

Attrition of International Seconded Staff in European Civilian Missions

Manuela Vender
Research fellow
University of Lugano, Switzerland
manuela.vender@usi.ch

Paulo Gonçalves*
Associate Professor
University of Lugano, Switzerland
paulo.goncalves@usi.ch

* Corresponding author: Via Buffi 13, CH-6904 Lugano, Switzerland.

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ABSTRACT:

Staff attrition represents one of the most important challenges facing non-profit international organizations and missions in post-conflict areas, dramatically affecting their cost-effectiveness and performance. This paper explores the causes of staff attrition in European Civilian Missions that adopt a particular system of recruitment called secondment. The paper also discusses possible improvement policies through an in-depth case-study of one Mission deployed in Kosovo. The case-study describes the difficulties encountered by the Mission in fulfilling its mandate due to extremely high staff turnover rates, reaching 50% in 2008. Analysis of the case provides clues to important variables driving attrition rates. Through the use of causal mapping, the research identifies the feedback processes that influence such variables. It also identifies improvement policies that can reduce attrition rates as well as possible limitations to those policies. Our analyzes highlight a number of tangible recommendations to Missions and non-profit organizations.

Keywords: Attrition, International Missions, Retention, Recruitment, Secondment, Staff

1. INTRODUCTION

The first European Civilian Missions (ECM) were established in post-conflict areas at the end of the 90's. In the last ten years, their numbers have increased substantially. Today, there are eleven (11) ongoing EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Civilian Missions as well as eleven (11) EU Representations led by European Union Special Representatives with their offices and staff. In addition, there are six (6) Missions led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which also has also twelve (12) field presences, such as: office, centre, project coordination or representation¹ On average, these Missions have a duration of at least five years. However, their duration may vary significantly depending on their nature and country of operations. Some of the Missions plan on a long-term field presence as it is the case of the eighteen years old OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje or the seven years old European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Less frequently, the missions may be short lived, such as the European Union Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) and OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) which lasted only about one year.

European Civilian Missions share a common interest in the security of post-conflict areas both in Europe and other continents. They are often characterized by centralized decision-making, rigid chain of command, high level of bureaucracy, and tendency to deploy international staff in non-family duty stations within areas where security is fragile. More importantly, they also rely on a recruitment system called secondment. Seconded candidates for vacant positions in an ECM are nominated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of one of the EU Member States, non-EU States within the European region or the United States of America. The pre-selection of the candidates is usually done by the member States' local office of the ECM or by independent agencies contracted to select candidates suitable for secondment upon application of the candidates themselves. The selected candidates are then interviewed or tested by the respective Recruitment or Human Resources Entities of the Missions at headquarters or field level. Although the secondment mechanism is generally considered as a quick system to select and recruit staff compared to other recruitment systems, it is also complicated, bureaucratic, and constrained. As it frequently takes place, only a limited number of nominations for seconded posts are submitted by participating States, of those only a fraction of the candidates are selected. In addition, seconded assignments can end at any time if the secondee's State decides not to prolong the secondment, due to financial or political considerations. Considering that almost all key-

¹ European Union-led Missions operate within the parameters of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), previously known as the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which is a part of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Some CSDP/ESDP and OSCE Missions also work under the framework of or in support of a United Nations Security Council Resolution.

positions (such as heads of missions and heads of departments) in such Missions are reserved for seconded staff, it is difficult for missions to ensure the continuity of their work. Despite its limitations, secondment has nevertheless been widely adopted and increasingly used by European Civilian Missions to promote equal representation in the workforce.²

In the last ten years, ECMs have faced serious staffing challenges due to the high attrition rates of its seconded staff. This trend, particularly evident in long- or medium-term Missions, is developing to such an extent that it may become one of the main factors, along with political and security instability, threatening the exercise of operations and the fulfilment of mandates of ECMs. “Attrition” means a loss of staff within an organization due to voluntary resignation, and not as a result of dismissal, end of service or other causes. In this paper, we use the term specifically to the group of international seconded staff within ECMs who voluntarily terminates their assignments. The term “attrition” was preferred to “turnover” because of its Latin etymology from “*atterere*” originally meaning “*to rub against*” (Merriam Webster’s online dictionary, 2010) which implies a movement of material due to gradual deterioration caused by friction. Accordingly, this is the figurative aspect of “staff attrition” represented in this paper: the departing of staff causing gradual deterioration of organizational capability. Attrition does, in fact, weaken organizations by reducing their effectiveness.

While lack of quantitative data prevents us from properly quantifying the extent of which attrition affects Missions, general estimates suggest that international secondees, on average, resign within the third year of their contract. It is also common for staff to leave after one year or two of service. Some Missions experience attritions rates above 30% of their international workforce, reaching in the worst cases 40% or 50%. Although the phenomenon concerns seconded internationals in all positions, it particularly affects staff members in lower and middle positions.

A number of studies focusing on for-profit organizations explain the problem generated by staff attrition and describe its consequences (Pfeffer, 2007; Turner 2004). Although attrition rates are extremely high also among other non-profit international organizations, such as NGOs and UN Missions deployed in developing countries, the literature is scant on staff attrition to non-profit and humanitarian organizations. In particular, studies on attrition in Seconded Missions are rare and difficult to access. Findings from for-profit case-studies are frequently referenced to explain attrition in non-profit International Organizations. The specificity of the non-profit sector, of the International Missions, and the secondment system, however, requires dedicated studies on the field and analysis of

² Also, to ensure parity in salaries, a basic payment allowance is usually provided to the secondees by the Mission itself. At times, member States have the possibility to contribute financially to the remuneration of the secondees. In some Missions, however, seconded States bear the obligation to cover all the financial costs of the secondment including wages and medical insurance.

the factors generating attrition. In addition, most studies have successfully highlighted the consequences of staff attrition on organizations, such as the harm to the organizational resources (Seavey, 2004) the drop in performance and productivity (Huckman and Barro, 2005), as well as the loss of institutional memory (Carley 1992).

However, studies have been less forthcoming in exhaustively identifying the different causes of staff attrition, the interrelationship among such causes, and, more importantly, in suggesting feasible and effective remedies to the problem.

This paper contributes to the literature on staff attrition in non-profits because it addresses the issue of attrition in the non-profit international sector for seconded international staff. Our work analyzes both the general aspects of international non-profit work environments and specific aspects of the secondment system that can cause attrition. Our findings shed light into the complexities of attrition in International Missions (not only ECMs but also those led by the United Nations) and the shortcomings of the secondment system. It also suggests ways to improve the secondment system and consequently reduce attrition rates. In addition, the paper documents a case of an European Mission in Kosovo that struggles with high attrition rates. The case-study explores the mechanisms by which high attrition rates (reaching 50%) can cripple an International Mission. It also investigates how policies aimed at reducing attrition can fail. In particular, our findings suggest that isolated “attempts” to contain attrition frequently lead to unanticipated side-effects that not only counter, but often exacerbate the original problem, leading to even higher attrition rates. Unfortunately, these “unanticipated side-effects” are a typical result of anti-attrition strategies used in many International Missions. Therefore, the lessons learned from this case have general implications and applications to other International Missions.

Finally, this study treats attrition as a multifaceted, dynamic and complex problem, analyzing the drivers of attrition from a dynamic perspective and considering the effect that different strategies may have on different drivers and the system as a whole. Also, this approach searches for endogenous causes of attrition, which allows improvement policies more leverage, since they can address internally generated problems. Such approach permits more effective and systematic generation of anti-attrition strategies that may help many similar organizations reduce attrition rates.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the causes of attrition have been widely studied in the last years in most work sectors, it has not been the case in the non-profit sector, particularly in the international humanitarian area. Literature has demonstrated that external rewards such as financial compensation and material benefits

are important determinants of attrition in the public sector, such as the school system where teachers tend to leave due to low salary and salary differentials (Rumberger, 1997), and in the for-profit sector, including the industrial sector, in which high wages seem to have, even more than pension benefits, a determinant impact on staff retention (Gustman and Steinmeier, 1995). The relevance of pension benefits in retaining staff was nevertheless highlighted by the researches (McCormick and Hughes, 1984). Studies show in particular that income and good working environment are essential for attracting and recruiting talented employees in the automobile industry (Mao, Hu and Song, 2009). The interdependence between the rewarding system and attrition is of particular relevance to organizations adopting the secondment recruitment system. This system, in fact, does not often guarantee attractive remuneration and benefits to the secondees.

Non-material drivers of attrition were also investigated and often linked to an inefficient, incompetent or unproductive human resources management (Pfeffer 1998) characterized by non-caring attitudes towards the staff (Pfeffer 1998) and unfair treatment among them (Brockner, 2006), which lowers their expectations towards the organization and the job (Heckscher and Holland, 1989). It was shown that human resources planning and management strongly impact on performance and achievements even in an automatized industrial context (Crocì, Perona and Pozzetti, 2000). The need for large, complex, multi-tasked organizations to take the right human resource decisions in order to function well has been clearly underlined by Mohanty and Deshmukh (1997) who has studied personnel management and planning in petroleum companies. His study is extremely relevant to International Civilian Missions which are also complex in nature and structure. It is interesting to note, however, that even for-profit organizations which are conscious of the need to bring about organizational changes, starting with their personnel management systems, are often incapable to take any steps in this direction (Love and Gunasekaran, 1997).

A wide range of simulation models were developed to help these organizations better manage their workforce, retaining staff and increasing their competitiveness (Zülch, Rottinger and Vollstedt, 2003). Driven by these purposes, some private organizations have gone through a process of reengineering (Zülch, Rottinger and Vollstedt, 2003; Purwadi, Tanaka and Ota, 1999) or adopting new quality management practices (Sadikoglu and Zehir, 2010) especially in the manufacturing industry (Bayo-Moriones and Merino-Díaz de Cerio, 2001). Modelling was used as a tool to support these processes, particularly in the manufacturing industry where it proved useful in optimizing the use of human resources (Zülch and Rottinger, 2007) through appropriate staff allocation and task assignments (Vollstedt, 2003). The model developed by Techawiboonwong, Yenradee and Das (2006) to study the

scheduling of skilled and unskilled temporary workers is relevant to European Civilian Missions using staff on short terms assignments to reduce staff shortages. The research on modelling concerning human resources management is extremely pertinent for the non-profit sector, which is why specific models based in humanitarian case studies and addressing the peculiarities of humanitarian, secondees, peacekeepers and volunteers are particularly needed.

The few references to the attrition in non-profit or humanitarian international organizations emphasize that leadership is an essential part of human resources, and that poor leadership and management often lead to failing human resources management practices which draws humanitarian workers away from their organizations (Loquercio, Hammersley and Emmens, 2006). The for-profit literature adds that a good level of interactivity between managers and staff brings about better performance (Ukko, Tenhunen and Rantanen, 2007). Furthermore, a positive relationship between the management and the staff has a positive impact on staff loyalty, job satisfaction and job commitment as it is shown in the Southwest Airlines's case study (O'Reilly and Pfeffer, 1995). Existing research correlates attrition with low levels of organizational commitment (Franklin and Mujtaba, 2007) and job involvement (Blau and Boal, 1987). However, studies on high-contact service shops demonstrated that employee's loyalty is essential to business performance and client satisfaction (Yee, Yeung and Cheng, 2010).

The literature has also given increasing attention to the positive impact of knowledge management on organizations such as high technology firms (Yang, 2010). Findings show that private organizations investing in an organizational learning culture are more likely to experience less attrition (Skerlavaj, Štemberger, Škrinjar and Dimovski, 2007). Training and education can play a positive role on the performance of leaders (Ahoniemi, Kulmala and Nissinen, 2009) as proved by the educational programs developed for managers in Australian hospitals (Eastman and Fulop, 1997) and Japanese manufacturing firms (Ishii, Ichimura, Ikeda, Tsuchiya and Nakano, 2009). Training and cross training are also given to employees in manufacturing plants to develop their skills and increase their efficiency (Stewart, Webster, Ahmad and Matson, 1994). They seem to have a particular positive impact on the satisfaction and morale of the staff employed in cellular factories (Olorunniwo and Udo, 2002). Research has however been limited in non-profit organizations concerning the influence of knowledge management on attrition. This is one reason for the authors to present this paper and discuss how training is used in European Civilian Missions.

Finally, many studies on for-profit organizations shed light on the difficulty of employees to harmonize professional work with family obligations, considering it a possible driver of attrition. This

is for example revealed by the research on women working in the information and technology sector (Armstrong, Riemenschneider, Allen and Reid, 2007) and by studies on staff with a family employed in hotels (O'Neill, Harrison, Cleveland, Almeida, Stawski and Crouter, 2009). This paper drives on the above findings concerning the causes of attrition and uses them to investigate the phenomenon in European Civilian Missions, particularly in the Mission analysed in the study-case presented in the next section. However, these findings as such cannot be fully applied to the Missions characterized by the secondment system, which is a complex recruitment system with particular conditions of services. It is therefore suggested to apply a dynamic analysis of attrition with the use of modelling trying to detect the variables driving attrition in this specific context. In addition, contrary to some of the research described above, these variables should be analysed not as single unities but within a system of interdependent causes, and paying attention to the effect of adopted anti-attrition measures on those variables.

There seems to be agreement in the for-profit literature that attrition has a high opportunity cost as it consumes time and resources that could be better used by the organizations to fulfill their missions and increase performance and deliverables. This is well documented in studies on personnel in medical and health care facilities, including research on nurses' attrition (Gray, Phillips and Normand, 1996) and attrition of frontline workers in long-term care (Seavey, 2004). Staff shortfall is usually the first measurable effect of the attrition imposing a financial burden on the organizations, particularly in those operating in the health-care sector. Additional costs include direct costs such as expenses for recruiting and training new staff (Johnston, 1998) and indirect cost due to decreases in performance and productivity (Waldman, Kelly, Arora, and Smith 2004). Also, staff shortage usually impacts negatively on the staff that has to cope with the work overload (Seavey 2004). The effects reported in the literature are also evident in European Civilian Missions affected by attrition as shown in the Mission K case-study described below.

3. CASE STUDY: MISSION K IN KOSOVO

To explore the impact of attrition in European Civilian Missions we analyze data from a Mission we refer to as "K", to preserve anonymity. The data includes documents produced by the Mission and from a large number of interviews with its seconded staff. Additional information is drawn from available literature on staff attrition. Mission K operates in Kosovo and was chosen among the other existing Missions because of extremely high attrition rates, reaching 50% Mission-wide and

up to 100% in some sections. To better understand the context in which Mission K operates, a brief description of the general situation in Kosovo is provided below.

3.1. General situation in Kosovo

Following the ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians and the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, an International Civilian Peacekeeping Mission, called United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), was established in the Serbia's Southern province of Kosovo in June 1999. UNMIK's mandate was to promote the establishment, pending a final settlement, of substantial autonomy and self-government in Kosovo while ensuring the safe and unimpeded return to Kosovo of its internally displaced persons and returnees. In the same year, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) was established as a Pillar of UNMIK to support the development of democratic institutions and the creation of a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo. Nine years later, the Assembly of Kosovo declared the Independence of the Province. This unilateral declaration of independence has not yet been recognized by 122 (out of 192) UN Member States and 5 (out of 27) European Union Members States. In July 2010, the International Court of Justice ruled that the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence did not violate the international law. This decision contributed to increase the international credibility in the Kosovo's Government. It is also expected to facilitate the recognition of Kosovo as an independent country by other members of the international community.

Following the declaration of independence in 2008, two European Civilian Missions became operational in Kosovo: EULEX and ICO. The status neutral European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) is committed to strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo and operates under the framework of the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and under the umbrella of the United Nations. The International Civilian Office (ICO), established by the International Steering Group for Kosovo, which is composed of the European Union and non-EU State members that recognize Kosovo's independence, has the mandate to support the implementation of Kosovo's new status. ICO is the only International Mission that fully recognizes Kosovo as an independent State. ICO's main strengths are the strong political support of the Kosovo Government and the consistent financial support of the European Union. Its weak point is the absence of experience in Kosovo.

Currently two opposed trends are noticed. On the one hand, there is an increasing availability of funds to status-neutral Missions from countries not recognizing Kosovo's Independence to promote community rights and protection mechanisms with a particular focus on the Serbian minority. On the

other hand, there is an increasing demand and funds from countries recognizing Kosovo as a State to fully develop the capacity of its domestic institutions so it can join the European Union. In the meantime, a growing civil unrest is registered in the Serbian-majority North of Kosovo which still considers itself as a part of Serbia.

Mission K runs diverse activities such as capacity-building training, extensive field monitoring, reporting and advising on human rights. The Mission is funded by a large number of States including EU and non-EU members in Europe as well as the United States of America. These countries must confirm the mandate of Mission K every single month by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, the Mission's activities must cease immediately. Mission K is dedicated to the principle of staff rotation and makes extensive use of the secondment system. Seconded staff are offered a one-year contract with possibility of extension and can serve a maximum of seven years in the same mission or institution with an additional three years in another mission or institution belonging to the same Organization. They receive monthly a Basic Living Allowance of about €3.000 from the Mission and may be entitled to an additional stipend or other benefits from their seconding Ministry of Foreign Affairs (depending on the country they are from and the position they hold). Dependent and pension benefits are however not guaranteed. Seconded staff account for about 85% of all the international staff in the Mission.

Mission K started its activities with a budget of more than €30 million which rose to more than €90 million in the first two years, decreasing every year since. In 2010 Mission K had a budget of €20 million, 15 % lower than its 2009 budget. The United States is currently the most important source of funding. Accordingly, the largest number of staff, 1550 locals and internationals, were deployed by Mission K in its first year of activities. Afterwards, the number of budgeted positions decreased regularly each year reaching fewer than 700 staff in 2010. Currently, there are fewer than 200 secondees serving the Mission. Mission K has faced staffing challenges since its inception. Attrition of seconded staff takes place in all positions, including management. The problem affects particularly the seconded staff in lower and middle-senior positions. The highest rate of attrition was recorded in 2008 when 50% of its international staff departed in the course of that year. Several field branches of the Mission have experienced an attrition rate of over 70% in the last two years, and one of them has reached an attrition rate of 100% in the period from 2007 to 2009. On average, seconded staff members remain in a position from one and a half to two years. Among all secondees fewer than 5% stay with Mission K for more than 2 years. In 2007, about 140 seconded staff who were interviewed expressed the desire to leave the Mission within the year.

The amount of new seconded staff in a Mission increases with recruitment, with time new staff gain experience. Eventually, experienced staff leave the Mission through voluntary attrition. Hence, the total amount of seconded staff increases with recruiting, the inflow of staff, and decreases with attrition, the outflow of staff (Figure 1). The high attrition rates experienced by Mission K through the years have created a severe shortfall in the available level of staff. Even when the total work rate (measured in tasks/week) remains the same, a consequence of departing staff is an increased workload per person for remaining seconded staff. In addition, a high workload often leads to fatigue, longer work hours, and high stress levels, all of which translate into low staff morale and contribute directly to increased attrition rates. Furthermore, high attrition rates generate the need for additional hiring. While recruiting takes time, eventually new staff are brought into the Mission. When that happens, their initial productivity is low, but they also require coaching, which is provided by experienced seconded staff. The combined effect is first a decrease in average productivity of the seconded staff as well as an increased work rate. All of such dynamics, captured in figure 1, intensify the problem of attrition. To resolve the staff shortage, it is possible to estimate the desired amount of staff required based on average productivity of staff (Pdy), the length of the workweek and the total work rate. In particular, the desired amount of staff would be given by the ratio of the total work rate (tasks/week) and the product of the length of the workweek (hours/week) and productivity (tasks/person-hours).

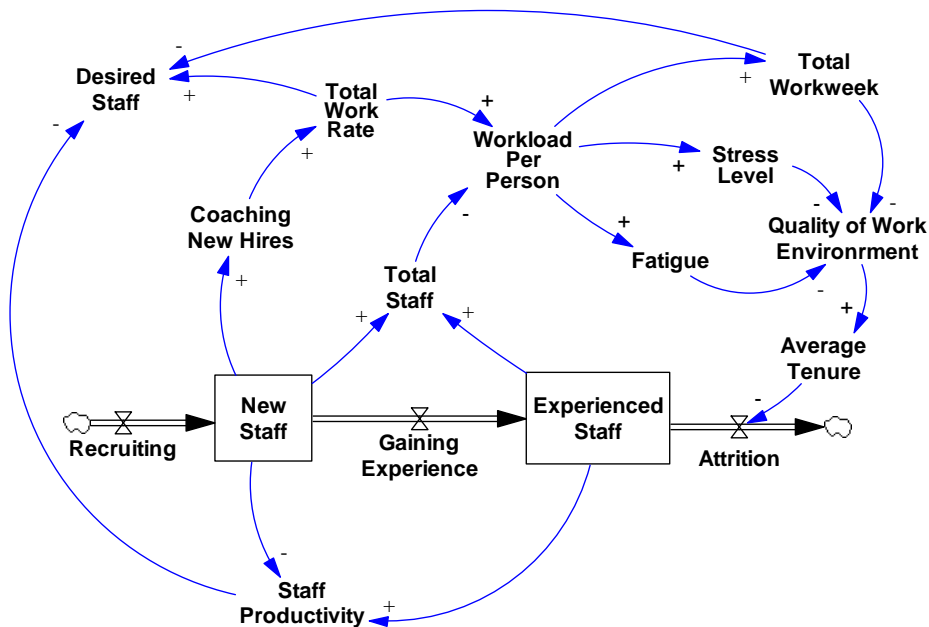


Figure 1 – Impact of high attrition rates.

Note: The rectangles represent important accumulations of people (stocks). The double arrows connecting the stocks represent the directed flow of people, capturing recruitment, change in experience, and attrition rates. The single arrows represent the flow of information and the direction of causality. Signs ('+' or '-') at the arrowheads indicate the polarity of the causal relationships: a '+' means that, all else equal, an increase in the independent variable causes the dependent variable to increase (a decrease causes a decrease); analogously, a '-' indicates that, all else equal, an increase in the independent variable causes the dependent variable to decrease (a decrease causes an increase). For further details see Sterman (2000).

High attrition rates has lead to dramatic administrative and financial implications, such as continuous recruitment, training and repatriation of new secondees, with significant recruitment and resignation costs. Applicants must be interviewed; new recruits must be trained at additional costs. The severity of the problems caused by attrition has been emphasized by Mission K, many of its supporting States, and internal and external auditors. Some of its specific components are detailed below:

Perhaps the most significant cost to Mission K was accrued due to the *costs of absenteeism* generated by high workload. From 2005 to 2006, up to 30% of all Mission K's seconded posts were vacant, requiring certain positions to be permanently advertised. Inability to fill such positions required seconded staff to address the existing workload, by working harder and overtime. However, the contract for seconded staff does not entitle them to be paid for overtime or extra workload. Hence, the additional stress and workload often has resulted in an increased level of absenteeism, tied with increased depression, sickness and poor morale. In 2008, at least 50% of the secondees had used the six uncertified leave days to which they are entitled in a year, along with five to ten days of certified sick leave. Considering 200 seconded staff in 2008 and about 100 of them taking between eleven to sixteen days of sick leave, it would cost the Mission between €20,000 to €180,000 in daily Board Living Allowances (consisting of €10/day) without an increase in performance and productivity in return. In fact, depression, constant sickness, and low morale significantly impact productivity, which would have additional tangible costs to Mission K.

Among the many *recruitment and resignation costs* Mission K incurred costs due to vacancy advertisements, interviews, travel, and staff check-in/check-out. Considering travel, newly recruited secondees are given a free airfare from their home country to Kosovo. Departing staff are also entitled to a free airfare ticket back home. Airfare tickets cost between €800 and €1000. In 2008, Mission K paid between €80,000 and €100,000 in return tickets from Kosovo for the 100 secondees that left the Mission. In the case of 50% successful hires, the cost of the incoming ticket would also have to be taken into account, raising travel costs to somewhere between €120,000 and €150,000.

The high percentage of vacant seconded posts resulted in permanently advertisements and constant interviewing. About 700 interviews were carried out in 2008 alone. Job interviews last on

average one-hour and require the participation of at least three seconded internationals. In addition, vacant seconded posts were advertised through more than 300 vacancy notices, requiring about thirty minutes of international telephone calls between Kosovo and the European premises of the Mission. Furthermore, checking-in new recruits and checking-out departing staff from the Mission are time consuming procedures and may take up to eight hours each. Many officers from Human Resources, Finance, Administration and other services are involved in the process. In 2008, 100 seconded staff checked-out and about half of those checked-in. Accounting for the cost of the combined hours of interviewing (2100 hours), vacancy notices (200 hours) and check-in/check-out (1200 hours) would lead to over €50,000 in utilized human resources, given a secondee salary of about €15/ hour (Board Living Allowance).

Mission K also incurred a number of other costs, such as consulting fees and training for new seconded staff. In terms of training fees, new secondees receive a daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of €156/day for the duration of the training program. Mission K also hired an external consultant, on a short term assignment, to conduct a Staff Satisfaction Survey, costing the Mission another €10,000. Altogether, the tangible costs described above range from €300,000 to €350,000 a year. Naturally, there are significant intangible costs associated with poor morale, low productivity, poor work environment, constant sickness, etc. Tangible and intangible costs together severely impaired the cost-effective performance of Mission K.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES USED IN KOSOVO

In the first five years subsequent to Kosovo's ethnic conflict, the International Missions, including the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), were particularly occupied consolidating and streamlining their operations and activities, trying to adapt to Kosovo's rapidly changing environment. At that time, it was not really a priority for them to assess, evaluate or improve their human resources policies and procedures. After the "adjustment period", the Missions' Human Resources Management could finally free itself to pursue other objectives such as improving the transparency and objectivity of the human resources processes, simplifying personnel procedures and administrative practices and more importantly attracting and retaining staff of the highest quality by ensuring better conditions of service. The unexpected insecurity and political instability in Kosovo in 2004, caused by the violent riots and the aggression of the Albanian majority against the Serbian minority in March of that year, became however a challenge for the existing Missions in the implementation of their mandates and the improvement of their organizational structures. The Missions

underwent a restructuring process, experiencing both an increase in recruitment activities due to the creation of new posts and the removal of positions that were no longer appropriate.

Faced with the magnitude of the staff attrition problem in recent years, Missions have tried to first understand the causes and implications of the problem and then to address it. Research teams were sent to Kosovo to investigate the problems faced by the international staff serving at the Missions. Several interview panels were set up with international staff holding positions in different grade levels. Staff satisfaction surveys were conducted. The research found that staff dissatisfaction was a root cause of staff attrition in European Civilian Missions. Missions were unclear about how to properly address the staff dissatisfaction. To address the problem, Missions have tried to retain staff, reducing the outflow of dissatisfied staff through *retention measures*, and to recruit more suitable candidates, increasing the inflow of new seconded staff through *recruitment measures*.

4.1. Retention measures

An important driver of attrition is the overall condition of service. Mission K aimed at increasing *contract durations* and overall *salary* of seconded staff. The increase of the duration of the contracts of the international staff, from six months to one year, was one of the most important human resources measures taken by some Missions. Mission K established a common practice to encourage and facilitate the extension of contracts. It also succeeded in slightly increasing the Board Living Allowance of its secondees. It tried, but did not succeed, however, in introducing pension benefits in the remuneration package of the seconded staff. In addition, some Missions also introduced flexible working hours on Fridays during the summer months in an attempt to improve staff morale.

Another measure used to try to retain seconded staff was to invest in *capacity building* and *orientation trainings*. Mission K has adopted a regular long-term staff training policy as a mechanism to retain its staff. Initially, both capacity-building and orientation trainings, offered to the international and local staff, were largely focused on post-conflict management and peace-building capacities. More recently, the training courses offered have conspicuously covered a wider range of topics, including managerial skills, negotiation and diplomacy, facilitation and mediations, effective communication, professional writing and information technology. The orientation course became of particular importance. It became mandatory to all new international seconded staff and had the goal of leveraging the knowledge of the work requirements and the values of the Missions. In some cases, orientation courses would be held outside Kosovo in the European Headquarters of the Mission's Organization, in Kosovo or in both locations addressing different issues.

Missions have also tried to reconcile work with private life attempting to create a *family oriented working environment*. However, they did not succeed in converting a non-family duty station into a family one despite the stability of security in Kosovo since 2005. At least in Kosovo’s southern part, a large number of international seconded staff have their partners and children living with them. Missions have adopted the policy of “closing an eye” or “looking the other way”, making it possible for staff with children to avoid disciplinary sanctions. Such policies have probably been the most effective action to promote the reconciliation of work and private life within the Missions. Mission K has gone further and amended the conditions of parents’ leave, entitling female secondees the possibility to take paid maternity leave in their first year of service and granting a four week paid paternity leave to male secondees. Prior to this, international female staff were entitled to paid maternity leave only after their second year of service; and paternity leave consisted of one week paid leave. Despite the improvement, seconded staff at Mission K are still not to be entitled to dependents’ benefits.

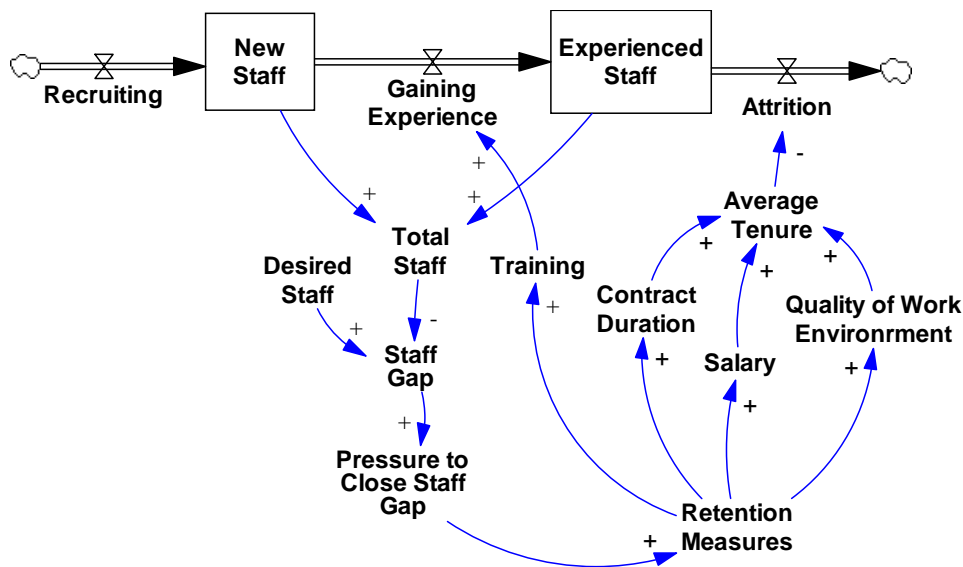


Figure 2 – Dynamics of retentions measures.

Figure 2 captures the dynamics of retention measures aiming at providing training, increasing contract duration and staff salary, and improving the quality of the work environment. It also captures the gap between desired staff (defined in section 3) and total staff as a driver for retention measures.

4.2. Recruitment measures

To improve recruiting, Missions sought to *shorten the time required to hire* new secondees, increase the number of total applicants and reduce hiring requirements. Several measures were put in

place to increase recruiting, such as streamlining procedures, increasing nominations, hiring people with little experience and for short terms assignments. For instance, Mission K simplified its bureaucratic procedures, improved interview techniques and introduced an on-line recruitment tool in an attempt streamline processes required to hire secondees. To recruit more suitable staff, Mission K advertised vacant positions in specialized publications. In addition, it encouraged States to *increase the number of nominations* for seconded posts, considered inadequate for the selection of qualified candidates. Furthermore, because contracted staff have better work conditions and tend to stay longer than secondees, some European Missions have converted a number of seconded positions to contracted posts as means to reduce attrition.

Another recruiting measure implemented was the creation of short-term assignments (STA), as a temporary solution to attrition. Human Resources Entities agreed to a number of short terms appointments and placed staff in acting positions to replace key-personnel that had left the Mission. Mission K has adopted the measure and continues to hire staff on a six months short-term assignments (STA) to deal with the loss of secondees through attrition. Finally, Mission K has *lowered the professional requirements* for certain non-senior seconded posts and has given priority to young candidates in an attempt to increase the number of secondees it hires. The Junior Professional Officer program, believed to be beneficial to the attrition problem, on the basis that junior people would stay with the Mission longer, has been promoted not only within Mission K but also in other International Missions in Kosovo.

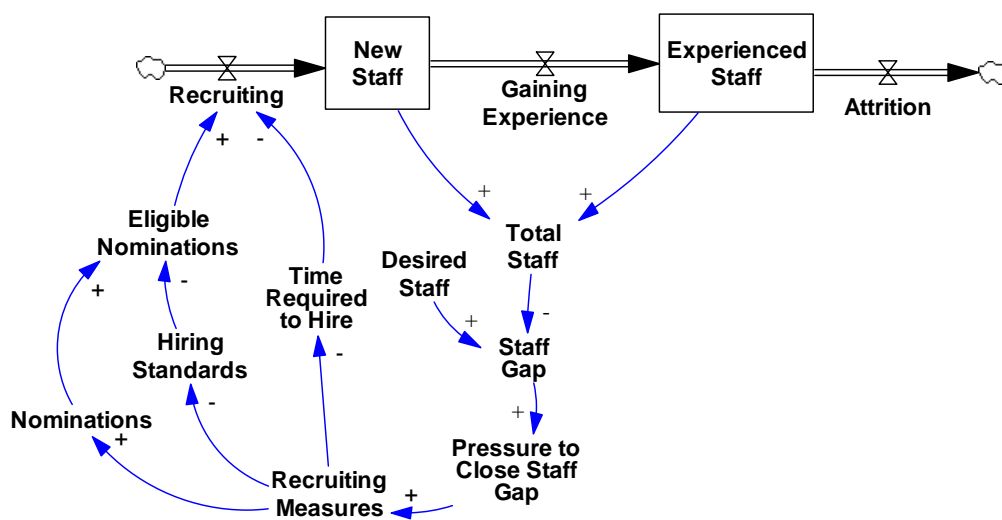


Figure 3 – Dynamics of recruitment measures.

Figure 3 captures the dynamics of recruitment measures aiming at increasing nominations, reducing the time to hire new staff and also decreasing hiring standards.

4.3. Shortcomings of adopted measures

Because of the complex relationship among multiple variables driving attrition, many of the retention and recruitment measures implemented by Mission K contributed to making the problem worse. In particular, hiring temporary staff and placing new staff in acting positions created severe problems. The more inexperienced staff were assigned to supervisory positions, the more mistakes were made, creating more rework, decreasing overall productivity and frustrating experienced staff, effectively pushing them out. Also, the more new staff were recruited on a temporary basis, the higher the workload on remaining staff due to training and coaching of new hires. Similarly, measures such as hiring Junior Professionals, lowering the requirements for non-senior positions and hiring staff with little work experience reduced overall productivity of staff and the effectiveness of the Missions.

Among the retention measures, offering training courses was also ineffective because better trained and more confident secondees could more easily find other jobs and leave the Mission. The problem was in part because the training courses were not specific to Mission K but increased general skills of the staff, which were also appealing to other organizations. Among the recruitment measures, better screened and better selected seconded staff also left Mission K within one or two years of service. Without significant changes in the work environment, the structure of pay and duration of contracts, more qualified staff had little difficulty in finding alternative jobs. In general the policies failed to significantly reduce the trend in attrition. Moreover, a systemic analysis of the attrition problem highlights how ineffective and limited the measures have been.

Failure to provide adequate compensation and stability:

Several Missions, and K in particular, failed to properly restructure the compensation package and contract duration of secondees. Mission K limited its measures to a slight increase in the Board and Living Allowance (BLA). It also extended the duration of the contracts for seconded staff in 6 months. The minor increase in pay (BLA) was insufficient to make a significant impact and did not address the issue of difference in pay among secondees holding the same position but nominated by different participating States. Also, there were no attempts to include a benefit package, which could have retained more senior and long-term minded staff. Moreover, the increase of 6 months in the duration of seconded contracts provided only a minor

sense of stability and job security. However, it failed to address the more serious problem of the limited duration of seconded service and the unstable situation of the Mission mandate itself, which could be revoked at any time without much anticipation.

Failure to address staff dissatisfaction:

Mission K has failed to properly recognize the level of dissatisfaction among its seconded staff. While the issue of “staff well-being” was addressed in a number of official meetings, no common understanding was reached among the States on the definition of “staff well-being” and how to achieve it. Consequently, the retention measures had only a weak impact on staff motivation because they failed to address the source of the problem generating long workweeks, high stress levels, high workload per person, low productivity, etc.

Security constraints, non-family duty station and work-life reconciliation:

Security constraints provide the basis for determining whether a duty station receives family or non-family status. In general, International Civilian Missions uphold security constraints even when the security situation has improved in their area of operations. This conservative measure is implemented to avoid unnecessary risks. Mission K has maintained its non-family mission status, despite significant changes such as Kosovo becoming an independent country recognized by many European States in 2008 and lack of security concerns in its area of operations. Due to its non-family status, seconded staff with children do not have the official right to establish a family in Kosovo.

Absence of systematic longitudinal data collection:

The poor quantity and quality of data makes it hard to analyse the attrition problem in depth and over time. Mission K, and other long-term Missions, should setup a database and regularly update it to monitor human resources metrics that directly and indirectly impact operational performance. Specifically, Missions should collect and analyze data on total work rate, work hours, number of staff in different positions, years served in the Mission, attrition and recruiting rates, number of nominations, nominations accepted, as well as a number of attributes about the employees (such as nationality, age, gender, educational background, years of professional experience, etc.). Additionally, attrition of contracted international staff and local staff should

be also monitored and documented with the aim of carrying out comparative studies among them.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the attrition, several retention solutions have been proposed such as creating an environment of solidarity, cooperation and teamwork (O'Reilly and Pfeffer 1995), investing in people by building an organizational culture based on trust and respect (Pfeffer 1998), fostering innovation and creativity in the organization (Franklin and Mujtaba 2007) and maximizing the opportunities for staff for example through training and job-rotation (O'Reilly and Pfeffer 1995). More recent studies emphasize the need for organizations to understand their strategies, practices, competencies and resources as a consistent system in order to increase efficiency and retain their staff (Turner 2004). Consistency is especially needed at the individual worker level (among the different practices involving the same person), among workers (same situations require a similar approach even when different people are involved) and over time (a worker should be treated today similarly to what he/she has been treated yesterday). In particular, it is advised that human resources management should be aligned with the strategy of the organization (vertical fit) and human resources practices should be consistent with the organization of work, the organizational culture, the workforce but also with the external environment and its trends (horizontal fit).

In line with the above, the European Civilian Missions are advised to develop a more people-centred approach (Pfeffer 1998) and to create conditions for staff well-being. Financial security is embedded in the concept of well-being, requiring adequate pay and benefits. In addition, Missions should entitle staff members and engage them in active decision making, and promote a friendly and caring environment to maintain motivation and productivity. Moreover, Missions should ensure consistency in human resources practices such as upgrading, downsizing and recruiting procedures; and harmonization of benefits and entitlements of all seconded staff independently of seconded Government. A better alignment of the Missions' mandate with the resources and competencies available within the Missions as well as among their functional programs themselves would undoubtedly benefit the recruitment and the retention of staff.

Past experience suggests that it may be easier to attract new staff than to prevent old ones from leaving. Single measures aimed at improving selection and recruitment, and disseminating vacancies did not lead to enduring results, because they were not accompanied by improvement of work conditions. Hence, the European Civilian Missions should develop a comprehensive attrition reduction

strategy comprising, first and foremost of integrated retention policies and, to a lesser extent, recruitment policies. In particular, the following policy recommendations could significantly improve retention while using the secondment as main recruitment system.

Restructure compensation system:

All secondees in similar positions should receive the same compensation irrespective of their nationality and seconded Government. Equal compensation would create a basis of fairness among the seconded staff and improve the quality of the work environment. At the same time, the Board and Lodging Allowance should be notably increased and brought to the standards of the remuneration of recruited staff in the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions. Dependents' benefits and pension funding should also be put in place. The compensation system could follow the system of contracted posts.

Develop a career path and improve job stability:

European Civilian Missions should facilitate the development of a professional career within the organizations to retain their secondees. This should be supported by longer and more stable contracts. Aligned with such efforts, Missions should abolish the time constraints on the duration of the secondment service, currently set at seven years in the same Mission.

Improve quality of work environment:

Improving the quality of the work environment entails a number of simple target steps. First Missions should limit the amount of overtime to which seconded staff are subjected, thereby establishes a cap in the length of the workweek and the amount of staff stress and fatigue. Then, Missions should ensure that staff be compensated for working overtime, which at least financially rewards staff commitment to performance. At the same time, the limit in the amount of overtime prevents staff from using overtime as a *de facto* means of increasing pay. Missions should prevent experienced staff from coaching new ones, thereby cutting the link from recruiting new staff and increasing the total workload. Instead, Missions should rely on outside consultants or educators to provide the specific training required. Training courses could also complement other aspects of specific Mission requirements that would enhance the experience of working for the Mission. By limiting the total workload, Missions would also cap the workload per person, thereby avoiding stress and fatigue.

Improve work conditions:

European Civilian Missions should invest in improving overall work conditions, such as empowering staff in non-senior positions, engaging them in the decision-making processes and increasing management training opportunities. Moreover the Mission could convert the status of the Mission to a family duty station; reduce barriers for staff to have children and raise a family; support care services for children; and adopt flexible work hours.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the locus of each of the policy recommendations focusing retention and how they relate to attrition in an integrated way.

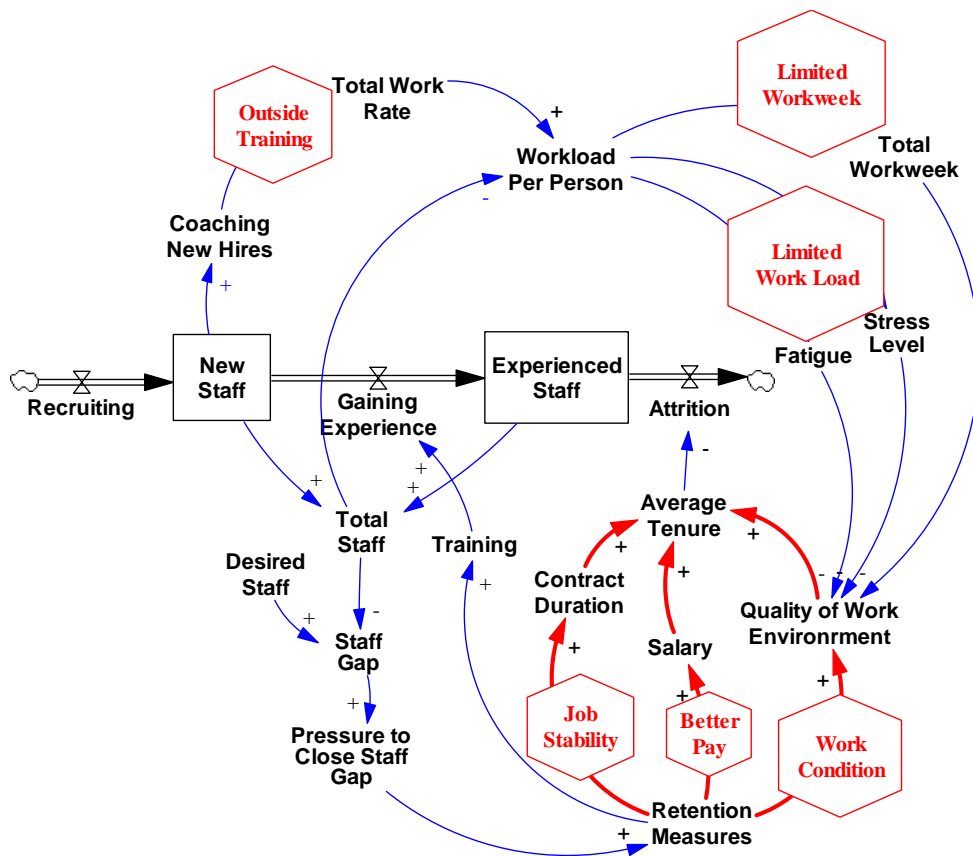


Figure 4 – Integrated policy recommendations focusing retention.

Note: The hexagons point to links at which the policies are applied. In the lower part of the figure, the policies strengthen the links; in the lower part they either weaken them or break the links.

Regarding the recruitment measures, the following policy recommendations are suggested to European Civilian Missions.

Recruit experienced people:

Instead of recruiting young and inexperienced staff, Missions should hire older and experienced people. Experienced people contribute to overall productivity and can effectively allow the organization to tackle a higher workload.

Increase hiring standards and share concrete job expectations:

If sufficient experienced people cannot be found, hiring standards should be increased such that the selected candidates are skilled to meet the demands of the job. Analogously, Missions should align expectations of new staff with the reality of the work. Job descriptions must realistically reflect the actual nature of service required. Together these measures limit the number of new staff that can be hired.

Increase number of nominations and reach out to prospective candidates:

Missions should continue to engage States to increase the number of qualified nominations. At the same time, they should proactively reach out to prospective job candidates in educational institutions, job fairs, and public events. Selective recruitment has been a very effective human resources strategy for successful for-profit companies such as Southwest Airlines (O'Reilly and Pfeffer 1995).

Avoid recruiting staff on short-term assignments:

Staff recruited on a short-term assignment (3 to 6 months) require significant coaching from other seconded staff and never become committed to the overall purpose of the Mission. As such, they not only increase the overall workload but also decrease productivity. While they present a short fix, a rapid opportunity of hiring more staff, the contribution to overall performance is illusory.

Figure 5 provides an overview of policy recommendations focusing on recruitment. The recruiting policies hexagons strengthen the links to which they are applied. In a few cases, such as “time required to hire” and “hiring standards”, the proposed integrated policies are opposite of those currently adopted. A longer time to hire staff and more stringent hiring standards limit the possibility of the Mission adopting short-cuts as a mechanism to address attrition. The rapid inflow of new recruits

may equate the outflow of experienced staff, but a number of problems associated with lack of experience follow. Finally, in the case of experienced recruiting, the policy generates a new flow not previously considered.

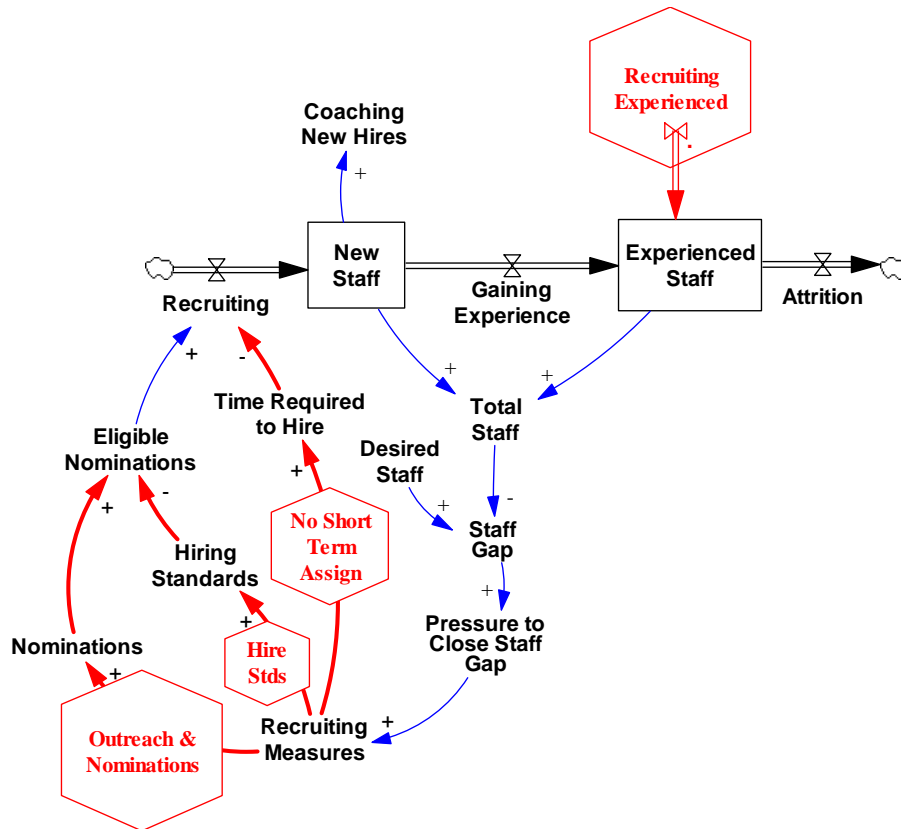


Figure 5 – Integrated policy recommendations focusing on recruitment.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This paper has sought to describe the problem of attrition of seconded staff that significantly affects European Civilian Missions in Kosovo. It has done so by studying Mission K, which has experienced high attrition rates (of up to 50%) in recent years. Our research indicates that Mission K is not an exception. Attrition rates are also high in many non-profit organizations, particularly in NGOs and International Missions operating in hazardous areas. Significant attrition rates command high costs, which include not only recruitment and training of new staff, but also lost capabilities of experienced staff, high absenteeism, dilution of experience and overall low productivity, and increased workload of remaining staff. Ultimately, high attrition rates can lead to significant staff shortages impairing the ability of Missions to fulfil their mandates. Often, attempts to resolve such staffing shortages aim at recruiting acting or temporary staff. Such measures work in the short-term, but the inexperience of the

acting-staff requires coaching from experienced ones, leading both to additional workload and lower productivity. Short-term measures to address staff shortages often contribute to higher attrition rates.

The dependence of the European Civilian Missions in Kosovo on seconded staff makes it difficult for them to ensure work continuity, if almost all key-positions are reserved for seconded staff and they leave the Missions due to unequal entitlement policies, inadequate workloads, high stress levels, constant fatigue and sickness, short duration contracts and unstable environments. On the other hand, the secondment system allows European and some non-European States to be represented in the Missions's workforce. Therefore, it would be interesting to maintain it and potentially improve it so that it could become more functional. We describe Mission K's efforts to reduce staff attrition, while maintaining the secondment system. The adopted measures include the development of "Staff Satisfaction Surveys", offering training courses and moderately improving remuneration packages, contract duration and leave entitlements. However, such policies fail to bring about measurable results, because they attempt to solve the symptoms, staff shortage, instead of the root cause of the problem, staff dissatisfaction.

Staff dissatisfaction in the European Civilian Missions in Kosovo can be attributed to inadequate remuneration and benefits, short contract duration, poor working conditions, high stress levels, long workweeks, high workload per person, and a perception of unfair treatment. All such attributes directly contribute to high attrition. Integrated recommendations to reduce attrition in the European Civilian Missions include: competitive pay and benefits package, establishing equality in payment, extending contract duration and developing a career path, improving the quality of the work environment (limiting the length of the workweek, the total amount of work, coaching requirements, etc.), recruiting experienced staff, increasing hiring standards and proactively reaching out to better job applicants.

It is hoped that the findings of this paper will be used to improve the secondment system by identifying and applying good practices from the contracted recruitment system while keeping its main characteristics such as the particularity of ensuring States' representation in the international workforce of the Missions and of maintaining a direct link between the States and their seconded nationals. More research is needed to understand whether International Missions relying on the secondment systems are more vulnerable to attrition than other Missions mostly or exclusively recruiting staff on a contracted regime, such as the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions. Additional studies should be conducted to analyze whether the secondment system itself could be used as an anti-attrition measure. The secondment system is easier to transform and adapt than other recruitment systems, and could be

integrated with new regulations and contractual forms. For instance, if a Mission would suddenly terminate its mandate, secondees could obtain a five- or ten-year contract for service to be performed in an International Mission or Headquarters.

It would also be worthwhile comparing the costs of attrition with those of prospective (or already implemented) improvement measures. Converting non-family Missions into family ones, for example, has often been discussed taking into account the costs that such change would entail. The costs associated with dependent benefits and the potential need to evacuate family members are typically considered high costs that family-Missions may have to pay. However, if Missions with “family status” are highly correlated with high staff retention, in the long-term the cost of family status Missions may be lower than those experienced by non-family status Missions. Therefore, Missions should carefully evaluate the costs of attrition, recruitment and retention policies, and the costs and benefits of changing status from “non-family” to “family” to be able to understand the best options available.

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