

## Staffing and the 2009 Human Resources Management Reform

The UN began a human resources management reform process in mid-2009 that continues to date. The reforms were designed to improve the UN's dysfunctional employment and recruitment system, which has had negative effects on the entire system, but especially impacts field missions that often have to adapt their staffing requirements according to changing political realities on the ground. In order to provide a more dynamic global work force and reduce recruitment delays, the reforms harmonized contracts between the field and Headquarters and introduced a new recruitment model, which prioritizes internal hires for vacancies. Rosters of pre-screened candidates are in development, which are intended to allow for more rapid deployment of skilled staff.

While the reforms were intended to improve hiring structures, the new recruitment system in some cases has further added to delays, with some positions taking up to one year to fill. These delays mean that often the most qualified and employable candidates take up positions elsewhere in the interim. Delays in recruitment exacerbate chronically high civilian vacancy rates seen across missions. As of 31 October 2009, UNAMI had a 27% vacancy rate and UNPOS was operating with 34% of its authorized posts empty. High vacancy rates hinder a mission's ability to take advantage of short but crucial windows of opportunity, especially important in political missions.

High mission vacancies also mean that field officers must lean on their counterparts at Headquarters for a variety of support work, putting additional pressure on limited staff in New York while minimizing their role in political analysis. UNPOS again provides an illustrious example where a desk officer in New York singlehandedly supported the day-to-day needs of the entire mission until a Junior Professional Officer was assigned to assist. The UNPOS Headquarters staff was overwhelmed and found it difficult to meet mission requirements, reflective of general understaffing and underfunding of the support capacity of Headquarters.<sup>1</sup>

The reforms have also negatively affected staff mobility, especially between the field and Headquarters, limiting the realization of a global workforce. In addition, the reforms only partially achieved harmonization of contracts. Considerable gaps remain in the terms and conditions between Secretariat staff and their counterparts in UN funds, programs and agencies, in many cases leading to competition between the various UN entities to attract the best candidates.

### Institutional Considerations

In addition to these reforms, there are two important institutional considerations that also have an impact on staffing of political missions – (1) the relationship between the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Department of Field Support (DFS), and (2) the budget approval process.

Within the UN, DFS is designated to provide logistical and personnel support to field missions of both DPA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). However, DFS may be structured to better suit the needs and requirements of DPKO's large-scale peacekeeping operations than the unique needs of niche political missions, especially with respect to their specific civilian staffing requirements, due to DFS's growth out of DPKO's Office of Mission Support. Inappropriate financial and procurement rules and procedures that govern DFS make it even more challenging for it to support both departments adequately. The institutional relationship between DFS and DPA, while improving, still has ample room for growth and there is recognition within DPA that it must further explore how to best utilize the resources available within DFS. In addition, the Global Field Support Strategy of January 2010 – that has received preliminary endorsement of the UN General Assembly in July 2010 but is still pending approval – seeks to address some of the above-mentioned challenges.

Second, political mission budgets generally and staffing requirements in particular, are the subject of considerable debate in the UN's Advisory Committee on Administrative & Budgetary Questions. There is a sense that proposed increases in staffing are disproportionately contentious within the Committee as compared to the more technical requirements of a mission. In addition, existing vacancies may lead the Committee to question the wisdom of authorizing additional posts, even in the face of shifting political circumstances.

Staffing represents a significant challenge to political missions, one that appears to have become more daunting – at least in the short-term – with the 2009 human resources reform. Delays in recruitment have concrete negative effects on the ability of missions to perform effectively and fulfill their mandates. As Kai Eide, outgoing SRSG of the UN Mission in Afghanistan, noted in his last briefing to the Security Council in March 2010, “the new recruitment system put in place in July 2009 simply has not worked...If not corrected soon, it will threaten the effectiveness, possibly even the survival, of many of the current UN Missions.”

<sup>1</sup> As noted in the 2010-2011 proposed budget for Special Political Missions (A/64/349).