



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/37/378/Add.1
28 October 1982

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-seventh session
Agenda items 107 and 111

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Application of the principle of equitable geographical distribution
of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Application of the principle of equitable geographical distribution of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat" (A/37/378).

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the application of the principle of equitable geographical distribution of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat transmitted in document A/37/378 is an addendum to the report of JIU on the same subject transmitted to the thirty-sixth session in document A/36/407. The addendum has to be read in conjunction with the original report and with the related comments of the Secretary-General which were submitted in document A/36/407/Add.1. The addendum refers to the comments of the Secretary-General on the first six recommendations in the original JIU report.

A. Necessity of applying the principle of equitable geographical distribution not only in regard to the Secretariat as a whole but also in regard to each entity of the Organization - Recommendation 1

2. By its decision 36/456 of 18 December 1981, the Assembly took note of the earlier report and the Secretary-General's comments and decided to continue discussion of the subject at its thirty-seventh session. The latest report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/37/143) shows the distribution of staff in posts subject to geographical distribution on 30 June 1982 and indicates the progress made in improving geographical distribution.

3. Thus, from table B of that report (A/37/143, p. 6), it can be seen that 90 Member States (57.3 per cent) are within their desirable range, an increase of 11 from the previous year and of 40 over the last five years. During the same five-year period, 30 Member States that were overrepresented have come within their desirable range and only 26 Member States (16.6 per cent) are still overrepresented. In spite of an increase in the total number of Member States by 9 over the last five years, the number of Member States which were not represented in any post subject to geographical distribution has dropped from 23 to 17. These figures show continued, measurable improvement in the equitable geographical distribution of the Secretariat.

4. Further change can also be seen from table C of the same report on the composition of the Secretariat with respect to the distribution of staff in posts subject to geographical distribution between the groups of developing and developed countries (A/37/143, p. 7). The number of such staff who were nationals of developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and in Latin America and the Caribbean (groups A and C respectively) increased from 37.8 per cent to 41.5 per cent over the five-year period and the number who were from countries with developed market economies and from socialist countries (groups B and D respectively) decreased from 62.2 per cent to 58.5 per cent.

5. The change over the same period also affected the senior and policy-making levels, that is, the Principal Officer (D-1) level and above. The percentage of nationals from developing countries (groups A and C) at this level increased from 40 per cent to 48.2 per cent and the percentage from developed countries

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(groups B and D) decreased from 60 per cent to 51.8 per cent. The figures also show an acceleration of this trend during the last twelve-month reporting period.

6. It appears that a number of comments expressed in the Secretary-General's report of last year, A/36/407/Add.1, were either expressed with insufficient clarity, or have been misunderstood by JIU. In the Secretary-General's view, it is important - for the orderly conduct of a debate on this point - that there be a clear understanding of the points on which there is agreement between the Secretariat and JIU. Thus, there is, of course, complete agreement that the two principles of efficiency, competence and integrity on the one hand and of geographical distribution on the other are entirely compatible. There is also agreement that equitable geographical distribution in the Secretariat as a whole presupposes a commitment by every head of department or office to work towards that objective in his or her sphere of competence, within the objectives established for that purpose by the Office of Personnel Services. Finally, there is agreement that the improvement in the geographical distribution of the Secretariat as a whole needs to be maintained.

7. The one area of disagreement is on whether specific targets of geographical distribution should be applied only for the Secretariat as a whole, or in respect of each department, office or "entity". The Inspectors feel that the latter should be the rule. The Secretariat considers that the application of numerical targets within each organizational unit is inappropriate, as it would hinder mobility, career development, and the exercise of the Secretary-General's responsibilities in terms of staff regulation 1.2. Furthermore, the application of such targets by organizational units might well hinder the progress towards improved geographical distribution in the Secretariat as a whole. For these reasons, the Secretary-General continues to consider that recommendation 1 of the JIU is not in the best interests of the Organization.

8. In this regard, note has been taken of the table in paragraph 8 of the JIU report. It shows a number of offices in which the number of staff as a whole, and of supervisory staff, shows a bias towards one or other geographical area. There are, of course, other offices showing biases of a sense different from that shown in that Table. What is important, in the view of the Secretary-General, is the progress made in the Secretariat as a whole, and clearly evidenced by the figures in table C of his report (A/37/143). The fact that between 1 July 1981 and 30 June 1982 the proportion of the 322 new staff members appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution who were nationals of the unrepresented and underrepresented countries rose to 43.1 per cent (139 appointments) and the proportion who were nationals of overrepresented Member States was reduced to 04.9 per cent (48 appointments) indicates that the heads of the different departments and offices have been co-operative in recruiting candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented countries.

B. Importance of implementing specific targets in the achievement of equitable geographical distribution in the United Nations Secretariat - Recommendation 2

9. The comments of JIU are based on personnel movements in the last six months of 1981. When combined with the personnel movements in the first six months of 1982, a quite different picture appears, as reported above. The 40 per cent target established by the Assembly has been achieved. In considering whether a higher percentage should be fixed in order to bring all Member States within their desirable ranges within a shorter period, account should be taken not only of the number of nationals of the unrepresented and underrepresented Member States but also of the number of nationals of Member States currently underrepresented who might be expected to resign from the Secretariat over this period.

C. Advisability of reducing the number of permanent appointments and increasing the number of fixed-term appointments - Recommendation 3

10. With respect to the third recommendation, the Secretary-General continues to believe, as was stated in his comments on the first report, that the determination of the proper ratio between fixed-term and career posts is a complex question which must relate primarily to the operational needs of the Organization, which may change over time. In this light, he considers that the establishment of any particular percentage, whether at, above or below 50 per cent, will introduce a limitation on his ability to offer to each staff member the type of appointment most in the interest of the Organization in the circumstances. He subscribes to the conclusion of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) in its statement to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) (ICSC/15/R.17/Add.1) that the final decision as to whether a permanent appointment should be granted to a particular staff member should be based solely on the merits and suitability of the individual in relation to the organization's needs, to the exclusion of all other considerations.

11. Since the General Assembly, in paragraph 1 its resolution 2241 (XXI) of 20 December 1966, expressed the belief "that, as a temporary measure and under the existing conditions, increased recruitment on the basis of fixed-term contracts, especially in the case of developing countries, might help to achieve a balanced geographical distribution", initial fixed-term appointments have been given to persons on secondment, to persons over 50 years of age, who for that reason are ineligible for career appointments, to persons who request fixed-term status, to persons appointed to posts funded for a limited period or for assignments expected to last for a specific period of time and, normally, to all candidates who are nationals of countries that are already overrepresented. As a result of this policy, the proportion of staff in posts subject to geographical distribution on fixed-term appointments has increased steadily from 30.6 per cent in 1967, 34.5 per cent in 1972, 37.6 per cent in 1977 to the highest proportion ever, 39.5 per cent in 1982. In practice, very few staff members are now being appointed initially on a career basis to posts subject to geographical distribution. In view of the increase of the proportion of fixed-term staff and of the improvement in the

geographical distribution of the staff over the same period, the Secretary-General considers that the present policy is achieving the objectives set by the Assembly.

D. Feasibility of introducing a new type of interruptible
(rotation) fixed-term contract - Recommendation 4

12. The Secretary-General shares the position taken in paragraph 21 of the statement of ACC referred to above (ICSC/15/R.17/Add.1) in which the administrations suggest that ICSC may wish "to study the questions of principle which arise concerning secondment in relation to the international civil service, as well as its legal and contractual aspects and such matters as whether a special type of appointment should be used for staff on secondment in place of the standard fixed-term appointment or whether any arrangements which might be worked out with national Governments should also be extended to secondment from other types of national employment, such as universities, institutes, private enterprises, and so on".

13. In the comments on the original report, the Secretary-General suggested the establishment of arrangements for the regulation of such secondments in a more systematic manner so that the Organization could obtain the maximum benefit from the services of such seconded officials without the introduction of a new type of appointment. As an initial step, the Staff Rules have been amended to permit recognition of the seniority in grade of seconded officials during a previous period of service with the United Nations to be counted towards their eligibility for promotion during a subsequent period of service.

E. Necessity of full observance of the Charter and the relevant
decisions of the General Assembly concerning appointments of
internal and external candidates to vacant posts -
Recommendation 5

14. JIU reaffirms its belief that there has been an excessive slant towards filling vacant posts subject to geographical distribution by internal reassignments and gives figures showing how many staff at each level entered that level on appointment and how many were appointed at a lower level and promoted into their present level. These figures are used to suggest that staff on permanent contracts are preferred over staff on fixed-term contracts.

15. It should be pointed out, however, that many of the staff who were promoted to their present level are still on fixed-term contracts and the nature of a staff member's contract is not an element which is taken into consideration when a decision is taken to reassign or to promote someone to a post. "Time-in-grade" is relevant more to eligibility for consideration for promotion than as an element which governs who shall be promoted. Seniority is only used to give priority when the staff being considered for promotion are otherwise of generally equal merit. Furthermore, the practice of appointing outside candidates in lower level posts and promoting staff with experience of the Organization is a normal exercise of personnel administration, unless the outside candidate is appointed because he or

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she has skills or qualifications relevant to the particular level which are not available within the Secretariat. Since, in recent years, the great majority of all staff has been appointed initially on a fixed-term basis, this practice affects all Member States. Preference in filling vacancies in accordance with staff regulation 4.4 is not given to staff on permanent contracts but rather to all staff already in the service of the United Nations, whether on a career or a fixed-term contract.

E. Improvement in geographical distribution of staff in senior and policy-formulating posts - Recommendation 6

16. Apart from the region of North America and the Caribbean, the situation at the senior and policy-making levels (D-1 and above) continues to improve, as can be seen from the following table:

Percentage distribution of staff in senior and policy-making level posts subject to geographical distribution by region compared with the mid-point of the desirable range of each region

	<u>Mid-point</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Difference in percentage points</u>
Africa			
1978	10.2	11.4	+1.2
1981	13.5	13.3	-0.2
1982	13.5	13.6	+0.1
Asia			
1978	21.3	15.6	-5.7
1981	18.1	19.6	+1.5
1982	18.2	19.5	+1.3
Europe (Eastern)			
1978	14.2	11.1	-3.1
1981	13.2	10.6	-2.6
1982	13.1	11.6	-1.5
Europe (Western)			
1978	22.7	26.1	+3.4
1981	22.8	25.5	+2.7
1982	22.6	23.7	+1.1
Latin America			
1978	7.2	9.1	+1.9
1981	7.7	8.2	+0.5
1982	7.6	9.0	+1.4
Middle East			
1978	4.4	6.0	+1.6
1981	5.5	6.9	+1.4
1982	5.5	6.9	+1.4
North America and the Caribbean			
1978	20.0	19.6	-0.4
1981	19.2	15.4	-3.8
1982	19.5	15.4	-4.1
Others			
1978	-	1.1	+1.1
1981	-	0.5	+0.5
1982	-	0.3	
Total	100.0	100.0	

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17. It should be pointed out, in this regard, that the total number of such posts, as of 30 June 1982, was 388. One percentage point equals, therefore, some four posts. The variation from mid-point of between 0.1 and 4.1 points translates, therefore, into between 0 and 16 posts. And this latter figure is an extreme - all others show a maximum variation of 1.5, or about six posts. Figures of this order of magnitude show quite clearly that the limits of "fine tuning" have practically been attained. It is obvious that there can never be a statistically perfect result, down to the last post, in every region.

Conclusion

18. Basing themselves on an assessment of the situation up to the end of 1981, JIU concluded that there had been no significant change either in the quantitative or qualitative distribution of the Secretariat. Taking the situation over the last five years, ending on 30 June 1982, a rather different conclusion can be drawn. The information given in this report and in the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat shows that steady progress has been made in the application of the principle of equitable geographical distribution of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat. The number of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States has decreased and the number of nationals of overrepresented countries who have been appointed has been reduced considerably. More than 57 per cent of all Member States are now within their range. The number of career appointments offered to new staff has been held to a minimum and the distribution of the staff in senior and policy making levels has continued to improve. It should be noted that JIU itself has offered different interpretations of Staff Regulation 4.4 contained respectively in their reports in documents A/36/407 and A/36/432. However, both reports clearly coincide in the objective of an efficient and effective Secretariat representing all the Member States and geographically distributed in a way that is considered equitable by all Member States. This is an objective which has been and will continue to be pursued by the Secretary-General.