

INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY

Eleventh meeting of the Council
Abu Dhabi, 24 – 25 May 2016

**Note of the Director-General
IRENA Staff Tenure Policy**

1. The Staff Regulations and Rules, endorsed by the IRENA Assembly, establish a seven-year limit to the length of service of staff with IRENA. At the ninth and tenth meeting of the Council, the Council, on the basis of the report of its Administration and Finance Committee, considered the impact this limitation in the duration of service has on staff and on the Agency. The Council decided to address this matter at its eleventh meeting (see C/10/SR/L.1, paragraphs 117 to 119). The present note provides an overview of the situation and presents options on the way forward for consideration by the Council.

Introduction

2. At its first session in April 2011, the Assembly adopted the Agency's Work Programme and Budget for 2011, approving a total of 72 posts. A bulk of recruitment took place in the first year of existence of IRENA and, since, the number of core posts has been increasing gradually. The current programmatic cycle includes a total of 90 core posts; 64 at Professional level or above, and 26 at the General Service level.

3. Pursuant to Staff Regulation 5.4, IRENA staff receive fixed-term or temporary appointments, with the total length of service not exceeding seven years. This limitation in the duration of service applies to all categories of staff, at both the Professional level and above and at the General Service level. The Director-General may extend this maximum length of service once for a period of up to two years provided that, for staff at the Professional level and above, there is a documented record of performance and the need for such extension to ensure continuity of the work of the Agency.

4. With the seventh year of the Agency's existence approaching, the first cohort of staff is reaching the tenure limit. Out of the first cohort of staff from 2011, 19 are still serving with the Agency, of which 15 at Professional level or above. These staff will reach their service limit in 2018. An additional 17 staff will reach this limit in 2019. Thus, in a period of two years, around 35% of the current core workforce, including more than 25% at Professional level or above, would be required to separate from the Agency if the seven-year limit is applied. In addition, the level of attrition observed in the past five years remained around 15%, which could further increase the separation rate in 2018-2019.

5. As a result, the Agency is facing a serious risk of depleting its intellectual and institutional capacity, losing accumulated knowledge, as well as needing to manage a high vacancy rate in the coming years. Having focused on filling the core posts in the past five years, the Agency is only now reaching a full core staffing component. Hence, IRENA may not be in a position to proactively manage a process of mass separation and recruitment within a limited period of time, which may pose a particular institutional challenge.

Considerations

6. To date, the Agency has made sustained efforts to attract, recruit, develop and retain qualified staff to fill the core posts approved by the Assembly. While a large number of staff have been recruited in the first three years of existence of the Agency, limited career progression opportunities in the Agency due to its small size, together with strict performance requirements, have resulted in a steady attrition, allowing an alignment of skillset with the programmatic priorities. In addition, a number of additional staff have been recruited to work on specific projects, bringing targeted technical and specialist capacity for projects of limited duration, consistent with the programmatic priorities and the available resources. As the Agency diversifies its resource base, the number of project staff will increase, with their service with the Agency being tied to the project duration and the availability of funding.

7. To date, almost 95% core posts have been filled, which, for the first time, allows the Agency to systematically monitor trends and consider and develop a longer-term talent management and succession planning strategy, while attracting highly qualified candidates. The overriding priority for staff retention to date has been high performance and the relevance of skillsets.

8. Even with IRENA's growing recognition, attracting and retaining highly qualified staff may face challenges on a number of fronts. For example, the global focus on climate and sustainable development is opening new career opportunities in the renewable energy sector. That means that IRENA is now competing with a growing number of entities for a relatively small pool of expert personnel and is starting to lose staff to some of these entities. Limitation in duration of service places IRENA at disadvantage, as most of these entities do not have a limit in service.

Way forward

9. The above outlines both the short-term challenge faced by the Agency as it nears the seventh year of its existence, and the longer term considerations that should be taken into account. As a result, the Council may wish to consider the following options to alleviate this situation:

- a. Removing the seven-year limit of service for IRENA staff. The Assembly could lift the time limit, but retain the fixed-term nature of the IRENA staff contracts. As a result, and consistent with the practice to date, the balance between staff retention and the need to obtain new skills, would be facilitated by the limited nature of the appointments. Strict performance evaluation and regular reviews of the competences and skillset needs would remain embedded in the workforce planning and management, taking into account the programmatic and other priorities.
- b. One-time waiver of the seven-year cycle. The Assembly could, as a one-time measure, decide, for the purpose of the calculation of the total length of service under Staff Regulation 5.4, to waive the first seven years of service for all staff appointed during the first seven years of existence of the Agency, considering the formative nature of the Agency during these initial years. This would allow for systematic monitoring and assessment of the staffing trends, to enable an informed consideration of the best interest of the Agency and its staff, based on empirical evidence and over a reasonable period of time. At its eleventh session, marking the tenth year of IRENA's existence, the Director-General would report to the Assembly on this matter, including on different facets such as factors to enhance staff retention and potentials for mobility in the Agency. Based on the information provided, the Assembly would decide on adjustments, if any, to the tenure policy.

10. The Council is invited to consider these options, in light of the information provided above. Should the Council recommend the removal of the seven-year limit outlined in the option (a), the Director-

General would propose the necessary amendments to the Staff Regulations for the Council's consideration at its twelfth meeting, in preparation for the seventh Assembly session. Should the Council recommend the one-time waiver outlined in option (b), a draft ad-hoc Assembly decision would be presented for consideration and recommendation at the twelfth meeting of the Council. Should no action be taken, the Agency would risk a severe depletion of its core workforce over a two-year period, with an anticipated negative impact on its effectiveness and level of performance.