

Human Resources Management: A key focus of the Joint Inspection Unit

This article is part of an ongoing series to commemorate the Joint Inspection Unit's 50th anniversary and highlight the JIU's work and achievements over the last 50 years.

The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly emphasized in its resolutions the need for the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to “focus more on management, budgetary and administrative issues”. Human resources is a core dimension of organizational management as they are a vital asset of any organization and often account for a significant proportion of its expenditures. Over the decades, the

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JIU has produced a number of reports and notes focusing on this area. In doing so, the Inspectors have kept in mind the United Nations' values enshrined in its Charter, which stress the principles of the highest standards for efficiency, competence, integrity, transparency of the recruitment process, equitable geographical representation and gender balance. In the area of HR management, a major contribution of the JIU has been to assess how the acknowledgment and incorporation of these core principles are

implemented in the policies and practices of the United Nations system organizations. The JIU has not only reviewed various human resources issues at the system-wide level, but also within individual organizations as part of the scope of management and administration reviews. Recommendations are tailored to each organization's specific requirements, strengths and challenges.

Workforce composition: recruitment, geographical representation and gender balance

The United Nations organizations emphasize building their workforce through proactive recruiting and by retaining competent staff to best achieve their missions and objectives. To support them, the JIU has conducted extensive work, both from a system-wide angle to share the good practice observed and at the individual organization level.

One enduring crucial aim of the system has been to achieve equitable geographical representation within the United Nations workforce. The earliest studies by the JIU on this topic date back to the 1980s. In 1981, a report addressed and analysed this subject within the UN Secretariat, and in 1982 a similar study focused on UNESCO. Since then, this topic has received continued attention. The most recent comprehensive research on staff recruitment, geographical representation and gender balance was conducted in 2012, the results of which were included in the report “Staff Recruitment in United Nations system organizations: A comparative analysis and benchmarking framework: Overview” and a series of three related notes on the institutional framework, the recruitment process, and gender balance and geographical representation. All of these provided a comparative analysis and proposed benchmarking practices and indicators for each aspects. This series of reports and notes was complemented by benchmarks for reference checks before recruitment in 2013.

Executive Heads and Senior staff

At times, JIU has reviewed specific categories of staff, particularly at the executive level. On this topic, the JIU produced the following reports: “Selection and conditions of service of Executive Heads in the United Nations system organizations” in 2009 and “Transparency in the selection and appointment of senior managers in the United Nations secretariat” in 2011. These reports particularly stressed the need to better advertise vacancies, select qualified candidates, limit the terms in office, and address outstanding or potential conflicts of interest. The JIU also encouraged conducting hearings and meetings with candidates running for posts of executive level in order to enhance transparency and credibility of the selection process and to make the process more inclusive of all Member States. Following a JIU recommendation, UNIDO was one of the first organizations in the United Nations system to introduce a candidates’ forum for the selection of its Director General. The decision to hold public hearings with the candidates to replace the current United Nations Secretary-General is a major recent achievement of this recommendation.

Staff mobility and work-life balance

Staff mobility is another theme that has been continuously monitored by the JIU. As early as 1991, the JIU looked into the “Rotation of staff within the United Nations system”, and in 2006 it analysed “Staff mobility in the United Nations”, and again in 2010 reviewed the “Inter-agency staff mobility and work/life balance in the organizations of the United Nations”. These reports aimed to improve internal mobility, both at the individual and system levels, and to improve the work-life balance of United Nations staff.

The JIU’s analysis led to the conclusion that inter-agency mobility was often driven by the needs of individual staff members and was not the result of a planned strategy, nor of proactive actions taken by organizations. Based on this conclusion, the JIU recommended that the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) should be the primary instrument to uniformly regulate staff mobility among all organizations of the United Nations system. Moreover, it should develop system-wide standards for the systematic collection, monitoring and consistent reporting of staff mobility data. The JIU recommended to the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system, that alongside implementing

uniform system standards, they should review their internal staff mobility and/or staff rotation schemes from a system-wide perspective.

Non-staff personnel: Junior Professional Officers, consultants, interns

To complement the work force, United Nations system organizations also rely on various categories of non-staff personnel that help deliver their mandates and activities. The category of non-staff personnel has been an ongoing focus of the JIU, with particular attention to their working conditions, benefits and remuneration and job functions.

Given the extensive use of external consultancies in the United Nations, the JIU has consistently addressed this topic in its reviews in order to assess the evolution of the policies, and related practices: in 1982, 2000 and most recently in 2012, as well as within its several specific management and administrative reviews. The reviews were conducted primarily in an effort to make proposals to harmonize policies system-wide regarding contracts and hiring procedures for non-staff external consultancies.

In 2014, the report on the “Use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities in the United Nations system organizations” included a series of country case studies (Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti and India) to provide a field perspective to the issue. The recommendations called for decent working conditions, fair salary and benefits. Furthermore, the JIU underlined the importance to terminate the inappropriate prolonged use of non-staff personnel, and recommended monitoring the duration

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The Young Professionals Program (YPP)/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer Programmes in the United Nations system organizations also received the attention of the JIU and the consequent report focused on the importance of monitoring the YPP in order to understand its needs and to assure adequate funding for the long-term tasks.

In 2009, the JIU note “Internships in the United Nations system” included recommendations in regard to increasing the number of interns from developing countries, the elimination of the mandatory break of eligibility for paid positions, and compensation or benefits to interns. The issues highlighted by the Inspectors in this note are ongoing and remain a sensitive and challenging topic to address.

Retirees

The JIU has also given a great deal of consideration in its reports to employment of retirees of the UN organisations. The note on the “Use of retirees and staff retained beyond the mandatory age of separation at United Nations Organizations”, in 2014 further pointed out the importance of limiting the re-hiring of retirees and retention of staff beyond the mandatory age of separation.

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The JIU recommended good practices in order to capitalize on the knowledge of retirees through mentoring programmes, or guaranteeing a better work-life balance with a phased retirement scheme option.

Examples of Joint Inspect Unit reports on Human Resources Management since 1991

1991	Rotation of staff within the United Nations system	Advancement of the status of women in the UN secretariat in an era of “human resources management” and “accountability”: A new beginning?	1994
1994	Staff turnover and delays in recruitment (the lapse factor)	Inspection of the application of United Nations recruitment, placement, and promotion policies (Part I and II). Recruitment, placement and promotions	1996
2000	Senior-level appointments in the United Nations, its programmes and funds	Staff mobility in the United Nations	2006
2007	Age structure of human resources in the organizations of the United Nations system	Internships in the United Nations system	2009
2009	Selection and conditions of service of Executive Heads in the United Nations system organizations	Inter-agency staff mobility and work/life balance in the organizations of the United Nations	2010
2011	Staff-management relations within the United Nations	Transparency in the selection and appointment of senior managers in the United Nations secretariat	2011
2012	Staff Recruitment in UN system organizations. A comparative analysis and benchmarking framework: Overview	Flexible working arrangements in the United Nations system organizations	2012
2013	Reference Checks in the United Nations system organizations	Selection and appointment process for UN Resident Coordinators, including preparation, training and support provided for their work	2013
2014	Use of retirees and staff retained beyond the mandatory age of separation at UN organizations	Use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities in the United Nations system organizations	2014
2015	Evaluation of mainstreaming of full and productive employment and decent work by the UN system organizations		