

Paper on the evolution of short-term contracts in ITU

by ITU Staff Union

CSAIO7, Strasbourg, 21-22 September 2006

Despite the definition of a short-term contract in the Staff Rules governing short-term appointment ... *short-term appointment for conference and other short-term service by the International Telecommunication Union, for a period not exceeding twelve months.*,

ITU has, over the years, abused the existence of this category of staff, renewing contracts over and over again. It should be pointed out that in ITU, short-term staff are not entitled to any kind of dependant or child allowance, nor to steps.

Around 1998, a Resolution was passed by the Plenipotentiary Conference (highest decision-making body in ITU) in the sense that, when a staff member on short-term contracts had been performing the same tasks in the same unit for five years, ITU should issue a job-vacancy notice with the aim of regularizing this staff member. Of course, there was never a guarantee that this person would get the post...

The major problem with this setup was that, by definition, a short-term staff member has very little or no say on how long he/she is to stay in a particular unit, which often removed any chance that might exist of having a post published. Staff members on short-term contracts for eight or ten years were not an uncommon occurrence.

In 2002, the ITU Council (governing body meeting yearly), approved Resolution 1195, including, in particular:

- *not linking staff contracts with posts;*
- *the conversion of a fixed-term appointment into a permanent one after four years of service, which is subject to satisfactory service of the staff member concerned, continuing work and funding;*
- *the abolishment of managed renewable term (MRT) appointments; and*
- *the conversion of existing MRT appointments into permanent ones, subject to the criteria in para ...*

The negotiations that followed this Resolution were long and hard, but a good policy came out, to the satisfaction of all: staff would be more mobile, thus making the management of the Union more flexible, while providing staff with increased job security. This policy, called the **New contracts policy** was put into practice in September 2002 as Service Order No. 02/08.

As well as taking into account fixed-term contracts, this service order included a provision for staff on short-term contracts:

2.2 Short-term contracts

2.2.1 *Short-term contracts shall be used for work of a temporary nature and limited to eleven months. The main objective is to ensure that short-term contracts are not used for regular and continuously ongoing work. They shall be used for hiring supernumerary staff such as:*

- *staff engaged for conferences, assemblies and meetings for short periods of time;*
- *free-lance translators, interpreters and précis-writers engaged for conferences, assemblies and meetings; and*

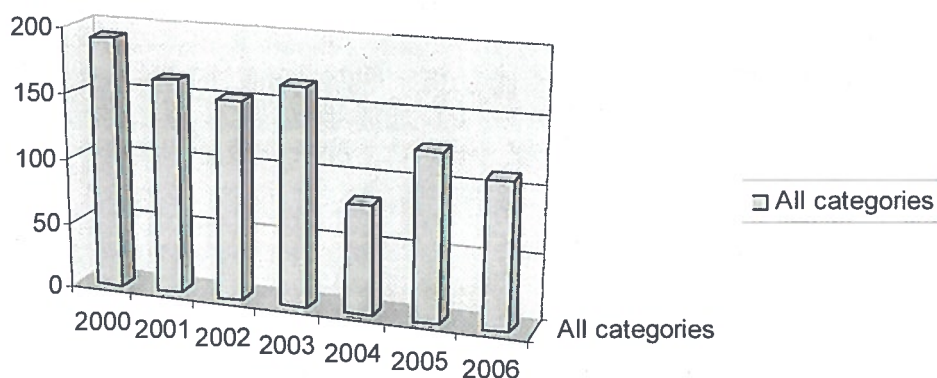
- *staff engaged to absorb work of a temporary nature or unforeseen extra workload.*
- 2.2.2 *If an initial short-term contract is to be extended beyond six months, the Personnel Department must be informed, by the Director as regards the staff of each Bureau, of whether the engagement is temporary in nature or represents a long-term requirement (in such a case, a temporary vacancy notice shall be published).*
- 2.2.3 *In all cases short-term contracts shall be limited to a maximum of two consecutive periods of eleven months for the same functions.*
- 2.2.4 *When it is demonstrated/ascertained that the tasks are of a long-term nature, and provided that necessary funding is available, a fixed-term vacancy notice shall be published for competition, using, whenever possible, an existing vacant post, so that the incumbent can be considered for a fixed-term appointment before the end of the maximum period on short-term contracts.*
- 2.2.5 *The recruitment of short-term staff in established posts should be restricted and replaced by mobility of staff in service interested in a temporary detachment.*

Immediately following the implementation of this measure, severe financial problems were identified by the 2002 Plenipotentiary Conference which all but froze any external recruitment for a number of months.

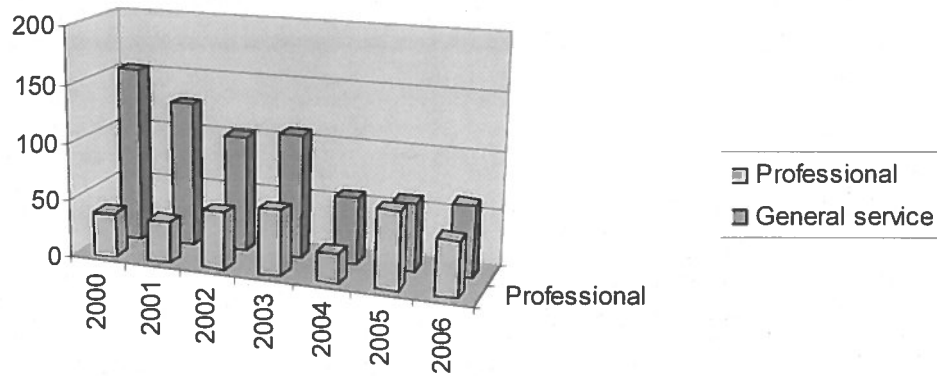
Despite these problems, the regularization of the situation of the staff already employed by the Union continued. Around 100 fixed-term contracts were converted into permanent ones and most of the long-term short-term staff members were regularized. By mid 2004, management unilaterally decided to stop the application of this service order as far as conversion into permanent contracts was concerned. Although nothing was ever said about the part concerning short-term contracts, the regularization of staff slowed down to a trickle.

The attached graphics provide a more explanatory overview of the situation of this type of contracts in ITU between February 2000 and February 2006, both in general terms and by category: a severe decrease can be observed between the February 2003 and the February 2004 measurements as a result of the budgetary restrictions put in place after the 2002 Plenipotentiary Conference.

Short-term contracts - all categories (2000-2006)



Short-term contracts by category (2000-2006)



At the moment, around ten or twelve long-term short-term staff still remain, but lack of will on the side of ITU management and continuing budgetary restrictions have made it impossible to have the situation of these colleagues regularized so far.

It is to be noted that lack of reliable data provided by the Personnel Department to staff representatives on the exact situation of colleagues.

The use of short-term contracts in ITU in recent years seems to have been more according to definition, although the ITU Staff Union fears that the situation experienced in the pre-2002 years could repeat itself.
