

# MOBILITY IN THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT: A SURVEY OF STAFF



*“Regular job transfers  
are an especially baffling practice”  
(Ickes & Samuelson, 1987)*

A discussion paper by the United Nations Staff Union at Vienna  
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## 1. The general concept of mobility: its philosophy and its application

Job rotation is defined as “*the planned movement of men from one position to another for the basic purpose of encouraging and stimulating the growth of the individual*”. (Morris, 1956). This concept sounds rather simple and easy to implement, but the moment the policies are put in place a number of questions are likely to raise. For example:

- Should job rotation be voluntary, mandatory or managed?
- How long should the individual periods in a specific job?
- Should employees get geographically moved as well?
- Should there be incentives for mobility? And if yes, which ones?
- How should the participants of a mobility policy get prepared for specific assignments?
- Should everybody get the chance to change his / her function or should the Management choose the most suited persons?

At the outset, a distinction has to be made between **geographic mobility** and the **professional or functional mobility**. *Geographic mobility* is defined as the movement of staff between geographically different duty stations for long periods with transfer entitlements. *Professional/functional mobility* is defined as the movement of staff between different functions/occupational groups, whether this implies a geographical move or not.

Some studies proposed the divide job rotation into **intrafunctional** or **interfunctional**. *Intrafunctional rotation* serves to train the staff for better performance on the job within the scope of a specialized function. *Interfunctional rotation* emphasizes the breadth of growth and is primarily for the purpose of preparing the staff for advancement as well as for better performance in positions which require more generalized abilities and understanding. (Morris, 1956). Another way to put it has been to identify **two systems of job rotation**: a job rotation policy, where the employees perform a different job in every period and a sort of specialization policy, where each employee is assigned a job at the beginning of his career and keeps doing this job in subsequent periods. The model of Ortega suggests that job rotation is a better learning mechanism than specialization (Ortega, 2001).

One of the main questions for many organizations and also for inter-governmental organizations is whether mobility or job rotation should be practiced.

Different theories discuss this issue but they can be grouped in seven groups as outlined below:

1. It may be that employers are uncertain as to the productivity of their employees, and switch them from job to job to **learn about their productivity** (Ickes & Samuelson, 1987).
2. Job transfers may allow an employee to **gain familiarity and experience** with a variety of aspects of an organization's operations, so that the resulting knowledge enable him to be more productive when promoted (Ickes & Samuelson, 1987).
3. Job transfers may be an attempt to sort employees into the jobs where they will be the **most productive** (Ickes & Samuelson, 1987).
4. It is often suggested that job transfers, especially in the foreign service, **prevent corruption** by ensuring that employees do not occupy a job long enough to reap the benefits of corrupt activities (Ickes & Samuelson, 1987).
5. **Employer learning**: the organization or company learns more about its own employees if it can observe how they perform at different jobs. This theory suggests that job rotation should be more common in organizations recruiting externally, because the organization has less information about the employees being recruited. This theory implies that rotation is more likely in organizations recruiting at a national or international level than in organizations recruiting at local level because at local level, the organization is more likely to have trustworthy references about the new employees (Eriksson & Ortega, 2006).
6. **Employee learning**: Employees who rotate accumulate more human capital than other employees because they are exposed to a wider range of experiences. Therefore job rotation helps to prepare junior employees to become top managers. If they move up to broader jobs, they need to gain deeper understanding of more aspects of the work (Eriksson & Ortega 2006).
7. **Employee motivation**: Job rotation motivates employees who would otherwise would get tired of the repetitive aspects of the same job (Eriksson & Ortega 2006).

Although job rotation is playing a very important role in some large companies, it is important to consider the positive and the negative outcomes of the mobility policy.

Already in 1956 Morris pointed out the main (positive and negative) issues related to mobility and his analysis is still applicable to today's situation.

#### Positive elements of job rotation

- Knowledge is increased and broadened.
- The understanding of the general management problems increases.
- The knowledge and understanding of technical problems in other department increases.
- There is a high interest factor because of the new working field.
- The new challenge serves as a strong stimulus to *"get on top of the job"*.
- Wider perspectives and different methods get developed to solve problems because the staff work under a variety of supervisors.
- Rotation gives a better understanding of the various external and internal forces which affect the company.
- More coaching as a result of rotation.
- Internal communication – one of the most important problems of large organizations – improves.
- Rotation indicates the necessity for knowledge and information to be transmitted to other departments.
- Employees develop a better background for making decisions favourable to the company as a whole rather than for the individual department.
- The constant readjustments may contribute to the development of self-reliance and confidence.

#### Negative experiences with job rotation

- Specialization is prevented by rotation.
- Sometimes assignments or positions require knowledge and skills in which staff does not feel well qualified.
- Rotating employees have to work very hard to cope with the new job.
- Some employees receive less coaching because their supervisors regard it as not worthwhile to coach them.
- All costs incident to moving (when geographically allocated) are not paid by the company.
- The social life can *"decrease"* because the rotated employees have to spend more time studying to handle new assignments.
- If the employees have a family and they are geographically moved children can suffer because they have to attend different schools and spouses may have problem in finding a job in the new location.
- For rotating staff who are moved fairly frequently joining local community activities is difficult.
- Rotation might seem to expose the company to substantial costs incurred because of erroneous decisions made by the rotating staff.
- There is a temporary loss of efficiency because of the disruption and also because the rotating staff lacks knowledge of many issues at the beginning.
- Rotating staff report that they know staff not included in rotation who feel resentful, unhappy or slighted. But some are also happy for not being rotated.

The studies available tends to point out that the rotating employees often do not experience long-term benefits in terms of career progression. However, staff are who are subject to periodic rotation are more likely to remain with the organization as the number of jobs they have performed there increases.

A study by Campion, Cheraskin and Stevens (1994) researched what skills employees gain through rotation. The answers were summarized in the following groups:

- broader perspective on other business functions (46%)
- adaptability and flexibility (31%)
- leadership skills (19%)
- exposure to various management styles (15%)
- financial and planning skills (15%)
- interpersonal skills (12%)

The study also explored for which jobs rotation would be most useful:

- professional non-managerial employees (35%)
- managers (23%)
- all jobs (18%)

Employees with high rates of rotation or high interest in it, reported greater benefits. This seems to indicate that when rotation is voluntary staff perform better.

The study by Campion & Cheraskin & Stevens (1994) analyzed also the impact of job rotation on career development.

#### Benefits for the career development

1. **Organizational attachment benefits:** satisfaction, involvement, commitment;
2. **Organizational integration benefits:** increased networks of contacts, transfer of company culture;
3. **Stimulating development benefits:** Variety of tasks and skills;
4. **Personal development benefits:** coping skills, insight into strengths.

#### Costs regarding the career development

1. Increased workload;
2. Decreased productivity for both, rotating and non-rotating employees;
3. Increased learning costs;
4. Decreased satisfaction and motivation both in the releasing and receiving unit.

The study verified the hypothesis that *employees in (a) early career, (b) with high education, or (c) with high performance will have higher rates of job rotation and express greater interest in job rotation than will other employees.*

## **2. Mobility in the UN Secretariat**

The concept of the mobility policy of the United Nations common system includes **two types of mobility**, one within each organization (**intra-mobility**) and another one across the organizations of the UN system (**inter-mobility**). Both result in changes either in occupation/function or geographic locations.

Regarding intra-mobility, the United Nations secretariat implemented an organization-wide managed mobility programme that started in 2007. As far as other United Nations organizations are concerned, many field-oriented organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP) have implemented much earlier a rotation policy because of their

Mobility policy has been a controversial subject in the Secretariat and the policy was subject to several reviews during the last years.

**1997:** Mobility, both professional / functional and geographical, was recognized by the UN as a key element of the "Programme for Reform" of the United Nations, promulgated by the UN Secretary General in 1997.

**2000:** Since January 2000, staff at the P-2 level recruited through the national competitive examinations or promoted through the G to P examinations have been required to be subject to a managed mobility programme. They are expected to move to a different post with new functions and supervision, in the same or a different department or duty station, after two or three years in their first assignment.

**2002:** Inception of the mobility policy: The mobility policy was introduced as an integral part of the staff selection system. It was established to develop a more versatile, multi-skilled workforce capable of delivering the broad range of mandates entrusted to the Organization, both at headquarters and in the field. Since its real introduction in 2007, the Managed Reassignment Programme has demonstrated a modest increase in staff mobility to meet the technical definitions established, but not always as substantive change in function or cross-departmental, occupational and geographical movement.

**2002-2006:** According to data derived from Human Resources Action Plans, the staff mobility index increased from 10.8 % to 21 %.

**2007:** Since May 2007 the Organization has been implementing the policy and assessing how it is working and if there are elements or aspects that need do be adjusted to meet the intended goals better.

**2008:** In December 2008 the last phase for D1/D2 levels was completed. At the same a pilot project VINE (Voluntary Initiative for Network Exchange) was initiated by the Secretary General to foster mobility across departments and duty stations. VINE main features were:

- Mobility across departments and duty stations
- Strictly voluntary
- Based on the initial interest of staff
- Compendium of posts created and circulated
- Professional staff on 100 series of one-year or longer
- Staff with 5 years or more in the same department or office have priority

**2009:** A proposal was submitted to the GA introducing mobility requirements for eligibility to apply for positions at P5 and above. However, the proposal has been put on hold by the GA pending and overall review of the mobility policy. The staff have expressed concern about a mandatory mobility policy without continuing contracts.

The main reason put forward by the UN for mobility is that in the last years the UN achieved a consistent growth in the fields of operations, budgets and functions. The UN to fulfil the requirements of its headquarters and he field activities needs a workforce that have to be flexible and moving. However, there is considerable discussion on what policy needs to be implemented to best respond to these needs while keeping staff motivated. The experience of staff with the previous policies and pilot exercises is that managed reassignment programme appears to take a tremendous amount of efforts for the placement of very few staff.

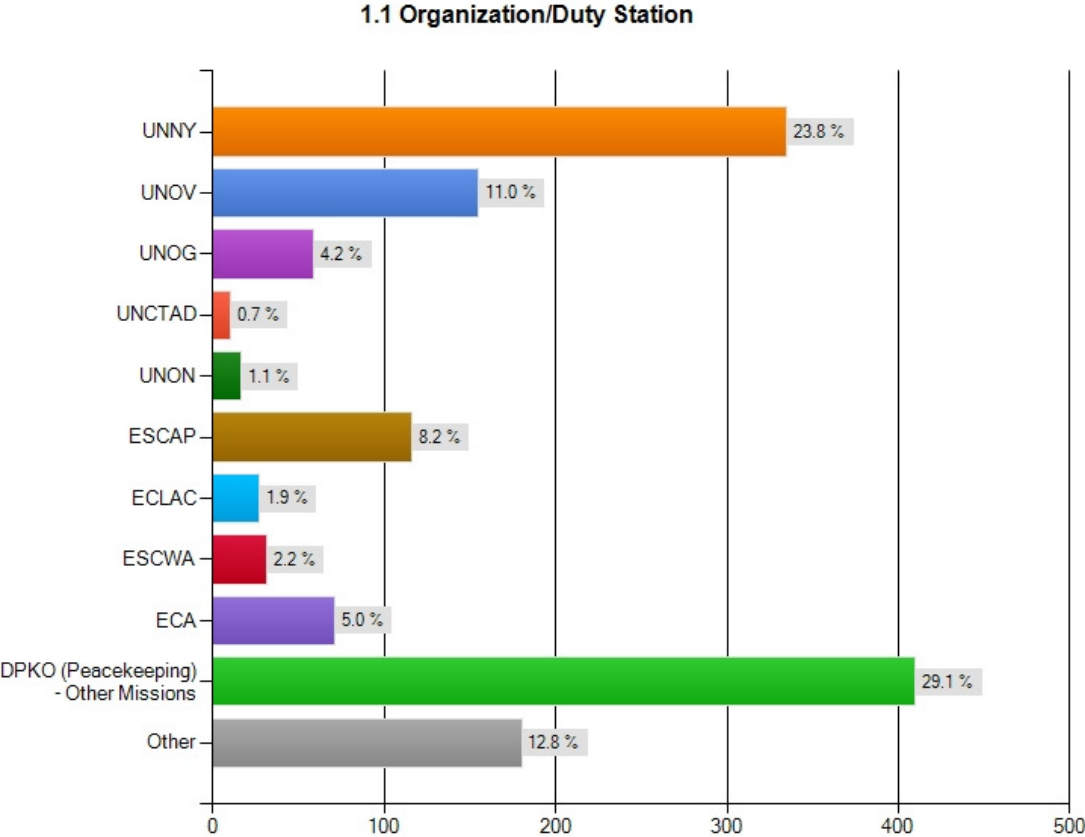
### **3. Survey of staff**

Between the end of 2009 and the beginning 2010, the staff unions participating in the SMCC launched a survey of staff to collect the opinion of staff on mobility. A total of 1,410 staff participated in the survey. Of these 84.4% completed all the questions of the survey. Out of these respondents, a large number (707) completed also the open questions adding personal views and proposals. Most of the survey participants referred to their own problems and listed mainly negative facts related to mobility.

[Management is keen on geographical mobility and aims for establishing mobility requirements for all staff members. However, for staff and staff unions within the UN mobility is linked to the continuing contracts. Also, the most important thing is to have a framework, under which the demanded mobility can take place.]

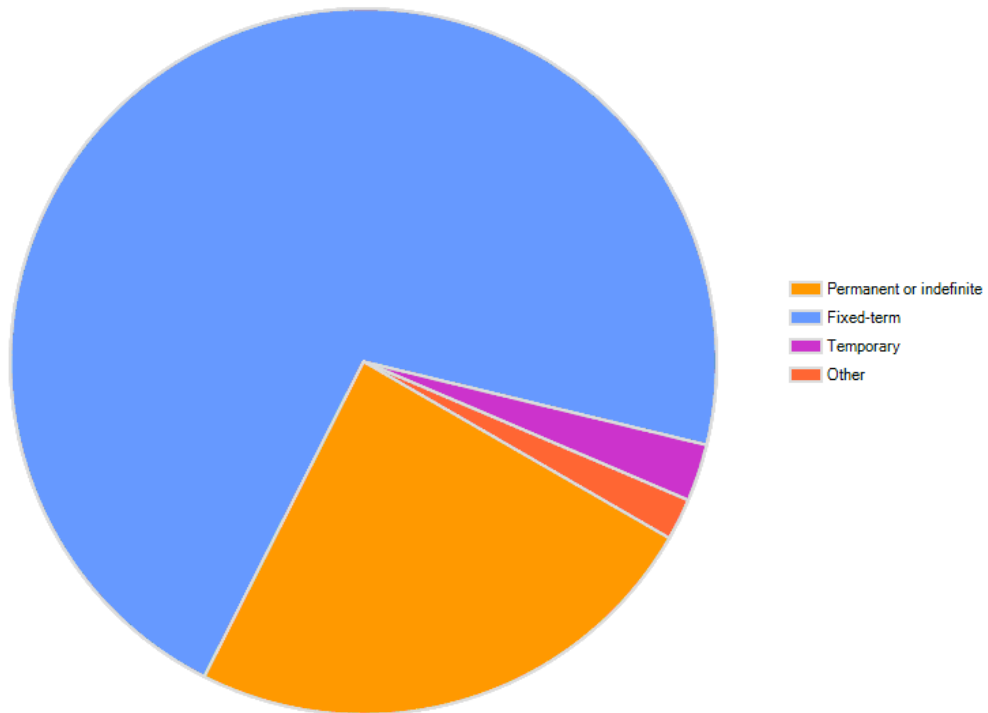
In the open question of the survey – *What are your suggestions as to other steps (including non-financial measures) that could be taken to enhance mobility and/or compensate for hardship more effectively, if any?* – great emphasize was put on the issue of job security. Many employees are afraid

that once they work in a duty station, they get “stuck” there. More staff would leave to a duty station, if they had the security to come back to their original work place after their assignments. The survey asked first for some personal details.



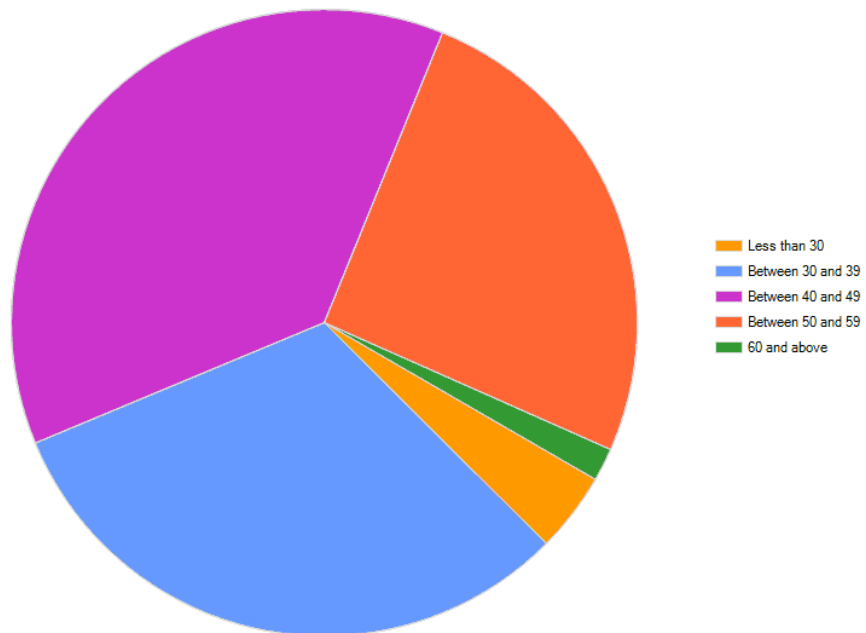
The major part of the respondents are working for DPKO or other missions followed by the New York and Vienna.

Type of contract



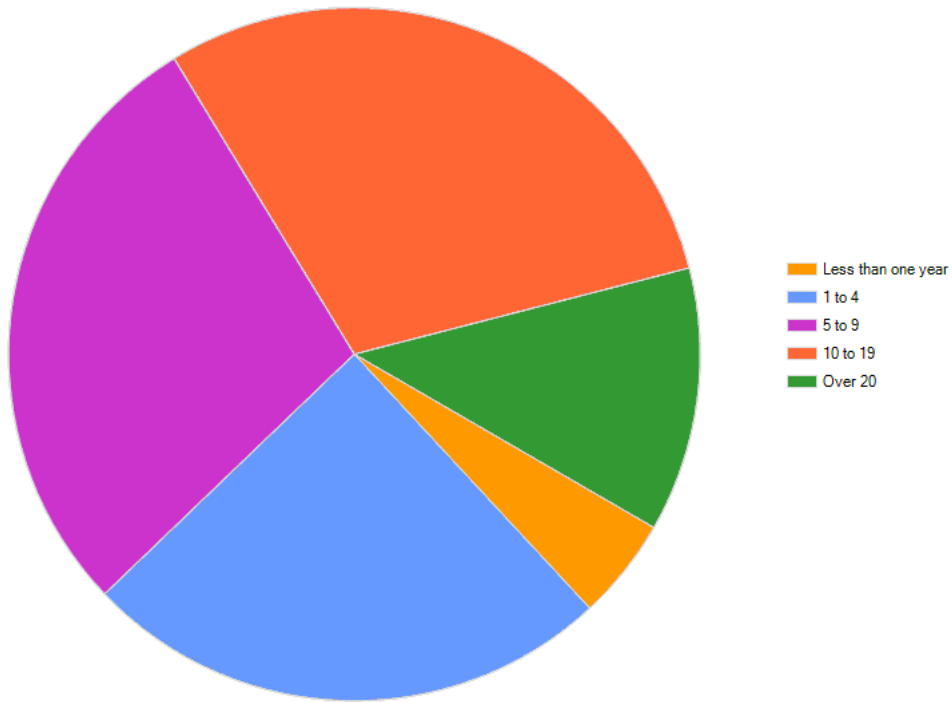
Most respondents have a fixed-term contract. Only 24% have permanent or indefinite contracts.

Age

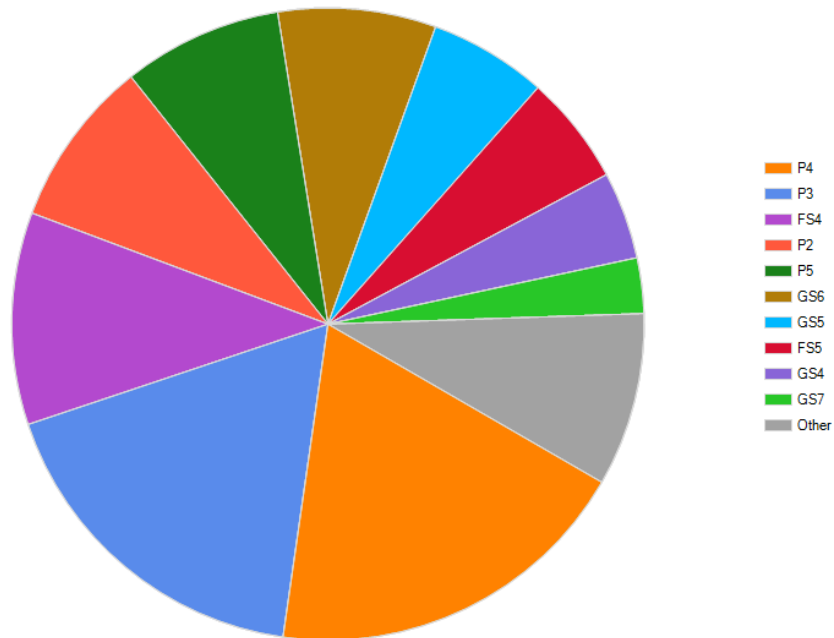


The largest group of respondents are between 40 and 49 and have been working for 10 to 19 years in the UN.

Number of years in the Organization

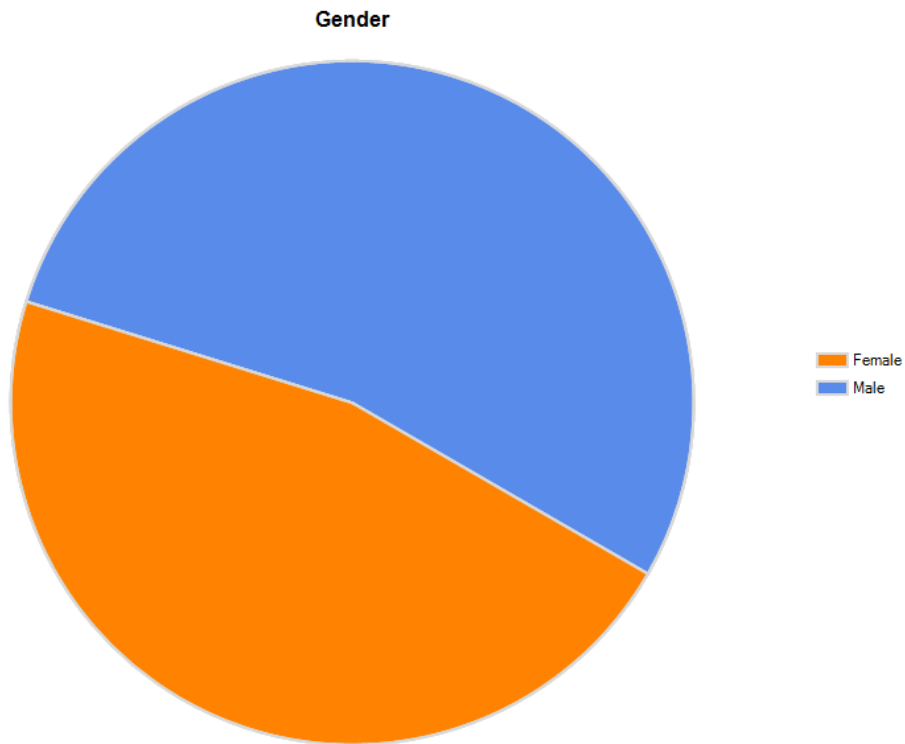


Level



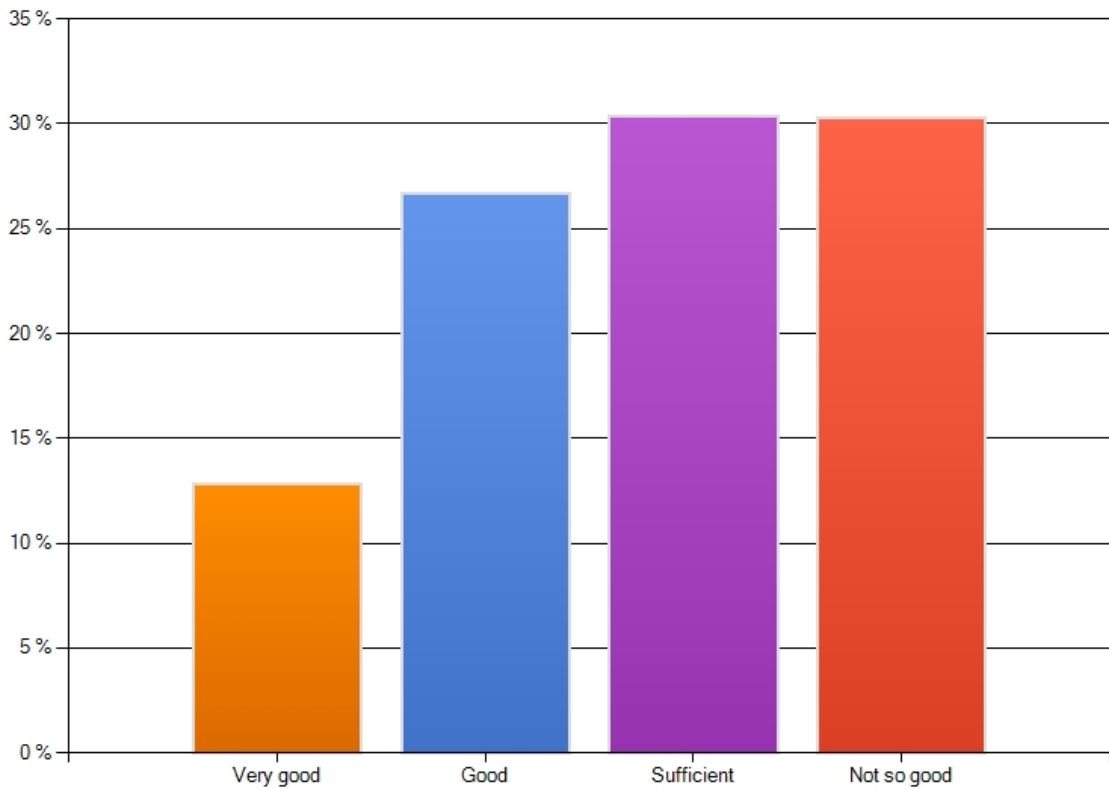
Most respondents are currently working at the P-4 level, followed by P-3 level. A slight majority of the respondents (53.5%) are males.





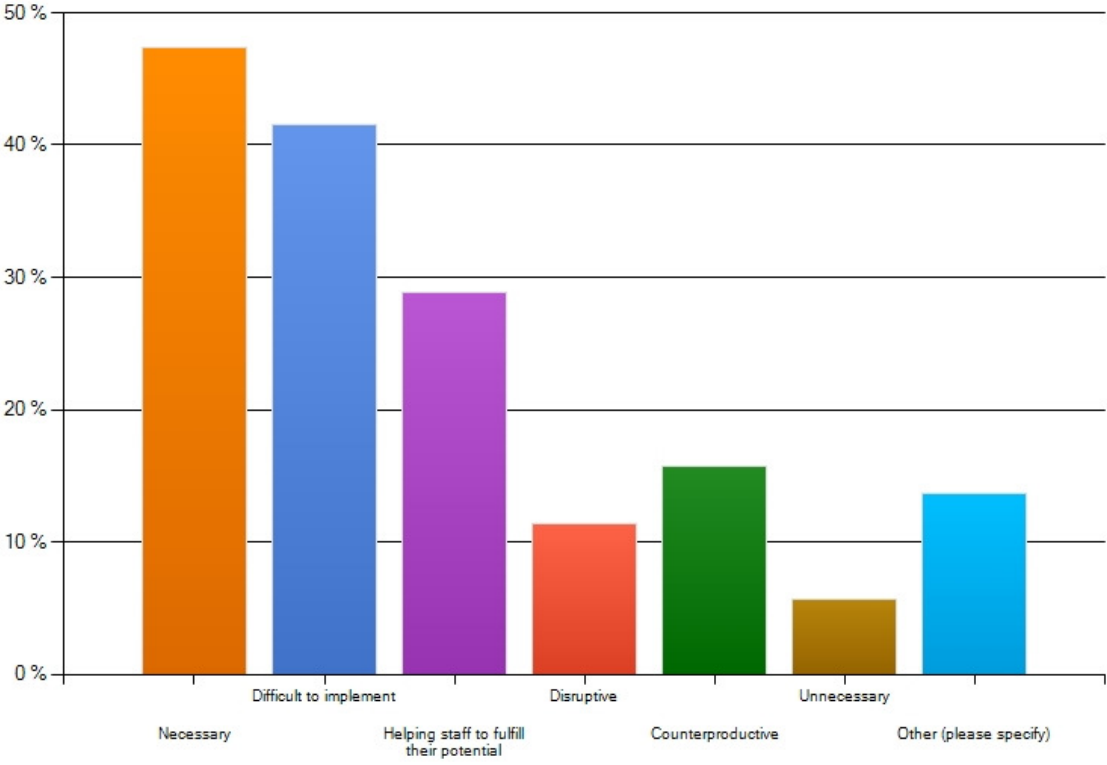
Out of all respondents, 37.4% worked in only one organization or department during their UN career, 26.2% worked in two different organizations, 15.8% in three different ones. Another 6.4% changed their organization or department four times, 3.3% changed it five times. The rest, 3.4%, changed organization or department six or more times.

**2.1 How would you consider your knowledge of the mobility policy of the Organization?**



On the issue of knowledge of the mobility policy, 30.3% regard their knowledge as *Sufficient*, another 30.3% as *Not so good*. Only 12.8% of the respondents felt that they had a *Very good* knowledge about the mobility policy, 26.6% consider their knowledge as *Good*. Nearly one third of the respondents claims that they are not informed at all about the mobility policy that is currently in place.

**2.2 Do you think the mobility policy for the Organization is [tick max. 2 boxes.If you tick more than 2 boxes you will not be able to go to the next page]:**

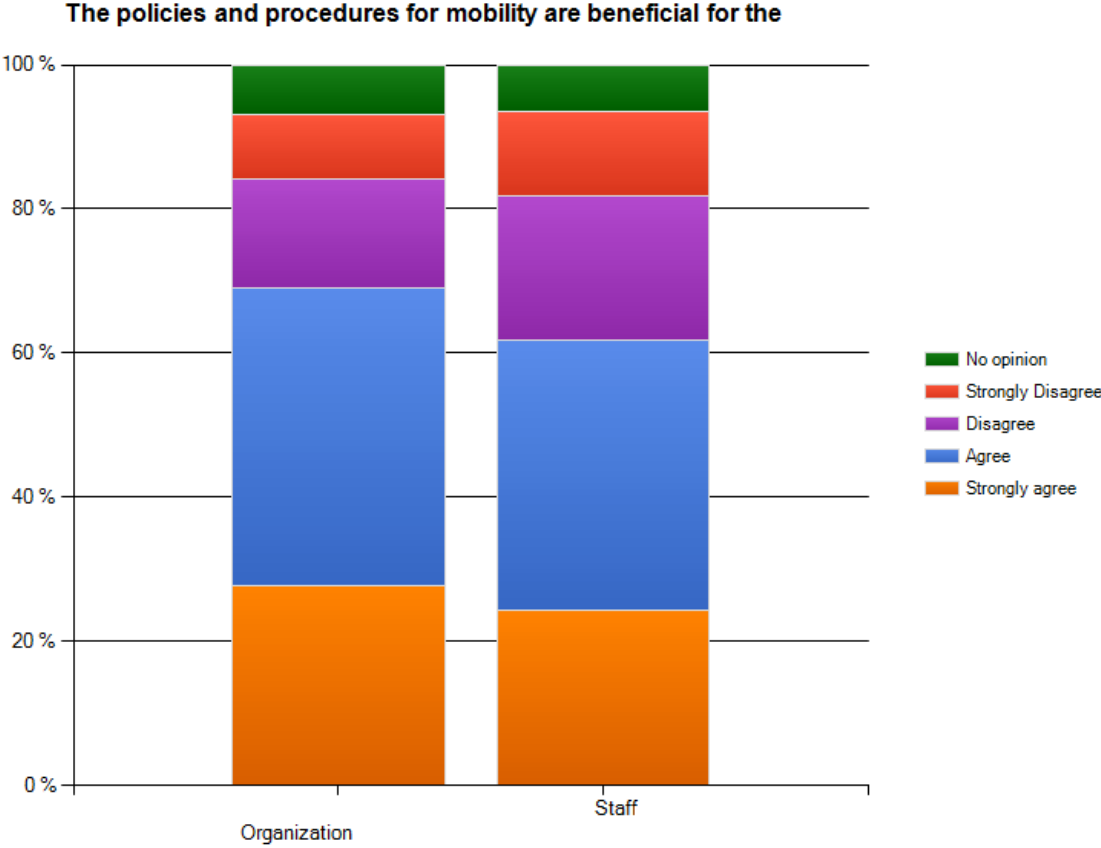


In 2005 a general staff survey was carried out and it included a question on mobility. The 2009 survey repeated some of the questions of 2005 survey to compare the results. However, the comparison is not perfect because the two samples are quite different mostly because of the large participation of staff from DPKO and other missions in the 2009 survey.

In 2005 and in 2009 the following question was asked: do you think the mobility policy for the Organization is:

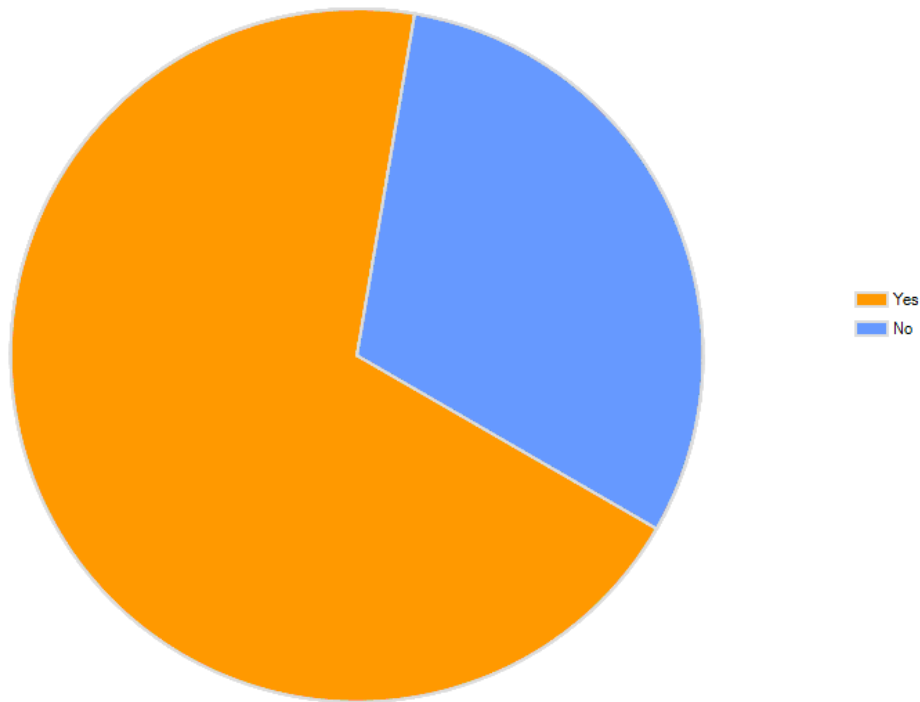
	2005	2009
Necessary	29.3	28.9
Difficult to implement	26.6	25.3
Helping staff fulfill their potential	14.1	17.6
Disruptive	9.3	6.9
Counterproductive	8.1	9.6
Unnecessary	7.1	3.4
Other	5.5	8.3

The biggest change between 2005 and 2009 is that slightly less people regard the mobility policy as disruptive, counterproductive or unnecessary. It is notably that the ranking seems to follow the sequence of the answer options in both surveys. It would be interesting if the percentages would change if there would be a different order.



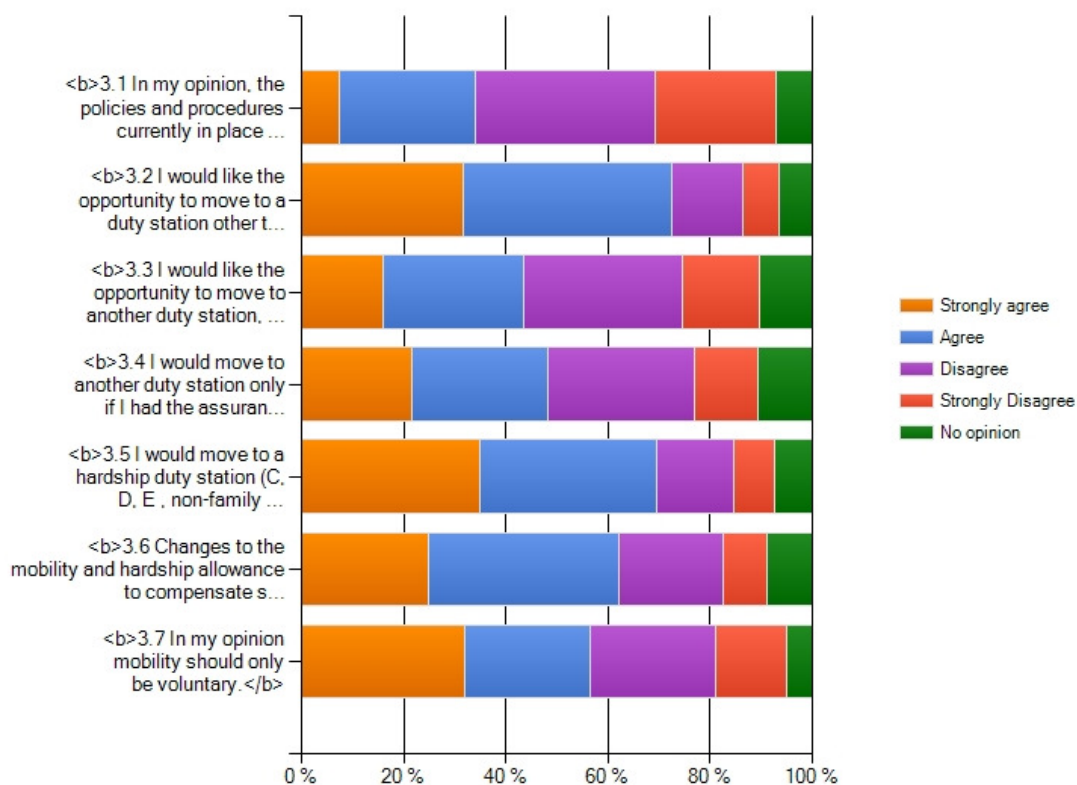
Staff responded positively to the question. A total of 69% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the mobility policy is beneficial for the Organization, 61.8% agree or strongly agree that mobility is beneficial for the staff. Only 9% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement that mobility rotation is beneficial for the Organization and 11.7% think that it is not beneficial for staff.

Are you aware of the obligations as a staff member to ensure that you do not remain in a post for more than 5 years?



Nearly one third of all respondents (30.7%) indicate that they are not aware of their obligations as staff members to ensure that they do not remain in a post for longer than 5 years. It seems that especially people working in the DPKO do not know about this requirement and this may be due to the contractual situation of staff in the DPKO. A total of 42% of them answered with “No” to the question. Also 26% of the staff from ECLAC and 24% of the ECA staff is not aware of this requirement. In the headquarters the portion of staff who are not aware is less (13% of UNNY, 19% of UNOG and 19.5% of UNOV).

**Indicate your experience with the mobility policy.**



**In my opinion, the policies and procedures currently in place help staff members to change job / function and move between duty stations.**

Only 7.3% strongly agree with this statement and 26.8% agree with it, whereas 35.2% disagree and 23.5% strongly disagree. Staff are clearly of the opinion that the Organization does not provide sufficient support for staff in relation to mobility.

**I would like the opportunity to move to a duty station other than the one I am currently serving in.**

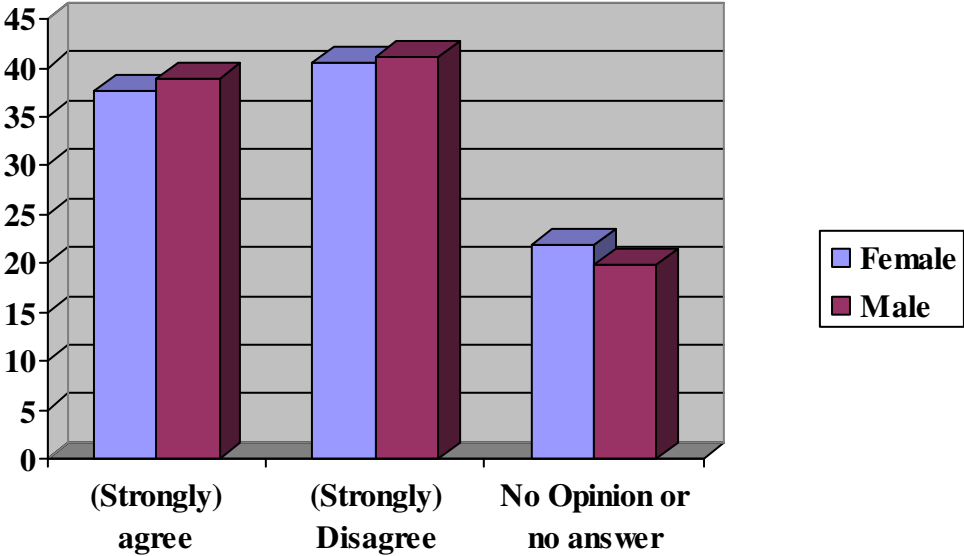
A total of 72.6% of the asked staff strongly agrees or agrees with this statement. Since a large portion of the respondents are from DPKO or other missions mostly in hardship locations, it is obvious that a great number indicated their willingness to move to another duty station. Stronger disagreement is instead expressed from the HQ duty stations. However, there is also a number of staff from HQ duty station who are interested in a change.

	DPKO	ECA	ECLAC	ESCAP	ESCWA	ICTY	UNCTAD	UNNY	UNOG	UNON	UNOV
<b>(Strongly) Agree</b>	69.8%	60.6%	63%	68.1%	71%	61.5%	80%	60.6%	47.5%	68.8%	55.5%
<b>(Strongly) Disagree</b>	10.6%	5.6%	22.2%	21.6%	9.7%	15.4%	20%	24.8%	39%	12.5%	24.5%
<b>No opinion no answer</b>	19.6%	33.8%	14.8%	10.3%	19.3%	23.1%	0%	14.6%	13.5%	18.7%	20%

**I would like the opportunity to move to another duty station, but personal/family considerations prohibit me from moving.**

Staff split in half on this statement. A total of 46.2% disagree and 43.6% support it. The issue of personal and family concerns also arises from the open question. Many employees want to get more support from the Organization in terms of education for children, housing, spouse employment and

financial incentives. An analysis of the answer by gender does not show major differences between male and female and staff.



The answers were also analyzed against the age of the participants. In the age group of the people less than 30 years 44.8% disagree or strongly disagree with the assertion, whereas only 25.9% agree or strongly agree. In the age group between 30 to 39 years there is slightly larger number of who agree or strongly agree (36.5%) while 40.6% respondents disagree or strongly disagree.

**I would move to another duty station only if I had the assurance of returning to my original duty station after a certain period.**

Nearly half of all (48.1%) employees wish to return to their original duty station after an assignment in another duty station while another 41% disagree.

**I would move to a hardship duty station (C, D, E , non-family duty station or peacekeeping mission) if the Organization would assist with my next placement following that assignment.**

A total of 69.7% of the respondents back up this statement, whereas only 23.1% disagree. The large consensus shows how important it is for the staff to have a reasonable level of job security in order to accept mobility and particularly mobility to a hardship duty station. The introduction of a mobility policy requires the assurance to staff that they have a future in the Organization and that they have the opportunity to change their duty station often and not get stuck in one duty station. The willingness to go to a hardship duty station also depends very much on the type of contract a person has. It is important for the employees to feel safe in their organization and to have a continuing contract.

**Changes to the mobility and hardship allowance to compensate staff for mobility and difficult living conditions in certain duty stations would influence my decision to seek or accept a post in the Organization outside my current duty station.**

On this statement 62% are in favor and 29% disagree. The majority of the respondents wants to obtain some incentives to work in difficult duty stations.

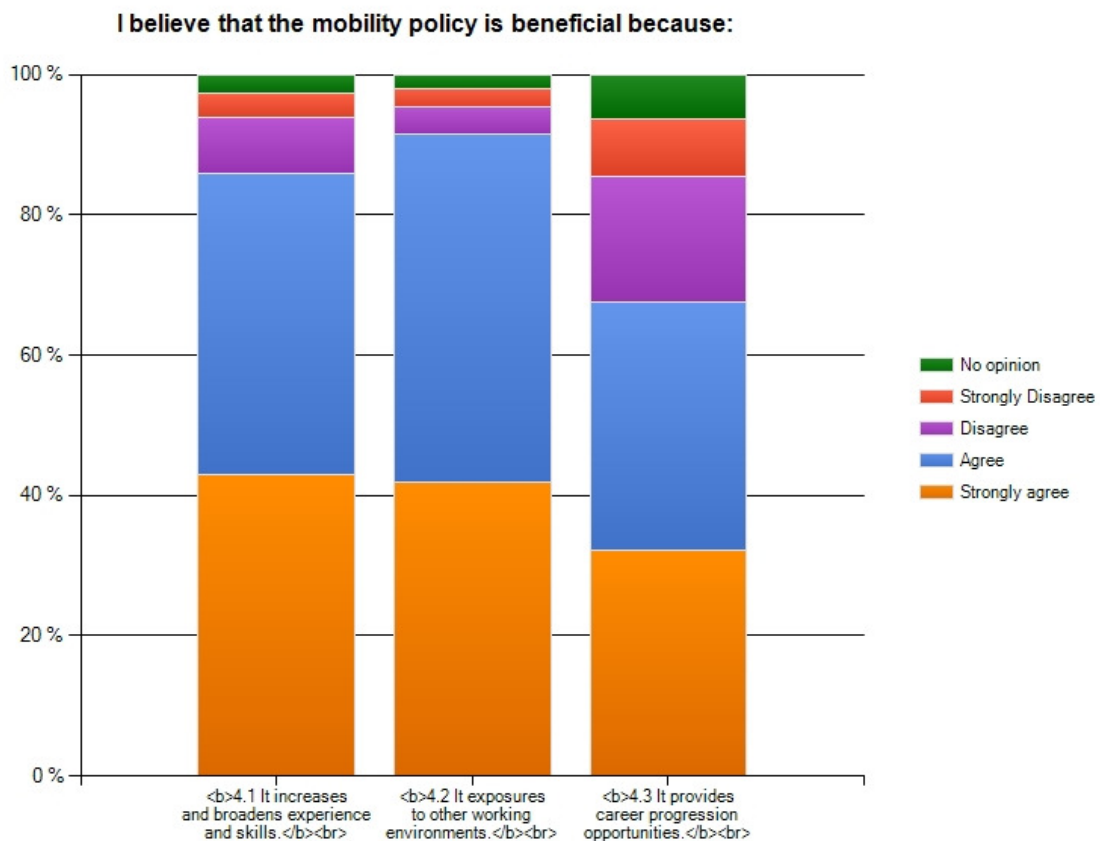
**In my opinion mobility should only be voluntary.**

On the voluntary aspect of mobility, 56.6% of the responded that mobility should be voluntary, while 38.3% are not in agreement and therefore support a mandatory mobility system. There is a clear difference on this matter among the different duty stations. Staff from the three Headquarters duty-stations based in Europe and North America think that mobility should be voluntary (New York: 66.7%, Geneva: 74.5%, and Vienna: 71%). The staff from ECA instead are largely not in favour of voluntary

mobility. The staff of DPKO are divided: 50.9% agree and 49.1% are against it. In Nairobi 57.1% employees are strictly in favour of a voluntary mobility programme.

Although the statement is supported within all age groups, “only” 52.3% of the respondents less than 30 years agree, whereas it is supported by 61.9% by staff 60 and above, and by 66.1% by the age-group 40-49 years.

The majority of both genders supports the statement with little difference between them. Women 63.1% agree or strongly agree with voluntary mobility whereas 56.9% of men support the idea.

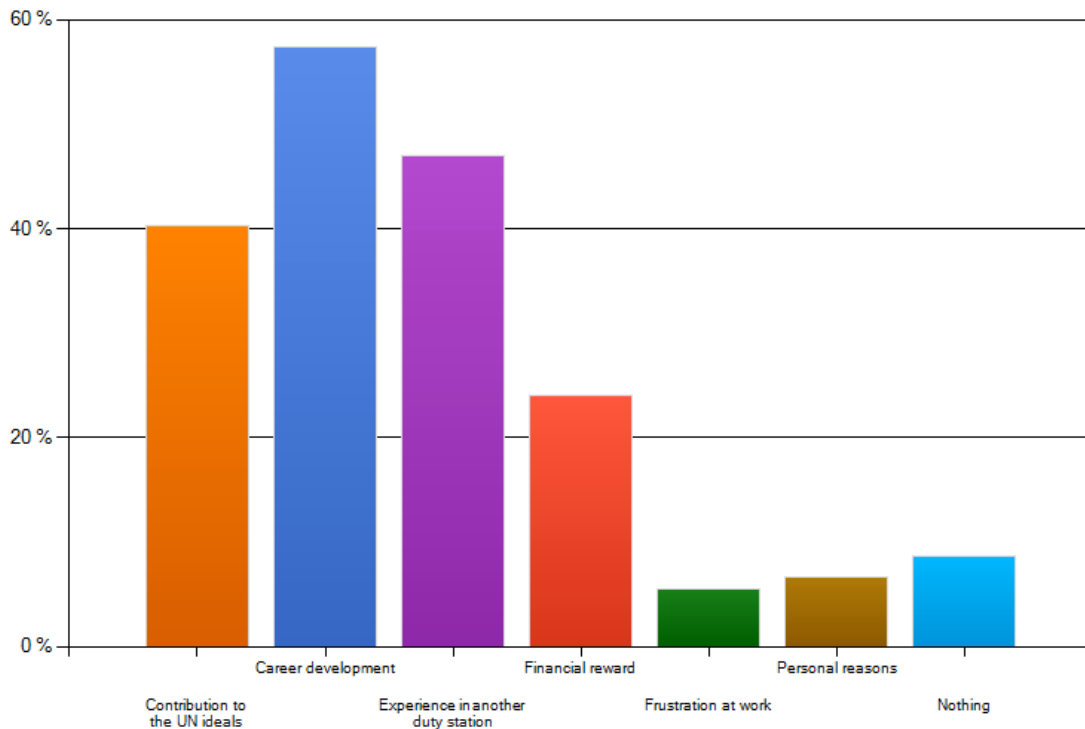


A large percentage of staff believe that the mobility policy is beneficial for specific reasons:

1. it increases and broadens experience and skills is widely supported by 85.9% of all respondents who strongly agree or agree. Only 3.5% strongly disagree.
2. even more people (91.4%) strongly agrees or agrees with the that mobility is good because it exposes to other working environments.
3. less people (67.7%) believes that mobility provides career progression opportunities.

The majority of people obviously acknowledges some positive aspects in the mobility policy. The first two questions get supported largely as they cover very broad areas. But the third question is more concrete the percentage of supporters declines considerably.

I was motivated or would be motivated to go to C, D, E or non-family duty station or peacekeeping mission because of [tick max. 2 boxes. If you tick more than 2 boxes you will not be able to go to the next page]:



In the 2009 survey the question on motivation to go on mission is not formulated in the same way as in 1995 and 2005 surveys.

1995 and 2005: What could or has motivate(d) you to go on mission in the field? (tick max. 2 boxes).

2009: I was motivated or would be motivated to go to C, D, E or non-family duty station or peacekeeping mission because of [tick max. 2 boxes].

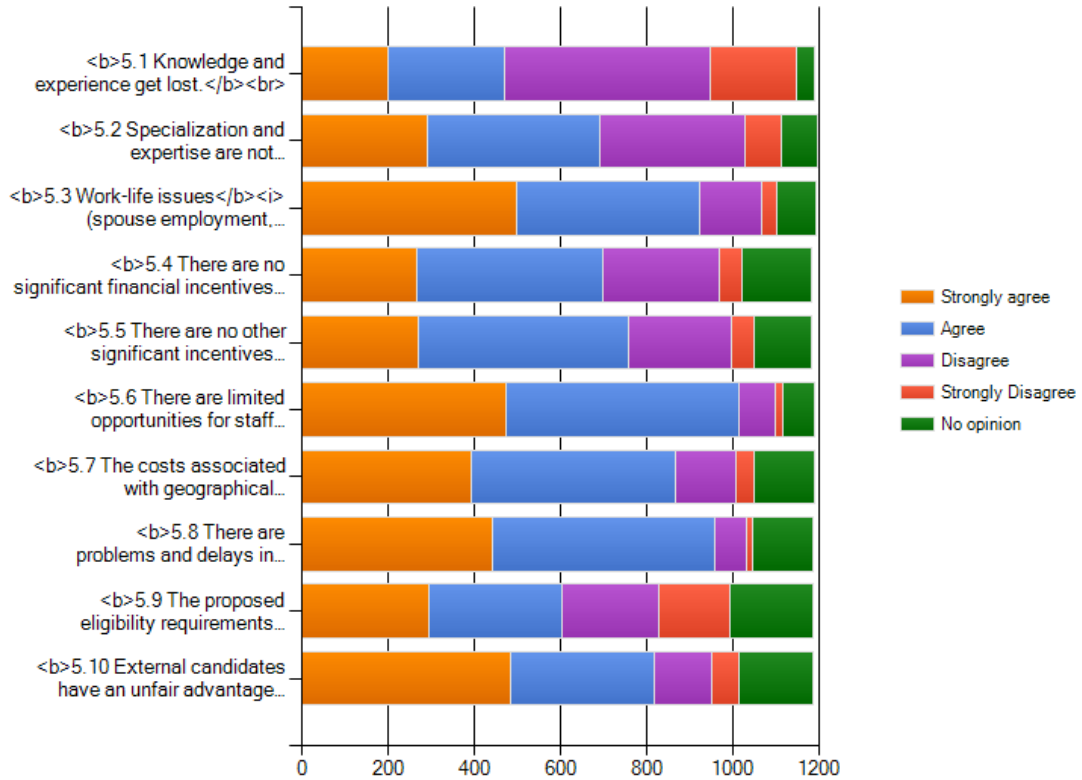
However, since there is a high degree of similarity, the answers of the three surveys could be compared.

	1995	2005	2009
Contributing to the UN ideals	31	32.6	20.7
Career development	23.5	25.6	29.6
Adventure (2005) Experience in another duty station (2009)	14.9	16	24.2
Financial reward	8.2	8.8	12.4
Frustration at work	7.2	3.5	2.8
Personal reasons	4.9	4.5	3.4
Nothing	2.9	3.7	4.4
Other	7.5	5.2	2.4



Overtime, “Contributing to the UN ideals” as a motivating factor has been declining significantly (from about 30% in 1995 and 2005 to 20% in 2009). Financial and professional factors instead have grown more and more in recent years.

**5. I believe the mobility policy is problematic because:**



In the last part of the analysis of the survey the problematic aspects of the UN mobility policy were asked. The following table shall show the *strongly agree* and *agree* combined, as well as the answer options *disagree* and *strongly disagree*.

**I believe the mobility policy is problematic because:**

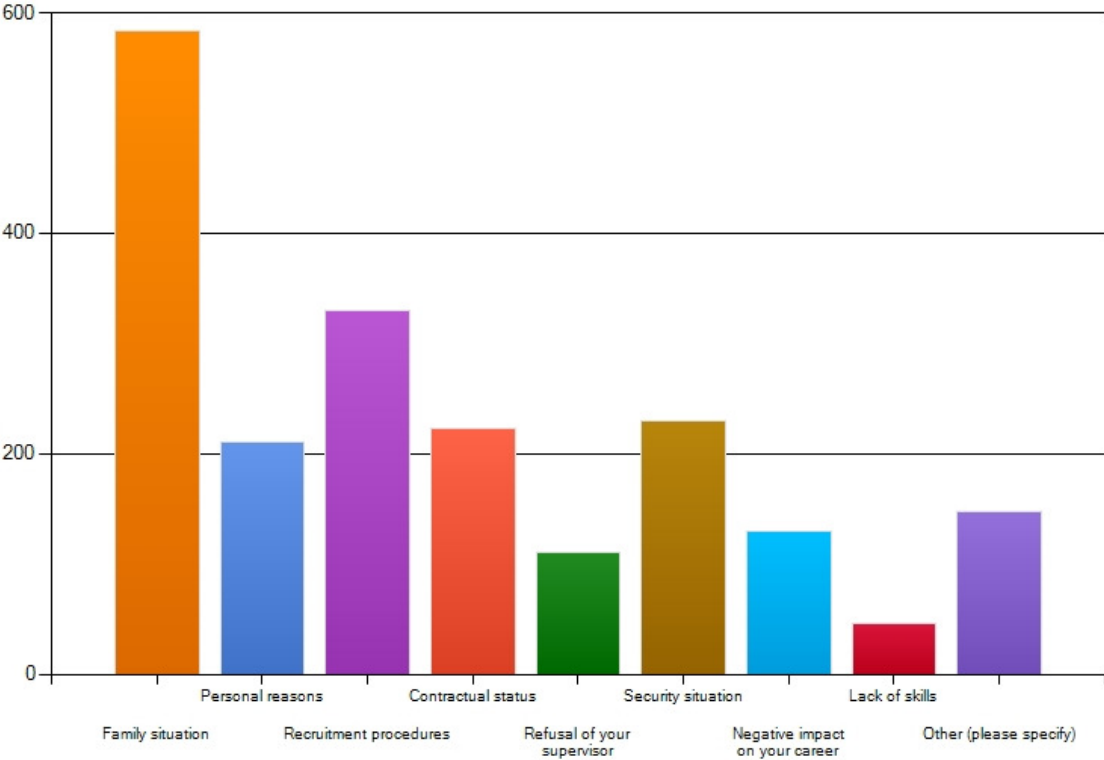
	(Strongly) agree	(Strongly) disagree
1. Knowledge and experience get lost.	39.5	56.8
2. Specialization and expertise are not adequately recognized and very competent Staff are forced to accept positions outside their area of expertise.	57.9	35.2
3. Work-life issues ( <i>spouse employment, children education, family stability, health and safety concerns</i> ) are not adequately considered by the Organization.	77.2	15.2
4. There are no significant financial incentives for mobility.	59	27.3
5. There are no other significant incentives for mobility.	64.1	24.7
6. There are limited opportunities for staff in some duty stations.	85.1	8.7
7. The costs associated with geographical mobility are considerable for the Organization and also for staff members ( <i>loss of spouse employment</i> ).	72.7	15.5
8. There are problems and delays in placing Staff.	80.6	7.5
9. The proposed eligibility requirements ( <i>1 geographical move for P5, 2 geographical moves for D1 and above including 12 months of continuous service in a hardship duty station</i> ) are difficult to fulfill for staff already on board and should be required for new staff because they have time to plan such moves during the course of their career in an organized way.	50.9	32.8
10. External candidates have an unfair advantage for high level posts since they do not have to meet the geographical move requirements.	68.9	16.6

In most issues (except for “knowledge and experience get lost”) staff agreed (varying from 50% to 85%) that mobility is problematic. For option number six (“there are limited opportunities for staff in some duty stations”) it is interesting to see which duty station support the statement.

	(Strongly) agree	(Strongly) disagree
DPKO	89.5%	10.5%
ECA	82.2%	17.8%
ECLAC	100%	-
ESCAP	93.9%	6.1%
ESCWA	100%	-
ICTR	100%	-
ICTY	100%	-
UNCTAD	100%	-
UNNY	91.9%	8.1%
UNOG	91.7%	8.3%
UNON	78.6%	21.4%
UNOV	92.7%	7.3%

The respondents from some duty stations are convinced that there are limited options for staff. Some staff working in the HQ duty stations disagree with the idea.

**5.12 In general, what has prevented or could prevent you from going on mission in the field? [tick max. 2 boxes. if you tick more than 2 boxes you will not be able to go to the next page]:**



	1995	2005	2009
Family situation		34.2	29
Personal reasons	34.2	13.6	10.5
Recruitment procedures	14.9	13.2	16.4
Contractual status	12.1	9.4	11.1
Refusal of your supervisor	14.3	9.4	5.5
Fear of risk [in 2009 "Security Situation"]	5.7	8.3	11.4
Negative impact on your career	5.4	3	6.5
Lack of skills	3	2.5	2.3
Other	10.5	6.4	7.4

Family situation and personal reasons constitute the main impediments to mobility across the three surveys (between 40% and 50%). Administrative impediments (recruitment procedures and contractual status) constitutes around 25% in the three surveys. Fear of risk (or security situation) has increased from 5.7% in 1995 to 11.4% in 2009. This clearly reflects the changes in the security situation of the UN in the world.

Many staff responded to the open question and articulated better their opinion on mobility. The issues raised were analyzed and grouped as follows.

**Family**

If the staff member asked to be mobile has a family some issues are rising up automatically. In dual-career families the spouse will most likely lose his or her employment and if there are children, they have to be taken out of their familiar environment into a new one and adequate housing has to be

found. If the staff member is asked to go a hardship duty station the separation from the family is obviously an issue. Several staff expressed the need for improvements of the host country agreements. Particularly, in relation to the working opportunity for spouses and for the possibility for family members to remain in the country when the staff member is moved to another duty station temporarily.

Many respondents of the survey pointed out that work-life issues do not always get appropriate recognition by the Organization. They ask for more benefits for the family.

Some comments of the employees of the UN are listed in the following:

*“For me what makes me resist mobility is the fact that organization cannot accommodate spouse employment; and coupled with the fact that I have a young child and hesitate to expose her to potentially hazardous security situation.”*

*“Allowing spouses to work together in the same missions.”*

*“Take seriously the spouse employment and not leave it as a policy just on paper as it is now.”*

*“Mobility is a necessary tool for UN for various reasons but extremely ineffective for people with families.”*

*“Single parents should be excluded from policy. This policy is highly discriminatory against staff members who are single parents.”*

*“Recognize that it is harder for women to move to hardship duty stations because of family reason and therefore the mobility policy is disadvantage for women.”*

### **Career**

Staff are sure that a geographical movement benefits their career. If they are moved to a hardship duty station they do not know what happens at the end of their contract. Staff do not know either, if the movement will benefit or hinder their career. Moving can be a risk for their career. Many employees feel that after completing a mission or at the end of a contract in new duty station that there is no work for them at the UN anymore.

*“Job security is the most important”*

### **Loss of experience and expertise**

The negative sides of staff mobility do not only affect the staff members who have to move. They also affect management because when the employees change their job every five years considerable expertise is lost. Staff also question the fact that many because of the mobility policy end up working in areas outside their expertise.

*“It would be beneficial to guarantee return to the original duty station. This would ensure that the experience through mobility could be used in previous post.”*

### **Additional costs**

Staff feels that mobility within the UN system causes additional costs. The rotating staff have to get trained on their new tasks and it takes time until they are as efficiently working as their predecessors. In addition, some staff pointed out to some other additional costs to mobility.

*“Hidden costs of mobility are also not accounted for by the UN as these go beyond the installation grant and shipment of household goods. Changing schools for the children and “registration fees” add up on the strain.”*

### **Competition/recruitment procedure**

Many staff are concerned that the recruitment process is not transparent and that favouritism plays a big part in terms of selection placements and promotion.

*“Many staff members would like to make a lateral move but even for that the staff has to again go through the whole process of recruitment. If the lateral moves within the mission are made easier, it would to some extent solve the problem.”*

*“I would be happy – at this stage of my career – to go to another specific duty station to gain new experience. However, my field of specialization is very specific within the UN system. There are only 1-2 other duty station I could go to. I spent personal money to travel to one of those duty stations to talk to managers there to seek opportunities for a permanent or temporary move and found it impossible within the existing means/initiatives of the UN/HRMS to do such a move.”*

*“Staff in hardship areas should be allowed to serve for a maximum four years in those areas and should automatically be re-assigned to another location with less hardship.”*

*“They should be made known and implemented right when a candidate starts work in the organization and implemented or advised then by OHRM regularly, so that they can plan their lives ahead.”*

*“A more slim lined recruitment process, with easy lateral movements, instead of today’s long haul recruitment process, that takes for years for the s/m to wait in uncertainty.”*

*“Serious, clear, transparent, predictable and enforced career development and promotion policies. Implement a serious Staffing System, not one that leaves everything on the shoulders of the staff member to “career network” half his/her work time to the detriment of work results; to find “managers that like him/her”; “to be visible”: here all depends on “who you know” and on “who are your friends”. ”*

### **Quality of life**

Moving to another duty station is likely to have an impact on the quality of life one way or the other especially when it comes to hardship duty stations and staff are concerned about this.

*“One problem I faced in Addis Ababa was the lack of involvement of the Organization in accommodation. The real estate law in Addis offers no protection to the lessee. ”*

Other concerns are expressed in relation to security conditions and arrangements in the various countries. Many staff ask for “proper security arrangements”.

*“Provide a higher standard of housing and welfare activities.”*

*“The security measures must be increased to protect staff and their families in hardship duty stations and standardized measures put in place to support victims of crime and malicious acts.”*

*“I have served on four continents and the worst part of moving is that it is incredibly time-consuming. You basically sacrifice all of your leisure time for two months before moving and at least one month upon arrival.”*

### **General problems and concerns**

No forecast for the financial implications of the implementation of the mobility policy has been made.

Despite current and planned initiatives, there are no mechanisms in place for knowledge management and knowledge sharing to prevent the potential loss of institutional memory due to increased mobility.

Lack of a clear analysis of the Organization’s needs regarding mobility to determine what type of skills, when and where they are required, coupled with a detailed inventory of current staff skills and competencies available by location.

Despite certain initiatives planned or being put in place, there are not enough incentive mechanisms to encourage staff to move.

#### **4. Issues for considerations**

Most people who responded seems to agree with the general principle of mobility but there are strong reservations on the basic conditions of the mobility program. If these are changed and improved more people would – voluntarily – take the advantage to move to another duty station.

##### **Transparency**

The issue of fairness and transparency has been highlighted with the request for the establishment of a centralized management structure for mobility, with transparent recruitment and selection criteria and the ability for OHRM to decide on the placement of staff.

##### **Incentives**

More incentives are requested to balance the losses caused by the move. Some staff indicated that a fast track promotion or preferential consideration for mobile staff and better financial incentives under the mobility and hardship scheme. Also it is important to have harmonized conditions of service, increased opportunities for training, career counselling and support with work-life issues.

##### **Specialized functions**

Many staff raised concerns on the feasibility of mobility in relation to the ability to staff to perform at their best for the organization. Mobility needs to consider the specialized functions of the staff member and ensure that their professional expertise is taken into account in the context of mobility. In particular, language staff and other specialised functions may have difficulties in moving to other duty stations because of the lack of positions.

##### **Work-life issues**

Mobility is such an important and essential topic because it affects many areas of life. It is not restricted to the working-life, but it has great impact on many work-life issues, which are considered key to an effective human resource policy. The Organization needs to make progress in advancing work-life issues that impact staff members' ability to be mobile. The survey makes clear what the main difficulties are the work-life issues. The staff ask for:

- support for spouses, dependants and other family members (including work permits and visa issues);
- Flexible working arrangements (i.e. flexible working hours, part-time work, compressed work schedules, job-sharing, phased or partial retirement and home-based work);
- Flexible leave arrangements (e.g. flexible working years and career breaks); special leave arrangements (e.g. sick-leave, family emergencies, maternity, paternity and parental leave, leave for training and studies);
- Occupational health, safety and staff security;
- Introduction of child care facilities;
- Elders care and caretaker groups;
- Induction and integration support at the receiving organizations;
- Possibility to establish a household in a duty station near the non-family duty stations to allow for periodic family reunion;
- Mobility schemes, including relocation policies.

##### **Career planning**

One of the proposal coming from staff is to allow staff to move to a different duty stations for an agreed period of time with the possibility to come back to the original duty stations or at least the certainty to move to another duty station after a minimum period of service. More staff would be willing to consider moving to other duty stations (particularly hardship stations) if they knew they did not have to “find their own way out” after some time.

##### **Better preparation**

Better preparation is necessary for staff who would like to be mobile. For example, introductory course and training on cross-cultural matters before moving to another country with the possibility of advance visit. Also, it would be good also be good to have the possibility for mobile staff to exchange of experiences of staff.

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