

UN Senior Leadership Appointments Dashboard: Methodological Notes

(As of October 22, 2020)

Overview

This database summarizes trends in UN senior appointments from late 1995 to September 30, 2020 (adding appointments in real time). Senior appointments are those that are at the ASG, USG, or DSG levels ([assistant secretaries-general, under-secretaries-general, and deputy secretaries-general](#)). **There are 1,238 appointments collected in the database so far:** 758 ASGs, 474 USGs, and 6 DSGs. Every reappointment is counted separately as a new entry, if there is a press release issued for it. The database contains information on appointments, not on the specific composition of the UN's leadership in a given year.

Completeness rates within the database

The database was compiled by a machine learning-based web data scraper tool designed by an external partner. The tool scrapes **public documents (press releases of appointments) released by the UN** on the main [UN web site](#). As we observed that there were positions for which there were no press releases, we also added some appointments manually, drawing on a variety of public sources, including [lists of current USGs/ASG](#) published by the UN's Protocol and Liaison Service. Each entry was verified by researchers through reference to the original press release or (if needed) online research. A sample of the data was then validated by a second researcher. Below are the completeness rates across various dimensions covered in the database:

- **Year of appointment:** 100%
- **Nationality of the appointee:** 100%
- **Name and surname of the appointee:** 100%
- **UN Region:** 100%
- **World Bank country income group:** 100%
- **UN Department/Fund/Program:** 100%
- **Mission (positions related to peace operations):** 100%
- **Gender of the appointee:** 100%
- **Job title of the appointee:** 100%
- **Rank of the appointee (ASG/USG/DSG):** 100% (The initial database had a completeness rate of 76.74%. The 100% rate was achieved by manual review of press releases and drawing on expertise of two long-term UN employees. See below for the Assessments of rank section.)

- **University/College of the appointee:** 86.4%.
- **Year of birth of the appointee:** 83.1%
- **Number of children at the moment of appointment:** (only registering appointees with at least one child): 50.61%
- **Marital status at the moment of appointment:** (only registering married appointees): 49.2%
- **Predecessor of the appointee in the position:** 48.6%

We have observed that completeness is less likely the farther back in time we go, as there are only 4 announced appointments for 1995 (the fact that UN only started issuing press releases online in October 1995 additionally influences data for that year), only 11 for 1996, and so on. Consistency of issuing press releases for these appointments has clearly increased over time. However, further analysis is needed to understand relative incompleteness by year, as it has been documented that there has been a large increase in the overall number of senior appointments over time. Therefore, we should expect to see a smaller number of appointments in earlier years.

Assessments of rank

Decisions had to be made on certain categories of appointments regarding their status as ASG/USG/DSG (or equivalent). The raw database compiled by the scraper included some appointments that do not qualify as such, including many resident coordinators. At the same time, some appointments did not have a clear assignment of either the ASG or the USG rank. The following decisions were made to assure and consistency and completeness of the rank data:

- **Force Commanders:** Not all Force Commanders are ASGs, and information is not always readily available to determine which are ASG versus D-2s. We made the assumption that all Force Commanders who were also “heads of mission” were ASGs. We also assumed all Force Commanders assigned to the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon as well as large, multidimensional peace operations (i.e., Mali, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, and South Sudan) should be counted as ASGs. These assumptions were based on an analysis of the Protocol and Liaison Lists, in which such roles were typically of ASG rank. In the future, we may create a category for ASG-level Force Commanders to note that they are mission leadership, but not SRSGs/DSRSGs.
- **High-level panel members:** Research in the Protocol and Liaison Lists and consultations with experts suggest that these roles are not assigned ranks, and they have therefore been excluded.
- **“\$1/year positions”:** All appointments at USG and ASG rank are included in the database, including symbolic appointments (so-called \$1/year positions).
- **Senior appointments made by the UN General Assembly:** Those USG/ASG appointments made by the General Assembly and announced in a press release were kept in the database.
- **All remaining cases:** Unclear cases remaining after the verification process outlined above were decided upon by drawing upon the expertise of two long-term UN employees.

Categorizing by UN Department/Fund/Program/Office/Other Entity

As much as possible, we followed the official [UN System Chart](#). The press releases do not include appointments for UN Specialized Agencies and Related Organizations, so these are not currently included in our database. The following guided our categorization:

- In most cases, the categorization by entity was straightforward, as the entity was included in the press release or is already well known.
- We categorized leadership of tribunals according to the name of their tribunal (ICTY, ICTR, SCSL, etc).
- A specific challenge arose in categorizing Special Representatives, Special Advisors, and Special Envoys of the Secretary-General. We made the following categorizations, based on expert advice:
 - Senior leaders associated with political missions, good offices, and peace operations were categorized with the department managing that effort: DPPA for [political missions and good offices](#) and DPO for peace operations. Some of these determinations, particularly for good offices, were more difficult to make the farther one goes back in time, as there is no comprehensive public list.
 - Other thematic and geographic Special and Personal Representatives, Envoys, and Advisers were grouped with EOSG. These include the so-called \$1/year positions.
 - Over time, we may separate these groups out in the data, as there may be interest in seeing trends in appointments in these types of positions. However, for the \$1/year positions, there is no public source of data to categorize these.
- Another challenge arose with categorizing positions that are not clearly attached to a specific entity. These are mainly ad hoc positions, such as members of ad hoc committees, leads of investigation mechanisms, and the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response. These have been categorized as “Other” in the data set and may be changed as new information comes to light.

Testing for missing appointments

Separately from the question of data completeness for each entry in the database, there is the additional challenge of appointments that are missing, because no press release was issued for them. For example, Jan Eliasson’s appointment to the Deputy Secretary General position in 2012 was announced at the UN News portal, but not at the UN press release site. Some UN entities, such as the UNDP in 2005, only began issuing press releases online to announce senior appointments at a certain point. In order to reduce the rate of resulting “missingness,” the following two actions were taken:

- Any missing USGs for Funds & Programs and for Secretariat entities between 1995-2020 were added based on manual review and analysis.
- 40 UN Protocol and Liaison Lists from the period 2005-2020, which list all sitting USGs and ASGs at the time of publication, were used to fill in the gaps.

We also conducted a sampling exercise, selecting at random 100 names from our database.

For each of the selected people, we manually verified that all of their senior appointments at the UN between 1995-2020 were included in the database. Among the selected appointees there were 188 senior UN appointments in the analyzed period, of which 171 were already included in the dataset. This implies a coverage rate of 91%. However, this ratio is only calculated based on random check of appointees who are already in the database. An alternative measure is the manual analysis of all USG-level appointments for Funds & Programs mentioned above. 56 USG-level appointments for Funds & Programs were made between 1995 and 2020. Of these, 46 were included in the database. This implies a coverage rate of 82.14%. All missing appointments identified in this exercise were subsequently added to the database.

Other considerations

- **Country income groups** were assigned based on the 2019 classification by the World Bank.
- **Group appointments (e.g., commissions, panels):** In 576 cases, individual appointments were announced jointly with several others in single press releases (e.g. when appointments to a commission are announced). These appointments were individually verified for their rank and either kept in the database as separate entries or removed.
- **Duplicates:** Some appointments were announced more than once in the same time period. Every appointment was verified to assure that it is not counted more than once.
- **Reappointments:** We include reappointments in the database, if there is an official press release announcing the reappointment.