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Proposed programme budget for 2024

Report on the assessment of the workplace at United Nations Headquarters

Sixteenth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for 2024

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the assessment of the workplace at United Nations Headquarters ([A/78/325](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 30 October 2023.

2. The report of the Secretary-General was submitted pursuant to section II of General Assembly resolution [75/253](#) C, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to present during the seventy-eighth session a comprehensive report that provided a forward-looking assessment of the workplace at United Nations Headquarters. The report would cover, inter alia, the evolving needs of the Organization, findings from the ongoing work to define future work modalities, lessons learned from the flexible workplace project and the experience of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the impact of any new work modalities, including with respect to flexible work arrangements, the Secretary-General's strategic assessment and cost-benefit analysis of the Organization's real estate portfolio in New York, implications for other United Nations offices, the realization of additional efficiency gains, considerations related to productivity, health and occupational safety and staff well-being, and proposals on any future flexible workforce needs, including costs and benefits. The report would be considered in conjunction with an evaluation conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) of the completed flexible workplace project to be presented at the same session (resolution [75/253](#) C, sect. II, para. 4).



II. General observations

3. The report of the Secretary-General provides information on workplace industry trends post COVID-19 (sect. II); the evolving needs of the Organization, including the implementation of flexible workplace strategies at Headquarters (sect. III); lessons learned from the flexible workplace project at Headquarters and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Headquarters office space (sect. IV); a strategic assessment of the real estate portfolio in New York (sect. V); future office space needs (sect. VI); and implications for other duty stations (sect. VII). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the report did not make any proposals for the approval of the General Assembly, either on policy or for resources, and had no financial implications.

A. Current real estate portfolio of office space in New York

4. In his report, the Secretary-General provides a synopsis of the current real estate portfolio of office space in New York, including each building's respective capacity as of July 2023, as summarized in the table below.

Table 1
Office space portfolio in New York as of July 2023

<i>Building</i>	<i>Seats^a</i>	<i>Maximum capacity^b</i>	<i>Assigned personnel^c</i>
Secretariat	3 573	4 664	4 664
1 United Nations Plaza (DC-1 Building)	—	—	—
2 United Nations Plaza (DC-2 Building)	1 232	1 343	1 343
305 East 46th Street (Albano Building)	750	750	650
304 East 45th Street (FF Building)	597	751	751
UNITAR Building	109	109	109
Total	6 261	7 617	7 517

Abbreviation: UNITAR, United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

^a The number of seats or working points on each floor, including unassigned desks and offices. Formerly defined as "staff capacity" in the report on the flexible workplace project.

^b The number of people that can be assigned to a floor, considering flexible working arrangements and absences due to leave, travel, etc. This is calculated as the number of unassigned desks on the floor multiplied by the agreed ratio, to which the number of dedicated offices is added.

^c The number of posts assigned to the floor by each department. Formerly defined as "posts assigned" in the report on the flexible workplace project.

5. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the current portfolio comprised: (a) two United Nations-owned premises, namely the Secretariat compound and the UNITAR Building, which was not specifically mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General owing to its limited capacity and minimal impact on the proposed consolidation of the Organization's leased real estate portfolio; and (b) leased office space in three buildings housing approximately 2,740 personnel: the DC-2 Building, for which a new lease was currently under negotiation, and the Albano and FF Buildings, whose leases were due to expire in September and December 2027, respectively. **The Advisory Committee trusts that any future assessments of the United Nations real estate portfolio at Headquarters will include detailed**

information on all premises, including both owned and rented buildings (see para. 8 below).

B. Projected future real estate and office space needs

6. The Secretary-General envisages adjustments to the real estate portfolio of United Nations at Headquarters over the next several years, as follows:

(a) Reduction of the real estate portfolio, with the discontinuation of the leases in the Albano and FF Buildings when they expire in 2027, which would yield an expected combined future annual cost avoidance of approximately \$25 million based on current lease rates ([A/78/325](#), para. 30);

(b) Renovation of the DC-2 Building, which would, inter alia, increase the capacity of the building from 1,343 to 2,615 through the implementation of a flexible workplace with a projected personnel-to-seat ratio of 1.56:1, which equates to an average of one day of telecommuting per week (*ibid.*, para. 29);

(c) Implementation of the recommendations of OIOS in its evaluation of the flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters (*ibid.*, para. 33).

7. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, the provision of a suitable physical workspace environment that meets business needs is integral to supporting mandate delivery at Headquarters (*ibid.*, para. 57). It also remains critical that the workspace support current and future work methods, and that the Secretary-General continue to observe trends and gather data in order to adjust the physical workplace to the evolving needs of the Organization and its personnel (*ibid.*, para. 58).

8. **The Advisory Committee notes that the Secretary-General's assessment of the future real estate portfolio at Headquarters envisages the further reduction of leased office space and the continued implementation of flexible workplace strategies, in conjunction with flexible working arrangements. The Committee stresses the importance of continuing to observe relevant trends and gather comprehensive data, including on actual occupancy levels based on the impact of the reconfigured flexible working space and implementation of flexible working arrangements (see paras. 13 and 34 below), in order to accurately assess current and future workplace requirements. The Committee therefore recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit a further report on the forward-looking assessment of the real estate portfolio at Headquarters during its eightieth session, based on refined planning assumptions. The Committee makes specific observations in the paragraphs below, including on matters that should be included in the next workplace assessment report of the Secretary-General.**

III. Specific observations

A. Planning assumptions

9. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the current planning assumptions underpinning the assessment of future real estate needs are as follows:

(a) no significant expansion or reduction of the workforce size in New York; and
(b) the use of telecommuting remains at an average of at least one day per week ([A/78/325](#), paras. 14 and 30).

10. With respect to workforce projections, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the Secretariat envisaged a need to continue to accommodate

approximately 7,500 personnel. This number included staff encumbering New York-based posts funded through the regular budget, the support account for peacekeeping operations and extrabudgetary resources, as well as other personnel, such as those on general temporary assistance positions, interns, consultants, individual contractors and Junior Professional Officers. The Committee was further informed that the proposed budget for the support account for 2023/24 reflected rental charges for New York for 1,313 personnel (the actual number funded would take into account any posts or positions that were not approved by the General Assembly) and that the rental cost recovery in 2022 reflected collection for approximately 1,200 extrabudgetary personnel. As such, the combined number of support account and extrabudgetary personnel was estimated at about 2,500. With the non-extension of the lease of the DC-1 Building, the three commercial buildings currently leased by the United Nations at Headquarters had approximately 2,740 personnel assigned to them, which was a similar number to that of the combined support account and extrabudgetary personnel, indicating that most of the personnel funded through the regular budget would fit in the Secretariat Building. In 2022, the distribution of rental payments across funding sources was as follows: \$8.2 million from the regular budget; \$22.2 million from the support account; and \$18.1 million from extrabudgetary resources. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide in his next reports on the proposed budget and on the workplace assessment more precise information regarding the existing and projected workforce requiring accommodation at Headquarters, including its size, type of personnel and source of funding, as well as the impact on rental costs by funding source. The Committee also stresses that cost recovery for rental charges for extrabudgetary personnel must fully comply with the relevant normative framework.**

11. As regards the impact of flexible working strategies on office space, the Advisory Committee was provided, upon request, with current and projected personnel-to-seat ratios in United Nations premises at Headquarters (see table 2). The projected ratio of 1.56:1 reflected the planning assumption adopted by the Secretariat that the usage of telecommuting would remain, on average, at least one day a week.

Table 2
Current and projected personnel-to-seat ratios

<i>Building</i>	<i>Current ratio</i>	<i>Projected ratio</i>
Secretariat	1.40:1	1.56:1
DC-2	1:1	1.56:1
Albano	1:1	1.56:1
FF	1:1	1.56:1
UNITAR	1:1	1.56:1

12. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the assignment of staff to flexible workplace areas in the Secretariat Building was based on agreements with departments and offices on their operational needs and telecommuting profile, which resulted in different staff-to-seat ratios applied to the various floors. Presently, the average personnel-to-seat ratio was estimated at 1.40:1. With respect to the projected seat-sharing ratio in the Albano and FF Buildings, whose leases are not expected to be renewed upon their expiration in 2027, the Committee recalls that the General Assembly decided that flexible workplace strategies should not be implemented in rental properties where the contracts were due to expire without prospect of renewal (see resolution [71/272 A](#), sect. XVI, para. 11).

13. In response to queries on actual data on staff occupancy at the Secretariat, the Advisory Committee was provided with information gathered from OIOS during its evaluation, on a sample basis, by examining the entry of staff and non-staff personnel in the first week of the month during February, June and October 2022 and in the second and fourth weeks of the month during April 2023. OIOS found an estimated occupancy rate of 30 per cent, ranging from 16 to 50 per cent depending on the entity, for its April 2023 review, compared with the average ratio estimated at 27 per cent that was observed in 2022 (see also [A/78/225](#), para. 16). The Committee was also informed that, according to the Secretariat, it was not necessary, at this time, to gather occupancy data to determine office space needs. Furthermore, the Secretariat considered the use of real-time data on staff movements obtained through badge swipes and computer logins would present challenges, including related to privacy of staff, and might not necessarily provide an accurate indication of office space usage on each floor. The Committee notes that in the report of the Secretary-General on capital investment planning ([A/78/536](#)), it is indicated that the standardized access control upgrade project in progress includes the implementation of a smart-card-based system that would serve to integrate the registration of individuals by location to allow accounting in real time (conference participants, visitors, etc.). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to identify viable options for measuring occupancy of premises and provide information on actual occupancy levels, along with refined projected seat-sharing ratios, as appropriate, in the next workplace assessment report.**

B. Evolution of rental obligations

14. In his report, the Secretary-General provides information on the evolution of leased premises at Headquarters for the period 2016–2022, as summarized in table 3.

Table 3
Evolution of rental obligations to landlords and area leased

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Building</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
DC-1	8 130	8 450	8 909	9 182	9 206	9 443	9 636
DC-2	14 966	14 954	15 762	16 885	16 376	14 593	15 926
Albano	12 418	11 642	10 551	10 915	11 277	11 355	11 696
FF	7 821	6 503	7 486	7 670	7 790	8 748	9 035
FF, 4th and 5th floors	2 006	2 100	2 152	2 185	1 220	–	–
30-00 47th Avenue, Long Island City (Falchi)	904	918	930	989	1 160	1 227	1 241
200 East 42nd Street (Daily News)	2 421	984	–	–	–	–	–
3 Court Square, Long Island City (Court Square)	3 608	3 723	1 270	–	–	–	–
300 East 42nd Street (Innovation)	9 140	9 271	6 605	–	–	–	–
Total obligations^a	61 414	58 545	53 663	47 826	47 029	45 365	47 533
Vacated		Daily News	Court Square, Innovation	FF, 5th floor	FF, 4th floor		

^a Rental obligations to landlords include base rent at rates specified in the leases and operational/maintenance charges for services provided by the landlords, which are variable.

15. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the implementation of the flexible workplace project in the Secretariat Building had enabled the Organization to reduce its real estate footprint and terminate three leases (for space at the Daily News Building, the Innovation Building and the Court Square Building) and vacate two floors under another lease (at the FF Building), which had resulted in annual cost avoidance of \$17.6 million in rental obligations, based on the cost of the leases at their respective times of expiration. Furthermore, the non-renewal of the lease of the DC-1 Building was expected to bring additional cost avoidance of \$9.6 million annually.

16. In his report, the Secretary-General also provides information on the estimated evolution of the leased real estate portfolio and related rental obligations for the period from 2024 to 2027. As shown in table 4, the total obligations are expected to be \$42,613,000 in 2027, compared with obligations in the amount of \$40,929,000 for 2023. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the 4 per cent increase was due to contractual rate increases in the existing leases and the estimated costs for the new lease under negotiation for the DC-2 Building, partly offset by the termination of the Falchi Building lease at the end of 2024 and of the Albano Building in September 2027.

Table 4

Projections of rental obligations to landlords and area leased, 2023–2027

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Building</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>2025</i>	<i>2026</i>	<i>2027</i>
DC-1	2 449 ^a	–	–	–	–
DC-2	15 926	21 798	21 798	21 798	21 798
Albano	12 023	12 260	13 046	13 693	10 496
FF	9 276	9 524	9 793	10 053	10 319
Falchi	1 255	1 255	–	–	–
Total obligations^b	40 929	44 837	44 637	45 544	42 613
Vacated	DC-1	Falchi			

^a Rent for the DC-1 Building was due for only part of the year, from January through the end of March 2023.

^b Rental obligations to landlords include base rent at rates specified in the leases and operational/maintenance charges for services provided by the landlords, which are variable.

DC-1 Building

17. The report of the Secretary-General indicates that the lease for the DC-1 Building expired in March 2023 and that it was decided not to renew it, based on an analysis of space requirements and evolving patterns of flexible working arrangements. Approximately 850 Secretariat staff accommodated in that building were relocated to other locations, the majority through assignment to flexible workplace environments in the Secretariat Building (A/78/325, paras. 21–22; see also para. 28 below). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that with the DC-1 Building vacated, the number of specialized agencies renting office space from the Secretariat had been reduced.

Falchi Building

18. The Falchi Building, which is used as a repository for United Nations archives, will be vacated in December 2024 (A/78/325, para. 23). The Advisory Committee recalls that, in 2022, the Secretariat started a three-year project, with an estimated

total cost of \$1,881,000, for streamlining archives storage and management in preparation for vacating the Falchi Building by the expiration of the lease (A/77/7, para. VIII.57, and A/76/7, paras. VIII.36–37). **The Advisory Committee looks forward to the timely completion of the project.**

Albano and FF Buildings

19. The leases for the Albano and FF Buildings are due to expire in September and December 2027, respectively. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that in order for both commercial leases not to be renewed in 2027, some 1,400 personnel (650 currently in the Albano Building and 751 in the FF Building) would need to be accommodated in the renovated DC-2 Building and though any additional assignment of staff to existing flexible workplace floors in the Secretariat Building that may be achieved. The current planning assumption was that the conversion to a flexible workplace of the remaining floors in the Secretariat Building would not be needed in order to vacate the Albano and FF Buildings (see para. 28 below). However, whether that remained the case would depend on a number of variables, such as changes in the number of personnel to be accommodated and the outcome of discussions with relevant departments and offices on their operational needs, taking into account flexible work arrangement patterns in those entities (see para. 28 below). The vacation of the Albano and FF Buildings at their lease termination dates in 2027 would yield a combined future annual cost avoidance of approximately \$25 million based on current lease rates, without considering the rental increases that are to be expected with lease renewals (A/78/325, para. 30). **The Advisory Committee trusts that updated and more comprehensive information on the vacation of the Albano and FF Buildings, including on related costs and expected efficiencies, will be provided in the next workplace assessment report.**

Options for future accommodation

20. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Secretariat continued to fully evaluate its workspace needs at Headquarters as opportunities emerged with respect to its commercial lease holdings. Presently, there were no plans to relocate Secretariat functions based on local cost considerations. **While acknowledging the reductions achieved with respect to the leased real estate portfolio, the Advisory Committee encourages the Secretariat to continue to explore further efficiencies, including in view of the planned improved service delivery concept, and report thereon in the next workplace assessment report.**

C. New lease and planned refurbishment of the DC-2 Building

21. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the lease for the DC-2 Building expired in March 2023 and a new lease is expected to be finalized by the end of 2023 or early 2024 (ibid., paras. 21 and 27). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the new lease, which was currently under negotiation with the United Nations Development Corporation, was expected to be for a 15-year term, with two additional 5-year options to renew. While dependent on the final execution of the new lease, the annual rent would amount to \$21.7 million for the first five years and would then be expected to increase to \$23.8 million from years 6 to 10, with a further increase to \$25.9 million from years 11 to 15.

22. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was also informed that the landlord would undertake, at its cost, building infrastructure upgrades that included works such as increased electrical power to occupied floors, enhancements to heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems and improvements in the energy performance of the building. In addition, as was standard practice for new long-term commercial leases,

the United Nations would receive tenant improvement allowances, which would ensure that the building was modernized and fit for purpose for the period of the new lease. The tenant improvement allowance under negotiation was expected to cover fully the estimated cost for the required building-wide interior renovation.

23. The envisaged interior renovation of the DC-2 Building will cover 26 floors, comprising: 21 floors with office space to be converted to a flexible workplace environment; 4 floors for specialty operational functions, namely, a court room and related support spaces for the Office of Administration of Justice; and 1 floor with a combination of bookable small quiet rooms and large conference rooms. The project will also incorporate lessons learned from the flexible workplace project at the Secretariat Building and post-COVID-19 space-use trends. In addition, the current personnel capacity in the DC-2 Building of 1,343 is estimated to increase to 2,615 after the renovations, based on the implementation of a flexible workplace and factoring in the assignment of personnel based on a conservative personnel-to-seat ratio of 1.56:1, which equates to an average of one day telecommuting a week (*ibid.*, paras. 28–29). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the space requirements of the offices concerned would continue to be a central consideration in the planning process and throughout the implementation of the DC-2 Building renovation, in terms of both the types of spaces needed and occupancy levels. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the implementation of flexible workplace strategies and other potential changes in logistical arrangements take into account the needs of language staff in order to continue to ensure that the services provided to Member States meet the highest standard of quality (resolution 75/244, para. 103).**

24. Regarding the timeline of the DC-2 Building renovation project, the completion of all design and construction documents is targeted for the second quarter of 2024, after which a solicitation exercise would be undertaken for the construction phase. Construction is anticipated to be completed by mid-2027, with the remainder of the year dedicated to the decommissioning and removal of all United Nations-owned property at the Albano and FF Buildings ([A/78/325](#), para. 32). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the project would require each floor to be vacated for a duration of six months, and that the current plan did not include the use of swing spaces. While a detailed schedule of the works was not yet available, the proposed renovation was planned to be undertaken in six phases, as follows: (a) phase 1: renovation of two seed floors that would be empty at the start of the project and, once renovated and converted to a flexible workplace, would accommodate staff from four existing floors; (b) phase 2: renovation of the four vacated floors, which would then accommodate staff from eight existing floors; (c) phase 3: renovation of the eight vacated floors, at which point the FF Building would be vacated; (d) phase 4: renovation of the eight vacated floors, at which point the Albano Building would be vacated; (e) phase 5: renovation of two vacated floors; and (f) phase 6: renovation of the remaining two floors.

25. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide an update on the negotiations for the new DC-2 Building lease to the General Assembly at the time of the consideration of the present report, including on the tenant improvement allowance and its impact on lease rates, as well as on possible future flexibility to adjust the real estate portfolio (see para. 20 above). The Committee also trusts that the Secretary-General will include detailed information on the refurbishment of the building in the next workplace assessment report.**

D. Secretariat Building

26. The flexible workplace project at Headquarters was approved by the General Assembly in resolution [69/274 A](#) and commenced in 2015. The project envisaged converting 27 floors of the Secretariat Building into a flexible workplace and was halted in 2021 before the completion of all planned floors owing to uncertainties created by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the close of the project, a total of 22 floors had been reconfigured, at a cost of \$48.2 million, with a generated additional capacity for 1,291 personnel (from 1,880 to 3,171), which exceeded the original estimate of 1,200 for all planned floors ([A/78/325](#), para. 13; see also [A/76/746](#), para. 2). In its resolution [75/253 C](#), the General Assembly, inter alia, noted with appreciation the realization of efficiencies from the implementation of the flexible workplace project at United Nations Headquarters, including the additional capacity in the Secretariat Building, and the project's full return on investment by 2021 (resolution [75/253 C](#), sect. II, para. 3).

Usage of reconfigured floors and plans for the remaining floors

27. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as of September 2023, the total staff capacity in the Secretariat Building was 4,664. Table 5, which is included in the OIOS report on the evaluation of the implementation of the flexible workplace at Headquarters ([A/78/225](#), table 1), provides information on the usage and capacity of the reconfigured floors.

Table 5

Designed and actual usage of reconfigured floors as at 22 May 2023

(Number of personnel assigned to each floor)

<i>Floor</i>	<i>Original capacity^a</i>	<i>Designed capacity^b</i>	<i>Staff capacity^c</i>	<i>Posts assigned^d</i>	<i>Assignment ratio^e</i>
7	72	148	113	125	1.11
9	77	151	122	171	1.40
10	85	148	120	188	1.57
11	89	154	124	198	1.60
12	67	135	109	121	1.11
13	74	130	107	250	2.34
14	88	144	115	131	1.14
17	90	143	115	205	1.78
18	87	148	119	195	1.64
19	89	138	112	197	1.76
20	79	119	100	175	1.75
21	89	139	113	239	2.12
22	90	155	125	175	1.40
23	91	136	111	187	1.68
24	92	128	105	165	1.57
25	86	153	124	148	1.19
26	91	154	125	140	1.12
30	82	140	115	135	1.17
31	92	146	119	145	1.22

<i>Floor</i>	<i>Original capacity^a</i>	<i>Designed capacity^b</i>	<i>Staff capacity^c</i>	<i>Posts assigned^d</i>	<i>Assignment ratio^e</i>
33	85	165	132	257	1.95
34	89	144	117	132	1.13
35	96	153	124	137	1.10
Total	1 880	3 171	2 566	3 816	1.49

Source: Division of Administration, Department of Operational Support.

^a Before the flexible workplace project.

^b The planned number of people that can be assigned to a floor, taking into consideration absences due, for example, to leave and travel. Assignment per floor is calculated on the basis of the number of unassigned desks on the floor multiplied by 1.25, plus the number of dedicated offices.

^c The number of staff who can occupy the floor on any given day.

^d The number of posts assigned to the floor by department or office.

^e Staff-to-seat ratio.

28. In considering the final report on the implementation of the flexible workplace project, the Advisory Committee expressed the view that the reconfiguration of the remaining five floors of the Secretariat Building (namely, floors 8, 29, 32, 36 and 37)¹ and the application of higher seat-sharing ratios, compared with the 1:1.25 ratio (which equates to 8 workstations for 10 personnel) initially planned for the project, based on the likelihood of increased levels of telecommuting of staff compared with pre-COVID-19-pandemic levels, were both viable options to be considered in the context of the strategic assessment and cost-benefit analysis of the Organization's real estate portfolio in New York, in order to increase the capacity of the existing and new flexible workplace floors of the Secretariat Building and to reduce rental leases at Headquarters (A/76/746, paras. 12–13). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that in the context of the project to vacate the DC-1 Building and the related relocation of approximately 850 personnel to other office space locations, one of the remaining five floors, floor 8, was converted to a flexible workspace, which had increased its capacity by 65 and enabled the consolidation of staff of the Department of Safety and Security. The Committee was also informed that the conversion of the remaining four floors to a flexible workplace would provide an estimated increase in capacity of approximately 200. **Taking into account the current plans regarding the leased premises and the evolution of flexible working arrangements, the Advisory Committee is of the view that the Secretariat should conduct, within existing resources, a cost-benefit analysis of the conversion of the remaining floors of the Secretariat Building to a flexible workplace environment, and provide information thereon in the next workplace assessment report.**

Staff productivity, well-being and health considerations

29. In its evaluation report, OIOS recalls that higher staff productivity was one of the benefits that the Secretary-General anticipated before the flexible workplace project was launched (A/78/225, para. 23). The evaluation of OIOS concluded that the flexible workplace did not demonstrably improve staff productivity and may have

¹ At that time, the departments and offices occupying the floors that had not been converted into flexible workplace were as follows: floor 8: Department of Safety and Security; floor 29: Department of Economic and Social Affairs; floor 32: Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and Office of the Special Adviser on Africa; floor 36: Office of Legal Affairs; and floor 37: Executive Office of the Secretary-General (see A/76/746, table 1).

negatively contributed to staff health and well-being owing to problems relating to noise, lack of privacy and inadequate enclosed space. OIOS indicated that increased telecommuting and resultant lower occupancy levels had improved staff experiences in the flexible workplace. Furthermore, there were distinct patterns in the level of satisfaction by grade, with staff at the P-5 and D-1 levels being the most affected by the loss of a private office, and by age, with staff aged 25 to 34 having the most positive experience with the flexible workplace environment and decreased satisfaction as the age of staff increased (*ibid.*, paras. 46–47).

30. OIOS made two recommendations, as follows: (a) the Department of Operational Support should, in collaboration with heads of entities, determine and implement the optimal occupancy levels in the flexible workplace for operational efficiency, staff productivity and staff well-being, taking into consideration the current use of flexible working arrangements, the requirements of entities and the views of staff, especially those with special needs; and (b) the Department of Operational Support should address the issues of noise and lack of privacy in conjunction with an assessment of the optimal occupancy level, by updating workplace protocols and basic rules and making modifications to physical space, where feasible. The Secretariat accepted both recommendations and initiated action, with expected implementation by 31 March 2025 (*ibid.*, annex).

31. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly noted that flexible workplace strategies in the United Nations should be aimed at improving the overall productivity and efficiency of the Organization, as well as the staff workplace environment (resolution 68/247 B, sect. IV, para. 3). The Committee notes that the evaluation of OIOS found that the implementation of the flexible workplace project at Headquarters did not demonstrably improve staff productivity and may have negatively contributed to staff health and well-being. The Committee trusts that the Secretariat will address issues impacting productivity and well-being, and ensure that lessons learned from the implementation of the flexible workplace at the Secretariat will be duly taken into account in similar projects at Headquarters and other duty stations.**

32. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that several of the measures implemented at Headquarters during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure a safe working environment remained in place, including the operational changes made to the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems and upgraded air filtration, the placement of hand sanitizer stations throughout the complex and some informative signage promoting hygienic behaviour. However, the distancing requirements for infectious disease control were no longer required and, presently, were not expected to be a consideration moving forward.

E. Flexible working arrangements

33. The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in resolution 71/272 A, decided that flexible working arrangements should be an integral part of all flexible workplace strategies (resolution 71/272 A, sect. XVI, para. 14). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that, over the past three years, positive impacts of a flexible workplace, and in particular telecommuting, had been reported across the United Nations system in relation to mental health and well-being, working-time autonomy and productivity, as well as inclusion and employer attractiveness, for example with respect to accessibility for persons with disabilities and for the promotion of gender equality. At the same time, there were also benefits arising from the physical office environment, such as face-to-face interactions and collaboration, increased innovation, hybrid work through space functionality, and ergonomic workspaces to support health and well-being. The Committee was further informed

that the Organization was seeking to harness and optimize the advantages of these distinct work modalities, recognizing that a balanced approach might look different across teams and entities based on their configurations, nature, exigencies of service, personal circumstances and location-specific requirements.

34. In its resolution [77/278](#), the General Assembly, inter alia, recalled the Secretary-General's bulletin on flexible working arrangements and encouraged the Secretary-General to support managers in monitoring staff attendance to ensure that the Organization continued to be responsive to Member States and maintained effective and efficient delivery of its work to assist legislative bodies in their work and to carry out their decisions, and to report thereon at the first part of its resumed seventy-eighth session (resolution [77/278](#), para. 40). **The Advisory Committee looks forward to the report of the Secretary-General related to flexible working arrangements, as requested by the General Assembly (see resolution [77/278](#)).**

F. Accessibility

35. In its resolution [76/273](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit at the main part of its seventy-eighth session a consolidated report, produced within existing resources, on system-wide efforts to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities, including an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and options on the designation of a global focal point to enhance coordination (resolution [76/273](#), para. 11). The Committee was informed that the Secretariat was unable to produce that report owing to its large scope, which required the provision of system-wide efforts in areas such as information and communications technology, personnel matters, conference management, procurement, construction and financial implications. **The Advisory Committee notes that the Secretary-General has not submitted the report on system-wide efforts to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities as requested by the General Assembly (see resolution [76/273](#)).**

36. In his report on the assessment of the workplace, the Secretary-General indicates that, as future space reconfigurations are considered, it is essential to maintain a focus on ensuring that the designs continue to support accessibility for all individuals with disabilities ([A/78/325](#), para. 15 (g)). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that at the Headquarters complex, several improvements had already been implemented as part of the recently completed three-year accessibility programme, which included automatic door operators, bathroom modifications, sidewalk curb cuts, the installation of tactile flooring in a corridor of the Conference Building, and the ongoing installation of a wheelchair lift at the General Assembly Hall speaker's rostrum. In addition, designs for the DC-2 Building renovation would incorporate accessibility, for example through open floor layouts, automatic door openers, sit/stand desks, as well as floor and wall textures as applicable. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to apply the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit to all United Nations renovation and construction projects, as appropriate, and to ensure accessibility in line with best practices, international standards and lessons learned from previous experiences (see resolution [76/273](#), para. 9).**

G. Utilities

37. In the context of its consideration of the programme budget proposal for 2024, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Secretariat would continue to review and identify further avenues for reductions in the cost of utilities to the extent

possible, particularly in terms of optimizing its real estate portfolio and reducing energy consumption, including through a recently upgraded building management system, which would improve the management and monitoring of electrical, steam and domestic water consumption (A/78/7, para. VIII.48). **The Advisory Committee again encourages the Secretariat to pursue energy efficiencies (see also A/78/7, para. VIII.48) and trusts that the Secretary-General will provide greater information on achieved and anticipated efficiency gains in the next workplace assessment report.**

H. Implications for other duty stations

38. In his report, the Secretary-General provides information on workspace at the United Nations Offices at Nairobi, Geneva and Vienna, as well as at the regional commissions (A/78/325, sect. VII). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with the table below, summarizing information on annual rental obligations, staff capacity and implementation of a flexible workplace at each of those entities.

Table 6
Rental obligations and flexible workplace implementation for offices away from Headquarters

	<i>Rental obligation (per year)</i>	<i>Current number of staff accommodated</i>	<i>Maximum staff capacity</i>	<i>Flexible workspace implementation status</i>
United Nations Office at Nairobi	—	4 534	4 534	Yes
United Nations Office at Vienna	1 euro	1 135	1 550	No
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ^a	—	512	612	Planned
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	1 baht	1 985	1 985	Planned
United Nations Office at Geneva ^b	5 452 432 Swiss francs	2 800	3 837	Yes
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ^c	\$792 088	481	581	Planned
Economic Commission for Africa ^d	—	2 017	2 017	Planned

^a The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia building is leased by the Government of Lebanon with the right to use by the Commission.

^b Rental obligation is for leased buildings only. Maximum capacity is estimated upon completion of the strategic heritage plan.

^c Only in Santiago.

^d Includes Economic Commission for Africa and other entities.

39. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the implementation of a flexible workplace environment was at different stages of implementation in several duty stations, with most still at the early planning phase. Information on current personnel-to-seat ratios provided to the Committee indicated that the United Nations Office at Nairobi had a ratio of 1.3:1, while the other duty stations had a ratio of 1:1 (0.83:1 in the case of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia). Data on projected staff-to-seat ratios were not available at the current stage. The implementation of a flexible workplace would take into consideration requirements that were specific to the duty station, in terms of physical layout and application of flexible working arrangements, local conditions and the specific needs of occupants. Only the United Nations Office at Geneva had conducted an assessment specifically on the implementation of workplace strategies. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide more comprehensive and updated information on rental obligations and on the implementation of the flexible**

workplace at other duty stations in the next workplace assessment report, including as regards increased capacity, costs, efficiency gains, productivity, staff satisfaction and well-being and the application of lessons learned from the workplace project at Headquarters. The Committee discusses matters pertaining to capital projects at other duty stations in its report on capital investment planning.

IV. Conclusion

40. The General Assembly is requested to take note of the report of the Secretary-General ([A/78/325](#), para. 59). **Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**
