ants."[163] The problem is that staff and managers lack familiarity with HR rules and processes. Many managers recruited for their diplomatic and political skills are not used to UN budgeting or management of people in the UN system, and they never or rarely receive training on HR management.[164]

Dissemination and clarification of regulations to candidates, staff, and managers would help avoid frustration, bitterness, anxiety, and inefficiency.[165] Missions can obtain some of the flexibility and autonomy they need by gaining more familiarity with the system and the rules. The more people understand the rules, the more they can play with them and explore their gray areas to find compromises and more flexible arrangements. Better understanding of the rules would also clarify what they actually say and what they are perceived to say, exposing some false interpretations and myths of HR policy.

Toward this end, HR teams could coach and advise staff engaged in recruitment. To better explain HR rules and how best to use them, HR teams could brief their colleagues on how to hire quickly, how to ask for standing administrative measures, and how to comply with but also go beyond competency-based interviewing. They could also clarify expectations, rules, and policies on geographic and gender balance, use of rosters, and opportunities to use consultants, which are not well understood. Continuous management training and coaching could be offered to heads of offices and sections and to team leaders within offices and sections.

HR teams could also help to better implement performance management and ensure accountability by monitoring the e-PAS process and providing support to managers on the ground. As noted by the secretary-general, "Feedback from managers indicates that they feel the support they receive when dealing with difficult situations is insufficient," and there is a need to "provide increased human resources expertise and

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162 Interview with senior official at UN headquarters, New York, April 20, 2017.

163 Interview with senior UN official, New York, March 30, 2017.

164 See Jibecke Joensson, "Strengthening the Selection, Preparation, Support and Appraisal of Senior Leadership in UN Peace Operations," International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations, 2017, available at www.challengesforum.org/en/Reports--Publications/CF/POLICY-BRIEF-20173/?retUrl=/Templates/Public/Pages/PublicReportList.aspx?id%3d962%26epslanguage%3den .

165 For example, HR staff could sensitize new staff members on legal dispositions on the non-renewal of contracts (including due to the changing operational needs of the mission) and have them sign a special document recognizing this. This could help prevent unnecessary litigation.

support."[166] Managers, for example, get far less help than staff in cases of litigation; there is no hotline or mechanism to quickly get advice, and HR teams on the ground are not always available and disposed to help terminate staff. Collaborative mechanisms between management, legal affairs sections, and HR sections in the field could be further encouraged to provide this support.

HR staff themselves also require additional support. Capacity-building initiatives like the rollout of "clinics" to address salient issues faced by HR professionals and managers and training programs on best HR practices, including with respect to underperformance, could be further developed.

Defining a System-Wide Vision

The lack of an entity with overarching authority and oversight over all HR processes and reforms at the UN has led to disparate management of initiatives such as Inspira, Umoja, the managed mobility framework, and the harmonization of conditions of service. This lack of a system-wide vision has prevented the UN from taking into consideration impacts that some initiatives could have on others, how they are connected, and how they could contradict each other.

UN entities managing human resources in the field and in New York could work together to better define a vision of human resources for field missions. Instead of perceiving themselves as implementers of General Assembly decisions and executors of policies, the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) and Field Personnel Division (FPD) could partner with DPKO and DPA to develop a strategic vision for human resources in current and future peace operations.

There is also an urgent need to move from a culture of outputs, where HR strategies are based on the design of reforms and processes and the launch of new mechanisms, to a culture of impact, where they are based on risk analyses and long-term studies. To that end, HR teams in the field and in New York could engage in a constructive dialogue. This dialogue could take place not only through "official consultations" by video telecon-ference and emails asking for inputs but also through discussions involving all stakeholders, from HR teams in missions to FPD and OHRM in New York and including, if possible, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and member states.

DEPOLITICIZING HUMAN RESOURCES

The UN's complex, rigid, and inflexible HR processes are not only the product of the Secretariat's decisions and attempted reforms; they are equally the product of the politics underlying HR decisions. Human resources are fundamentally politicized at the UN. Even if the UN Charter states that the secretary-general and UN staff "shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization," it also states that "staff shall be appointed by the Secretary-General under regulations established by the General Assembly."[167] Some of these regulations, decided consensually by member states, have constrained Secretariat staff and pushed them in directions that have made the organization less efficient, especially for field missions. The political scrutiny reserved for peacekeeping operations at the General Assembly and their uniquely restricted staffing framework have further complicated the management of their staff.

The budget for each peacekeeping operation is decided by the General Assembly each year. The secretary-general submits budget proposals to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), which reviews them and makes recommendations to the General Assembly's Fifth Committee for its review and approval. The experts of the ACABQ are supposed to act as a filter, making recommendations and providing independent advice to the Fifth Committee, which makes the final decisions. The ACABQ makes recommendations bearing in mind the interests of member states and the bones of contention in the Fifth Committee, but also based on technical considerations and past evidence.

The Fifth Committee reviews the recommendations in May and June (for the adoption of budgets running from July 1st to June 30th), and its decisions

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166 UN General Assembly, *Overview of Human Resources Management Reform: Performance Management.*

167 UN Charter, Arts. 100–101.

are subsequently endorsed as official decisions of the General Assembly as a whole. The Fifth Committee usually follows the ACABQ's recommendations, at least on technical issues, but it does not always, especially when issues are political and touch upon diverse interests around the table. From the detailed staffing of peace operations to the definition of rules and policies, human resources are therefore dependent on negotiations among member states.

Reducing Politicized Appointments and Micromanagement of Staffing

Member states naturally seek to maximize the number of their nationals within the UN, especially in the most strategic posts at headquarters and in missions, in order to influence the Secretariat and increase exposure to internal information. For senior positions, including under-secretaries-general and assistant secretaries-general, the Secretariat can appoint people without going through a competitive process. This can enable the secretary-general to get the right people and promote gender parity but the appointment process is also intertwined with politics. Member states intensely lobby for candidates, which potentially perpetuates politicization further down the line, since officials who owe their appointment to a member state's influence will not necessarily stand up for the Secretariat's independence.[168] According to the assistant secretary-general for strategic coordination, "The dominant selection criteria in the most senior UN appointments are political and geographic," and individuals' political connections and acceptability to member states are sometimes more central than knowledge, management skills, or field experience.[169] Recognizing these issues, the new secretary-general's team has made efforts to make senior appointments more transparent and to increase scrutiny, and terms of reference for DSRSGs were published in 2017 for the first time.

Beyond senior appointments, staffing of peace operations also depends on intense political negotiations. During the annual session of the Fifth Committee on peacekeeping budgets, member states negotiate the posts for each mission, one by one.[170] As one UN staff member mentioned, "They negotiate every single P3 position in every mission exactly like they would negotiate an international treaty."[171] Every position is the subject of intense lobbying and hours of discussion to reach consensus in the Fifth Committee and avoid a formal vote in the General Assembly.

As a result, the Secretariat—and missions—have little room to maneuver and control staffing, especially when it comes to reorganizing and readjusting staffing tables during the course of the budgetary year. UN missions might face the need to adapt their structure, such as to have more DDR officers when a DDR process is finally agreed, more political affairs officers when national negotiations are set to resume, or more human rights officers when a series of atrocities is perpetrated. However, staffing tables are only authorized by the Fifth Committee once a year; any change by HR teams in the field during the course of the year is subject to approval by the General Assembly at the next budget vote, making missions reluctant to undertake such changes. For example, the ACABQ recommended the abolishment of several positions that the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) proposed for reassignment in 2017.

Some member-state representatives have expressed their disapproval of this practice, calling it "absurd" and "the worst kind of micromanagement."[172] The control of staffing tables appears to be a symptom of the politicization at the very heart of UN human resources, demonstrating that the technical value of proposals, changes, reforms, or modalities of staff management is far from the only factor determining the organization's HR policies.

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168 "The recruitment process is essentially political, with a large amount of decision making ceded in the case of a handful of some of the most important posts to the permanent five members of the Security Council ('the P5'). While this system fosters a sense of ownership of certain key states in the UN, and has brought some strong people to the UN, it also puts the independence of the Secretariat in jeopardy, reduces the potential for strong leadership and demoralizes staff." Hochschild, *In and above Conflict*.

169 Ibid.

170 The reports of the ACABQ detail the conversion and establishment of posts in each office. See, for example, UN General Assembly, *Budget Performance for the Period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, Financing for the Period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 and Proposed Budget for the Period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 of the Support Account for Peacekeeping Operations—Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*, UN Doc. A/71/883, April 28, 2017.

171 Interview with representative from DFS, New York, February 6, 2017.

172 Interview with representatives of a permanent mission to the UN, New York, May 16, 2017.

Navigating the Dynamics of the Fifth Committee

HR policies are also debated in the General Assembly instead of being managed by HR experts. They are decided by member states that are not always acting in the UN's interests but in their own: how many people they can get in, how much it will cost, or how they can leverage their vote to negotiate another political gain. Since any major institutional change to human resources has to go through such political negotiations, decision making is slow. For example, compensation regulations were only updated after more than twenty-five years and three years of negotiations.[173] In addition, most changes that emerge from these negotiations are incremental, being slow to take effect and impact the organization.

Because they are discussed in the Fifth Committee, HR policies for field missions have become an object of political bargaining in negotiations. Countries that do not have a seat in the Security Council can use the Fifth Committee as a forum to interpret Security Council decisions related to the deployment and mandates of peacekeeping operations. According to one expert, "They can flex muscles at the Fifth Committee" and oppose proposed HR reforms for the sake of weighing in the balance and pursuing other political gains.[174] Member states that already have seats on the Security Council can also use the Fifth Committee to further adjust decisions taken in the council. The obstruction of or amendments to some of the Secretariat's reform proposals are therefore highly dependent on political dynamics among member states.[175]

Member-state representatives have described this politicization of human resources in the ACABQ and Fifth Committee as "quite toxic" and "very obstructive."[176] Opposing views are allegedly crystallized and lines of division hard to overcome. Groups of member states appear to be extremely

suspicious of each other: "They think there is a hidden agenda if we push for something. It is beyond mistrust," noted one member-state representative.[177]

Understanding the Political Postures Underlying HR Policies

The Fifth Committee tends to focus on recruitment and staffing. Other issues that are clearly important to the UN, including career development and performance management, receive less attention. The main topics of contention between member states in the Fifth Committee include the following:[178]

- **The UN as a job fair for member-state nationals:** For some member states, the placement of their nationals is an essential issue underlying debates. As one member-state representative described, "Some view the UN as a job shop for their nationals." When member states negotiate geographic distribution, internal mobility, and preference for internal candidates for vacancies, many are simultaneously seeking positions for their nationals, either by seconding staff or lobbying for open vacancies. Greater representation in the UN, particularly in strategic posts at headquarters and in missions, allows them to influence the Secretariat and gain more access to internal information. Underrepresented countries are the most attached to making positions more open to external candidates. Others defend maintaining some positions in field missions because their nationals either hold those positions or they plan to place their nationals in them. For example, Russia is reportedly defensive of procurement posts and of external candidates more generally.

- **The level of flexibility given to the Secretariat:** Another sensitive topic in the Fifth Committee is the level of flexibility given to the Secretariat over human resources. There are basically two competing visions in the Fifth Committee on this

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173 "The new package proposed by the International Civil Service commission [is] the first major reassessment for Professional staff in 26 years and the 'fruit' of three years of discussions." United Nations, "Proposed Compensation Package for United Nations System Draws Mixed Reviews, as Budget Committee Considers Impact on Staff Pay, Benefits, Recruitment," November 10, 2015, available at www.un.org/press/en/2015/gaab4176.doc.htm .

174 Interview with representatives of permanent mission to the UN, New York, May 12, 2017.

175 The power of staff unions also hinders HR reforms since they consult member states and pressure them to oppose some measures.

176 Interview with representatives of a permanent mission to the UN, New York, May 26, 2017.

177 Ibid.

178 The same dynamics exist in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34), where the lack of triangular cooperation between the Secretariat, financial contributors, and troop- and police-contributing countries causes harsh debates. See Alexandra Novosseloff, "Triangular Cooperation: Key to All," *Global Peace Operations Review*, November 20, 2015, available at http://peaceoperationsreview.org/thematic-essays/triangular-cooperation-key-to-all/ .

issue. The EU, the US, Japan, and South Korea act as a like-minded group promoting greater flexibility and autonomy for the Secretariat.[179] Russia, China, and the G77, on the other hand, tend to advocate for preserving the General Assembly's control, including by creating an over-weighted bureaucracy; they often push to create new committees, launch new processes, or add oversight. According to a representative of DFS, "For some countries the approach of problem solving is inspired by the character of regime: while some promote incentives and free-market solutions, others push for bureaucratic control."[180] As a consequence, noted another UN official, "When they hear 'flexibility,' some member states think that the [secretary-general] wants to do things without their oversight."[181] Standardizing rules and procedures and ensuring equality and fairness in recruitment gives these countries a sense that their nationals will be treated equally. Other countries, such as Mexico, Norway, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, fall between these opposing sides and act as mediators.

- **The geographic distribution of staff:** Many underrepresented countries, including the G77 and China, insist on geographic balance in UN staffing. These countries, which include most of the largest troop and police contributors, also advocate for better representation in recruitment of civilian staff. As declared by the G77 in 2016, "The Group continues to note with concern the lack of improvement in the representation of troop and police contributing countries within the peacekeeping support structure, both in the field and at Headquarters, and in particular at senior levels. The Group recalls that the General Assembly has consistently requested the Secretary-General to make concrete efforts to

improve this situation."[182] Other member states, however, claim that increasing the representation of these countries among civilian staff would amount to double compensation, since they already receive reimbursement for the troops, units, and equipment they provide.

A number of other issues also come up in debates. For example, some member states are inclined to cut certain categories of posts like human rights or gender officers. China, for instance, has reportedly sought to cut human rights officers in peacekeeping missions, including in the Central African Republic, where a Chinese company is exploiting oil in an area controlled by one of the main armed groups.[183]

Pursuing Reforms in a Politicized Framework

These divisions, coupled with the fact that all HR decisions in the Fifth Committee are sought by consensus without going to a vote, undermine most attempts to reform human resources.[184] As mentioned by one member-state representative, "The last resolution took four years to be adopted. We finally have one, but it's not as robust and empowering as we hoped."[185] The final resolutions tend to be extremely different from what the Secretariat initially proposed and to make reforms cumbersome, irrational, and difficult to implement.

The mobility reform, for example, was amended due to harsh resistance and political debates in the Fifth Committee that substantially transformed the initial proposal of the Secretariat. The Secretariat wanted to use vacancies to move staff around. The General Assembly refused this proposal and forced vacant posts to be advertised and to be open to both internal and external candidates, with no prefer-ence given to internal candidates. This is why a "vacancy track" was added to the managed mobility

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179 The US, for example, promotes HR reforms and advocates for empowering the secretary-general to do the most he can without coming to the Fifth Committee to ask for permission.

180 Interview with representative of DFS, New York, February 6, 2017.

181 Interview with UN official, New York, May 18, 2017.

182 Sirithon Wairatpanij, statement on behalf of the G77 and China to the seventieth session of the Fifth Committee, New York, May 9, 2016, available at www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=160509b .

183 Louis Charbonneau, "China Pushes to Cut UN Human Rights Posts," Human Rights Watch, June 7, 2017, available at www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/07/china-pushes-cut-un-human-rights-posts ; Colum Lynch, "China Eyes Ending Western Grip on Top U.N. Jobs With Greater Control over Blue Helmets," *Foreign Policy*, October 2, 2016, available at http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/02/china-eyes-ending-western-grip-on-top-u-n-jobs-with-greater-control-over-blue-helmets/ . PTIAL International, a petroleum company, is exploiting oil in areas controlled by the Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic in the center of the country and has been reportedly recruiting members of this group for its security.

184 According to a representative of a permanent mission to the UN, there is a "gentlemen's agreement that the implications of voting on binding decisions with monetary implications would be too severe." Interview, New York, May 16, 2017.

185 Ibid.

reform. The impossibility of placing existing staff in vacant posts before opening them to external candidates has made it harder to find mobility opportunities, as staff can only move by swapping posts. According to a representative of DFS, "You have more than 190 member states, and everybody's point of view needs to be reflected in the reform. That is why mobility became so over-weighted, complex, and bureaucratic."[186]

In addition to the mobility program, the following reforms and policies were either blocked or amended due to political negotiations in the Fifth Committee:

- **Reduction of timeframes for recruitment:** The secretary-general requested the General Assembly to reduce the standard posting period for position-specific job openings from sixty to thirty days for professional and higher categories. He justified this proposal with data showing that, "regardless of the length of the posting period, the majority of applicants choose to apply either at the beginning or at the end of the posting period, with more applying during the first half of the posting period than during the second half." However, certain member states wanted to keep the sixty-day period to make sure their nationals would have time to apply, finally leading to a compromise of forty-five days. Similarly, a move to online processing of applications to reach more candidates and reduce the time needed to advertise posts and test candidates has been opposed by some African countries to ensure the process is fair for their nationals who do not have easy access to the Internet.[187]

- **Staff promotion and movement:** The ACABQ has strongly defended the mandatory creation and advertisement of posts, including when staff are reassigned: "With respect to the vacancy rate for reassigned posts/positions, the Advisory Committee is of the view that reassignments involve a change of functions and should be

considered equivalent to the abolishment of a current post and establishment of a new post, and that they are therefore subject to procedures applicable to new posts with respect to, inter alia, the requirement for full justification of their functions, the recruitment and selection process and the application of a vacancy factor of 50 per cent in the first year of their establishment."[188] The G77 and China warned in 2017, as they have every year, that they will "closely scrutinize the secretary-general's proposals for the establish-ment, abolishment, reclassification, reassign-ment, and redeployment of posts."[189] Similarly, the G77 has opposed extending temporary duty assignments from three to six months, viewing the creation of more temporary duty assignments and the natural movement of people in and out of missions as sufficient ad hoc solutions.

- **Use of consultants:** One of the topics that receives more consensus in the Fifth Committee is the use of consultants: "Everybody hates consultants," noted a UN official working closely with the Fifth Committee, from member states who want to make funding cuts to those who want to use regular job postings instead.[190] Consultants are easy to cut compared to fixed costs (e.g., reimbursements for troops and contingency-owned equipment, civilian staff) and other operational costs (e.g., information and communications technology, air assets, transport). Since 1997 there have been concerns about consultants being assigned tasks that should be carried out by staff.[191] The G77 insists on building the capacity of UN staff or recruiting new staff in lieu of consultants. The ACABQ is therefore also reluctant to recommend using external consultants: "The Advisory Committee reiterates that reliance on the use of external consultants should be kept to an absolute minimum and that the Organization should use its in-house capacity to perform core activities or to fulfil functions that are recurrent over the long

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186 Interview with representative of DFS, February 6, 2017.

187 Interview with representatives of a permanent mission to the UN, New York, May 16, 2017.

188 United Nations, *Budget Performance for the Period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, Financing for the Period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 and Proposed Budget for the Period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 of the Support Account for Peacekeeping Operations*, April 28, 2017.

189 Lourdes Pereira Sotomayor, statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, New York, May 11, 2017, available at www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=170511b .

190 Interview with UN official, New York, May 18, 2017.

191 UN General Assembly Resolution 51/226 (April 25, 1997), UN Doc. A/RES/51/226. See also Office of Internal Oversight Services, *Audit of the Recruitment and Use of Consultants and Individual Contractors by the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support*, January 6, 2016.

term or are related to policy matters."[192] As a result, when the secretary-general asked for a 22 percent increase in the budget for consultants, the committee responded that "in-house evaluation capacity, such as in the Office of Internal Oversight Services, would provide more independent external evaluations of the Departments of Peacekeeping and Field Support" and therefore recommended a $140,900 reduction in DPKO's budget for consultants and a 20 percent reduction in that of DFS.[193]

- **Hiring of retirees:** The Fifth Committee has also refused to change the terms of employment for retirees, who can receive a maximum salary of $22,000 a year, a figure that has not been adjusted in over twenty years.[194] This impairs the UN's ability to contract former staff who could meet temporary needs. The Secretariat has proposed allowing retirees to work a certain number of days per year with the salary corresponding to the category and level they had when they retired, but without much success.

- **Amendments to contracts:** The Field Personnel Division (FPD) proposed options for retaining staff when the UN shuts down missions. According to a representative of DFS, "We produced a good paper on downsizing, with a good business case suggesting…six months [of] buffer pay after closure" to avoid losing people who would otherwise not stay until the end of the mission, "but the ACABQ did not pass it."[195]

Building Trust between Member States and the Secretariat

Politics is inherent to the UN system, and changing the political dynamics of the Fifth Committee will be difficult. Member states will also probably continue to parachute staff into the UN. However, micromanagement and obstruction could be significantly reduced if the lack of trust between member states and the Secretariat is addressed.

From their side, member states do not find the Secretariat particularly trustworthy because of its inefficiency, and they are reluctant to offer flexibility and latitude to an institution they do not trust. They tend to have even less trust in field missions, which operate under tremendous pressure and often prove unable to deliver. Member states put the Secretariat under exceptional scrutiny, sometimes even more so than with other agencies: "UNOPS circumvents a lot, in ways that the Secretariat could not get away with," explained a senior UN official. "It is quite unfair from member states, who keep lauding UNOPS but do not treat both organizations with the same scrutiny."[196]

From the other side, HR personnel in the Secretariat feel that member states do not let them do their work, micromanaging and scrutinizing any reform initiative. As a result, HR teams are often cynical and fatigued: "We have been proposing reforms ad nauseam, but all initiatives were chopped apart," complained a representative of DFS.[197] Secretariat personnel confessed that they limit their proposals, keeping in mind the interests of member states: "The first thought that we have is 'this will never pass,'" noted another DFS official.[198]

A number of staff in FPD said they feel powerless to improve the system, despite having ideas for solutions. The organizational culture of the Secretariat seems to be marked by a loss of initiative, with staff hesitating to be bold and censoring themselves. This perpetuates a vicious cycle, with the Secretariat not making recommendations it deems necessary, the ACABQ diluting the Secretariat's half-hearted proposals, and the Fifth Committee further transforming the ACABQ's suggestions.

If the Secretariat can demonstrate that it can streamline processes, hold staff accountable, and manage human resources effectively, it could regain some trust from member states. According to a senior UN official, "If one set the [Fifth Committee] aside, there is so much which is broken at the Secretariat in terms of policies, procedures, or division of labor. First we should fix

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192 United Nations, *Budget Performance for the Period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, Financing for the Period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 and Proposed Budget for the Period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 of the Support Account for Peacekeeping Operations*, April 28, 2017.

193 Ibid.

194 UN General Assembly Decision 51/408 (November 4, 1996), UN Doc. GA/51/408.

195 Interview with representatives of DFS, New York, January 18, 2017.

196 Interview with UN official, New York, May 18, 2017.

197 Interview with representatives of DFS, New York, January 18, 2017.

198 Ibid.

our own failures and show them we can make it work. Then we can tell member states that the rest is their call."[199]

Even from the perspective of some member states, there is a lot the Secretariat can do without going to them. Micromanagement has been partly self-inflicted, with the Secretariat asking the General Assembly for permission to do things within the secretary-general's authority, setting up a vicious cycle. As a senior member-state representative advised, the secretary-general should only approach the Fifth Committee with issues that really need its approval: "Just do it and say you are sorry afterwards instead of asking [for] permission."[200]

The secretary-general has substantial authority and could exercise it to the maximum extent possible to streamline processes. The Secretariat can amend policies with relative autonomy and has total freedom when it comes to tools and processes. For example, the Secretariat could filter out 80 percent of candidates during the recruitment process without changing policies that would require member-state approval. It can use standing administrative measures to bring in consultants and staff without competitive processes during crises and can adopt a flexible interpretation of "crisis." The Secretariat also has complete leeway when it comes to the performance management system. Reforming this system could partly compensate for challenges with recruitment by making it easier to terminate underperforming staff.

Reluctant member states will be more likely to tolerate faster processes if they are convinced that everything is fair. For example, the secretary-general has authority over roster mechanisms, which many member states support, and could use this to relax and rationalize their management and maintenance. The secretary-general could more regularly create generic job openings to fill rosters, share rosters with external partners, allow rostered candidates to be considered for lower levels, allow high-performing staff to be included in their job family's roster, and establish talent pools for experts in more specific areas.

Secretariat personnel could also learn to sell their ideas and initiatives to member states through effective diplomacy.[201] The secretary-general could take the lead on reform, presenting reasonable, well-researched proposals and lobbying member states to support them through individuals they trust.

More transparency could also build trust in the Secretariat. Through public reporting, the secretary-general could engage the Security Council not only on substantive issues but also on management issues. For example, the Security Council played an essential role in giving the UN Mission in Colombia flexibility during its start-up, supporting expedited processes and providing official backing for special arrangements. Establishing a mechanism for the secretary-general to report back to the Security Council on operational aspects of mission start-up, including management and HR issues that impact the execution of mandates, could make a difference. If problems with recruiting, retaining, and managing staff due to financial or operational constraints impede implementation of the mandate, the Security Council could revise the mandate or offer political support to influence the General Assembly.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The UN's HR challenges are linked to a wide range of interrelated (and sometimes competing) dynamics: the inherent political struggles playing out in the organization, the disempowerment of HR teams in field missions, the cumbersome bureaucracy, and an organizational culture based on a narrow vision of the staff profiles needed for peace operations, the sacred principle of competitiveness, lack of accountability, and rigid attachment to compliance with rules, regulations, and policies.

Problems with human resources in the UN do not result from the failures of a particular department of the Secretariat but from deficiencies across the spectrum of key actors within the Secretariat

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199 Interview with UN official, New York, May 18, 2017.
200 Interview with representative of a permanent mission to the UN, New York, May 16, 2017.
201 Interview with member of the ACABQ, New York, May 18, 2017.

and among member states. This is why it is so hard to fix the HR system: political, organizational, and cultural factors are intertwined at both the macro and micro levels. Human resources are dependent on diplomatic negotiations and dynamics among member states, limited automated systems and tools available to the Secretariat, and restrictive rules, policies, and principles. The least change requires navigating multiple dilemmas: the balance between efficiency and competitiveness, control and flexibility, standardization and tailored responses, centralization and decentralization, risk of nepotism and paralyzing oversight, systemic reform and incremental improvements to processes, and organizational and political interests.

Many HR reforms have been implemented in the past. With the Global Field Support Strategy, CivCap initiative, harmonization of conditions of service, Umoja, and managed mobility framework, the UN has tried to expedite processes, make conditions of service fairer, and share the burden of field work. Although past reforms aimed to rationalize and manage the diverse and urgent needs of peace operations, all these initiatives have taken time to be implemented effectively, and holistic adjustments are needed.

The UN needs a clearer vision for how to make its HR system more fit for the purpose of field missions. While past HR reforms focused on staffing growing field missions, the current financial pressures and calls for better-tailored (and smaller) missions may provide a new impetus for more strategic HR reform focused on capabilities rather than numbers.

With the ongoing internal review processes, Secretary-General Guterres has an opportunity to define a strategic agenda to clean up the HR system by streamlining inefficient and nonsensical processes and better aligning authority and responsibility. He can also lay out connections between the reform initiatives he inherited and plans to launch and demonstrate to member states that he wants to make the HR system more accountable, more efficient, and better adapted to field operations. The secretary-general has to demonstrate that he will be ready to invest as much energy and political capital in fixing this system as he is in improving the transparency of senior appointments and gender parity. A group of

external and internal experts should closely review mobility, performance, and recruitment processes, including in light of best practices in other UN entities operating in the field such as UNHCR, UNOPS, the World Food Programme, and UNDP.

In developing an agenda for HR reform, the secretary-general should take into account the four challenges described in this study:

- **Getting the right people** for field missions by putting in place better principles and systems for recruitment, making working arrangements more flexible to attract and retain staff, and improving performance management systems, including by reforming internal justice mechanisms to make it easier to terminate underperforming staff;

- **Reducing bureaucracy** by decentralizing decisions on and control over recruitment to field missions and streamlining rules and procedures for the field, including by lifting restrictions, relaxing the principle of competitiveness, and facilitating internal movement;

- **Empowering HR teams** in the field by ending the culture of hostility between HR staff and hiring managers, reducing the clerical duties of HR teams in the field, and promoting HR staff as strategic partners in finding solutions to recruitment and management problems; and

- **Depoliticizing human resources** by building confidence between member states and the Secretariat and reducing the Fifth Committee's micromanagement of human resources.

To address each of these challenges, change is needed in three areas, each of which concerns different actors:

1. **Political:** There are political dynamics blocking HR reform that only member states can address:

   - **To get the right people**, member states should abstain from pressuring the Secretariat to recruit their nationals, offer more support to promoting and giving preference to internal candidates in the system, and authorize the use of external partnerships to quickly deploy civilian capacities.

   - **To reduce bureaucracy**, member states should consider allowing field missions to streamline processes and revising policies related to competitive processes.

- **To empower HR staff**, member states should allow field missions to control their own staffing tables as long as they respect the budget set by the Fifth Committee.

- **To depoliticize human resources**, member states should end micromanagement and give the secretary-general more room to maneuver, especially when it comes to the management of staffing tables and the definition of HR policies.

2. **Organizational:** There are organizational issues that the Secretariat has the authority to handle:

- **To get the right people**, the Secretariat should refine job descriptions to make it easier to hire candidates with specialized profiles; revise recruitment techniques; establish civilian standing capacities for peace operations; facilitate internal mobility; promote career development and promotion of staff; review conditions of service to make working arrangements and contracts more flexible and improve staff welfare; and improve performance management mechanisms to make it easier to let go of underperforming staff.

- **To reduce bureaucracy**, the Secretariat should streamline procedures, including by reviewing ineffective administrative rules, synchronizing automated systems, and simplifying recruitment processes in the field; use more flexible staffing arrangements; decentralize selection of candidates; extend the use of flexible recruitment procedures such as special administrative procedures; better use internal and partner capacities to address personnel needs; make the performance management process simpler and more efficient; and address the divide between authority and responsibility by empowering DFS and missions to make HR decisions and by closing the gap between HR policymaking and execution.

- **To empower HR staff**, the Secretariat should reorient HR staff in the field from executing rules and procedures to providing strategic support by coaching, advising, and better disseminating processes and rules; decentralize HR functions to the field; and ensure HR teams in the field have access to the data, systems, and resources they need to

regain oversight of field recruitment, staff management, and performance tracking.

- **To depoliticize human resources**, the Secretariat should increase transparency in making senior appointments, establish a frank dialogue with the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee on necessary reforms, and report to the Security Council on HR issues preventing the implementation of mission mandates.

3. **Cultural:** Finally, there are issues related to the UN's organizational culture that the secretary-general needs to address:

- **To get the right people**, the secretary-general should develop a clearer vision for human resources that balances fairness and efficiency; promote a culture of mobility by creating significant incentives to develop hardship experience; promote a culture of performance by training staff on reporting underperformance and mismanagement, moving from process-oriented to performance-oriented accountability, and adopting comprehensive 360-degree evaluations; and foster a culture of pride in the UN.

- **To reduce bureaucracy**, the secretary-general should push for a change of institutional culture from valuing compliance to valuing efficiency and from assessing outputs to assessing outcomes.

- **To empower HR staff**, the secretary-general should instill in them a sense of ownership over strategic management of staff and workforce planning; end the culture of hostility between HR teams and other staff; develop reporting lines and mechanisms enabling HR teams in the field to report back to New York; and sensitize SRSGs on the flexibility they have in making HR decisions.

- **To depoliticize human resources**, the secretary-general should seek to build trust between member states and the Secretariat, explore the range of his autonomy in defining HR policies and procedures, and publicly report on HR issues.

In many areas, there is only a need to revise existing tools to make them work better: performance reports, written assessments, rosters, and the current types of contracts are good tools that need

to be amended to function better. Leadership should better follow up on e-PAS to ensure that performance assessment steps are followed and should extend the system to assess staff more comprehensively and with more robust methods. Written assessments should be registered so that good candidates do not need to take them repeatedly. Rosters should be regularly populated through generic job openings, not through position-specific job openings, and be both more finely classified and more flexible. Fixed-term contracts should include stronger legal dispositions related to decisions not to renew them. All this could be managed by the Secretariat without referral to the General Assembly.

In other areas, existing tools could be used with more flexibility. Competency-based interviews should be complemented with substantive discussions with candidates. Procedures related to temporary duty assignments or standby capacities should be simplified and decentralized. Restrictions should be lifted for hiring consultants, UN volunteers, or general staff members willing to apply to jobs in missions. These are areas where the secretary-general has leeway to make changes.

Finally, certain areas need to be more holistically revamped. Missions should be given more control of their staffing tables. The new staffing system and managed mobility framework led by teams in New York deserve further reflection so that field

missions can regain decision-making authority and responsibility in recruitment processes. Internal promotion and career-development opportunities should be redefined. For reform in these areas, member states will have to support the secretary-general's efforts for change.

These recommendations come from an organizational perspective; they are based on the UN's interest in having more efficient field operations. They have to be balanced with other requirements and considerations, and some might not be popular with member states, staff, or external candidates. This is where the secretary-general has to lay down his specific vision to find the right balance between the UN's political, organizational, and cultural objectives and dynamics. Progressive changes can be based on current efforts, tools, and mechanisms, as long as they are led by a clear strategy.

However, any big new reform should avoid further bureaucratization and politicization and seek to place people before processes. HR policies and systems have for too long been a question of procedures, rules, and mechanistic tools and have been too heavily based on technical considerations. The secretary-general should go beyond these technicalities. He should seek to humanize the UN's HR system and to make it a positive enabler for those who serve peace in the most challenging and complex environments.

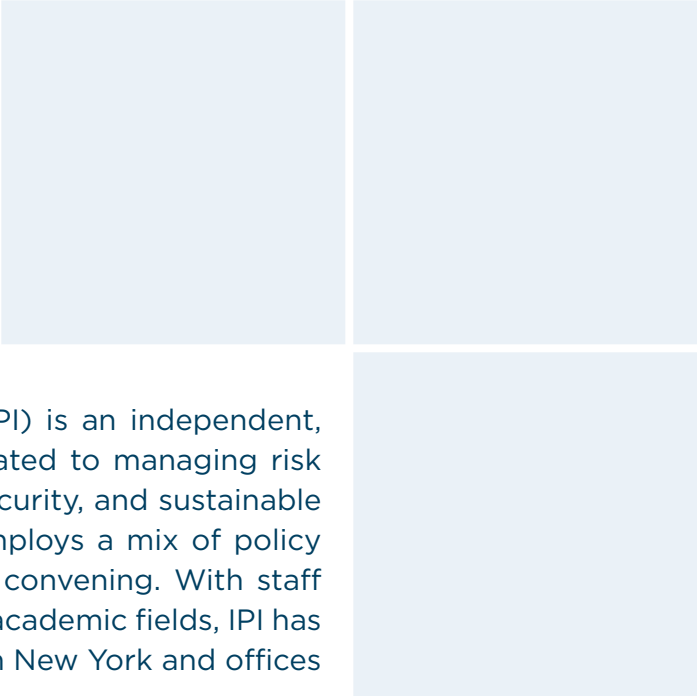Table 1. Recommendations to make the UN's HR system fit for purpose

Challenge / Agent and type of change	Getting the right people	Reducing bureaucracy	Empowering HR staff	Depoliticizing human resources
Political issues (member states)	Abstain from pressuring the Secretariat to recruit member-state nationals. Offer support to promoting and giving preference to internal candidates. Authorize the use of external partnerships to quickly deploy civilian capacities.	Consider authorizing field missions to streamline processes for promoting staff. Consider revising policies related to competitive processes, including related to advertising job openings.	Allow field HR teams to control missions' staffing tables and change the function or level of positions in staffing tables as long as they respect the budget set by the Fifth Committee. Authorize a fund for missions to use for other types of contracts to allow them to be responsive to changing needs.	End micromanagement and give more leeway to the Secretariat and field missions, especially for managing staffing tables and defining policies.
Organizational issues (Secretariat)	Refine job descriptions, including by: • Allowing for more tailored job openings in nontraditional areas; and • Regularly populating rosters and adding layers of classification within them to identify specialists and set up talent benches. Establish civilian standing capacities for peace operations composed of the best-performing staff in different fields of expertise. Facilitate internal mobility,	Streamline processes, including by: • Reviewing ineffective administrative rules, such as unnecessary restrictions on moves or recruitment; • Synchronizing automated systems; and • Removing central review boards from the recruitment process for position-specific job openings in the field. Extend the use of more flexible recruitment procedures, including by: • Using special administrative measures during surges,	Reorient HR staff from executing rules and procedures to providing strategic support, including by: • Outsourcing the clerical functions of HR staff; • Guiding and training HR teams to make them more client-oriented; • Strengthening the capacity of HR teams to coach, advise, and support hiring managers and staff, including in recruitment, termination, and performance management; • Improving knowledge and	Increase transparency in making political appointments and make senior-level appointments more competitive. Establish a frank dialogue with the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee on necessary reforms. Report to the Security Council on HR issues preventing the implementation of mission mandates to gain political leverage for discussions in the Fifth Committee or to adapt mandates according to HR constraints.

Depoliticizing human resources	Empowering HR staff	Reducing bureaucracy	Getting the right people
	dissemination of rules; and • Considering embedding HR officers in sections or pillars of field missions and better involving them in senior management mechanisms. **Decentralize HR functions to the field, including by:** • Making chiefs of human resources in missions accountable for the overall recruitment process, from opening of vacancies to bringing new staff on board; • Giving more autonomy to HR teams in the field to manage staffing tables; • Streamlining HR processes for the field; and • Decentralizing the functions of ombudspersons to the field. **Ensure HR teams in the field have access to the data, systems, and resources they need to regain oversight of field recruitment and staff management, including for performance tracking.**	crises, or changes of mandate; and • Exploring the use of conditional contracts and project-based contracts. **Decentralize selection of candidates from New York to the field, including by:** • Revisiting the new staffing selection system and managed mobility framework to decentralize decisions; and • Decentralizing decisions related to temporary duty assignments. **Better use internal and partner capacities to address personnel needs, including by:** • Maintaining a database of staff willing to move on to field missions on short notice; • Ending restrictions on recruitment of consultants, UN volunteers, and national staff; • Making use of rosters more flexible; and • Sharing rosters with partners and using partners to	including by designing a competency-based database of internal staff willing to move. **Promote career development and promotion of staff,** including by: • Introducing mechanisms to promote field staff who perform well, such as including them in rosters and considering their mobility preferences; • Giving nonfinancial rewards to field staff who perform well and instilling a renewed pride in working for the UN to fight low staff morale; and • Devoting significant resources to training staff and fostering career growth. **Review conditions of service,** including by: • Using flexible contracts to respond to short-term needs in peace operations, including through consultancies and special administrative procedures; • Reducing bureaucratic constraints on moving staff between duty stations and to

Getting the right people	Reducing bureaucracy	Empowering HR staff	Depoliticizing human resources
different sections within the same duty station; • Developing flexible working arrangements such as the option to work remotely or to have flexible hours; and • Improving staff welfare through better standards for accommodation and medical care, including for management of post-traumatic stress disorder. **Revise recruitment techniques,** including by: • Allowing hiring managers to complement competency-based interviews with other interview methods; • Reevaluating written assessments, reducing their potential bias, and registering positive results so candidates do not need to take the same tests repeatedly and can validate their competencies and assessment criteria; • Improving outreach to a wider pool of potential applicants; and • Increasing the transparency of recruitment processes.	identify experts. **Make the performance management process simpler and more efficient,** including by: • Making personnel records available across sections and departments; and • Making the e-PAS procedures leaner. **Address the divide between authority and accountability,** including by: • Avoiding further dividing responsibilities and increasing complexity by creating additional structures that are not empowered to make HR decisions during upcoming restructuring and management reforms; and • Closing the gap between the Department of Management and DFS and between policymaking and execution.		

	Getting the right people	Reducing bureaucracy	Empowering HR staff	Depoliticizing human resources
	Improve performance management mechanisms, including by: • Setting up a task force including external experts to evaluate performance management systems; • Putting in place a mechanism for terminating chronically underperforming staff; • Revising the conditions for separation and probationary periods in contracts to include performance considerations; • Reviewing the internal justice system to make termination processes simpler and more flexible; and • Centralizing performance data and making it available across departments, sections, and HR teams in the field to prevent re-hiring of underperforming staff.			
Cultural issues (secretary-general)	**Develop a clearer vision defining the balance between efficiency and fairness in the staffing system and revisit the principle of competitiveness.**	**Push for a change of culture from valuing compliance to valuing efficiency and from assessing outputs to assessing outcomes, including by:**	Empower HR staff and instill in them a sense of ownership over strategic management of staff and workforce planning, both in DFS in New York and	Build trust between member states and the Secretariat. Explore the range of the Secretariat's autonomy in

Getting the right people	Reducing bureaucracy	Empowering HR staff	Depoliticizing human resources
Promote a culture of mobility, including by: • Creating significant incentives for mobility such as rewarding field experience with promotion to higher levels or provision of continuing contracts; and • Updating the terms of reference for relevant job openings in headquarters to require field experience, and vice versa. **Promote a culture of performance, including by:** • Training staff on reporting underperformance and mismanagement; • Moving from process-oriented to performance-oriented accountability; and • Shifting to 360-degree evaluations, including allowing staff to rate and evaluate managers. **Foster a culture of pride in the UN.**	• Avoiding the creation of more bureaucratic mechanisms to respond to HR issues; • Redefining accountability to focus on effective service delivery and success in recruiting and retaining capable staff rather than on compliance with rules; and • Promoting risk taking in recruitment, including by facilitating potential termination or establishing probationary periods.	in HR teams in the field. **End the culture of hostility** between hiring managers and **HR teams in the field,** including through training. **Develop reporting lines and mechanisms enabling HR teams in the field to report back to New York on regula-**tions preventing field missions from implementing their mandates or making HR processes inefficient. **Sensitize SRSGs on the flexibility they have in making HR decisions as under-secretaries-general.**	defining HR policies and procedures. **Issue more public reports on HR issues.**

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