



## Survey on Roster Memberships and their Discontinuation

### Preliminary Report and Findings

Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations Secretariat

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Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for participating in the recent *Survey on Roster Memberships*!

Your data show the realities of the rosters, beyond the words of UN policies and rules, and what these roster memberships mean for you and whether they have had a positive impact on your service in the Secretariat.

Given the fact that management is proceeding with finalizing and promulgating a revised policy that will include the [accelerated discontinuation of your current roster memberships](#), we decided to publish preliminary findings of the survey to showcase to management that what they are proceeding with is not just a 'cleanup exercise' but something that will impact staff directly and negatively.

This preliminary report highlights the most pertinent findings. A more detailed report with refined analysis, as well as disaggregated data, will be provided in due course.

We want to reiterate our request to management to keep all current roster memberships **indefinite**. The removal of these current memberships will impact staff negatively and will also further damage staff morale and engagement.

## 1 Background on Upcoming Changes to Roster Management

As part of the negotiations between Management and Staff Unions / Associations, and at the [annual 2023 Staff Management Committee \(SMC\) Meeting](#), management presented their plans to overhaul the way rosters are managed. This included a specific proposal to introduce new roster expiration dates that are different based on gender.

The Staff-side (Staff Unions / Associations) rejected this proposal and emphasized that roster memberships need to remain indefinite, highlighting the importance of using rosters more effectively for staff selection decisions, as well as accelerating the process and ensuring fairness of staff selections overall.

In line with SMC procedures, a [disagreement was recorded](#) and subsequently presented to the Secretary-General for decision.

The Secretary-General's decision was conveyed to the members of the SMC (via the President of the SMC) on 05 July 2023 and detailed that:

- 1) Existing roster memberships will rather be discontinued after four years (six years for female members).
- 2) The discontinuation of roster memberships should be accelerated.
- 3) When the staff selection policy is revised, all current roster memberships dating back four or more years (for male) and six or more years (for female) will have their roster membership discontinued.



## 2 Current Position of Your Staff Unions

The Staff-side's position is that roster memberships need to remain indefinite:

- A) The decision by the SG stands in conflict with a prior agreement at SMC IX (2021) where the expiration dates would be lifted for all rostered candidates. This agreement was reached due to the 'indefinite nature' of roster memberships under ST/AI/2013/3.
- B) Instead of management working together with staff unions in a forward-looking manner, to jointly improve and redesign recruitment and retention-related processes, the Secretary-General's decision removes roster memberships of staff altogether, either immediately or by introducing a future expiration date, with the clock ticking from the date of entry on the roster.

Staff Unions respect the decisions of the Secretary-General on new staff selection policies, which could include future expiration dates. Such discretion, however, is fundamentally different from arbitrarily and unjustifiably deviating from past policy, disregarding prior SMC agreements that were already implemented, and choosing to use the concept of '*discontinuing existing roster memberships*' as a cure-all for difficulties in ensuring timely and effective recruitment of talent, which it is not.

The justification given by management, namely that rosters "need to be trusted by managers", is both irritating, as rostering is itself a managerial action (i.e. on behalf of the UN as employer), and also fails to recognize the long-term, intense and professional efforts by Human Resources and Hiring Managers to build up credible rosters. The Secretary-General's accelerated discontinuation also discards the hard work and serious efforts staff have put into obtaining their current roster memberships. The repeated argument that roster management had become unwieldy due to the sheer number of roster candidates (around 60,000) was flimsy given that a high percentage of this number was retirees, deceased individuals, and memberships of staff at levels 1 or more below their current positions. It was also disingenuous, given that individual Hiring Managers do not have to filter thousands of roster memberships. They see only those candidates who have actually applied for any given position.

The Staff-side needs to highlight that the UN no longer has a system of internal promotion (or even hiring prioritization for internal candidates) and now focuses on [\*career satisfaction\*](#).

The consequence is that roster memberships, as part of the staff selection policy and processes, are a primary avenue for having a shot at an upwards career trajectory. While management's efforts in 'job diversification' and 'lateral mobility' are noted, the underlying concept of *career progression* is one that improves the conditions for those offering their services (work) for compensation (money, benefits and entitlements). The notion that job/career satisfaction can be increased in the absence of an upwards career trajectory is a noble but presently unrealistic one.

Staff representatives contend that it is unlawful and unfair to create new policies that retroactively deprive staff of their legitimate expectations to continuing being on current rosters, **which do not have expiration dates** and which were created through full adherence to the administrative instructions in force.

**We request, at a minimum and urgently, that all current roster memberships without expiration dates retain that indefinite status.**



If no corrective action is taken by the Secretary-General, the following effects may materialize:

- a) Fewer opportunities will be available for staff to be retained in cases of downsizing (beyond the protections established in the downsizing policy, [ST/AI/2023/1](#)).
- b) Punishing staff who have been unfortunate enough to be rostered during time periods of recruitment freezes. Their roster memberships effectively expire before having had a proper shot or ample opportunities at being selected due to the long periods of hiring freezes.
- c) Fewer opportunities will be available for staff to be sent on **surge assignments** or participate in the 'mutual recognition of roster' memberships with non-Secretariat entities. This creates an unfair situation with externally rostered and 'mutually recognized' roster candidates, who may not be subjected to similar expiration dates, effectively leading to discrimination against UN-Secretariat roster candidates.
- d) While staff unions stand in full support of measures for gender parity in the Secretariat, they question the justifications and rationale for such a "gender-discriminate" roster management system. The specific nature of the gaps or imbalance it seeks to address is unclear and it does not refer to any evidence or recognized best practices. It is also unclear how such a measure can address the difficulties faced in large job families or at P2 level, where women are a majority. The staff unions are concerned that such a sweeping action, as well-meaning as it may be, might end up being the tree that hides the forest. It can be legitimately perceived as paternalistic, condescending and cosmetic, given that it is ill-fitted to the problem that it seeks to solve.
- e) Staff will be forced to re-participate in new time-consuming, resource-intensive, and costly staff selection exercises to be placed back on the exact same rosters from which they will be imminently removed and then removed again in the future.
- f) Disproportionately impacting staff who have not participated in recent selection processes due to family constraints or other legitimate reasons, including organizational constraints such as hiring freezes and downsizing priority.
- g) Overloading the system of internal justice through submission of grievances.
- h) The discontinuation of roster membership implies that a staff member who has been on a job for close to ten years or more is no longer capable of performing the tasks and may be terminated and replaced with another, who likely does not have much experience but interviews better; or that practical experience gained on the job is being traded for competency-based interviews.
- i) Getting roster placements has been a difficult and time-consuming process for many staff and removing them from a roster is analogous to removing academic credentials from someone who earned them.



- j) Rather than discontinuing roster memberships based on tenure, would it not be beneficial for the United Nations to implement a programme of continuous professional development by rewarding talents based on qualifications, performance, multiple skills set, and on-the-job knowledge required for their roles?

### 3 Survey Details and Demographics

#### 3.1 Purpose

In response to management’s planned policy changes related to the management of rosters, including the introduction of expiration dates, staff unions and associations across the Secretariat [invited staff to take a survey](#) about their current roster memberships.

Staff were given an opportunity to directly express their concerns regarding this decision on roster membership discontinuation. Despite repeated efforts to obtain from management a complete data set about how roster discontinuation would impact currently serving staff, this survey represents the first effort to analyze how many staff will be removed from rosters and the likely impact on job planning and overall morale and satisfaction.

#### 3.2 Survey Configuration

The survey was facilitated via Survey Monkey and the details were as follows:

Survey Title	Roster Memberships - A survey by SMC Staff Union members - Composition des listes de réserve - Enquête menée par les syndicats membres du Comité Administration-personnel  The survey questions and response options were available in English and French.
Target Group	<i>United Nations Secretariat Staff Members</i>
Number of Respondents (n)	5,276 overall, however not all respondents answered all questions.
Survey configuration	- Fully anonymized (as per Survey Monkey options) - Full text responses will only be shared in aggregated form as part of the comprehensive survey analysis, and not at an individual response level. All efforts have been undertaken to avoid the identification of respondents.
Questions and Type	10 Questions overall, mix of single choice, multiple choice with free text options and free text responses.
Analysis approach	For the preliminary analysis, the respondent demographics will be presented but no further disaggregation of responses based on demographics will be done at this point.

Table 1 - Survey Parameters



### 3.3 Respondent Demographics

The survey has a total of 5276 respondents whereas the respondents can be broken down as follows:

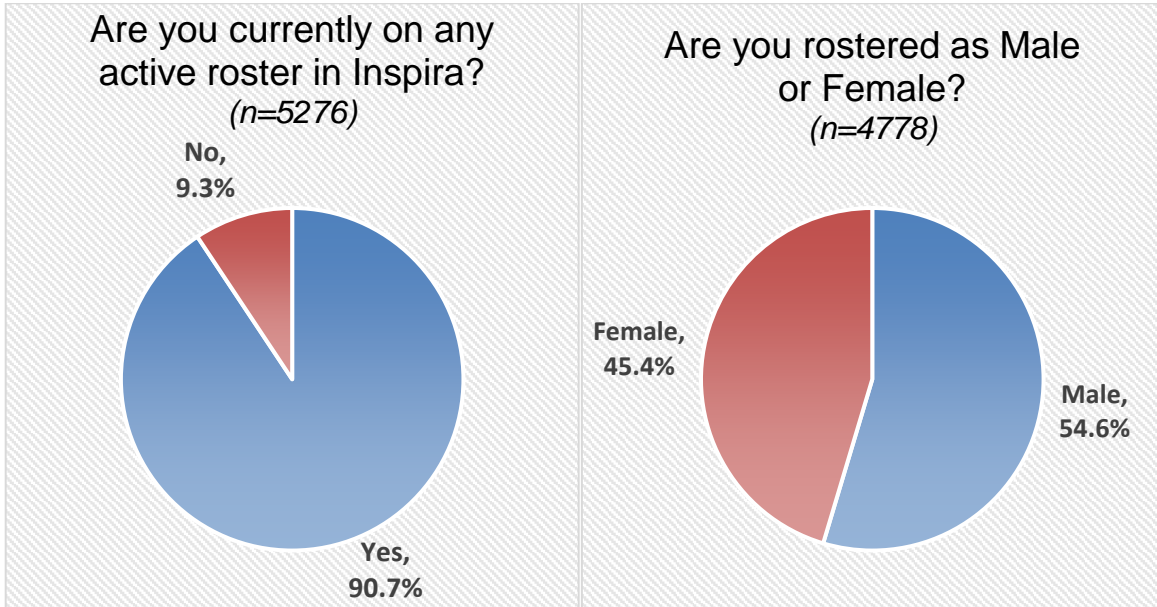


Figure 1 - Active Roster Membership

Figure 2 - Gender breakdown

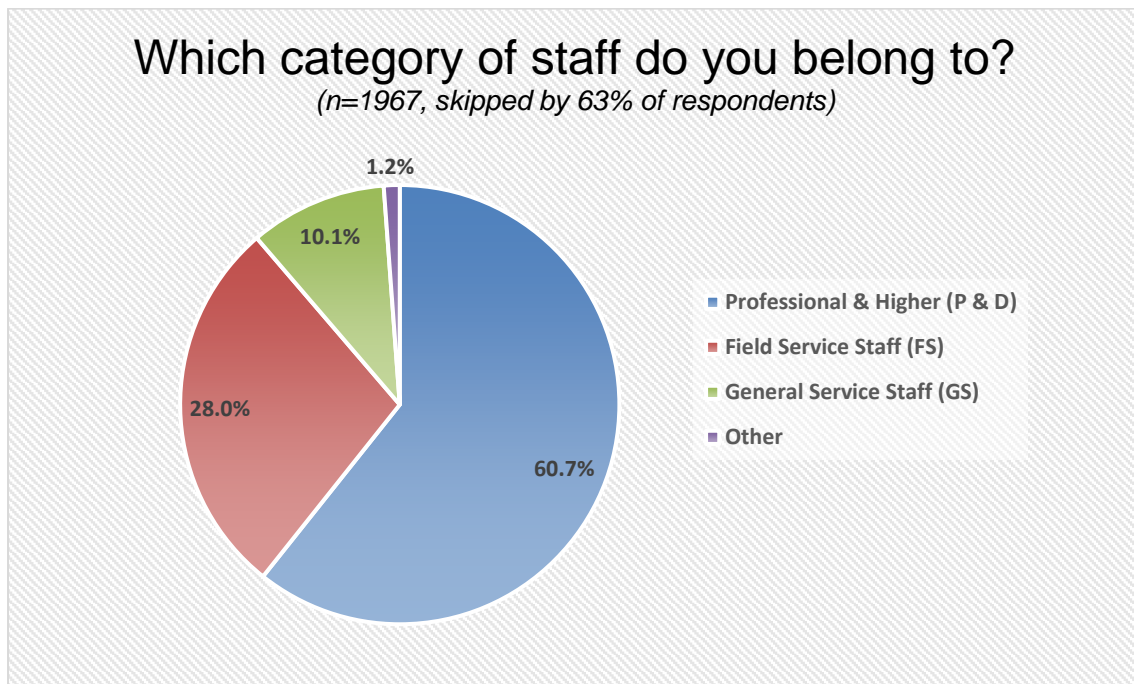


Figure 3 - breakdown by category

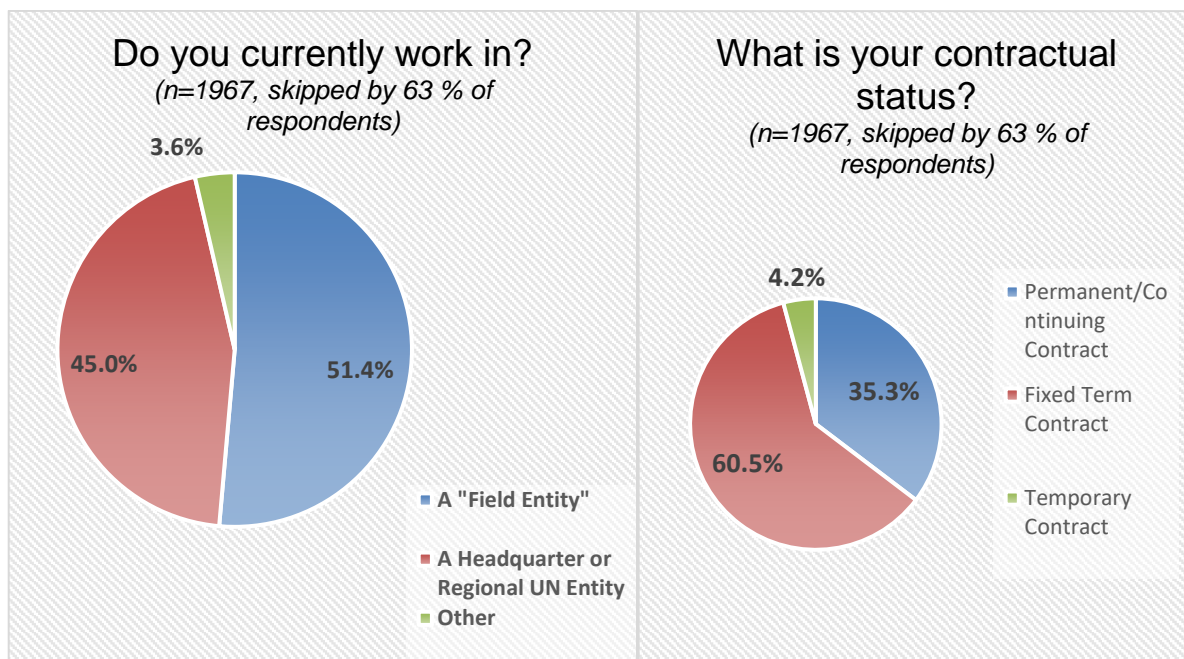


Figure 4 - Contractual Status

Figure 5 - Duty Station Type

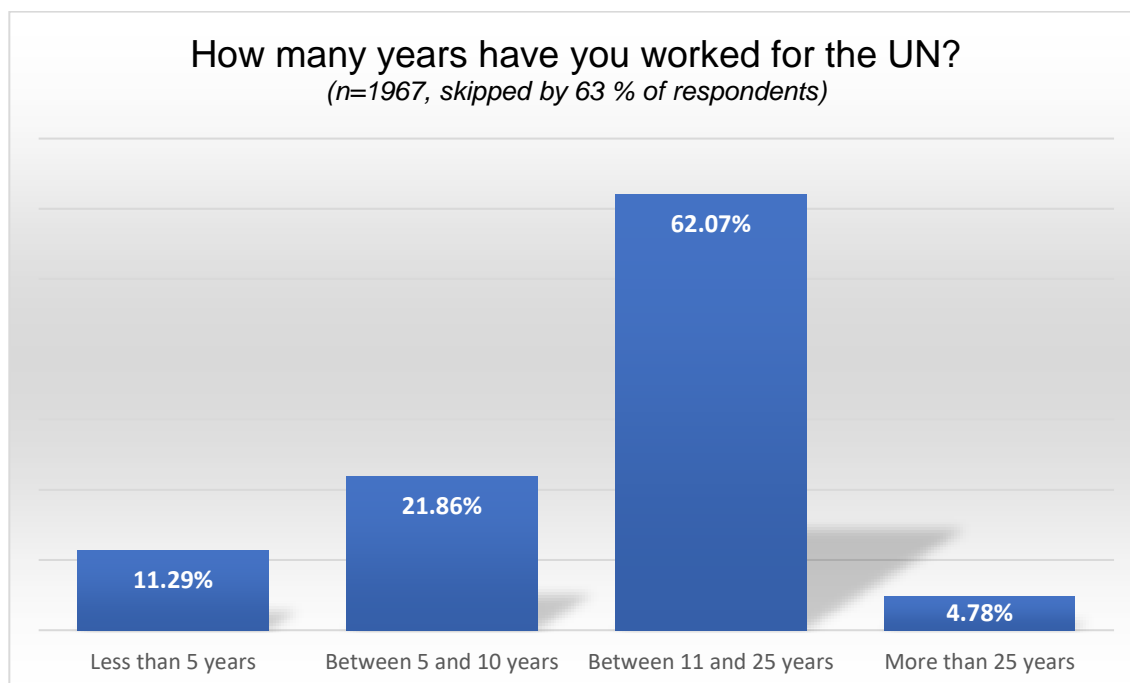


Figure 6 - length of service with the UN



## 4 Preliminary Analysis of Responses on Rosters and Roster Effectiveness

### 4.1 Interpretation of Results

It is unsurprising that a high rate of respondents have active roster memberships (90.7 %), given that staff should - since promulgation of the current staff selection system - be rostered for their current positions.

However, the overwhelming majority of rostered staff members, as per the survey responses, have already been in the organization for more than 10 years (> 60). A change of the roster memberships and underpinning mechanisms, therefore, will:

- affect a large number of staff members, particularly those in the field, and
- overwhelmingly affect those with a long service record in the organization, who represent the 'institutional knowledge' of the organization and who stand in the middle of their career.

It is very likely that changes to roster memberships, which are perceived as negative by affected staff members, will have direct consequences on job satisfaction, engagement and as a further consequence, overall productivity and innovation potential of the organization.

This is further aggravated by the relatively high number of respondents who, in their career, have been selected from a roster (58 %). As they have seen the roster mechanism work, it is unlikely that they would perceive a discontinuation of their membership as 'positive'.

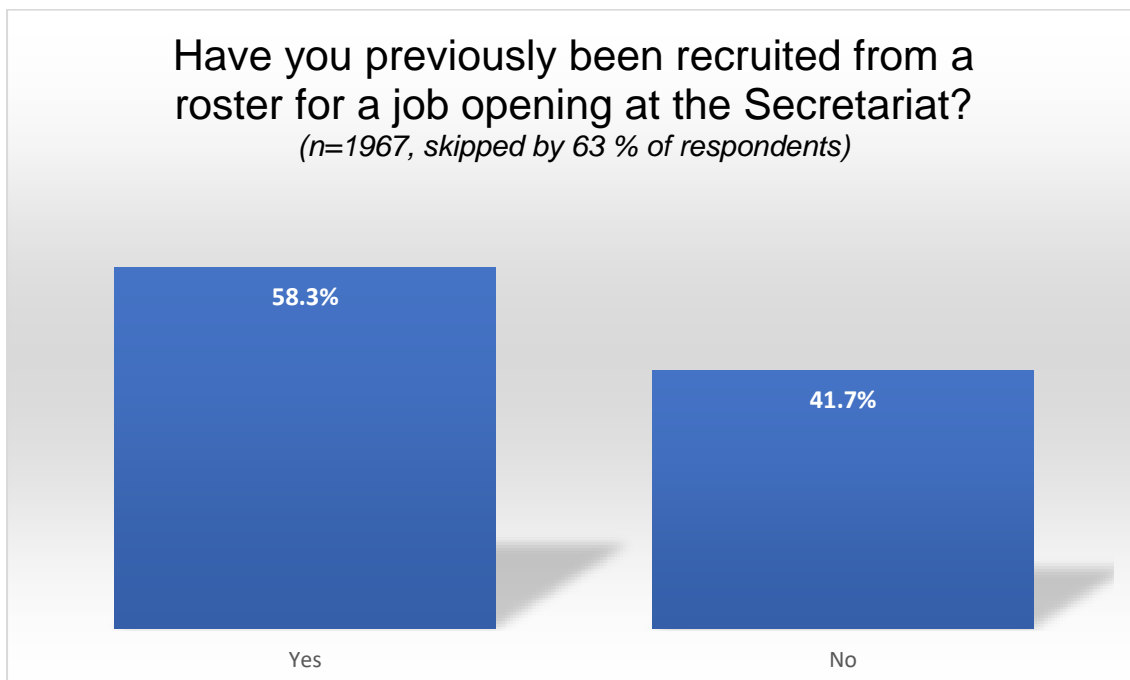


Figure 7 - Prior Recruitment from Roster





## 4.2 Roster Details

Figure 8 displays the progression concerning number of respondents in relation to the number of roster memberships they hold. It is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of respondents holds one or two memberships (64 % to 100 % of respondents). However, the progression beyond three roster memberships is surprising. A third of respondents have three (!) or more roster memberships. The upper boundary being ten(!) roster memberships. It should be noted that the survey asked only for memberships at the **current or higher grade**. The reason for this survey restriction was to reveal the inherent potential for **lateral moves or promotions**.

Unfortunately, the data does not lend itself towards analysing how many of these roster memberships were part of a successful staff selection process or roster exercise (i.e. what is the rostering to onboarding ratio). Only management would be in a position to provide this data. Staff Unions would strongly encourage management to analyze this aspect further. Every roster membership represents a strategic investment by the organization into potential candidates for future vacancies.

While one can argue that a roster placement is predominantly a byproduct of a staff selection process, given the significant number of roster memberships of both internal as well as external candidates it does, through its large number, represent a significant monetary value that, through the introduction of expiration dates, would effectively write off past investments completely.

One can further argue whether the organization is right to conduct such a change without the explicit consent of member states who, ultimately, paid for each and every roster membership.

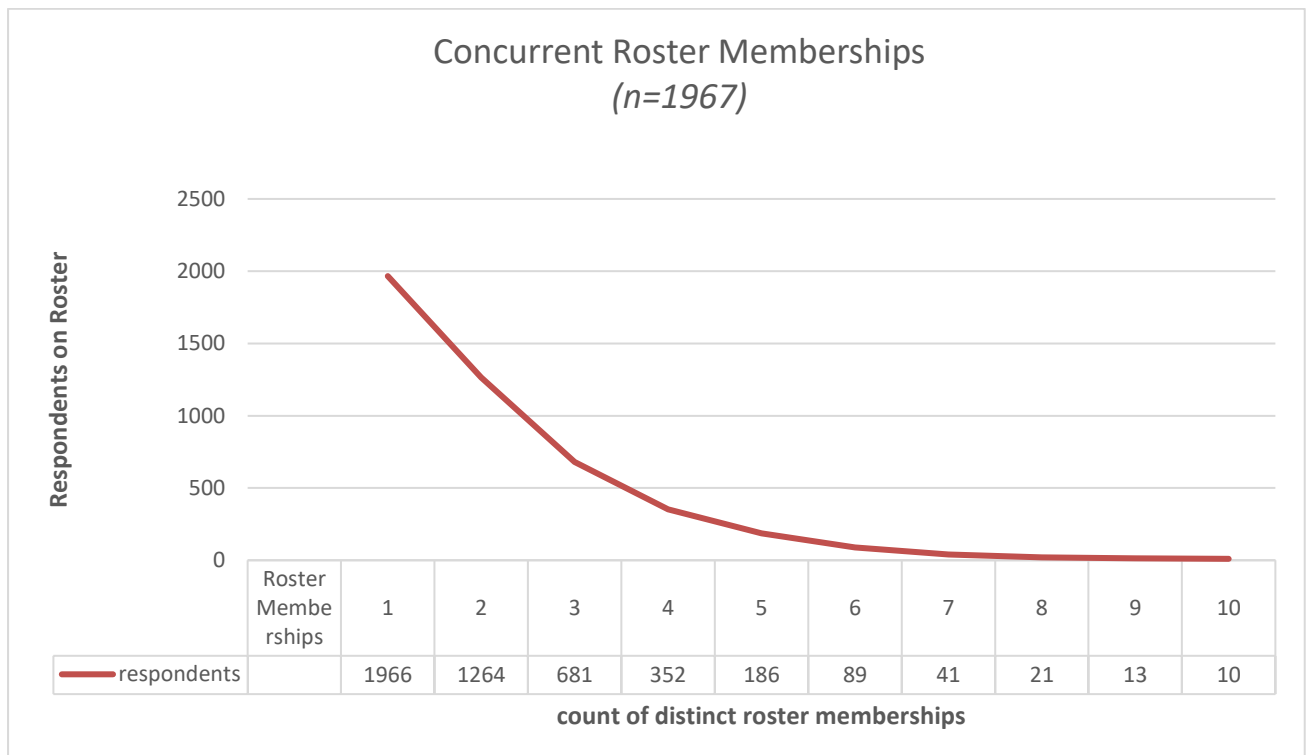


Figure 8 - Concurrent Roster Memberships



### 4.3 Sentiment of Staff about Roster Membership Discontinuation

A total of 2,958 free text responses capturing the sentiment of rosters and the expiration of their memberships have been submitted by staff. These responses will be analyzed as part of a final report and comprehensive analysis, to be issued in the coming month. This subsequent analysis should reflect on what the survey data show about how roster discontinuation will impact different categories of staff, particularly based on gender and service in the field. Trends relating to which rosters will be most impacted by discontinuations will also be examined.