

June 2020

## Ensuring Equitable Geographic Diversity of Staff

### Background

1. Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, which governs the selection of staff states that "Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible." The first resolution of the General Assembly on the issue of the principle of geographical distribution (resolution 153 (II) of 15 November 1947) reaffirmed the principle of recruiting staff on as wide a geographic basis as possible.
2. The latest report of the Secretary-General on composition of the Secretariat and staff demographics (A/74/82) indicates that in recent years, among posts subject to geographic distribution and a system of desirable ranges, the number of un-represented and under-represented countries in the UN continued to rise to more than sixty countries, along with an increase in the number of over-represented countries. At the same time, less than 8.3 per cent of the Secretariat's 37,000+ staff are recruited under the system of geographic distribution and the corresponding system of desirable ranges. The absence of any rule governing the geographic diversity on extra-budgetary and other posts has resulted in overwhelming imbalance in the recruitment of staff.
3. The Secretary General has expressed commitment to strengthening efforts to achieve equitable geographic representation as outlined in *Section D. Commitment to Diversity of the Senior Managers' Compacts for 2018*<sup>1</sup> and was again included in the Compacts for 2019. The 29 May 2019 memo from the Chef de Cabinet to all Heads of Entity titled *Making Progress Towards Achieving A Diverse Workforce That reflects The International Character of The Organization* spells out detailed measures with regards to the different types of posts. All heads of Secretariat entity are requested to review the composition of staff in their entities irrespective of the funding sources of the posts, to prepare entity-specific plans, and to make immediate and tangible progress to a more equitable geographical representation and achieving a diverse workforce that reflects the international character of the organization.
4. In January 2020, OHRM published the *Geographical Diversity Strategy*<sup>2</sup>. The strategy focuses on two principal areas under the overarching concept of greater geographical diversity: (1) equitable geographical representation; and (2) greater regional group diversity. In his latest remarks on 6 March 2020<sup>3</sup> the Secretary General outlined a two-pronged strategy to address this issue. With respect to equitable geographic representation the goal is to have every Member State represented in the Organization, and to bring as many under-represented Member States within range in the system of desirable ranges. With regards to greater regional group diversity, the goal according to the SG is to reduce the proportion of the most highly represented regional group and to increase the proportion of less represented regional groups, thereby reducing the overall imbalance.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iseek-external.un.org/user/login?destination=node/990374>

<sup>2</sup> [https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/OHR%20Geographical%20Diversity%20Strategy\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/OHR%20Geographical%20Diversity%20Strategy_EN_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-03-06/secretary-generals-remarks-group-of-friends-gender-parity-delivered>

## Key Issues

1. Management needs to **ensure transparency** at the staff level including through: transparency in the application of the methodology to be employed correct the current imbalance of geographical composition of staff in the Organization; transparency on explicit targets, timetables and other specific actions recommended to entities; periodic reporting on progress, and transparency on staff demography including their movement, through the institution of online dashboards in all entities that ensure equitable geographic representation exists at all levels within entities of the Organization- across all units, sections, branches, and divisions. Management should engage with Staff Representatives in this regard.
2. Management should undertake policy reviews to develop a plan of action and ensure equitable geographical representation at all stages of the human resources cycle **focusing on recruitment, staffing and promotions**. As indicated in the Strategy, mechanisms should be established to internally steer appointment decisions through direction from the top, to ensure a review of equitable geographic representation and regional representation in all levels- Divisions, sections, and units, irrespective of funding sources, as per OHRM guidance. Management should further ensure that the evaluation criteria for any given post is objective and relates to the actual functions of the post. This includes setting up of compliance monitoring so that an entity's performance will not continue to be driven by the sum of individual recruitment decisions that do not take into consideration to geographic and regional imbalances. Diversity and inclusion officer posts should be instituted in all entities to mitigate decision-making processes influenced by "affinity bias" or unconscious bias that may be prevalent within the Organization. All new vacancies, regardless of the source of funding as well as promotions should be aimed at improving equitable geographical distribution in the Organization.
3. Addressing equitable geographic distribution is a longstanding issue. While acknowledging the steps underway, Management needs to institutionalize equitable geographic representation not only to rectify the current imbalance but also undertake measures to **avoid any recurrence of such imbalances in the future**.

## Recommendation

Establish a Working Group to explore ways to implement the Geographical Diversity Strategy, with the terms of reference to cover issues including but not limited to, methodology to address current imbalances as well as the development of targets and timelines; issuance of disaggregated data on staff movement; compliance monitoring mechanisms such as the establishment of diversity dashboards and appointment of diversity and inclusion officers similar to the framework already in place for gender representation.