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Human resources management

Proposal on the movement of Secretariat staff from the General Service category to the Professional category

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with General Assembly resolution [33/143](#) of 20 December 1978, the Secretariat has restricted the recruitment of staff from the General Service and Field Service categories, up to and including the FS-5 level, to the Professional category to periodic competitive examinations, which are open to staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories under certain conditions, with placement of successful candidates confined to a limited number of P-1 and P-2 posts.

The General Assembly, in that resolution, accepted the observations and recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit, disapproving the practice of promoting staff in the General Service category near the end of their career to the Professional category based solely on seniority.

Since then, structural improvements have been introduced to the staff selection system, providing a fundamentally different context compared with 1978. Currently, the staff selection system is a fully competitive process that requires staff members to apply to job openings and complete a competitive recruitment process along with all other external and internal applicants on an equal footing and includes a review by a central review body. The underlying reason for the introduction of competitive examinations as the exclusive means of movement from the General Service category to the Professional category back in 1978 has therefore been made obsolete through those structural improvements.

Continued use of the restrictions adopted in 1978 runs counter to the principle of equal and fair treatment for all applicants. Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations states that “the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff ... shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity”. The prevailing restrictions limit the talent pool and reduce opportunities to secure talent in accordance with the Charter. They also diminish chances to progress towards equitable geographical distribution and gender



parity mandates established by the General Assembly. Within the United Nations common system, the Secretariat is the only organization that bars certain applicants from competing for open positions owing simply to their status as serving staff members in specific categories, consequently making the Secretariat a less attractive employer for a considerable pool of applicants. The continued restrictions also have a negative impact on staff morale and career satisfaction among staff in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category, a core pillar of the Secretariat workforce.

Given the structural improvements to the staff selection system, the Secretary-General had put forward two proposals to allow all staff serving in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category to apply for positions in the Professional category, in 2016 and 2018. In response, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions recognized “the qualifications possessed by staff serving in the General Service and related categories and the need to improve their opportunities for career development” and recommended that a pilot project be developed. However, the General Assembly did not adopt a resolution on human resources management at its seventy-third session, and the prevailing mandate from resolution [33/143](#) remains in place.

Addressing the concerns previously raised by the Joint Inspection Unit, and taking into consideration the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the new proposal by the Secretary-General for removing eligibility restrictions advances equal and fair treatment for all applicants, is aimed at furthering human resources imperatives such as equitable geographical distribution and puts the Secretariat on a par with other United Nations system organizations. The Secretary-General proposes to allow staff members in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category to apply for:

(a) Positions in the Professional category that are not subject to the system of desirable ranges and are located in a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is assigned;

(b) Positions at the P-3 or higher levels that are subject to the system of desirable ranges and are located in a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is assigned, when the staff member is a national from an unrepresented or underrepresented Member State at the time of application.

The proposal also includes removing the “G to P” element from the young professionals programme, which will be used exclusively to recruit young professional candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States.

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution [33/143](#) of 20 December 1978, requested that the Secretary-General regulate the movement of staff from the General Service category to the Professional category through competitive methods of selection. It further specified the exclusive use of competitive examinations in its resolution [35/210](#).

2. At the core of the resolutions was the expectation that recruitment of Professional staff from the General Service category should be conducted exclusively through competitive methods of selection and that selected staff must fulfil requirements with regard to work experience and post-secondary education for jobs in the Professional category.¹

3. Following the adoption of the resolutions, the Secretariat introduced a programme of competitive examinations for positions at the P-1 and P-2 levels for the recruitment of staff members from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States and for the movement of staff in the General Service and related categories to the Professional category as set out in Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/173](#) of 29 August 1979. Only staff members in the General Service and related categories with five or more years of continuous service in the Secretariat and post-secondary educational qualifications were allowed to sit for the examination. At the time, a limited number of the 30 per cent of posts subject to geographical distribution at the P-1 and P-2 levels were, in accordance with the resolution, designated for recruitment through competitive examinations of such eligible staff members. Pursuant to resolution [55/258](#), adopted in 2001, the share of positions available for successful candidates was further reduced to 10 per cent of available posts at the P-1 and P-2 levels.

4. The resolution adopted in 1978 followed the observations and recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit in its reports from 1971 to 1978,² as well as by the then Administrative Management Service in 1974.³ The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in its report to the General Assembly, agreed with the Unit and the Service.⁴ The Unit came to the conclusion that the "practice of recruiting General Service staff, near the end of their career, to the Professional category with no other requirement as to qualifications than their seniority"⁵ should be discontinued, as it led to a general decline in the level of university qualifications among staff in the Professional category and had undesirable effects with regard to age and equitable geographical distribution of staff. The issues raised by the Joint Inspection Unit will be covered in detail in section III of the present report.

5. It is important to note that, at the core, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Administrative Management Service highlighted that the practice of promoting staff from the General Service category to the Professional category at the time was incompatible with competitive recruitment methods and that staff in the General Service category "should be free to compete on equal terms with other candidates for posts not subject to competitive examination. In order to avoid any favouritism, however, it would be well to be extremely strict in defining the level of qualifications in terms of the degree or diploma standard required, and not to be content with vague

¹ Resolution [33/143](#), sect. I, para. 1 (g).

² See [A/8454](#) (Parts I and II) (transmitting JIU/REP/71/7), [A/31/264](#) and [A/33/228](#).

³ See [A/C.5/1601/Add.1](#).

⁴ [A/9841](#), para. 19.

⁵ JIU/REP/71/7 (Summary), p. 9.

references to a level of knowledge”.⁶ The Administrative Management Service offered recommendations emphasizing a similar point: “The General Service and Field Service staff who meet the essential academic language and geographical distribution requirements should be permitted to enter into competition for posts at the P-1 or P-2 level.”⁷

6. The current staff selection system, which also covers the promotion of staff, has fundamentally changed from the practice that led to the restrictions decided by the General Assembly in 1978 and would fully meet the requirements stated above by the Joint Inspection Unit and the Administrative Management Service. Today, the staff selection system as set out in administrative instruction [ST/AI/2010/3/Rev.2](#) requires that all applicants, including serving staff, meet the requirements of the job opening, results in the selection of the candidate considered to be best suited for the function and includes a review by a central review body. The system includes a competitive assessment and an independent review that ensures that applicants were evaluated on the basis of the corresponding evaluation criteria.

7. Therefore, the use of competitive examinations as the exclusive means of movement from the General Service category to the Professional category has been made obsolete through the application of the staff selection system. The core concerns of the General Assembly regarding the use of competitive methods of recruitment and necessary qualifications to perform the functions of Professional staff expressed in resolution [33/143](#) would be fully addressed by staff in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category being allowed to compete for job openings in the Professional category under the staff selection system.

8. It should be noted that, already in 1968, the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat⁸ provided a clear description of the standards that should apply to promotions of staff members in the General Service category to the Professional category:

“It was the view of the Committee that appointment to the professional category should be freely available to general service employees who fully meet the requirements for professional service. However, these transfers between categories should not be used to reward general service employees for past service. They must be well qualified to perform the new work at acceptable professional standards. It was the further view of the Committee that such transfers should occur only where the candidate concerned:

“(a) Has satisfied all technical requirements for appointment to the professional category; or

“(b) Has clearly demonstrated his ability to carry on work at the professional level; and

“(c) Is willing to undertake fully the commitments of officers in the higher category, including service at other duty stations as required.”⁹

9. These standards outlined by the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat in 1968, and referred to by the Joint Inspection Unit in 1971, are precisely

⁶ JIU/REP/71/7, para. 426.

⁷ [A/C.5/1601/Add.1](#), recommendation 28.

⁸ The Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat consisted of seven members appointed by the Secretary-General in 1968 with wide geographical distribution, including members who have experience of the work of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations and the work of the Secretariat.

⁹ [A/7359](#), para. 115.

the standards that would be applied today if staff in the General Service and related categories and FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category were able to apply for positions in the Professional category through the staff selection system. In the 1970s, however, these standards had not yet been established, and the introduction of a dedicated competitive examination was the only path.

10. This leaves the current restrictions to an open talent marketplace in the context of a competitive staff selection system in stark contrast to the principle of equal and fair treatment for all applicants and is no longer aligned with the Charter of the United Nations, Article 101, paragraph 3, of which states that “the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff ... shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity”. The current staff selection policy restricts the talent pool and possible sources of diverse workforce supply for the Secretariat and reduces the opportunity to secure longer-term talent in accordance with the Charter, as it prohibits staff serving in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category to compete for job openings in the Professional category.

11. With the staff selection system in place to ensure competitive methods of selection for Professional staff with a review by a central review body, and given the impact of the current restrictions on the equal treatment of all applicants, the misalignment with Article 101 (3) of the Charter, and the lost opportunities to consider potentially qualified applicants to further equitable geographical distribution, those restrictions are no longer coherent with the intentions of the General Assembly as articulated in resolution [33/143](#).

12. Lastly, the Secretariat is the only organization in the United Nations common system that bars groups of serving staff members from competing for vacant positions in the Professional category owing to their grade. No other organization of the common system is limiting its access to a diverse and qualified applicant pool or denying serving staff the chance to compete within a staff selection system that is itself grounded in a competitive process, which is fundamentally different from the situation in 1978.

Previous proposals by the Secretary-General

13. Over the past decade, the Secretary-General has put forward two proposals for endorsement by the General Assembly to revisit the eligibility restrictions for staff to compete for positions in the Professional category.¹⁰ Although unsuccessful, the consideration of the proposals by the Advisory Committee and the Assembly delineated prevailing concerns and highlighted the need to introduce a thorough analysis and a more nuanced proposal that is fully aligned with human resources priorities defined in Article 101 (3) of the Charter and reaffirmed in resolution [77/278](#).¹¹ The analysis and proposal contained in the present report incorporate these priorities to offer a compelling case for removing a long-standing obstacle in reforming human resources management, bringing the Secretariat to the level of other organizations of the United Nations common system in line with ongoing policy reforms and addressing a long-standing gap in the principle of equal treatment.

14. In 2016, the Advisory Committee expressed an unfavourable view of the Secretary-General’s proposal contained in his report ([A/71/323](#)), stating that “the Secretary-General has not undertaken sufficient analysis of the potential impact on human resources objectives resulting from the proposed elimination of the examination requirement for staff in the General Service and related categories to be

¹⁰ [A/71/323](#), paras. 53–58, and [A/73/372/Add.1](#), paras. 82–90.

¹¹ See paras. 10, 29 and 31.

eligible to move to the Professional category”,¹² and recommended against approval of the proposal.

15. Taking the views expressed by the Advisory Committee¹³ into account, the Secretary-General put forward an updated proposal to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session.¹⁴ The view of the Advisory Committee at that time was more favourable towards the proposal. It recognized “the qualifications possessed by staff serving in the General Service and related categories and the need to improve their opportunities for career development”.¹⁵ The Committee expressed the view that “the Secretary-General should develop a proposal for a pilot project ... in order to achieve equal opportunities for recruitment to entry-level Professional posts, including career opportunities for staff members in the General Service and related categories”.¹⁶ However, the Committee also pointed out that some of the issues originally identified by the Joint Inspection Unit “continue to be relevant”,¹⁷ which has prompted a detailed review of those issues in the present report.

16. The General Assembly, however, did not adopt a resolution on human resources management at its seventy-third session, and the decision in its resolution [33/143](#) remains in place.

II. Long-term impact of recruitment restrictions

17. The prevailing restrictions for staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories to apply for positions in the Professional category stand in sharp contrast to the principle of equal treatment of all applicants and limit the Secretariat’s opportunities to secure the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity by constraining the supply. The analysis below will illustrate the unintended long-term impact of restrictions on possible talent supply and the negative impact on staff members, in particular those at the G-6, G-7 and FS-5 levels, who make up around 18 per cent of the Secretariat staff population.

Reduced access to talent

18. The filling of positions in high demand, in particular at the more junior levels, constitutes a challenge at times for many organizations, including the Secretariat. This applies especially to positions in the area of data management and analysis, as well as functions associated with digital technologies, for which global demand from the public and private sectors is high and accelerating. Allowing staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories to compete for positions in the Professional category under the staff selection system would provide a pool of talent to be considered for the recruitment needs for hard-to-fill positions and would fulfil the intent of Article 101 (3) of the Charter by removing constraints to securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.

19. To estimate such a pool of potential talent from relevant General Service and Field Service categories, an analysis of functional titles of current staff members at the G-6, G-7 and FS-5 levels has been undertaken. For instance, in the area of digital transformation and the data analysis job family, table 1 shows that at least 590 staff

¹² [A/71/557](#), para. 44.

¹³ [A/73/497](#), paras. 24–31.

¹⁴ [A/73/372/Add.1](#), para. 90.

¹⁵ [A/73/497](#), para. 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 27.

members at the G-6, G-7 and FS-5 levels work in data and digital-related jobs – functions that are hard to fill for any organization, including the Secretariat.

Table 1
Staff members at the G-6, G-7 and FS-5 levels performing digital transformation and data analysis tasks as at 31 December 2022

<i>Functional title</i>	<i>Number of staff</i>
Information Systems Assistant	247
Information Technology Assistant	78
Senior Information Systems Assistant	64
Statistics Assistant	63
Senior Statistics Assistant	41
Information Management Assistant	24
Senior Information Technology Assistant	23
Digital Communications Assistant	17
Geographic Information Assistant	8
Data Management Associate	7
Data Analysis Assistant	6
Information Systems Officer	5
Data Engineering Assistant	3
Geographic Information Systems Assistant	2
Data Analyst	1
Data Associate	1
Total	590

20. Staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories performing tasks in the data and digital-related areas could provide a pool of candidates to meet the needs of the Secretariat in line with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere, if they were allowed to compete under the staff selection system.

21. In addition, staff members serving in G-6, G-7 and FS-5 functions have on average more than 10 years of service. These years of service bring a wealth of experience with an in-depth understanding of operations, policies and procedures of the Secretariat. Such contextual and institutional knowledge is particularly important in an organization with very particular operational environments, governance structures and policies, where a detailed understanding of operations is essential to ensuring business continuity while advancing continuous improvement and innovation. The lack of opportunity for staff in the General Service and Field Service categories to compete for positions in the Professional category artificially blocks access to this talent pool.

22. Moreover, staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories are multilingual. An analysis of more than 10,000 staff members selected for job openings at all General Service levels and at the FS-4 and FS-5 levels since 2017 showed that 34 per cent are fluent in two and 7 per cent are fluent in three official languages, according to the application data. This translates to more than 4,000 staff members recruited to the General Service and Field Service categories fluent in two or more official languages, who could, therefore, present a potential talent pool to advance multilingualism in the Professional category.

Reduced levels of career satisfaction

23. Over time, the restrictions have led to career dissatisfaction, a sense of unfairness, and a lack of belonging of staff in the General Service category. Data from the 2021 United Nations Staff Engagement Survey showed that staff members at the G-6 and G-7 levels, who were most likely to meet requirements of positions in the Professional category, had the lowest career satisfaction score, 8 to 11 points lower than the overall career satisfaction level of all staff in the General Service category, given the limited opportunities to further advance in the organizational hierarchy despite their qualifications and ambitions (see table 2).

Table 2

Career satisfaction score from the United Nations Staff Engagement Survey of 2021

<i>Category/level</i>	<i>Score</i>
General Service	59
G-6	51
G-7	48

24. In addition, a survey conducted in 2016 among staff members in the General Service category showed that more than half of the 4,675 respondents were not aware of the eligibility restrictions when they joined the Organization. Often, the realization about the limits to their career advancement occurred at a later point, causing a drop in career satisfaction and a sense of unfairness at a time when they still had many years of productive service ahead of them.

Resignations

25. Given the current restrictions, staff members in the General Service category and relevant levels in the Field Service category wanting to advance in their career beyond the highest levels in the General Service category or the FS-5 level often apply for positions outside the Secretariat in other United Nations system organizations. When selected by a different organization, staff resign from the Secretariat to take up their new position. Each of those resignations from the Secretariat is a talent loss to the Organization, and those staff members bring their knowledge and experience gained in the Secretariat to other organizations that do not have such restrictions. In 2021, 195 staff members at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels holding an appointment other than a temporary appointment resigned without being reappointed in 2021 or 2022. While individual resignations may be the result of various circumstances, the fact that the resignation rate of staff at some of these levels is higher than the overall resignation rate points to the issue of lacking career options for them, with resignation from the Secretariat as the only option left.

26. As shown above, the existing eligibility restrictions have a negative impact on both the Organization and staff. Blocked access to a potential pool of experienced and multilingual talent, especially for hard-to-fill jobs or jobs that require deeper institutional knowledge as well as reduced staff morale and career satisfaction, is negatively affecting the achievement of the long-term human resources outcome of a multi-skilled, mobile, engaged and adaptable workforce.

III. Analysis of issues that led to recruitment restrictions

27. It is important to note that the shortcomings highlighted by the Joint Inspection Unit in its reports from 1971 to 1978 occurred as a consequence of the practice to recruit “General Service staff, near the end of their career, to the Professional category with no other requirement as to qualifications than their seniority”.¹⁸ At the time, an annual department-by-department review to promote General Service staff to the Professional category was conducted, lacking the rigour and standardization of a competitive recruitment process and clearly defined job-related requirements. The absence of a competitive process that also applies the requirements of a staff selection system for promotions marks the fundamentally different approach of 1978 compared with today’s practice.

28. The staff selection policy (ST/AI/2010/3/Rev.2) provides a fundamentally different context today, as it requires a competitive recruitment process, which would also apply to staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories applying to job openings in the Professional category. Those who are interested in a Professional-level job opening would have to complete a competitive recruitment process, that is, submit an application as with all other applicants, meet the same eligibility requirements and pass the same prescreening and assessment procedure to be considered for selection. Therefore, the underlying reason for the introduction of competitive examinations as the exclusive means of movement from the General Service category to the Professional category until 1978 has been made obsolete through the application of the staff selection system.

29. Besides the fundamentally different context for the possible movement of staff in the General Service or Field Service category to the Professional category created by the staff selection system, the analysis below details the potential impact and the applicability of the concerns raised by the Joint Inspection Unit when it recommended eligibility restrictions in 1978. A review of current data relating to the matters raised by the Unit provides a solid evidence base for reconsidering the continued need for the current eligibility restrictions and addresses the concern raised by the Advisory Committee in document A/73/497 about the continued relevance of some of the issues identified by the Unit.

30. The Joint Inspection Unit found in 1978 that the practice of promoting staff in the General Service category to the Professional category without a competitive process needed to be restricted for the following reasons:

- (a) It was practised as a reward for long service;
- (b) It lowered the academic qualification standards in the Professional category;
- (c) It led to the recruitment of “older” staff into “junior”-level positions;
- (d) It increased the average age;
- (e) It reduced the number of P-2 posts for young people;
- (f) It had a negative impact on equitable geographical distribution;
- (g) It did not offer those General Service staff recruited to the Professional category further prospects for promotion;
- (h) It led to promotions only within a department.

31. Each section below corresponds to issues raised by the Joint Inspection Unit and uses up-to-date data and analysis to assess their relevance.

¹⁸ JIU/REP/71/7 (Summary), p. 9.

A. Recruitment to the Professional category as a reward for long service

32. The Joint Inspection Unit criticized the practice of “promoting staff members to the professional category from other categories, especially in the case of the General Service staff who ... tended to receive their promotions to the professional category towards the end of their career as a reward for long service”.¹⁹ The analysis below demonstrates that this concern is obsolete because the prevailing staff selection policy does not permit any movement without meeting the requirements of job openings, and because it is not supported by the current data on staff in the General Service category who moved to the Professional category, either through the competitive examination or following their resignation from a job in the General Service category.

33. With regard to current data on movements of staff from the General Service category to the Professional category through the staff selection system and the concern that these occur towards the end of their career, it is important to note that the average age of the 564 staff members who previously served in the General Service category and are currently serving in the Professional and higher categories was 36.8 years at the end of their incumbency of a post in the General Service category. This indicates that such movements occurred 28 years ahead of their expected retirement, as illustrated in table 3.

34. Those former General Service staff members who were recruited at some point through a competitive process under the staff selection system to a job opening in the Professional category had an average length of service in the General Service category of around seven years. The average length of service at their highest level in the General Service category before recruitment to the Professional category either through the competitive examination or after their separation was around 3.6 years, as shown in table 3.

Table 3
Staff members formerly in the General Service category and currently in the Professional and higher categories as at 31 December 2022, by level, average length of service and average age

<i>Last GS level prior to move to P category</i>	<i>Average length of service in GS category prior to move to P category (years)</i>	<i>Number of staff</i>	<i>Average length of service in last GS level prior to move to P category (years)</i>	<i>Average age at the end of GS incumbency prior to move to P category</i>
G-7	11.2	98	4.8	41.1
G-6	8.4	226	4.3	38.1
G-5	5.3	138	2.7	35.5
G-4	3.8	75	2.4	32.1
G-3	2.3	27	2.0	29.9
Total	7.2	564^a	3.6	36.8

Abbreviations: GS, General Service; P, Professional.

^a The 564 staff members moved from the General Service category to the Professional and higher categories with or without separation from the Secretariat, that is, some came through the “G to P” examinations, while others were separated from the Organization before recruitment into the Professional category.

35. The current data reveal that those movements of staff members from the General Service category to the Professional category through the staff selection system, after their separation, or through the examination under the young professionals

¹⁹ A/32/327, para. 81.

programme did not occur towards the end of their careers. On the contrary, staff members in the Professional category recruited from the General Service category spent on average 7.2 years in the General Service category or 3.6 years in the last General Service level preceding their movement. They were, on average, 36.8 years old at the end of their incumbency in the General Service category and had at least 25 years of service remaining before retirement.

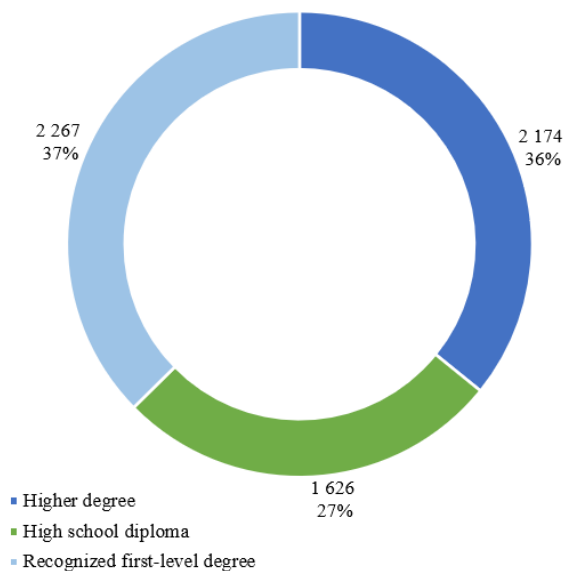
B. Academic qualifications

36. In its report, the Joint Inspection Unit criticized the practice of promoting General Service staff to the Professional category as having “very serious drawbacks”²⁰ such as “a general decline in the level of university qualifications among the staff”.²¹ The analysis below provides the factual basis to conclude that this concern raised by the Unit has become obsolete, given the procedures established by the administrative instruction on the staff selection system (ST/AI/2010/3/Rev.2), which stipulates that all applicants must meet the academic qualifications required for the job opening. The minimum education requirement for positions in the Professional category is a recognized first-level degree. This would also apply to General Service or Field Service staff competing for a job opening in the Professional category. They must meet this academic qualification requirement to pass the screening, unlike the practice before 1978. In addition, the current data reveal that staff currently serving in the General Service category possess significantly higher levels of academic qualifications compared with the time of the report.

37. A review of data covering applicants selected for positions at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels over the past five years revealed that over 70 per cent possessed either a recognized first-level degree or a higher degree, including a master’s, doctorate or post-graduate degree. Only 27 per cent of applications had a high school diploma as the highest educational level, as illustrated in the figure below.

Number and percentage of highest educational levels in selected applications to job openings at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels, 2018–2022

(Population: 6,067)



²⁰ JIU/REP/71/7, para. 425.

²¹ Ibid.

38. The data show that not meeting the academic requirements being one of the main consequences of the past practice, as criticized by the Joint Inspection Unit in the 1970s, is not applicable as a result of the use of the staff selection system and that it is no longer relevant, given the concerned staff members' level of academic qualifications.

C. Impact on age

39. In its report, the Joint Inspection Unit criticized the practice of recruiting General Service staff to the Professional category as leading to "the recruitment of older staff (in most cases over 40 years of age) to the P-1/P-2 level, which should be a 'junior' level; it is thus a major factor in the ageing of the Secretariat".²² The analysis below provides the updated factual basis for the impact on age of the recruitment of staff from the General Service category to job openings in the Professional category. The current data reveal that such recruitment did not increase the average age of staff to "junior"-level positions compared with the time of the report, when such promotions took place at the end of staff members' careers.

40. The data show that, on average, former General Service staff who are currently serving in the Professional category were younger at the time of appointment to the Professional category than the average age of currently serving P-2 and P-3 staff members. At the time of appointment to a Professional position, former General Service staff had a median age of 39 years, while staff members at the P-2 and P-3 levels, as at 31 December 2022, were older, with a median age of 42 years, as shown in table 4.

Table 4

Median age of staff members at the P-1 to P-3 levels, and staff in Professional positions who started their careers in the General Service category

<i>Category/level</i>	<i>Median age (years)</i>	<i>Remark</i>
P-1 to P-3	42	Current staff; age as at 31 December 2022
General Service category to Professional category	39	Age at time of recruitment to Professional position

41. The population of former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories also includes candidates who successfully passed the "G to P" examination and were recruited to positions in the Professional category. To take the examination, candidates must have fulfilled the requirement of five years of prior service in the General Service category, even though they may meet the educational, experience and language requirements at an earlier stage in their career in the General Service category. This artificially increases their average age when they move into the Professional category through the "G to P" examination. In addition, staff members aiming to compete in the "G to P" examination have to prepare for the test while they are full-time employees, which may also contribute to further increases in the average age. Enabling staff in the General Service and relevant levels in the Field Service categories to compete for job openings will remove these requirements and is likely to lower their average age at the time of possible recruitment.

D. Opportunities and needs at junior professional levels

42. The Joint Inspection Unit, in its report, criticized the practice of admitting General Service staff members to the Professional category as reducing the "number

²² Ibid.

of P-1/P-2 posts which could be offered to young people with a high level of university education and trained in modern disciplines”.²³ To understand the scope of opportunities at the junior levels in the Professional category, the present report provides an analysis of: (a) vacancy rates for positions in relevant Professional levels; and (b) identified areas in which it was difficult for the Secretariat to fill jobs at relevant Professional levels and that could benefit from a larger applicant pool.

43. As at 31 December 2022, around 20 per cent of positions at the P-2 and P-3 levels and funded through any budget, including temporary positions, were vacant.²⁴ It appears that there are sufficient opportunities for staff in the General Service and Field Service categories to compete for vacant positions in the Professional category and that this applicant pool could help to fill vacant positions following a competitive process under the staff selection system.

44. Furthermore, possible applicants at the G-5 to G-7 levels may offer an opportunity to improve gender parity in peacekeeping operations and special political missions. As at 30 April 2023, 52 per cent of staff at the G-5 to G-7 levels were women. This is higher than the proportion of women in peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other political presences at the P-1 to P-3 levels, as illustrated in table 5. In accordance with the Secretary-General’s system-wide strategy on gender parity, the representation of women in the Professional category shall be between 47 and 53 per cent. Removing the eligibility restrictions could contribute to achieving a higher representation of women at the P-1 to P-3 levels, particularly in peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other political presences.

Table 5

Number and percentage of Secretariat staff at the G-5 to G-7 levels and staff in peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other political presences at the P-1 to P-3 levels, by gender, as at 30 April 2023

	<i>Secretariat (G-5 to G-7)</i>		<i>Peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other political presences (P-1 to P-3)</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Women	4 984	52	519	39.1
Men	4 582	48	808	60.9
Total	9 539	100	1 327	100

45. The analysis above illustrates that removing existing restrictions may potentially help to address staffing challenges and does not appear to reduce opportunities for other applicants.

E. Impact on geographical composition

46. In its report from 1974,²⁵ the Joint Inspection Unit criticized the practice of admitting General Service staff members to the Professional category as creating “an obstacle to the application of the principle of geographical distribution since it results

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics” for 2022 (A/78/569). Included are established posts, general temporary assistance for a finite duration, general temporary assistance for a finite duration for peacekeeping, voluntary contributions posts, and temporary posts active and funded as at 31 December 2022.

²⁵ See A/33/228.

in the recruitment, at the P-1 to P-2 level, of large numbers of staff from overrepresented countries”.²⁶ In the report, the Unit indicated that during the years 1971 to 1975 “51 out of the 53 staff members promoted to the Professional category were from overrepresented or normally represented countries, and only 2 from underrepresented countries”.²⁷ In other words, 96 per cent of staff members who were promoted from the General Service category to the Professional category at the time of the report were nationals of Member States that were overrepresented or within range during those years.

47. To understand the possible impact of staff in the General Service and Field Service categories applying to job openings in the Professional category on the geographical composition of staff in that category, the present report provides: (a) a comparative analysis of nationalities in the General Service category and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category with those in the Professional and higher categories; and (b) an analysis of the nationalities of staff who advanced from the General Service category to the Professional and higher categories.

Composition of the staff population

48. It is important to note that, for the purpose of the present analysis, nationalities of staff members at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels, as well as all staff in the Professional and higher categories, were considered with regard to the representation status of a Member State under the system of desirable ranges, regardless of whether the staff members had geographical status.

49. The current composition of nationalities of staff members at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels, by geographical representation status of Member States, as at 31 December 2022 was reviewed. The data reveal that 18.7 per cent (2,053 staff members) were nationals of underrepresented Member States, along with 0.3 per cent (34 staff members) who were nationals of unrepresented Member States, under the system of desirable ranges as at 31 December 2022 (see table 6).

Table 6

Number and percentage of staff members at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels, by geographical representation status, as at 31 December 2022

<i>Representation status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Unrepresented	34	0.3
Underrepresented	2 053	18.7
Within range	4 460	40.6
Overrepresented	4 387	39.9
Other	64	0.6
Total	10 998^a	100.0

^a Including staff from the State of Palestine and staff who are stateless.

50. The composition by nationality of staff members at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels compares favourably to the composition in the Professional and higher categories (see table 7), thereby providing a pool of possible applicants that could have a positive impact on equitable geographical distribution.

²⁶ Ibid., sect. II.1.

²⁷ Ibid., sect. II.2, para. (a).

51. For example, among staff in the General Service and Field Service categories, there is a somewhat higher share of nationals of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States. This provides the possibility of having more applicants with nationalities from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States as currently represented in the Professional and higher categories in the possible pool of applications for job openings. Specifically, there were three unique nationalities at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels, which were not represented in the Professional and higher categories, and over 2,000 staff members with nationalities from underrepresented Member States, which could present potential opportunities to decrease the number of underrepresented Member States in the Secretariat following competitive recruitment processes.

Table 7

Number and percentage of staff members in the Professional and higher categories (up to the D-2 level), by geographical representation status, as at 31 December 2022

<i>Representation status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Unrepresented	23	0.2
Underrepresented	2 295	17.0
Within range	5 698	42.2
Overrepresented	5 425	40.2
Other ^a	49	0.4
Total	13 490^b	100

^a Including staff from the State of Palestine and staff who are stateless.

^b Including all staff with and without geographical status.

52. With regard to the composition of the nationalities of former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories by geographical representation status of Member States as at 31 December 2022, the data showed that nationals of underrepresented Member States constituted a larger share among this staff group (30 per cent) than among the general population of staff in the Professional and higher categories (17 per cent), as illustrated in table 8.

Table 8

Number and percentage of former General Service staff members in the Professional and higher categories as at 31 December 2022, by geographical representation status

<i>Representation status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Underrepresented	167	29.6
Within range	187	33.2
Overrepresented	208	36.9
Other	2	0.4
Total	564^a	100.0

^a Including staff from the State of Palestine and staff who are stateless.

53. As shown in table 8, the share of former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories who are nationals of Member States that were

within range and overrepresented as at 31 December 2022 was 26 percentage points lower than what was highlighted in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit.²⁸ This demonstrates that the potential impact on equitable geographical distribution for former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories is much more favourable in 2023 than in 1975.

54. As seen in the analysis above, the latest data indicated that the proportion of former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories who were nationals of Member States that were within range or overrepresented significantly decreased compared with the 1970s. They also showed that current staff in the General Service and related categories could contribute to achieving a more equitable geographical distribution of the Secretariat, if they were able to participate in the competitive recruitment process and in combination with the requirement that, if applying to a position that is subject to the system of desirable ranges, they have to be a national of an unrepresented or underrepresented Member State at the time of application.

F. Career prospects

55. In its report,²⁹ the Joint Inspection Unit pointed out that those staff in the General Service category promoted to the Professional category at junior professional levels “usually have no perspective for further promotion, and this is contrary to the idea that the junior professional grades should be reserved for young people with good academic qualifications capable, with time and experience of assuming higher level duties”.³⁰ To assess whether the concern about a lack of further career progression raised by the Unit is still valid, the analysis below was conducted on former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories. The data provide a snapshot of current staff but are indicative of the potential of staff moving from the General Service category to the Professional category for assuming higher-level duties.

56. The data of the 564 former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories demonstrate that 79.3 per cent of them (or 447 staff) are on posts higher than the P-2 level. Indeed, former General Service staff advanced to all levels, including senior levels up to the D-2 level and beyond (although those are not included among the 447 staff), and there is no observed career ceiling once they compete under the staff selection system.

G. Promotion within a department

57. In its report,³¹ the Joint Inspection Unit pointed out that nearly all of the promotions of General Service staff to the Professional category occurred within their own departments. The Unit criticized that the promotions had been “made on the basis of considerations relating to the internal management of the departments”³² and that candidates from other departments and those with higher qualifications had been excluded.³³ Before reviewing current data pertaining to movement trends for former General Service staff currently serving in the Professional and higher categories, it is important to highlight that the concern raised by the Unit has become obsolete, given

²⁸ See [A/33/228](#).

²⁹ See [A/32/327](#).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 81.

³¹ See [A/33/228](#).

³² *Ibid.*, sect. II.2, para. (d).

³³ *Ibid.*

the procedures established by the administrative instruction on the staff selection system (ST/AI/2010/3/Rev.2), which stipulates that a competitive recruitment process is followed to fill vacant positions, and which would also apply to cases when staff members in the General Service and related categories and the Field Service category apply to job openings in the Professional category. The filling of vacant positions is therefore, by definition, no longer a matter of “internal management of the departments”, as criticized by the Unit in 1978, and all candidates meeting the requirements are considered.

58. A review of the current data about the first entity in the Professional category of former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories and the last entity when the same staff members were in the General Service category reveals that almost all the 564 staff currently serving in the Professional and higher categories moved within the same entity. However, this trend seems primarily to be a consequence of the current eligibility restrictions and the path through the “G to P” examination, which encourages recruitment within the same entity. Because recruitment from the “G to P” roster does not allow for additional evaluation by the actual hiring manager, a staff member who is successful in the “G to P” examination and who is already known within an entity is more easily recruited. Therefore, it seems that current procedures, in particular the recruitment of successful “G to P” candidates from the roster, drive the dynamic for recruitment within the same entity.

59. Removing the current restriction to allow staff members in the General Service and Field Service categories to apply for a vacant position in the Professional category would address reservations that hiring managers may have, as the applicant will need to compete alongside all other applicants for the job opportunity. However, in order to break the tendency of staff to be recruited to the Professional category from the team in which they served as staff in the General Service category, the new proposal contains the provision that the staff member needs to apply to a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is currently assigned. This is also aligned with the definition of personnel in the Professional category as international staff, who are normally internationally recruited, meaning that they are hired to work at a duty station outside their home country.

H. Conclusion

60. The analysis above has provided evidence that applying the current staff selection system also to staff serving in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category who wish to compete for vacant positions in the Professional category will address the key issues that drove the restrictions introduced in 1978 by the General Assembly in its resolution [33/143](#) by ensuring that:

- (a) A competitive recruitment process is in place;
- (b) Candidates meet the requirements of the job opening;
- (c) The selected candidate is best suited for the function.

61. Allowing staff serving in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category to compete for job opportunities in the Professional category under the staff selection system will:

- (a) Align the recruitment practice with Article 101 (3) of the Charter;
- (b) Leverage an expanded talent pool to strengthen the Secretariat’s diversity efforts;

(c) Bring the Secretariat, as an employer, on a par with all other United Nations common system organizations.

62. The refined proposal presented below will address the root cause of multiple undesirable consequences of the promotion practice before the adoption of resolution [33/143](#) and cover any remaining concerns that were revealed by the analysis above, by applying the staff selection system in combination with the specific provisions of the proposal, thus making the restrictions put in place in 1978 obsolete.

63. While, at present, the process for moving from the General Service category to the Professional category is different than in the 1970s, the data revealed that most of the former General Service staff currently in the Professional and higher categories still worked within the same entity right before and after their move – an observation already made by the Joint Inspection Unit in 1978. It appears that the requirement that successful “G to P” examination candidates should be recruited from a roster without further evaluation by a hiring manager is a key driver of this situation. While the proposed application of the staff selection system also to staff in the General Service and Field Service categories who wish to compete for job openings in the Professional category is likely to break this cycle with the assessment of all applicants during the recruitment process, the new proposal of the Secretary-General will address this aspect with a specific provision that requires staff to apply to a different duty station than the one where they are currently assigned, to dispel any remaining concern that the General Assembly may have.

64. Lastly, the Joint Inspection Unit raised the concern that the past practice of admitting General Service staff members to the Professional category created “an obstacle to the application of the principle of geographical distribution since it [resulted] in the recruitment, at the P-1 to P-2 level, of large numbers of staff from overrepresented countries”.³⁴ The analysis above has shown that the composition of nationalities of staff members by geographical representation status of Member States at the G-5 to G-7 and FS-5 levels offers considerable potential, as 34 staff members were nationals of unrepresented Member States and 2,053 were nationals of underrepresented Member States as at 31 December 2022. To ensure that this diversity of nationalities is leveraged towards equitable geographical distribution, the new proposal of the Secretary-General includes a specific provision related to geographical posts.

IV. Proposal

65. The data-driven analysis for the present report systematically reflects on the concerns raised by the Joint Inspection Unit between 1971 and 1978, the intent of the General Assembly in its resolution [33/143](#), and past views of the Advisory Committee on prior proposals made by the Secretary-General in 2016 and 2018.

66. Building on these considerations and the analysis above, the Secretary-General has recalibrated previous proposals brought to the General Assembly. The revised proposal, therefore, contains specific elements to ensure that removing prevailing restrictions for certain groups of staff to compete for vacant positions in the Professional category:

- Advances core principles of recruitment to the United Nations in line with Article 101 (3) of the Charter, including the principle of equal treatment of all applicants

³⁴ Ibid., sect. II.1.

- Fulfills the intentions of the General Assembly, which led to the adoption of resolution 33/143 in 1978, by applying competitive methods of recruitment of Professional staff following the current staff selection system, which did not exist at the time
- Opens diverse talent pools with relevant skills and reduces the loss of talent among core pillars of the workforce
- Leverages opportunities to progress towards equitable geographical distribution
- Addresses the concern regarding movements possibly occurring within the same teams or entities

67. The Secretary-General would therefore welcome the approval by the General Assembly of the present proposal to remove eligibility barriers for staff serving in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category so that they are eligible to apply for:

(a) Positions in the Professional category not subject to the system of desirable ranges and located in a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is assigned, to ensure that:

- (i) The application requires competing for a position under the staff selection system in a new organizational environment;
- (ii) The application is aligned with the expectation for an internationally recruited staff to serve in a duty station normally outside the home country;

(b) Positions at the P-3 and higher levels that are subject to the system of desirable ranges and are located in a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is assigned, when the staff member currently serving in the General Service and related categories or at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category is a national of an unrepresented or underrepresented Member State at the time of application.

68. Furthermore, the removal of the “G to P” element from the young professionals programme, which will be used exclusively to recruit young professional candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, is proposed.

V. Actions to be taken by the General Assembly

69. The Secretary-General invites the General Assembly:

(a) To approve the proposal to remove eligibility barriers for staff serving in the General Service and related categories and at the FS-3 to FS-5 levels of the Field Service category so that they are eligible to apply for:

- (i) Positions in the Professional category that are not subject to the system of desirable ranges and are located in a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is assigned; or
- (ii) Positions at the P-3 and higher levels that are subject to the system of desirable ranges and are located in a duty station different from the duty station where the staff member is assigned, when the staff member is a national of an unrepresented or underrepresented Member State at the time of application;

(b) Approve the removal of the “G to P” element from the young professionals programme.