



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-fourth session

Item 140 of the preliminary list\*

### Pattern of conferences

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### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report has been prepared pursuant to resolution [73/270](#) and previous resolutions on the subject and responds to the mandates addressed to the Secretary-General contained therein. It also provides information on procedures and activities relating to the pattern of conferences in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2018.

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\* [A/74/50](#).



## I. Introduction

1. A strong multilateral system is underpinned by the efficient and effective provision of conference management support, which in turn is contingent upon client orientation, innovation and partnerships. Examples of tangible synergies between these concepts abound in the present report as the Secretariat's conference-servicing operations in 2018 continued to harness the potential of advanced technologies and adjust their working methods in the constant modernization and improvement of their operations in New York and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna. New features were added to expand the scope, diversify the functions and increase the user-friendliness of existing tools. Novel mechanisms were launched to simplify procedures and improve the client experience. Original applications were developed to increase the generation of high-value business intelligence. Wherever possible, innovations were applied globally and integrated with existing enterprise systems. In many cases, they were also shared with other United Nations entities. In all these undertakings, multilingualism served as the binding factor and overarching theme.

2. The number and range of innovations introduced reflect a deliberate policy of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to encourage innovation in all aspects of conference management. The addition of new interfaces to eLUNa makes it far more than a custom computer-assisted translation tool, and its integration with the consolidated official terminology database, UNTERM, and the workflow management tool, gDoc, is further harmonizing and streamlining the documentation process at all four duty stations and beyond. Improvements in the data-generation capacity of mission-critical applications such as gMeets, the extension of tools to help to better predict the workload, and the development of mechanisms to determine cost implications are now providing conference-servicing operations with the business data needed to optimize resource allocation. A one-stop shop for meeting service requesters, a multilingual, digital *Journal of the United Nations*, a more user-friendly and efficient participant accreditation tool and a simplified mechanism for arranging interpretation support for field missions are among other notable improvements achieved in 2018. Meanwhile, increased services for persons with disabilities have enhanced the accessibility of conference resources and, therefore, access to the work of the United Nations as a whole.

3. The Department is committed to continuing to focus on, and enhance, its core business of delivering high-quality meetings and documentation services in an efficient and effective manner. The Department's compliance with the key performance indicators for documentation and meetings management in 2018 remained as high as in 2017 or improved, as shown in the present report, allowing it to generate significant efficiencies. Against the backdrop of an ever-changing environment and in concordance with evolving client expectations, the United Nations conference services are becoming nimbler and more versatile.

### **Commitment to innovation: a deliberate approach**

4. Necessity may be the mother of invention, but innovation requires space and support to take place. Proactive strategies to foster a culture of innovation and to encourage staff, individually and collectively, to identify areas for improving the conference services provided were systematically deployed across the Secretariat. An innovation team was established in Geneva and combines a top-down and bottom-up approach whereby staff can put forward ideas, which, once approved, are tested through test trials and prototyping. The team is currently conducting an extensive analysis of conference-servicing needs using innovative design thinking and client-

centred approaches, with a view to identifying how to improve and expand meeting services to Member States and conference organizers. It is also examining the applicability of predictive analytics to optimize the planning and use of meeting resources.

5. In New York, the Department won the 2018 Secretary-General Award for innovation for its work, in partnership with the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of Information and Communications Technology, to develop an online testing platform for the recruitment of language staff, enabling candidates to participate in competitive examinations without having to travel to test centres. This has not only expanded the candidate pool but also increased the accessibility of the examinations to persons with disabilities and to candidates in less well-represented regions.

6. The quality of the innovations of the Secretariat's conference services is reflected in their uptake by other entities within the United Nations system and beyond. The Department also chairs the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, which brings together experts from a wide range of intergovernmental organizations and allows them to exchange experiences and know-how, remain abreast of relevant developments and pursue synergies and joint ventures in various areas, including training and sustainable event management.

7. At all duty stations, the conference-servicing operations worked closely with their local information technology teams. Cooperation with the Office of Information and Communications Technology helped the Department to leverage its own information and communications strategy in support of conference services. The results of that cooperation, in the framework of the Department's policy of active innovation, and its client-oriented approach, are presented in the relevant sections of this report. Initiatives and measures taken towards the mainstreaming of multilingualism at the United Nations and the consistent and effective implementation of the terms of reference of the Coordinator for Multilingualism have been described in the report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism ([A/73/761](#)).

## **II. Meetings management**

### **A. Cycle of meetings and conferences**

8. In its resolution 3491 (XXX), the General Assembly decided that the cycle of meetings and conferences should coincide with the budgetary period. The Assembly subsequently adopted resolution [72/266 A](#), in which it approved the change from a biennial to an annual budget period on a trial basis, beginning with the programme budget for 2020. In the light of this change, the Committee on Conferences, in accordance with its mandate, may wish to consider requesting the Secretary-General to prepare, for the time being or at least during the above-mentioned trial, draft annual calendars of conferences and meetings, in line with the new budget cycle, and to consider approving, in 2019, a calendar only for 2020.

### **B. Adoption of the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2020 and 2021**

9. Should the Committee decide to follow the current practice of biennial planning of the pattern of conferences, it would review at its substantive session, in September 2019, the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations

for 2020 and 2021 as prepared by the Secretariat ([A/AC.172/2019/L.2](#)) and transmit its recommendations to the General Assembly in its report for 2019 ([A/74/32](#)).

### C. Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

10. Requests to meet during the main part of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly have been received from eight bodies thus far. In accordance with established practice, the requests will be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences, which will make a recommendation to the Assembly.

### D. Intersessional departures

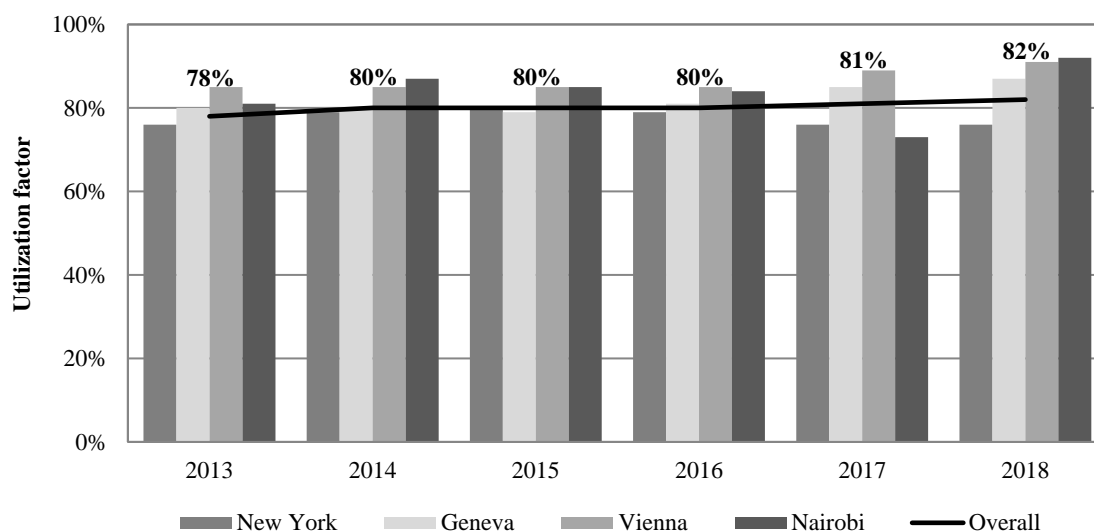
11. The Committee on Conferences approved five requests for intersessional departures.

### E. Utilization of conference-servicing resources by United Nations organs

12. All four duty stations made efforts to improve the interpretation utilization factor, in accordance with section II, paragraph 18, of resolution [73/270](#), by engaging relevant intergovernmental and expert bodies, as appropriate. As a result, the overall interpretation utilization factor rose to 82 per cent in 2018, as shown in figure I.

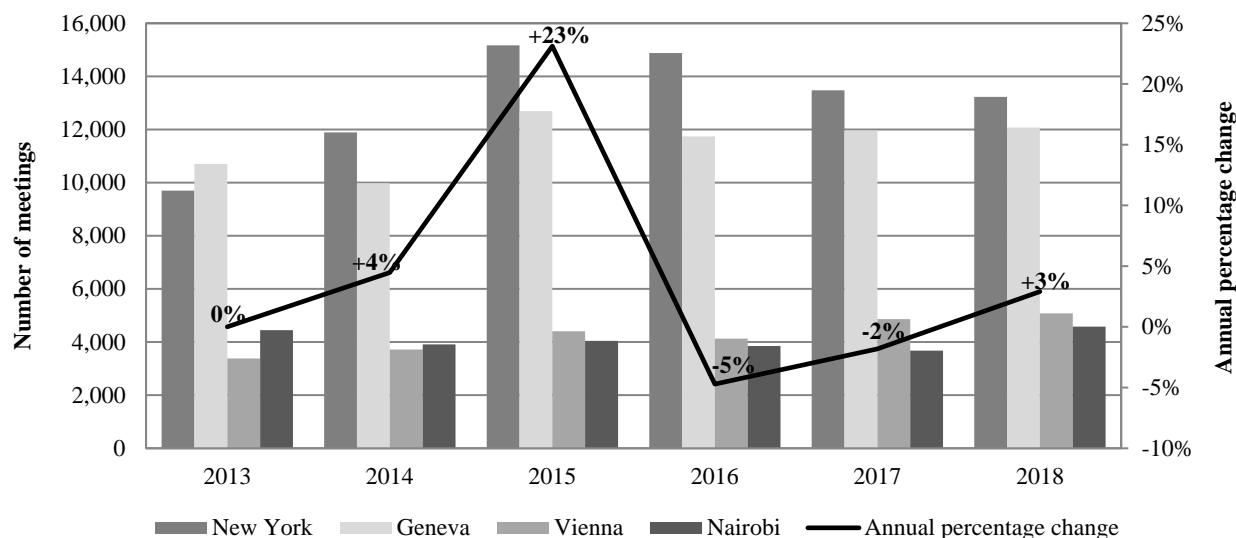
Figure I

**Interpretation utilization factor of all calendar bodies (2013–2018)**



13. The total number of meetings held at the four duty stations in 2018 increased by 3 per cent compared with 2017, from 33,975 to 34,962, as shown in figure II. Compared with 2013, the number of non-calendar meetings increased by 40 per cent and accounted for 75 per cent of all meetings in New York and Geneva in 2018. This increase placed heavy constraints on the resources allocated to servicing mandated calendar meetings.

Figure II  
Meetings workload (2013–2018)

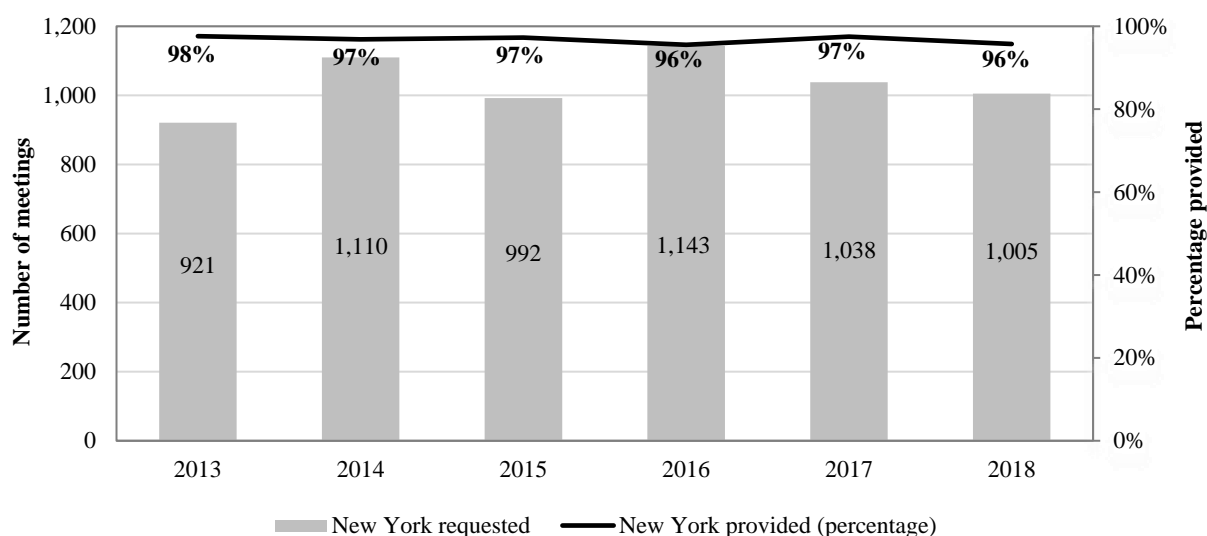


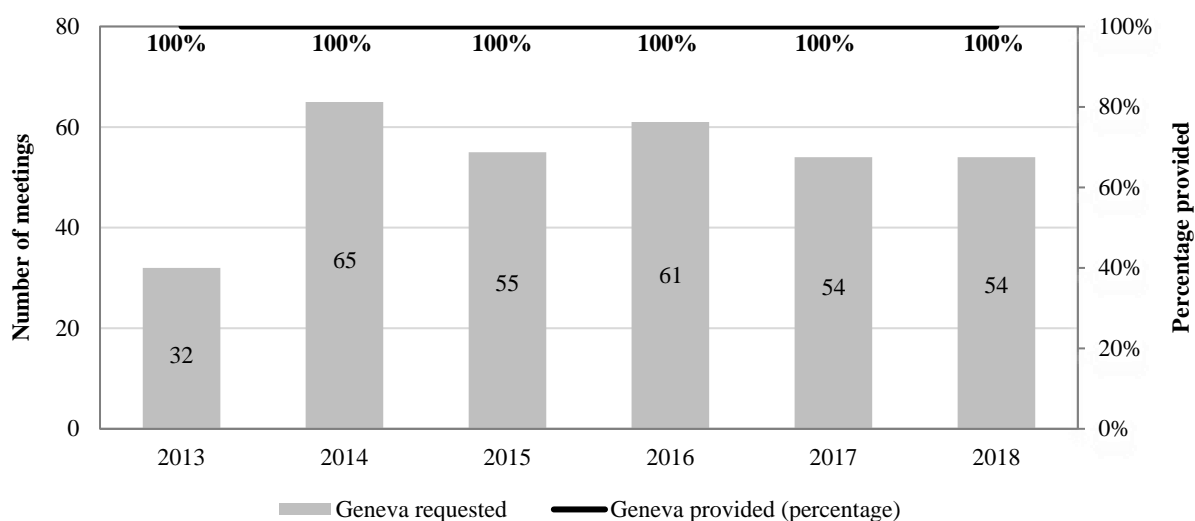
#### F. Provision of interpretation services to bodies entitled to meet “as required”

14. In New York, a similar percentage of requests for interpretation by bodies entitled to meet “as required” were fulfilled in 2018 as in 2017. In Geneva, the only body entitled to meet “as required” is the Human Rights Council, and all its requests for interpretation services and meeting rooms were met, as shown in figure III. There are no bodies entitled to meet “as required” in the other two duty stations.

Figure III  
Provision of interpretation services to meetings of “as required” bodies (2013–2018)

New York



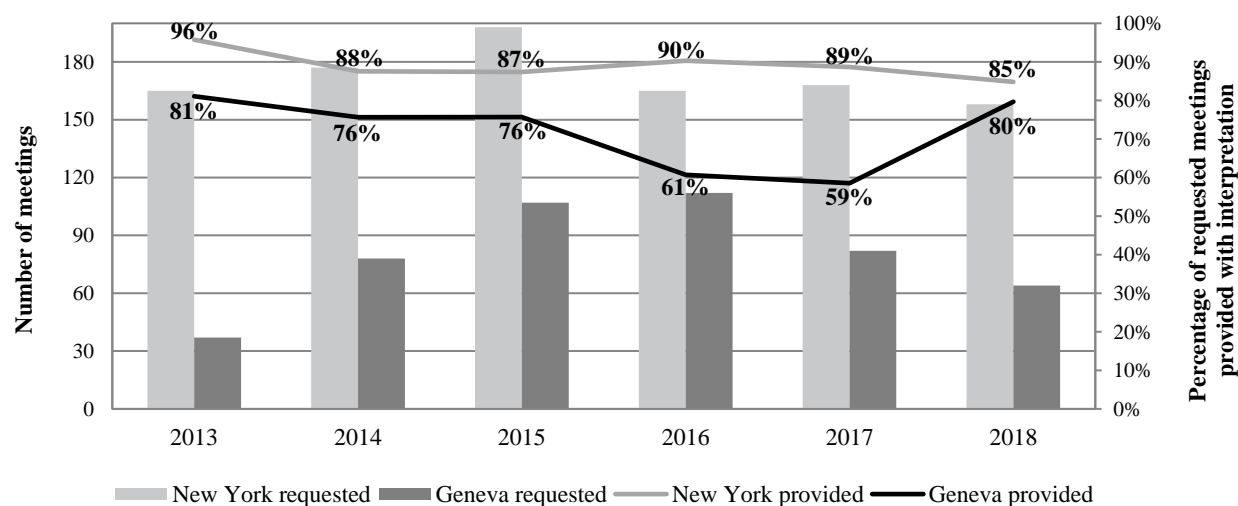


### G. Provision of conference services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

15. Figure IV below provides a summary of the provision of conference services to regional and other major groupings of Member States at the four duty stations from 2013 to 2018. All requests for meeting rooms made by such groupings were met in 2018, as in previous years. In New York, the continued increase in last-minute cancellations by calendar bodies in the past five years affected the provision of interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States: the proportion of requests met fell to 85 per cent in 2018 from 89 per cent in 2017. In Geneva, fewer requests for meetings with interpretation were received in 2018 and a higher percentage of such requests were thus met (80 per cent, compared with 59 per cent in 2017). In Nairobi and Vienna, there were no requests for interpretation services to be provided for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States in 2018.

Figure IV

**Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States in New York and Geneva (2013–2018)**

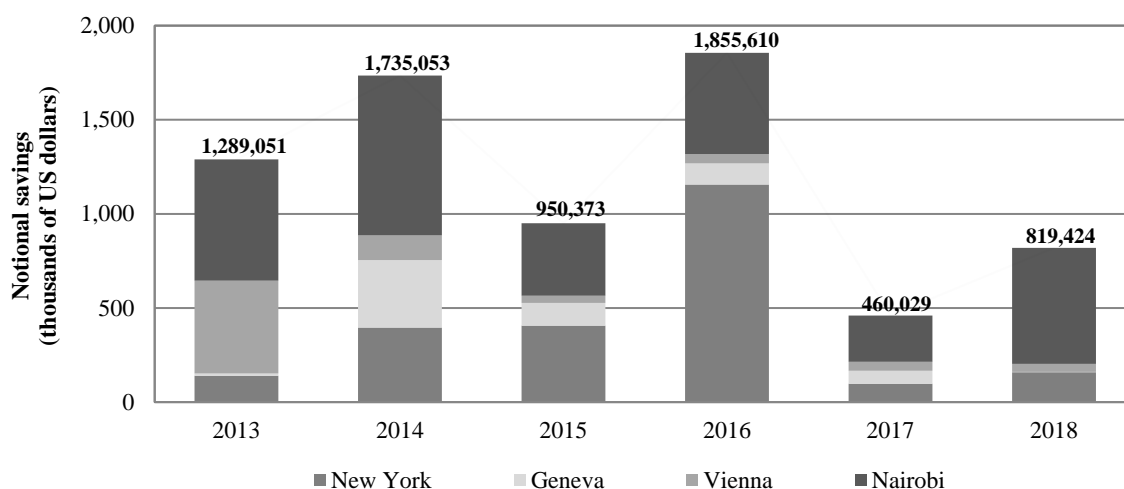


## H. Meetings held away from established headquarters

16. All duty stations continued to apply the integrated global management rule, where appropriate, when assembling a team to service a meeting away from headquarters. In 2018, notional savings of \$819,424 were achieved through integrated global management, reflecting an increase of 78 per cent over 2017 (see figure V). Streamlining meeting requirements and increasing the multitasking of staff played an important role in achieving the savings. It should be noted, however, that the additional workload of coordinating and servicing such meetings is not reflected as an administrative cost to the United Nations.

Figure V

**Notional savings from shared services of meetings held away from duty stations (2013–2018)**



## I. Conditions of conference centres

17. In accordance with resolution [73/270](#), the Secretary-General will report to the General Assembly, during the main part of its seventy-fourth session in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2020, on the possible renovation work aimed at addressing the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference centre in Nairobi.

18. At the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the average utilization rate of all conference rooms together was 81 per cent in 2018, up from 78 per cent in 2017. The annual average occupancy rate was 93 per cent and also above the almost 89 per cent average for 2017, thanks to the sustained promotion and marketing initiatives undertaken by the conference management service, which targeted a wide range of external clients. The scheduled recarpeting of the conference centre was completed in 2018, with the exception of the two plenary rooms. The plan is to complete the recarpeting and the upgrade of the podiums by 2020. A business case has been submitted to ECA leadership, together with a capital investment plan, to address the urgently needed upgrade of the centre's technological facilities.

## J. Innovations in meetings management

19. An overhaul of gMeets to enhance its functionality and allow easier entity-based reporting was started in 2018. All information about upcoming, current or past official

conferences or meetings, as well as meeting entitlements, is derived from gMeets, making it a mission-critical system for calendar planning, the day-to-day organization of meetings, resource management, communications with clients and reporting. The system is in use at all headquarters duty stations (New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi), as well as at ECA, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and has been acquired, through service-level agreements, by the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

20. In March 2018, a one-stop-shop, web-based application was launched as the client-facing interface of gMeets in New York to provide meeting requesters with easy access to all meeting services while enhancing coordination among service providers to achieve system-wide efficiency. Clients can now select from a wide range of services including conference rooms; interpretation; nameplates, podium signs and room set-up; publishing material in the *Journal of the United Nations*; audiovisual services; webcasting; access and security-related services; and the loan of technological equipment. Facts and figures, such as definitions of terms and cost estimates, are made readily available to enable clients to take informed decisions regarding their meeting requests. As at 31 December 2018, the system had processed 2,629 meetings from 261 clients, comprising 131 permanent missions, 28 regional groups or other major groups and 102 United Nations system entities. A second development phase was launched in January 2019 to expand the service catalogue to include special events, exhibits and bilateral meetings, among other options, and the generation of a single invoice for meeting services, in coordination with Umoja.

21. A digital version of the *Journal of the United Nations* became operational in January 2018, thereby facilitating the work of delegates and other meeting participants. In the first year, the number of digital users reached 183,000, with over 2 million page views. This digital transformation resulted in further enhancements to the user-friendliness of the *Journal* and made an increasing part of it available in the six official languages of the United Nations year-round rather than only during the main part of the sessions of the General Assembly, which had been the practice for many years. These changes were made possible by the modernization of the production process of this flagship publication, and further enhancements are planned for 2019.

22. The use of Indico, an open-source meeting registration and accreditation tool piloted in Geneva, was expanded in 2018. By the end of the year, Indico had been used at 1,371 conferences at and away from headquarters locations for 12,413 sessions and the registration of over 200,000 participants. The tool, which has also been adopted by other United Nations entities, has benefited conference organizers by streamlining accreditation, reducing duplication and allowing the discontinuation of eight previous applications while supporting the Organization's strict security requirements for access to premises. Meeting participants, in turn, have benefited from easier badging procedures and access to meeting-related information. Indico has been selected to cover meeting participant management in Umoja Extension 2.

23. In New York, the first module (pre-forecasting) of gDoc 2.0 was introduced to facilitate the review and assessment of draft resolutions for their conference services implications. Assessment procedures are now streamlined, and the results are centrally recorded. During the main part of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, more than 400 draft resolutions were processed through the module.

24. In Geneva, a self-service tool was implemented to automatically estimate the resource and financial implications of conference services and of the technical and support services arranged for extrabudgetary meetings and special events. The tool



was successfully piloted with the Office for Disarmament Affairs and will be introduced to permanent missions. The costing of statements of programme budget implications for resolutions of the Human Rights Council and other Geneva-based organs was also automated to expedite the preparation of such statements. In addition, an online tool for arranging interpretation support for field missions of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council was implemented in 2018 to eliminate a paper workflow, improve transparency and monitoring and shorten processing times. Since June 2018, a report on the utilization of the conference resources by the calendar bodies entitled to meetings with interpretation is automatically generated and sent to the secretariats concerned a week after the conclusion of the session. It is hoped that this systematic and timely reporting will help all calendar bodies to comply with their 80 per cent minimum utilization requirement.

25. In Vienna, a practical and comprehensive training programme for meeting room personnel hired on a “when actually employed” basis was introduced. Without regular posts for in-room servicing, the United Nations Office at Vienna relies on a roster of short-term staff to service many of its meetings. The training programme included modules related to disability awareness, interpretation, safety, customer service and etiquette. The programme will be further refined in 2019 and conducted regularly, with a view to improving service delivery to all meeting participants.

26. In Nairobi, to help to determine the reasons for fluctuations in the use of the premises of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Division of Conference Services administered a survey in 2018 targeting meeting requesters across its client base. An initial analysis of the results suggests that requesters of conference services are interested mostly in organizing workshops, training events and other programme delivery activities that require conference services.

27. Digital recordings continue to be available to any meeting body at its request. In 2018, the United Nations Office at Geneva provided digital recordings for over 3,000 meetings, which were made available to delegates through a web portal (<https://conf.unog.ch/digitalrecordings>). Recordings of public meetings are available without a logon; access to recordings of private meetings is limited to those with credentials. The users of this service include human rights treaty bodies, the Conference on Disarmament and disarmament treaty bodies, as well as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and ECE. Three Vienna-based bodies entitled to written records also continued to use digital recordings in 2018, with two of them using the recordings in lieu of written records. There were 84,555 visits to the relevant page with the audio player in 2018, compared with 57,740 in 2017, 89,752 in 2016 and 63,897 in 2015.

28. The Department of Global Communications made webcasts of public statements and meetings available on demand for short-term viewing. It also continued to seek to improve and expand the reach of its webcast services, as reported to the Committee on Information (see [A/AC.198/2019/3](#)).

### **Use of United Nations premises**

29. The use of United Nations premises is regulated by administrative instruction [ST/AI/416](#) of 26 April 1996, entitled “Use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits”, which is being revised by relevant departments and offices. In addition, the use of the United Nations premises for meetings and events not related to the intergovernmental process of the United Nations in New York is further guided by the note verbale transmitted by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management to Member States and all heads of departments in April 2018. The note verbale provides up-to-date guidance on the use of United Nations conference rooms, with emphasis on the

non-commercial nature of the meetings and events to be held, as well as on the responsibilities of event sponsors.

30. Given the strain that the number of meetings and events not related to the intergovernmental process continues to place on the limited conference management resources in New York (where they accounted for 44 per cent of total meetings in 2018), including the resulting accelerated wear and tear of the meeting room facilities, a study on the establishment of a charge-back mechanism to cover the associated costs was conducted. Charge-back mechanisms have already been implemented in the other three duty stations.

31. In Geneva, permanent missions, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and eligible extrabudgetary clients can reserve available time slots for meetings and events, in compliance with administrative instruction [ST/AI/416](#). In Vienna, requests for conference facilities from external entities continued to increase in 2018, following the strong trend noted in previous years. For example, the number of side events organized in conjunction with four of the major conferences managed by the United Nations Office at Vienna increased from 98 in 2013 to 216 in 2018. Approval by the substantive secretariats must be obtained in each case, and most performances and activities of non-governmental organizations are programmed as side events during major conferences.

32. In Nairobi, four events not organized by United Nations bodies and agencies were held in 2018. In addition, the United Nations Environment Programme held the first meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics. Express authorization by the Office of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi was obtained and letters of agreement were signed by the organizers prior to the events. The utilization of meeting rooms at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in 2018 rose to 54 per cent from 39 per cent in 2017, and there is potential to further increase the servicing of non-United Nations client requests.

### **III. Documents management**

#### **A. Timely submission, processing and issuance of documents**

33. Overall compliance by author departments with the deadlines for submitting slotted documents for processing (editing, translation and formatting) remained high in 2018, at 90 per cent, as shown in figure VI. Compliance by the Secretariat with the four-week processing deadlines for documents that were submitted on time and within word limits also remained high, at 98 per cent (see figure VII). Meanwhile, compliance with the issuance deadlines increased yet again, to 94 per cent, continuing the upward trend from the 51 per cent recorded in 2013, as shown in figure VIII.

Figure VI  
Timely submission of slotted documents (2013–2018)

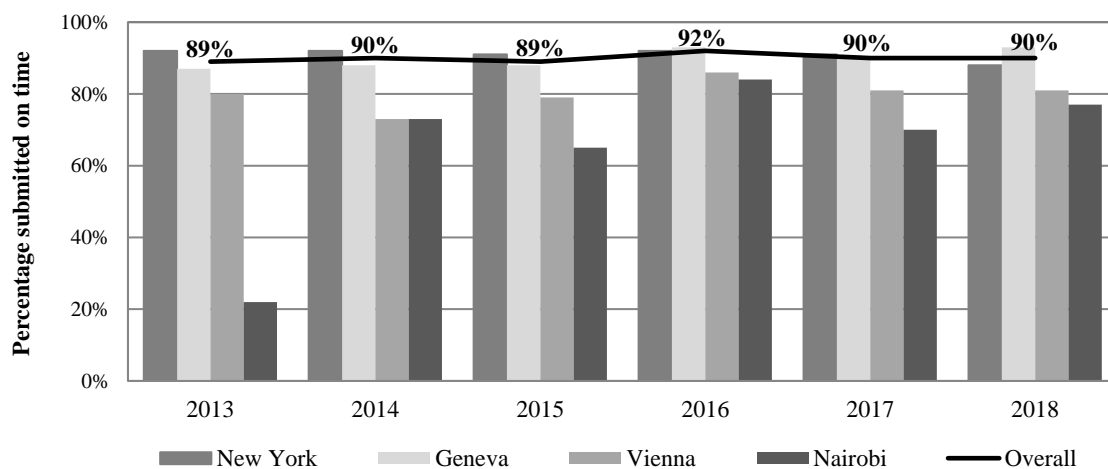


Figure VII  
Timely processing of slotted documents (2013–2018)

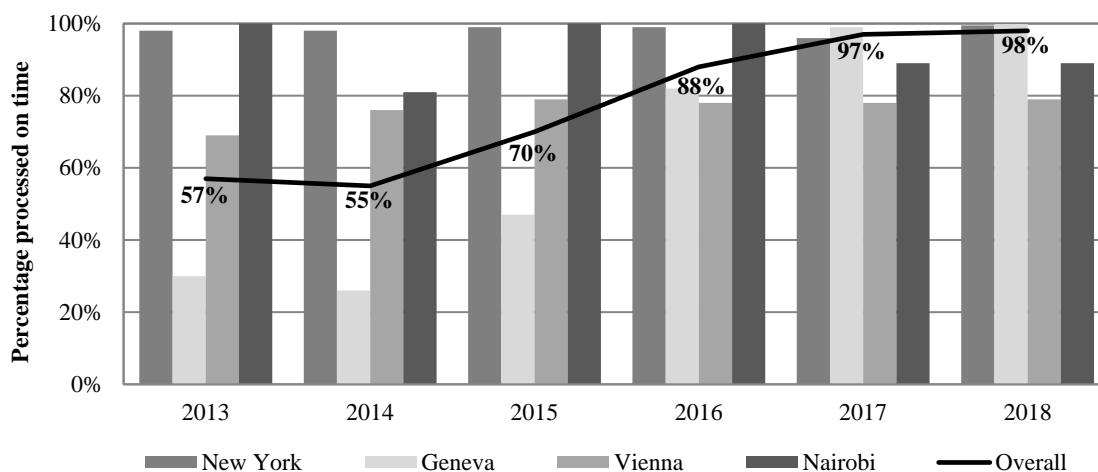
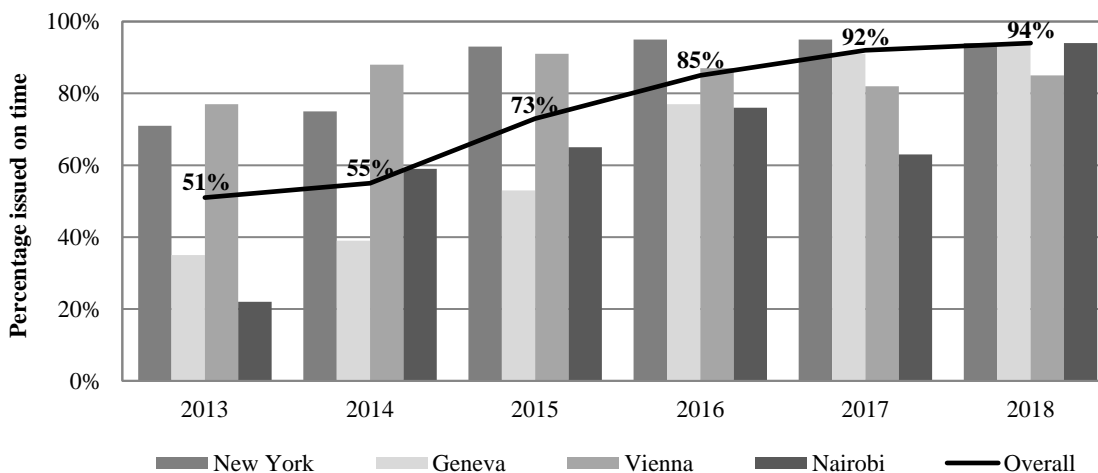


Figure VIII  
Timely issuance of slotted documents (2013–2018)



34. In New York, timely submission stood at 88 per cent, slightly lower than in 2017. However, the total number of slotted documents increased by 4.5 per cent compared with 2017. Efforts continued to be made to slot reports for submission earlier than the mandated 10- or 8-week benchmarks, where feasible, to enhance predictability and improve system-wide efficiency. This includes a dedicated indicator in the senior managers' compacts for 2019 that requires the timely submission of 100 per cent of manuscripts by mutually agreed slot dates, within the word limits and in full compliance with all editorial directives.

35. To address documentation issues relating to the Fifth Committee, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management continued to refine the slotting schedule in full consultation with the author departments and offices and the secretariats of the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, as appropriate.

36. In Geneva, timely submission compliance reached 93 per cent in 2018, surpassing the 90 per cent achieved in 2017 thanks to regular interactions and follow-up with substantive secretariats to improve the reliability of forecasts. Four of the submitting entities attained 100 per cent submission compliance. In Vienna, timely submission compliance in 2018 remained at 81 per cent, as a number of documents could not be slotted in accordance with the mandated time frame owing to local meeting patterns. In Nairobi, timely submission increased from 70 per cent in 2017 to 77 per cent in 2018, with 89 documents for extrabudgetary bodies being submitted on time (none of the calendar bodies that submit documentation for processing held sessions in 2018). The United Nations Office at Nairobi continued to work in close collaboration with submitting entities to assist them in the early stages of planning.

37. In terms of processing, the rate of compliance with the mandated processing time frames in New York in 2018 was 99.2 per cent for Secretariat reports and 99.7 per cent for non-Secretariat reports submitted on time and within word limits. The corresponding figures in Geneva were 100 per cent and 99.8 per cent, respectively. In Vienna, processing compliance for reports originating in the Secretariat was at 84 per cent, but most of the non-Secretariat reports emanating from the working groups of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law were not suitable for rush processing or contractual translation owing to their highly technical or legal nature and length. Consequently, the overall (Secretariat and non-Secretariat reports) processing compliance rate was 79 per cent, an increase nonetheless from 78 per cent in 2017. In Nairobi, processing compliance remained at 89 per cent. It should be noted that, over a period of five years, the word count of documents received in New York increased by 23 per cent, from 6,646 words per document at the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly to 8,192 words at the seventy-second session. Despite this increase, thanks to the dynamic prioritization of the workload and use of new technologies, the Documentation Division in New York was able to decrease the processing time per report from 17 days to 9 days between 2013 and 2017.

38. In New York, 94.4 per cent of all slotted documents were issued in accordance with the mandated time frame in 2018. Late submissions and a considerable number of documents exceeding word limits account for the 5.6 per cent of documents not issued six weeks prior to the corresponding meeting, in accordance with the mandated time frame. Nevertheless, 100 per cent of documents were issued before the start of the meeting.

39. Issuance compliance in Geneva reached 93.7 per cent in 2018, up from 91 per cent in 2017. For documents submitted on time and within the established word limits, compliance reached 99.8 per cent, thanks to the concerted efforts of all stakeholders to improve planning, identify priorities and closely monitor progress. The practice of staggering the submission of documents for intergovernmental bodies with long

sessions, such as the Human Rights Council, continued throughout 2018. It was also successfully applied to selected meetings of ECE. Tight deadlines notwithstanding, all 16 General Assembly and Economic and Social Council supplements were issued in a timely manner. In addition, all 42 universal periodic review outcome reports issued in 2018 were on time, that is, issued six weeks prior to the start of the session or date of consideration.

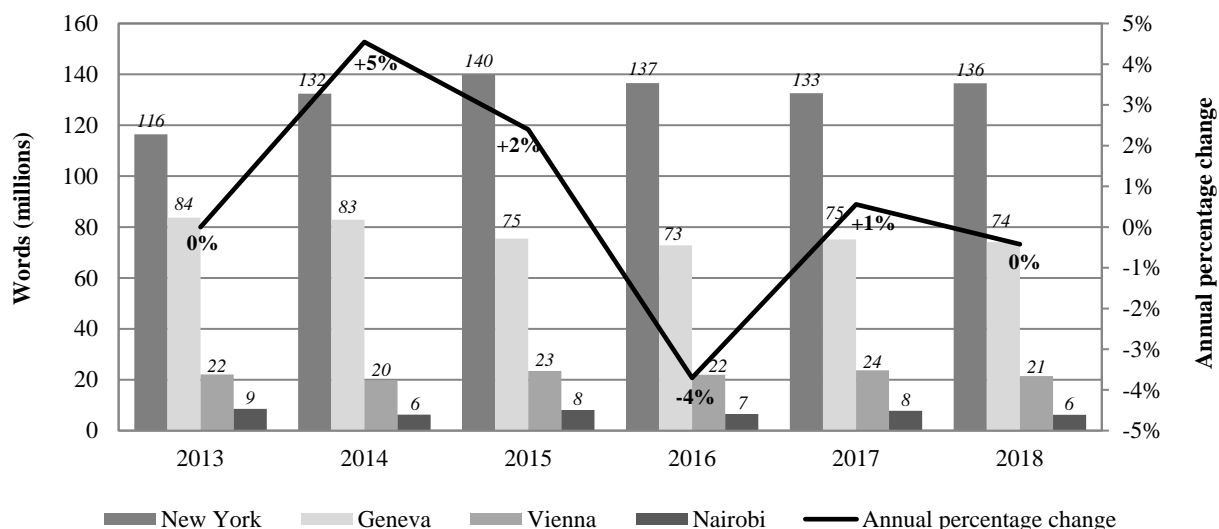
40. In Vienna, overall issuance compliance increased to 85 per cent from 82 per cent in 2017. In certain cases, alternative processing patterns were agreed to with the submitting departments and offices and subsequently accepted by Member States. In Nairobi, overall issuance compliance rose sharply to 94 per cent from 63 per cent in 2017.

## B. Control and limitation of documentation

41. The number of words submitted globally for translation in 2018 (237 million) remained practically unchanged from 2017 (240 million), as shown in figure IX.

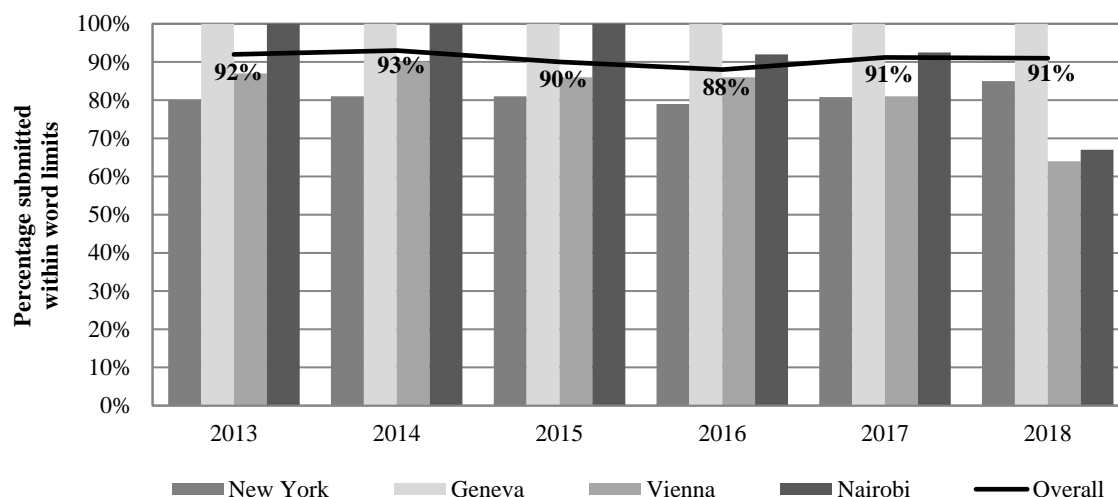
Figure IX

Translation workload (2013–2018)



42. The proportion of documents submitted for processing within word limits also remained unchanged at 91 per cent (see figure X).

Figure X  
Documents submitted for processing in line with the mandated or agreed word limits (2013–2018)



43. In New York, the translation workload grew by 3 per cent, with 75 waiver requests submitted by author departments and offices adding 700,000 words to the workload. Nevertheless, the proportion of slotted documents submitted for processing within word limits rose from 81 per cent in 2017 to 85 per cent in 2018. In Geneva, the 2018 translation workload was similar to the previous year. Word limits for all slotted documents were strictly implemented, and submissions from the human rights treaty bodies were closely monitored for compliance with word limits and number of languages for translation, in accordance with resolution [68/268](#). Waivers were granted only for seven Joint Inspection Unit reports that could not be slotted owing to their cross-cutting nature and for one procedural report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

44. In Vienna, the translation workload decreased slightly in 2018 compared with 2017, in keeping with historical patterns for the first year of each biennium. Since a significant number of documents processed in Vienna are legal texts exempt from word limits, only 64 per cent of the documents complied with the limits. In Nairobi, the documentation related to the meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and of the recently mandated United Nations Habitat Assembly were forecasted and slotted. Documents such as programmes of work and budget reports and other technical or legal reports that exceeded the mandated word limits were subject to negotiated slot dates that differed from the mandated 10-4-6 pattern, with due consideration given to the large volume of documents forecasted for the meetings scheduled for the first half of 2019.

### C. Productivity

45. The throughput productivity, that is, the total number of words processed divided by all the translation staff involved in producing them, for 2014–2018 is shown in table 1.

Table 1  
Throughput productivity of the translation services in pages per day, 2014–2018

Duty station	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
New York	5.4	5.8	5.9	5.9	6.1
Geneva	5.1	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.3
Vienna	5.3	5.1	5.4	5.2	5.4
Nairobi	5.5	5.9	5.8	5.3	4.9

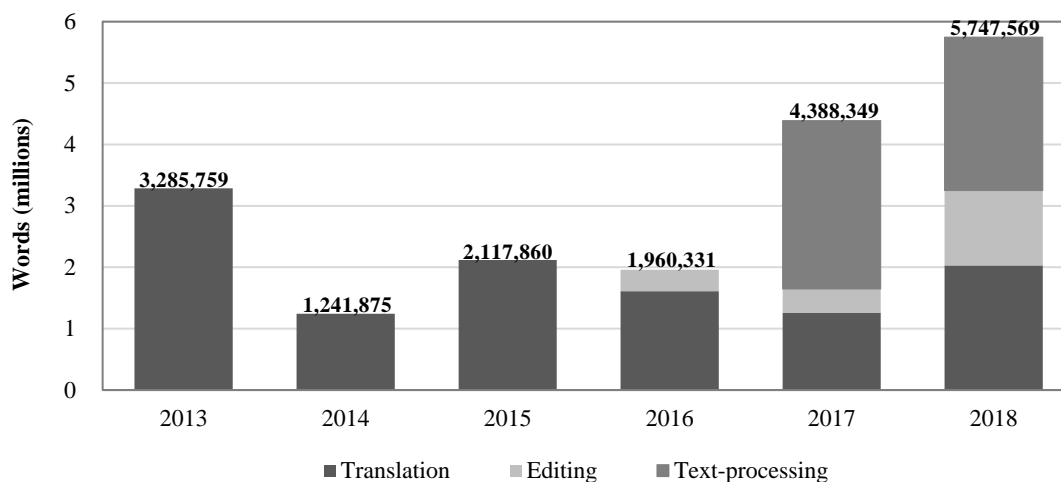
46. The upward trend in translation productivity can be attributed to the increased use of eLUNa and self-revision. The productivity rates at the other three duty stations are expected to reach levels similar to that of New York in the next few years. The reduction in productivity in Nairobi reflects the increased technicality and complexity of the documents processed in 2018; a number of long reports for policymakers required numerous consultations with submitting offices to ensure the accuracy of translation. It should be noted that efficiency in translation is measured not only by productivity but also by the number of support staff involved in the process. Over the years, new technologies, for example, have made it possible to phase out the use of typists and reference assistants.

#### D. Workload-sharing

47. The volume of workload-sharing among the duty stations is shown in figure XI. Although the volume is increasing, concurrent workload peaks across the duty stations continue to limit the Secretariat's ability to expand workload-sharing year-round.

Figure XI

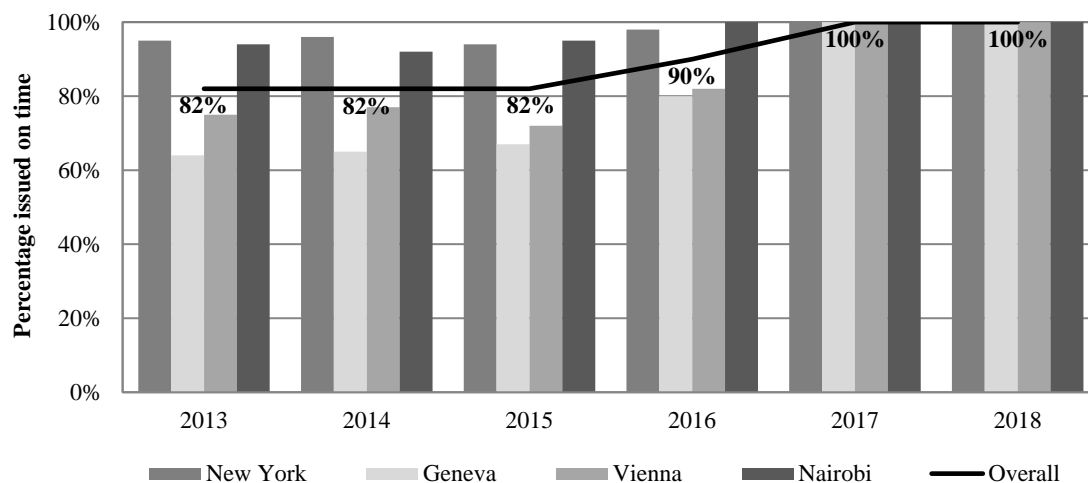
Workload-sharing among duty stations, 2013–2018, in words and by type



#### E. Simultaneous issuance of documents

48. One of the pillars of multilingualism is the simultaneous issuance of documents in all official languages. All duty stations achieved 100 per cent compliance in 2018, as shown in figure XII.

Figure XII  
Compliance with the simultaneous issuance requirements (2013–2018)



## F. Digitization and uploading of important older United Nations documents

49. As reported in previous years, the Department was actively involved in the project “Digitization: turning seven decades of United Nations work into open knowledge”, which was supported by voluntary contributions of \$5 million from Qatar and \$100,000 from China. The project was concluded in October 2018 and accomplished the preservation of over 1.25 million pages covering the most vulnerable, older, historic documents.

## G. Innovations in documentation management

50. The pipeline visualization tool developed at the United Nations Office at Geneva was adopted and deployed in Vienna in 2018. The tool helps language sections with planning and prioritization and supports more efficient use of in-house and contractual resources. At the same time, a new prioritization system was implemented in the workflow management tool. This contributed to an increase in processing compliance for Secretariat reports in Vienna in 2018.

51. Work continued in 2018 to enhance the suite of gText applications and share them with other organizations on a cost-recovery basis. The functionality of eLUNA, which started as a computer-assisted translation application based on the Organization’s document repository and linked to the United Nations official terminology base, UNTERM, was expanded further with the development of a new interface for drafting verbatim records, to add to the editing and revision interfaces also developed recently. In addition, new neural machine translation components that yield better results than statistical machine translation, especially for morphologically complex languages, were incorporated into the system. The gText applications are currently in use at the four duty stations, four regional commissions and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Deployment at ESCAP is planned for 2019, and testing is under way to provide access to the Department of Global Communications. UNTERM has been consolidated, with the completion of the migration of all local terminology databases from all duty stations and regional commissions and the removal of duplicate records in 2018. This will help to ensure consistent use of terminology across the Organization. The United Nations System



Chief Executives Board for Coordination, through its high-level committees, has continued to encourage the use of official terminology in the preparation of official documentation summarizing the committees' proceedings.

52. The gText applications were also integrated with the Secretariat's documentation management systems, gDoc and DCPMS, to allow for the direct uploading of documents and transfer of metadata and the automatic feeding of the document repository. The integration is expected to further improve in 2019 with the development of gDoc 2.0. The ultimate goal is to be able to extract metadata for the production of machine-readable documents.

53. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management continues to co-lead, with the High-level Committee on Management and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the activities under the project "United Nations semantic interoperability framework for normative and parliamentary documents". The proof-of-concept exercise conducted in 2018 with documents from FAO, the World Health Organization and the International Maritime Organization for the markup of interlinked resolutions using the XML Akoma Ntoso standard for parliamentary documents, approved in 2017, has paved the way for exploring the possibility of delivering metadata-enhanced, machine-readable documents that could generate efficiencies in documentation processing by allowing the tracking of documentation life cycles and workflows and improving the discoverability and linkage of documents while ensuring their official validity and preservation.

## IV. Staffing

### Vacancies, recruitment and innovations in staffing

54. The vacancy rates by duty station in key occupational groups as at 31 December 2018 are presented in table 2, with the figures for 2017 presented for comparison in table 3. In most cases, the rates remained the same or decreased. The vacancy rate in the interpretation service in Nairobi fell to 11 per cent and is expected to drop further in 2019. The vacancy rate in the text-processing units in Geneva decreased to 16 per cent (13 posts) in 2018, compared with 19 per cent (17 posts) in 2017. No particular difficulties were encountered in filling the posts; a further 12 posts were filled in the first quarter of 2019.

Table 2

### Vacancy rates in key occupational groups as at 31 December 2018 (posts)

	<i>New York</i>		<i>Geneva</i>		<i>Vienna</i>		<i>Nairobi</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Interpretation services	4	3	5	5	0	0	2	11
Translation services	30	9	13	7	3	7	4	17
Text-processing units	18	14	13	16	1	3	3	14
Editing services	1	4	2	8	–	–	N/A	N/A
Verbatim Reporting Service	2	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Abbreviation:* N/A, not applicable.

Table 3  
**Vacancy rates in key occupational groups by duty station as at 31 December 2017 (posts)**

	<i>New York</i>		<i>Geneva</i>		<i>Vienna</i>		<i>Nairobi</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Interpretation services	9	7	5	5	1	4	7	37
Translation services	31	9	10	6	5	12	3	14
Text-processing units	17	14	17	19	1	3	3	14
Editing services	2	7	2	10	–	–	N/A	N/A
Verbatim Reporting Service	3	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Abbreviation:* N/A, not applicable.

### **Recruitment of language professionals**

55. Seven competitive examinations for the recruitment of language professionals were concluded in 2018, resulting in 143 professionals being rostered for subsequent employment as staff. One of the examinations was for computational linguists and three were for interpreters. The remaining three were fully remote combined examinations for translators, editors, verbatim reporters and copy preparers, proofreaders and production editors, whereby successful candidates are placed on a single roster for subsequent recruitment and loan or transfer to any of these functional areas. Thanks to the accessibility of remote testing, the three examinations attracted record numbers of applicants, especially from less well-represented regions, and yielded sufficient candidates to cover the anticipated staffing needs over the next three years and address the vacancy rate in the French Translation Service in particular. In addition, the examinations enabled the language services to identify language professionals suitable for temporary freelance or contractual work. This and the combined nature of the examinations have drastically reduced the number of examinations that need to be held, significantly increasing the efficiency of the recruitment process. It has also represented considerable cost savings for candidates who previously had to pay to travel to designated test centres, often in other countries.

56. The pilot of a remote tool for testing interpreters in 2018 identified certain technical issues that are currently being addressed, with a view to trialling the tool in the competitive examination for French interpreters in 2020, provided it offers the same quality testing environment as that achieved at on-site test centres. The pilot also revealed the tool's potential usefulness in the remote coaching of interpreters; consequently, it will be used in the Department's training and outreach activities.

57. The outposting of five members of the French Translation Service in New York to Vienna, which started in 2016, was a temporary measure to retain staff who would otherwise have resigned at a time when the number of retirements was high and the competitive examinations were not yielding sufficient candidates to cover vacancies. The situation in the past two years has improved considerably, owing to the new remote combined examination yielding 38 candidates to fill posts at the P-3 level and progress in filling vacancies in the Service at the P-4 level. The outposting will therefore be discontinued, with the last two staff members still in Vienna rejoining the Service in New York in early 2020. It should be noted that, although effective in retaining staff at a time when experienced capacity was much needed, the outposting represented minimal cost savings and placed a disproportionate burden on the team in New York, where it had a negative impact on productivity.

58. The Secretariat hosted 85 language interns in 2018, who together spent 5,520 days in the language services, receiving 4,630 hours of staff supervision in the form of feedback, coaching, individual training on diverse topics and career guidance. Most of the interns (76) came from one of the partner universities of the Department (i.e. universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding or entered into a remote practicum agreement with the United Nations or are members of the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation). The language services also held 340 training and informational sessions during the year under the university outreach programme. As part of the review of its collaborative arrangements with partner universities, the Department increased the number of universities with remote practicum agreements to eight in 2018. These agreements offer practical experience to promising translation students in a way that is cost-effective for them. The Department plans to enter into associate membership agreements with certain universities that are in less well-represented regions but do not fully qualify for membership in the network of universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding. This has the potential to support the long-term succession planning needs of the United Nations.

59. As part of the outreach programme, the Department continued to use social media in all official languages to raise awareness of career opportunities at the four duty stations. The number of followers of the Department's Twitter accounts and Facebook pages increased during the year by 29 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively. The number of its YouTube channel subscribers also increased, by 39 per cent, reflecting the importance of social media for outreach to potential recruits.

60. The Pan-African Masters Consortium project, which is aimed at increasing access to high-quality tertiary education in Africa through its internationally aligned master's degrees in interpretation and translation at five universities, has received a no-cost extension until November 2019. Over 100 students supported through the project have graduated, and many are currently on freelance rosters of international and regional organizations, thus contributing to the overall development strategy of increasing quantitative and quality skills to supply job markets both within Africa and globally. A second curriculum workshop is being organized in 2019 to widen the project's scope to include community-based and public service interpretation and translation and offer a platform for synergies with other donor-funded education projects and university cooperation programmes.

## **V. Facilities and accessibility**

61. The Secretariat's conference-servicing operations in New York and Geneva continued to arrange accessibility services for the meetings that are entitled to or have extrabudgetary provisions for such services, which in 2018 included sign language interpretation, live and remote captioning, the provision of assistive devices, on-demand Braille printing and accessible seating. During the third quarter of 2018, renovation work was undertaken in the General Assembly Hall to ensure enhanced access for persons with disabilities. This included the installation of a wheelchair lift to the podium and the rostrum, the replacement of fixed adviser seats with movable seats to allow room for wheelchairs at either the delegates' or the advisers' positions along the west side of the Hall, and the installation of a ramp to the main entrance of room GA-200. At the United Nations Office at Geneva, the picture-in-picture feature was introduced in three conference rooms so that webcast, captioning and sign language interpreters are displayed at the same time in inset windows. At the request of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Languages Service of the Office facilitated the provision of plain English versions of 4 core Committee documents, including 1 resolution, to add to the 14 documents transcribed into plain English in early 2018.

62. The Division of Conference Services in Nairobi continued to support efforts to increase the accessibility of its facilities and conferences. The Division is preparing a list of rates for accessible conference services to make them available to extrabudgetary conferences and is seeking to bring its website into line with international accessibility guidelines. Improvements to the accessibility of conference facilities at the Vienna International Centre also continued in 2018.

63. The Department was actively involved in the system-wide internal review of the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the study on accessible conferences and events initiated by the Joint Inspection Unit at the Department's request in 2016 and 2017 ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)). The Department will strive to implement the recommendations emanating from the review and the Unit's study and improve accessibility in its area of operations. The Department continues to work to improve the accessibility of its existing systems and ensure that accessibility considerations are taken into account from the early stages of development of new systems and tools.

## **VI. Measuring the quality of conference services**

64. To monitor the provision of high-quality conference services to Member States, the Department collects feedback through a global e-survey, which is available all year round in all official languages. In 2018, 91 per cent of all respondents to the e-survey rated conference services as either "good" or "very good". In New York the figure was 89 per cent, in Geneva 100 per cent (and 92 per cent in a separate local survey), in Vienna 100 per cent and in Nairobi 90 per cent.

65. In addition, in November and December 2018, the United Nations Office at Geneva ran a series of on-the-spot and in-depth interviews with delegates and meeting organizers, as well as a survey of substantive secretariats and a workshop combining strategic foresight methodology with design thinking methodology in a project aimed at providing insights into real-time client experiences and trends for conference services over time. The outcome of the project will serve to deepen understanding of the expectations of Member States and substantive secretariats regarding conference services today and in the medium and long terms.

### **Informational meetings with delegations in 2018**

66. At all the informational meetings held in 2018, representatives of the Member States expressed their appreciation for the quality of the work of the language services, noting that the conduct of work in the six official languages enables the full participation of all meeting participants and promotes multilingualism.

67. Six separate language-specific informational meetings held in New York highlighted the initiatives and efforts of the translation services to ensure the quality of documentation, such as further enhancements to the eLUNa computer-assisted translation tool; the reorganization and update of terminology development procedures; the consistent application of quality assurance checks; and the provision of training and feedback to new staff members. The interpretation services emphasized that the increase in the speed of delivery of statements in recent years remained an issue that hindered the flawless delivery of interpretation. In its resolution [72/313](#) on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, the Assembly recommended that speakers should be mindful of the speed at which they deliver statements, considering the need for accuracy of interpretation. In the interest of ensuring top-quality conference interpretation, the Secretariat will continue to monitor the speed of statement delivery. The informational meetings also drew attention to the guidelines for gender-sensitive language that the language services had helped to develop in all six official languages.

68. The informational meeting held in Geneva put to the test the new format of focusing on a range of thematic areas related to conference management services (e.g. innovation, accessibility, client-focused servicing and the impact of the strategic heritage plan) and was very well received. An innovative mechanism for gathering real-time feedback from the participants was also welcomed by all.

69. The informational meeting with permanent missions held in Vienna served as a follow-up to the points raised by Member States during the meeting in 2017, including the centralization of meeting-related information, the upgrading of meeting room equipment and greater interaction between language staff and technical experts. The informational meeting in Nairobi served to inform permanent missions of the progress of current construction projects. The presentation included a summarized history of past improvements and the current challenges posed by technological obsolescence.

## VII. Conclusions, recommendations and proposed next steps

### A. Conclusions

70. The Secretariat continued to deliver on its mandate to provide high-quality conference services in a timely manner, maintaining and achieving high levels of performance in all key indicators. The proactive innovation policy implemented by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management resulted in the deployment of new tools, mechanisms and strategies that are increasing, modernizing and diversifying the services provided by its conference management operations in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, to the benefit of the meeting participants who use them and the multilateral process as a whole.

71. The Secretariat will continue to build on these results and introduce further innovations in 2019. Plans include the launch of gDoc 2.0 to further streamline the documentation workflow, the expansion of the functionality and scope of the one-stop shop and the digital version of the *Journal of the United Nations*, and the roll-out of an online training tool for language staff. The implementation of a cost-recovery mechanism for meetings not related to the intergovernmental process in New York will be initiated.

72. Continued innovation, modernization and improvement have become the defining characteristics and driving force of the Secretariat's conference management operations as they pursue increased effectiveness and efficiency while ensuring further improvement to the quality, timeliness, sustainability and accessibility of the services that they provide.

### B. Action recommended of the General Assembly

73. The Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly:

- (a) Take note of the report;
- (b) Consider the calendar of conferences and meetings on an annual basis, in line with the budget cycle, at least for the duration of the trial stipulated in resolution 72/266 A, and request the Secretary-General to present future calendars, during the same period, on an annual basis;
- (c) Express its support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to pursue innovation in conference servicing;
- (d) Also express its support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to further strengthen coordination among duty stations on conference-servicing activities, including through global monitoring and reporting.