



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 February 2019

Original: English

Seventy-third session

Agenda item 127

Multilingualism

Multilingualism

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [71/328](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventy-third session, a comprehensive report on the full implementation of its resolutions on multilingualism.

The report reiterates my vision for a multilingual United Nations, reflecting the universality of our Organization, its presence on all continents and its unique language regime. The multilingual nature of the Organization must also be reflected in its internal functioning in order to support the delivery of its mandates and improve its efficiency, performance and transparency.

The report provides an update on the measures taken to mainstream multilingualism, a core value – and a shared responsibility – of the Organization, into the activities of all entities of the Secretariat since the submission of the previous report on this subject ([A/71/757](#)). Recommendations for the attention of the Assembly are presented in bold.



I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly has consistently underlined the importance that multilingualism, a core value of the Organization, plays in achieving the goals of the United Nations as set out in the Charter. The Assembly has also recognized that multilingualism promotes unity in diversity, international understanding, tolerance and dialogue; contributes to the ownership and sustainability of the actions taken by the United Nations; and is a means of improving the efficiency, performance and transparency of the Organization. The Assembly has affirmed the responsibility of the Secretariat for mainstreaming multilingualism into its work, including all its information and communications activities. In this respect, it has called for the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, including all United Nations duty stations and offices away from Headquarters.

2. The present report provides a summary of the actions taken from January 2017 to December 2018 to implement the relevant mandates.¹ The departmental names used in the report reflect the organizational chart of the Secretariat at the time of the respective events.

II. Coordination of multilingualism

A. Appointment and role of the Coordinator for Multilingualism

3. In its resolution [54/64](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to appoint a senior Secretariat official as coordinator of questions relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat. The current Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management was appointed as Coordinator for Multilingualism by the Secretary-General on 11 December 2015.

4. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution [70/9](#), detailed terms of reference for the Coordinator were submitted to the Assembly for consideration at its seventy-first session² and endorsed in Assembly resolution [71/328](#).

B. Coordination within the Secretariat

1. Engagement of the network of focal points

5. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution [61/266](#), in which the Assembly took note of the proposal to establish a network of focal points for multilingualism, the successive Coordinators for Multilingualism have been supported by departmental focal points.

6. In its resolution [71/328](#), the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to continue to develop the network of focal points supporting the Coordinator. As of December 2018, 38 out of 40 Secretariat entities had appointed a total of 60 main and alternate focal points.

7. Since her appointment, the current Coordinator has met as required with the network of focal points for multilingualism in order to inspire and guide mainstreaming measures in all areas of the Secretariat. In 2017, the Coordinator issued a compilation of best practices and lessons learned identified by the focal points, which is available to all Secretariat staff members. In addition, the Coordinator

¹ Supplementary information is available at:
www.un.org/Depts/DGACM/Multilingualism_report_supplementary.pdf.

² See annex II of the previous report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism ([A/71/757](#)).

sent regular communications to the focal points. In 2018, 11 such communications were sent by the Coordinator, including prior to each international language day.³

8. A high number of Secretariat entities (33 of 38) contributed inputs to the present report, a 43.5 per cent increase from the previous report. The contribution of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations also included inputs from 10 peacekeeping operations.⁴

2. Raising awareness of multilingualism

9. Mainstreaming multilingualism implies integrating language considerations into every process of the Organization, including decision-making, policy formulation, budget documentation, programme implementation, knowledge management and reporting. Integrating multilingualism into the activities of the Secretariat requires making conscious and deliberate language choices, on the basis of an analysis of the applicable mandates, client needs and the resources available, including human capital. Through the Coordinator, I encouraged Secretariat entities to make such language choices based not only on an analysis of the costs of multilingualism, but also on the risks involved in monolingualism, including misunderstandings, lack of ownership, disenfranchisement and distrust.

10. In order to clarify further the scope of multilingualism and its requirements, the Coordinator developed dedicated communication tools, including a webpage in all official languages on the website of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, and intranet pages in the working languages on iSeek.⁵ The iSeek pages are intended to: (a) raise awareness of multilingualism among United Nations staff; (b) be a source of information and inspiration on multilingualism; (c) support a consistent and coherent approach to multilingualism; and (d) serve as a repository for the reports and synopses of the meetings of the network of focal points. These pages are now hosted under my priorities on iSeek.

11. With a view to ensuring greater ownership of the multilingualism requirements by the various entities, the Coordinator has also developed and regularly updated a comprehensive matrix of relevant mandates (from intergovernmental bodies) and recommendations (from oversight bodies). The matrix, which contains nearly 600 references, is available to all United Nations staff members on iSeek.

12. In order to highlight the Organization's extensive linguistic diversity, the six official language days have been consistently celebrated by the Secretariat. The Coordinator took the lead in proposing a division of labour among Secretariat entities, publishing calendars of events and promoting such celebrations. Prior to each language day, the Coordinator encouraged Secretariat staff to use the respective language in their work and to take advantage of the language learning opportunities offered by the United Nations.

³ A list of the language days is available at: www.un.org/en/sections/observances/celebrating-multilingualism/index.html.

⁴ The United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP).

⁵ iSeek is the Organization's intranet.

13. With the assistance of the Department of Public Information, in 2017 the Coordinator published an awareness-raising video, now available in eight languages,⁶ highlighting multilingualism as a core value of the United Nations. On the margins of the fifth conference of the United Nations and the universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Organization on cooperation in training candidates for competitive language examinations, the Coordinator organized a panel discussion entitled “International organizations and academia: partners in sustaining multilingualism in the service of peace, development and human rights”.

14. In 2018, at the proposal of the Coordinator, a new category was introduced under the United Nations Secretary-General Awards, to honour a staff member or team for their best practices and innovative approaches to fostering multilingualism at the United Nations. The entries, originating from various corners of the Secretariat, contributed to establishing multilingualism as both a common good and a shared responsibility.

3. Development of a coherent approach to multilingualism

15. During the reporting period, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General supported the Coordinator’s efforts to develop a coherent approach to multilingualism. I attended, or sent a delegate from my Office to participate on my behalf, various language events. I delivered statements, remarks and video messages in multiple languages, including about multilingualism. The recognition of multilingualism as one of my priorities has been reflected on iSeek, and multilingualism has been included periodically on the agenda of the Management Committee.

16. During the reporting period, the Coordinator updated the Management Committee twice, in March 2017 and September 2018. The Committee invited all heads of departments and offices to mainstream multilingualism into their workplans; decided that all Secretariat entities should support the Coordinator in the development of a policy framework on multilingualism; and requested that the responsible entities finalize the guidelines on setting language requirements in job openings, and complete the review of how language skills are assessed in staff selection processes by the end of 2019. The mobilization of extrabudgetary resources by the Coordinator was also welcomed by the Committee, and all entities were requested to support this mobilization.

17. In addition to these regular briefings, a common performance indicator dedicated to multilingualism was included in 2018 in the compacts that I concluded with senior managers (including heads of Secretariat entities and field missions run by the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations). This measure was implemented pursuant to General Assembly resolution [71/328](#) and, in accordance with my commitment to reviewing accountability mechanisms to support the mainstreaming of multilingualism, reflected in my previous report on multilingualism ([A/71/757](#)).

18. Through this addition to the compacts, it is expected that multilingualism will be better understood as a factor for improving the Organization’s efficiency, performance and transparency. By requiring that all workplans and, where applicable, mission plans and budgets, integrate multilingualism and/or language considerations, and that all parliamentary documentation be submitted by authoring entities for multilingual processing on time and within the established word limit, this common indicator is expected to trigger a positive chain reaction throughout the Secretariat.

⁶ Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as Kiswahili and Portuguese.

Guidance was provided by the Coordinator in the form of a toolkit in support of the mainstreaming of multilingualism in departmental workplans.

19. Guided by the General Assembly, the Coordinator made progress towards the development of a strategic policy framework on multilingualism. A thorough review of current policies and practices, within the Secretariat and in similar organizational settings, was conducted by an external consultant, with contributions from the International Organization of la Francophonie (in accordance with paragraphs 24 and 35 of Assembly resolution 71/289) and the support of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Coordinator for Multilingualism. The strategic policy framework is expected to be proposed in 2019.

20. To increase consistency and support a coherent approach to multilingualism, the Coordinator has developed a template to collect data, building on best practices from similar organizational settings. The template, which has been used to prepare the present report, has generated coherent data, thereby improving comparative analysis. The Coordinator also worked closely with the Office of Human Resources Management to enable easy retrieval of data on language requirements in job openings from Inspira, the Organization's web-based talent management system.

21. The Coordinator continued to share concerns and opportunities for advancing multilingualism with other senior managers in the Secretariat. In 2018, 22 communications were addressed by the Coordinator to senior management.

22. In accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 71/328, the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the Coordinator worked together during the reporting period to encourage a coordinated approach to multilingualism across CEB member organizations. New communications tools are being developed, and I designated the Coordinator to serve as lead entity at the CEB level. Such tools are expected to raise awareness among all CEB member organizations of the role multilingualism plays in delivering the Organization's mandates and improving efficiency, performance and transparency, and to encourage information-sharing among CEB member organizations with a view to overcoming common challenges and seeking innovative solutions.

C. Outreach to Member States and other stakeholders

23. The Coordinator has sought to strengthen partnerships with: (a) Member States; (b) entities of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations based on a shared language, including through such mechanisms as the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), which is chaired by the Coordinator; and (c) academia.

24. To that end, the Coordinator, personally or through representatives, periodically held informational meetings and exchanged correspondence on questions relating to multilingualism with, and at the request of, interested Member States from a wide range of language groupings including, at the suggestion of the Department of Field Support, troop- and police-contributing countries. The Coordinator also liaised with language groupings prior to each language celebration and participated regularly in such events.⁷

25. In an effort to compile best practices from similar organizational settings, a partnership with the Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism of Switzerland was established by the Coordinator in October 2018, at the initiative of the United Nations Office at Geneva, which will operationalize the partnership.

⁷ Remarks delivered by, or on behalf of, the Coordinator at language-related events are available at: www.un.org/Depts/DGACM/multilingualism.shtml.

26. The Coordinator collaborated with the CEB secretariat to encourage a coherent approach to multilingualism among CEB member organizations, in accordance with her terms of reference (see A/71/757, annex II). In addition, at the proposal of the Coordinator, in 2019 the Joint Inspection Unit plans to analyse how United Nations entities have mainstreamed multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, into their activities (see A/73/34).

27. Also in line with her terms of reference, which called for an exchange of information with relevant international organizations to build comparative knowledge on multilingualism, the Coordinator, in her additional capacity as Chair of IAMLADP, proposed in 2018 that a survey on multilingualism in intergovernmental and international organizations be undertaken. Close to 50 IAMLADP member organizations, including non-United Nations bodies, took part in the survey, which covered many aspects of language policies and practices.

28. The Coordinator also continued to reach out to civil society and academia during the reporting period, including by supporting seminars on related matters.

D. Priorities and programme of work for 2019–2020

29. In addition to her regular duties as described in the terms of reference for the Coordinator, the Coordinator will undertake the following priority activities in the coming biennium:

(a) Finalize the development of a Secretariat-wide coherent policy framework on multilingualism and update relevant data collection tools accordingly;

(b) Support the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance in finalizing the guidelines on setting language requirements in job openings;

(c) Assist the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Human Resources Services Division of the Department of Operational Support in reviewing how language skills are assessed in staff selection;

(d) Assist the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, in collaboration with the Human Resources Services Division of the Department of Operational Support, in developing an inventory of staff language skills;

(e) Support, as the lead designated by the Secretary-General, a comprehensive and coordinated approach to multilingualism among CEB member organizations.

III. Integrating multilingualism into the Secretariat: status of implementation

A. Management

1. Cross-cutting measures

30. Starting in 2018, all compacts⁸ I signed with senior managers, including my special representatives for missions managed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, require that their entities' workplans or, where applicable, mission plans or budgets, integrate multilingualism

⁸ See also paragraphs 17 and 18 above.

and/or language considerations. This requirement is applicable to the subdivisions of each entity as well. In September 2018, of 47 Secretariat entities including field missions that provided self-assessments of their compliance rates, 57.5 per cent reported that their workplans integrated multilingualism, while 68 per cent reported that they have fully or partially mainstreamed multilingualism or language considerations into their subdivisions' workplans.

31. In addition to this common performance indicator on multilingualism, 12 entities indicated that their heads included additional objectives in support of multilingualism in their respective compacts.

2. Conference management

32. Innovations in support of language parity and multilingualism have been described in the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (see [A/72/116](#) and [A/73/93](#)) and in the supplementary information thereto.⁹

33. During the reporting period, all official documentation continued to be made available simultaneously in all applicable languages through the Official Documentation System of the United Nations. However, some entities reported that, at the request of Member States, materials had occasionally been made available in an advance, unedited format in English only, to facilitate the work of the relevant bodies and support the deliberative process.

34. The documentation chain benefited, over the reporting period, from the continued efficiencies brought about by eLUNA, the translation interface developed in-house that provided instant access to (a) previously translated documents; (b) terminology records; and (c) machine translation systems. A number of Secretariat offices and departments, including the conferences services at Headquarters, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna, the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), as well as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), now have access to eLUNA. Arrangements are being made to provide access to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2019. Demonstrations of the interface were made to other Secretariat entities, such as the Department of Public Information.

3. Human resources management

Policies

35. As highlighted in my previous report on multilingualism ([A/71/757](#)), human resources services play a key role in:

- (a) Mainstreaming multilingualism throughout the Secretariat;
- (b) Shifting towards a multilingual workforce and, in general, instilling an organizational culture and work environment that is conducive to multilingualism;
- (c) Maintaining the equality of the Secretariat's working languages in conformity with relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolution [71/263](#) on human resources management.

36. Accordingly, the proposed global human resources strategy for 2019–2021 that I submitted for the consideration of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session

⁹ Supplementary information to the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences is available from the website of the Committee on Conferences (<https://coc.dgacm.org/>).

(A/73/372) highlighted the importance of a multilingual workforce in order to achieve a strong United Nations. The report also addressed the role that languages and multilingualism play in all three components of the human resources strategy. The Assembly, in its resolution 73/281, further recognized the pivotal role that human resources management plays in delivering the Organization's mandates.

37. The International Civil Service Commission, in its report for the year 2018 (A/73/30), recognized that, in addition to geographical distribution and gender parity, other aspects of staff composition, including language capacity and cultural diversity, need to be managed through policies that encourage inclusiveness and prevent discrimination, harassment and abuse. In this spirit, the Commission proposed the addition of a workforce diversity component to the human resources management framework.

38. During the reporting period, the Office of Human Resources Management and the United Nations Office at Geneva conducted a harmonization exercise with a view to ensuring greater consistency in language learning, teaching and assessment across the entire Secretariat and all United Nations languages. The output of this ongoing project will be a United Nations Language Framework that is tailored to the needs of the Organization, with considerable potential to provide:

- (a) A common definition of the levels of language proficiency (in the various linguistic areas) that can be applied to both positions and individual staff members;
- (b) Common assessment criteria for the Language Proficiency Examination;
- (c) A common curriculum in the six languages;
- (d) Professional language assessment tools for career development and recruitment purposes (such as computerized pre-screening language tests).

Recruitment and placement

Senior leadership

39. In 2017, for the first time, the joint Senior Leadership Appointments Section of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support issued a global call for nominations to senior leadership positions. Applications from women candidates with fluency in French and Arabic, in addition to English, were strongly encouraged. Notes verbales in all official languages were addressed to permanent missions and the call was promoted on social media in Arabic, English and French. During the selection process, applicants' language skills were consistently assessed, with at least 25 per cent of interview questions asked in each of the required languages. Applicants' language proficiency was consistently recorded and included in the submission to the head of the lead department.

40. Over the reporting period, senior leaders' language proficiency has also been more consistently included in appointment notices issued by the Secretary-General, in recognition of the important role of multilingualism in implementing the relevant mandates.

Career outreach

41. During the reporting period, the Department of Field Support continued to apply strategically multilingualism in its interactions with Member States, troop- and police-contributing countries and the general public to attract qualified candidates with adequate language skills to careers in the field. It did so by hosting workshops and round tables in English, French and Arabic, conducting outreach field visits to Arabic-, English-, French- and Spanish-speaking countries, and developing a range of communication products in the six official languages to be used during presentations on careers in the field, outreach visits or career fairs.

Language requirements

42. In its resolution 71/263 on human resources management, the General Assembly reaffirmed the need to respect the equality of the two working languages of the Secretariat, further reaffirmed the use of additional working languages in specific duty stations as mandated, and requested the Secretary-General to ensure that vacancy announcements specify the need for either of the working languages of the Secretariat, unless the functions of the post require a specific working language.

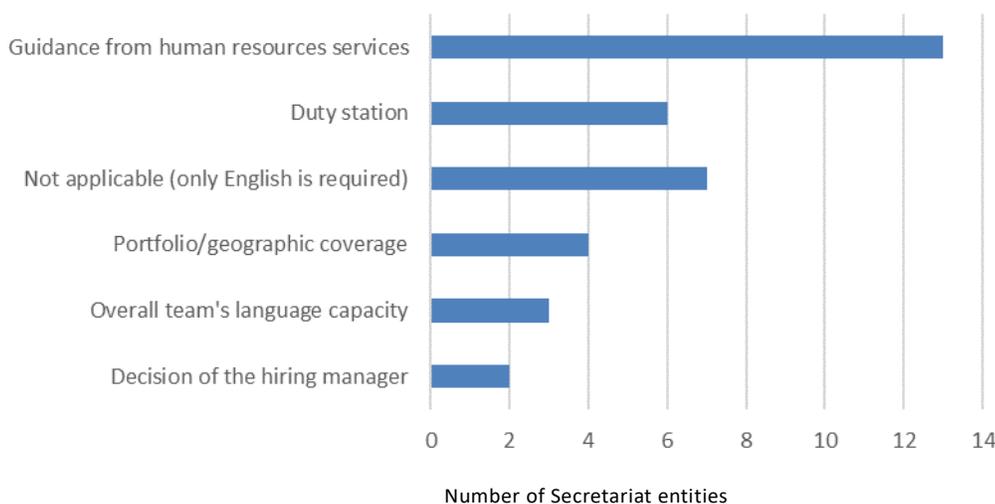
43. The established practice is that hiring managers are expected to align the language criteria with the principle of equality of the two working languages of the Secretariat and that, if required to perform the functions of the position, proficiency in a specific working language may be necessary. Additional language proficiency requirements are occasionally established for specific duty stations. For positions in the field, the official language or languages spoken in the country of the duty station could be considered an asset, for instance. The Staff Selection System Manual published by the Office of Human Resources,¹⁰ and the related standard clauses to be used when building job postings in Inspira, serve as overall guidance on this matter.

44. An analysis of the openings published in 2017 revealed that, of the 6,399 openings issued, 151 (2 per cent) required fluency in either working language (English or French) interchangeably; the majority of openings required fluency in a specific working language. The reasons behind the observed imbalances are being analysed and will be addressed with senior management.

45. The guidance provided by the Office of Human Resources Management regarding language requirements has translated into a variety of practices in the various entities and duty stations. Figure I summarizes the factors used, at times cumulatively, to determine language requirements, as reported by 31 responding entities. The plurality of these criteria reinforces the need for hiring managers to receive support in setting language requirements in job openings. The Coordinator has cooperated with the network of focal points, and the Office of Human Resources Management in particular, to prepare a worksheet aimed at helping hiring managers to set language requirements.

Figure I

Factors determining language requirements in job openings (as at 30 September 2018)



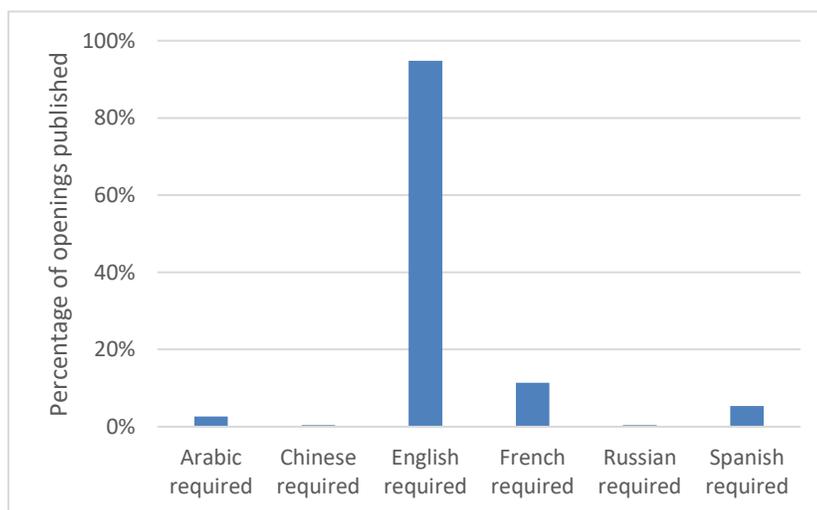
Source: Respective Secretariat entities.

¹⁰ The Manual is available from Inspira's password-protected interface, under the "Manuals" tab.

46. A thorough analysis of the language requirements set out in all 6,399 openings published in the Secretariat in 2017 has revealed an imbalance between the working languages, with English required in 94.8 per cent of all openings and French in 11.4 per cent of openings. Arabic was required in 2.7 per cent, Chinese in 0.4 per cent, Russian in 0.5 per cent and Spanish in 5.3 per cent of all openings (see figure II).¹¹

Figure II

Language requirements in all openings published in 2017, by official language required

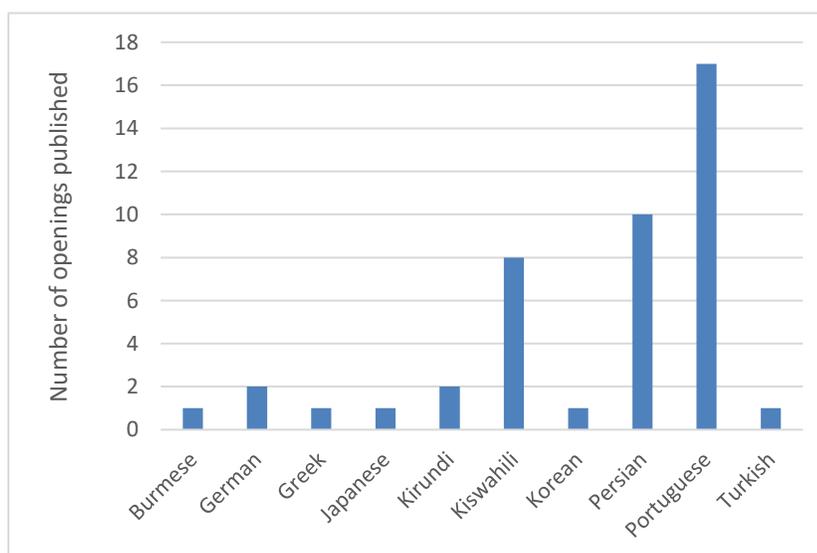


Source: Inspira.

47. Language requirements related to non-official languages are summarized in figure III.

Figure III

Language requirements in openings published in 2017, by non-official language required



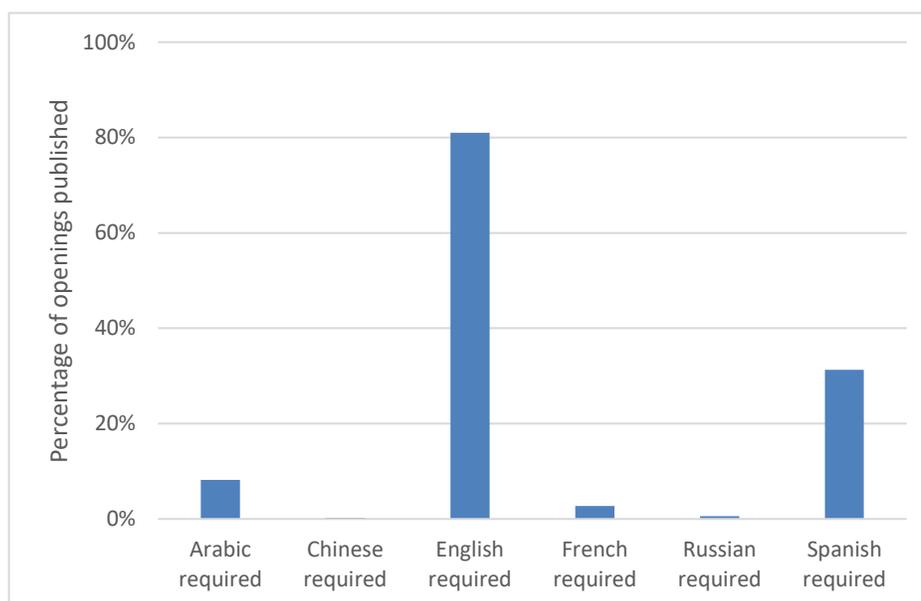
Source: Inspira.

¹¹ Since some openings required multiple languages, the sum exceeds 100 per cent.

48. The range of languages required in job openings published by the regional commissions was generally broader and more balanced, in view of their distinct language regimes. As reflected in figure IV, Arabic was required in 8.2 per cent of all openings published by the five regional commissions (71.6 per cent at ESCWA), English in 81 per cent of openings, and Spanish in 31.5 per cent of openings (93.2 per cent at ECLAC). Similarly, the situation was more balanced at the United Nations Office at Geneva during the reference year (2017), where English was required in 86 per cent and French in 53 per cent of all published openings.

Figure IV

Language requirements in openings published by the regional commissions in 2017, by official language required



Source: Inspira.

49. The Coordinator also compiled best practices regarding language requirements from similar organizational settings, including all member organizations of CEB. One of her main findings was that, while the language regimes of other organizations are often not as strictly defined as that of the Secretariat, many have established more demanding minimum language requirements for recruitment. The organizations have generally invoked political or practical considerations, such as their universal membership or their presence in the field, to justify such requirements. Seven member organizations of CEB¹² require all international recruits to have knowledge of at least two languages, sometimes with specific requirements in terms of language combinations or proficiency level.

Languages of publication

50. The long-standing policy of the Office of Human Resources provides that regular job openings for positions in the Professional and higher categories, as well as in the Field Service category, subject to international recruitment are published in both working languages of the Secretariat. This rule is strictly followed, supporting

¹² The seven organizations are UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

my efforts to achieve greater equality among such languages at the United Nations and to build a multilingual workforce to serve a stronger Organization.

51. At the same time, all temporary job openings, job openings for General Service and related categories and internship announcements are published in one language only, which is the language required to perform the functions advertised.

52. Some entities have, however, developed more inclusive policies, such as ECA, where temporary job openings in the Professional and higher categories have been consistently published in English and French, and the Department of Field Support, which publishes some job openings in Arabic too.

Languages used as a medium of communication in staff selection

53. As a general rule, staff selection in the Secretariat can be conducted in either of the working languages. The young professionals programme, for instance, offers applicants the choice to participate in its competitive examination in English or French. For specific job openings, however, staff selection is generally conducted in the language that is required.

54. Some entities have developed practices that better support multilingualism. In Vienna, for instance, to support staff selection in a variety of languages, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) maintain a list of staff trained in competency-based interviewing, including the official languages in which they can conduct such interviews. Similarly, at the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the United Nations Environment Programme, efforts have been made to ensure that some of the interview panel members have a command of the required or desirable languages to enable them to assess the applicants' skills. At the United Nations Office at Geneva, all interview panel members are proficient in the required languages set out in the job opening, while at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), interviews can be conducted in either of the working languages of the Secretariat that are required in the job opening.

55. In accordance with her terms of reference, the Coordinator also compiled best practices from other United Nations entities about the languages used during staff selection and noted, for instance, that applicants invited by ILO to assessment centres can select which of the three ILO working languages (English, French or Spanish) they wish to be assessed in, provided that language is defined as "required" in the job opening.

Language assessments

56. Language requirements constitute primary eligibility criteria. The staff selection process is, therefore, meant to establish that all selected applicants meet the minimum eligibility requirements. In addition, language criteria listed as "desirable" in job openings may be used for determining suitability and contribute to the shortlisting of candidates for further assessment through a written test or competency-based interview.

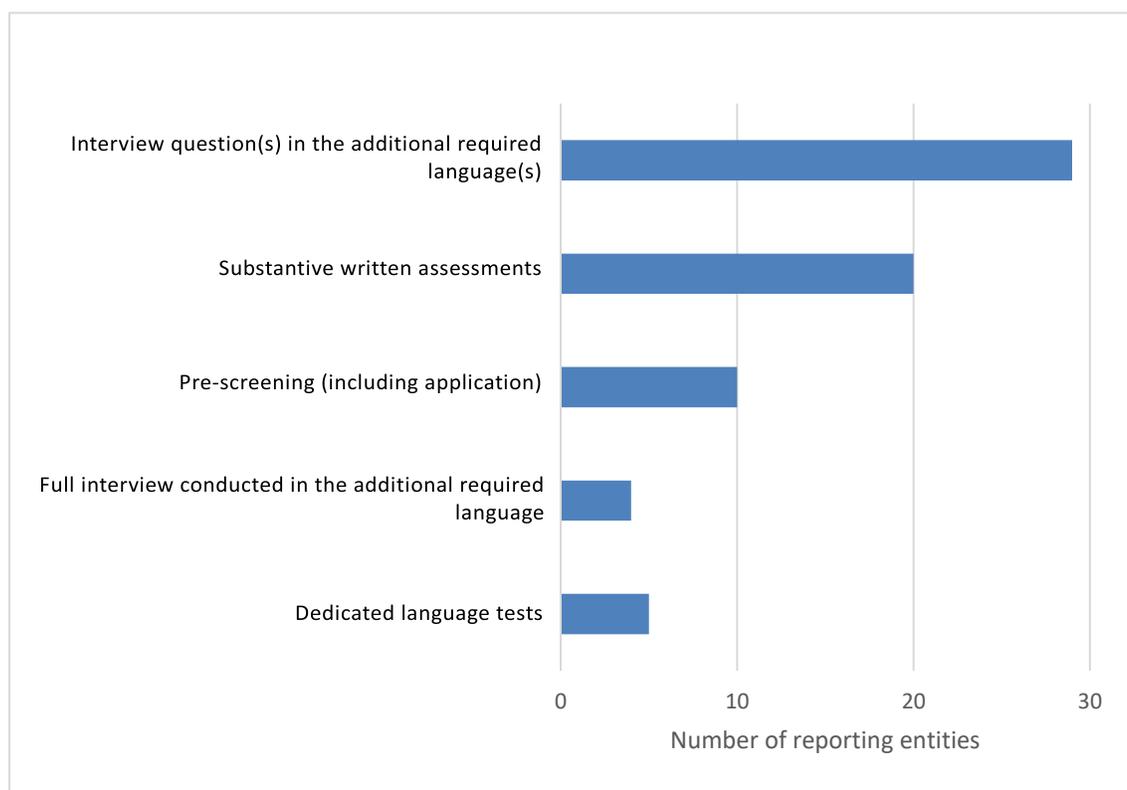
57. In view of the above, the Management Committee requested that the Office of Human Resources Management review, by the end of 2019, how language skills are assessed during the staff selection process. The Coordinator established an overview of the current practice as a first step in this direction. The Department of Operational Support, in collaboration with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, will work on the review to be submitted by the end of the year.

58. In accordance with guidance provided by the Office of Human Resources, applicants are screened upon submission of their applications based on their self-assessment of their level of proficiency in the language or languages required according to the job opening. The language proficiency of shortlisted candidates is

also vetted by an assessment panel during the competency-based interview. The interviews are conducted in the language or languages required to perform the functions of the post, and may also include questions and responses in the languages indicated as “desirable” in the job opening. Language proficiency may also be evaluated through written assessments.

59. Building on this general guidance, Secretariat entities have developed diverse assessment methods (see figure V). Such methods are sometimes used cumulatively. The most common assessment method is the inclusion of one or more questions in the additional required language or languages during the competency-based interview. This method poses some practical challenges, however, in the light of the general lack of language-specific rosters of trained interview panel members; the subsequent difficulty of constituting panels whose members are all proficient in the additional language; and the ensuing risk that it may not be possible for the language skills of applicants to be assessed collectively by all panel members.

Figure V
Methods of assessing language skills in the staff selection process in the Secretariat (as at 30 September 2018)



Source: Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among all Secretariat entities.

60. In compliance with her terms of reference, the Coordinator also compiled best practices regarding language assessments from other member organizations of CEB. The analysis revealed that various practices are in use, including recognition of the Language Proficiency Examination (at FAO, for instance) and external assessments (at FAO, UNHCR and the World Trade Organization) as part of the staff selection process. At the World Trade Organization, in the absence of proof of proficiency, applicants are given the opportunity to have their language skills tested during the selection process.

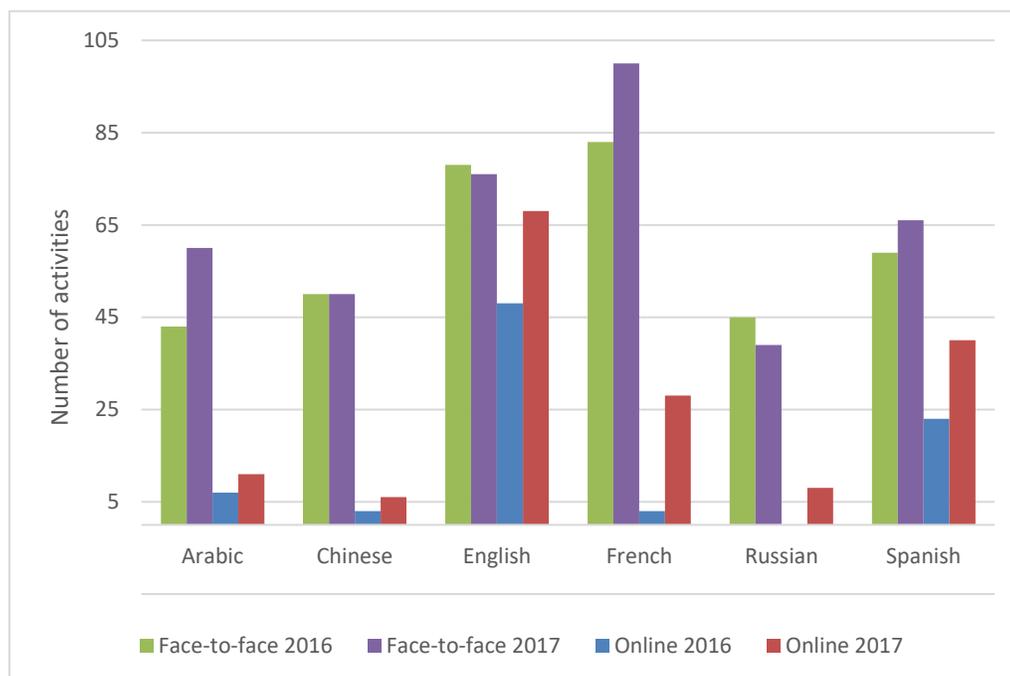
Training

Language training

61. In support of the mainstreaming of multilingualism, the Department of Management expanded its language learning activities across the Secretariat, beyond Headquarters. It offered more online training and significantly increased the total number of activities (up 25 per cent from 2016 to 2017), including face-to-face activities (up 9.2 per cent), to accommodate larger cohorts, more diverse needs and a wider spectrum of duty stations (see figure VI).

Figure VI

Composition of language training activities conducted by the Office of Human Resources Management



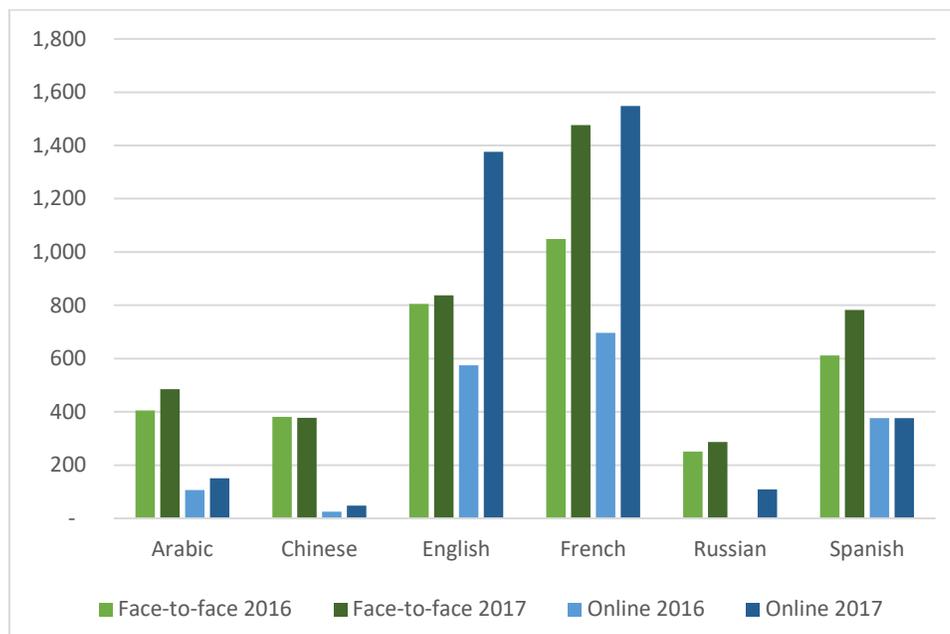
Source: Office of Human Resources Management.

62. Since 2017, 1,614 online language learning licences have been distributed to staff members located in 106 countries, in particular in remote areas where no on-site language training is available.

63. The diversification of the Department of Management's language learning catalogue resulted in a significant increase in language learners, from 5,282 participants in 2016 to 7,855 in 2017, an increase of 49 per cent.¹³ All languages benefited, to various degrees, as illustrated in figure VII.

¹³ Some participants took part in several activities over a calendar year.

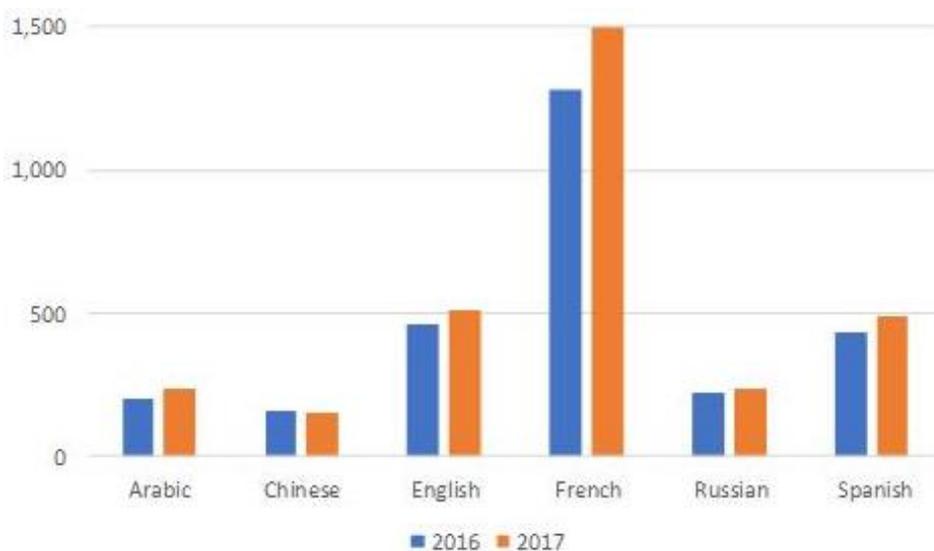
Figure VII
Total number of participants in language learning activities organized by the Office of Human Resources Management



Source: Office of Human Resources Management.

64. At the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Staff Development and Learning Section was renamed the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism in 2017, and changes were initiated to its course offering to better suit the needs of its growing client base (see figure VIII). As a result, specialized courses were expanded; more flexible formats were introduced; and an in-house learning platform was developed. A semi-intensive summer course, specifically tailored to the United Nations context, was offered in French in 2016 (3 sessions, 45 participants) and 2017 (8 sessions, 120 participants), and expanded to English and Spanish in 2018.

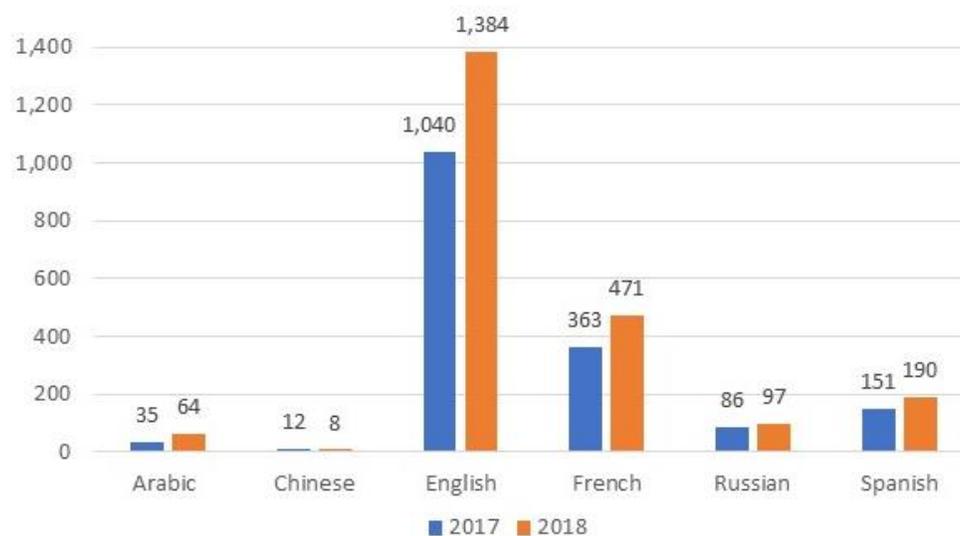
Figure VIII
Total number of participants in language learning activities organized by the United Nations Office at Geneva



Source: United Nations Office at Geneva.

65. Over the past two years, the number of candidates for the Language Proficiency Examination, administrated centrally by the Department of Management but organized locally in about 100 countries every year, also significantly increased (up 31.2 per cent between 2017 and 2018), as shown in figure IX.

Figure IX
Number of candidates invited to take the Language Proficiency Examination



Source: Office of Human Resources Management.

Mandatory training

66. In 2018, the Office of Human Resources Management conducted an analysis of all nine training courses that were mandatory at the time for all staff members of the

Secretariat, pursuant to [ST/SGB/2018/4](#).¹⁴ It revealed that only six of the courses were available in both English and French, and only three in another official language. The Office of Human Resources Management will support multilingualism by ensuring that all mandatory courses are offered in English and French at the very least, and in other official languages wherever possible. It will also encourage the provision of supporting materials (for in-person or online training) and related activities (such as the Leadership Dialogues) in additional languages.

4. Procurement

67. In support of multilingualism, the Procurement Division developed four online courses in 2016 and 2017, in English, French and Spanish, and continued to assign dedicated human resources (one staff member per official language) to assist and support vendors throughout the registration process in their preferred language. At the United Nations Office at Vienna, the Procurement Unit had the capacity to address questions in all six official languages of the United Nations and other languages. Business seminars held at Headquarters in 2016 and 2017 were offered in various languages. Of the 78 business seminars conducted by the Procurement Division, 7 were offered in Chinese, 53 in English, 6 in French and 10 in Spanish.¹⁵

68. To a lesser extent, multilingualism was also reflected in requests for expressions of interest issued in 2016–2017. Of the 2,257 such requests published during the biennium in the United Nations Global Marketplace,¹⁶ 210 were available in French, 43 in Spanish and the remaining 2,004 in English. A detailed analysis, by Secretariat entity, is available in figure X.

69. In addition, some field missions used various languages to procure goods and services with the aim of securing best value for money. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, for instance, consistently used the local languages (Greek and Turkish) when issuing local solicitation documents, holding procurement seminars for the local business community or designing procurement information materials.

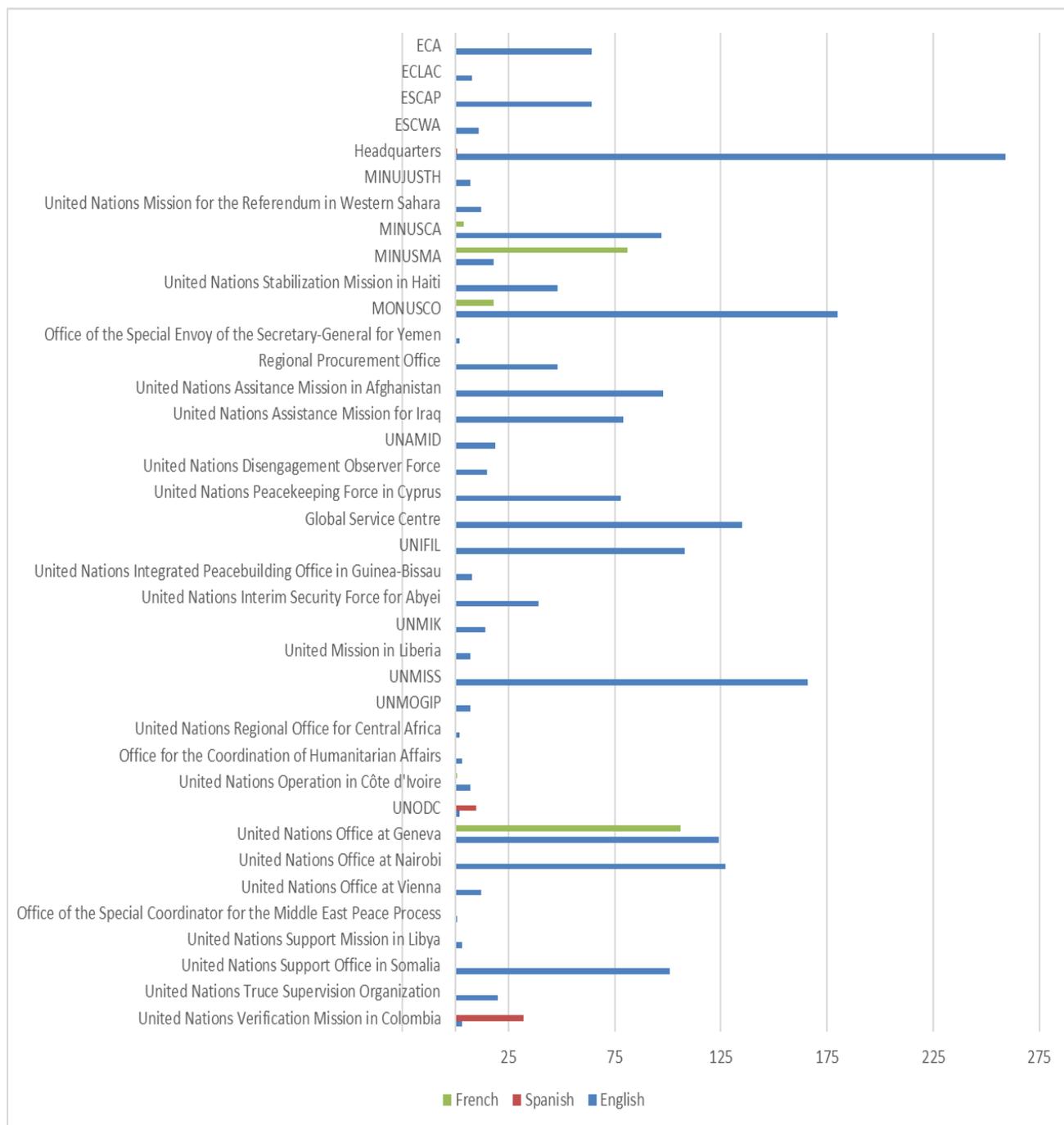
70. Other entities, however, reported limitations in conducting procurement activities in languages other than English. Umoja, the Secretariat's enterprise resource planning system, was mentioned among such limitations, as it only supports the English language. Other limitations included the use of some standardized legal documents available in English only. On an informal basis, resources permitting, some field offices occasionally translated core solicitation documentation into other languages to aid vendors in understanding the requirements, as is the case at UNODC. However, the English version of the documents prevails in the event of a dispute.

¹⁴ The analysis is available at: https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/MandatoryLearning_2018_v4_0.pdf.

¹⁵ Some of the seminars were held in two languages.

¹⁶ The United Nations Global Marketplace contains information about bids exceeding \$40,000 in value.

Figure X
Requests for expressions of interest issued during the 2016–2017 biennium, by office



Source: Office of Central Support Services of the Department of Management.

B. Information and communications

1. Cross-cutting measures

71. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General has played a leading role in mainstreaming multilingualism in information and communication activities during

the reporting period. A variety of languages was frequently used by the most senior managers, including myself, when delivering speeches and messages. Background briefings and interviews with the press were held in multiple languages. Whenever possible, bilateral meetings I held were conducted in the language of the interlocutor, and all supporting documents were drafted in the target language. With the assistance of the Department of Public Information, most of my video messages were also made available in all official languages.

72. Likewise, at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the inputs for the speaking engagements of the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD were submitted in the relevant official language, building on the diversity of language skills available among the staff. Press conferences organized at UNCTAD headquarters were held in English and French, while press conferences in other duty stations were often conducted in the local language. When media outlets requested interviews with UNCTAD representatives, efforts were made to identify experts who could answer in the language of the journalists.

73. To support both gender mainstreaming and the mainstreaming of multilingualism in the Organization, the Department of Management, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, with the support of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, developed gender-inclusive guidelines that are specific to each of the six official languages. These guidelines are available from the United Nations website and the “United for Gender Parity” website in the six languages.¹⁷ The guidelines include recommendations to help United Nations staff to use gender-inclusive language in various types of communication. The “United for Gender Parity” website also includes a toolbox for using gender-inclusive language and training materials.

2. Websites and social media

74. The minimum standards for multilingualism of United Nations websites,¹⁸ which were updated by the Department of Public Information in 2017, continue to provide guidance to website developers and managers. In 2017, the Office of Information and Communications Technology, in cooperation with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Department of Public Information, established a website governance mechanism whereby all new public websites managed or supported by the Office of Information and Communications Technology are expected to either meet the multilingualism standards or receive a waiver, which encourages maximum adherence to the standards. Of the seven requests for waivers received in 2017, four were granted, after a thorough review and discussion with the client.

75. The status of multilingualism on United Nations websites varies considerably across the Secretariat. Of the 213 websites under the main United Nations domain name that the Department of Global Communications owns, manages or supports, 200 (94 per cent) are available in the six official languages.¹⁹ However, other Secretariat entities have faced challenges in maintaining language parity on their respective websites. Of the 48 entities including peacekeeping operations that provided inputs to the present report, nearly all reported that the content of their external websites

¹⁷ Available at: www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/.

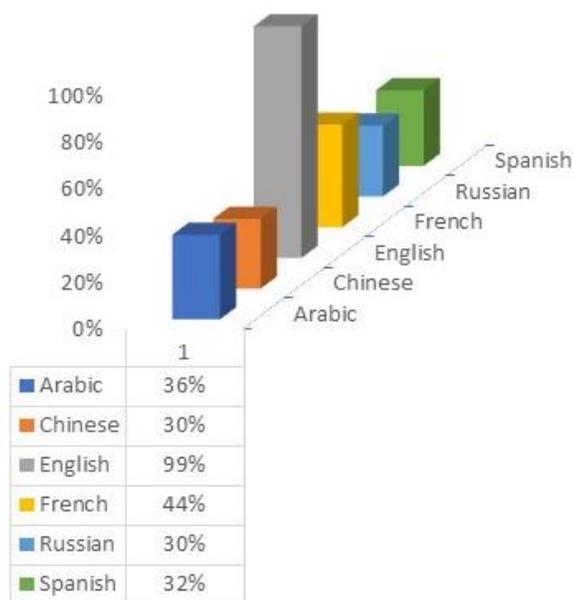
¹⁸ Available at: www.un.org/en/sections/web-governance/minimum-standards-multilingualism-united-nations-websites/index.html.

¹⁹ Supplementary information about United Nations websites is available at: www.un.org/Depts/DGACM/Multilingualism_report_supplementary.pdf.

was fully available in English, while content in the other official languages ranged from 30 per cent for Russian and Chinese, to 44 per cent for French (see figure XI).

Figure XI

Estimated percentage of external website content available, by official language (as at 30 September 2018)



Source: Respective Secretariat entities.

76. To expand its multilingual capacity, the Department of Public Information has continued to partner with universities, which provide translations of some public information materials on a pro bono basis. During the reporting period, four agreements were signed to provide capacity in Arabic, French, Russian and Kiswahili (Chinese and Spanish were already covered by previous agreements).

77. Departments and offices with a strong field presence, such as the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OHCHR and UNODC, continued to expand their multilingual presence on websites and social media²⁰ in order to reach the widest possible audience. In field missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, host countries' official languages have regularly been used in communications and on websites and social media. During the reporting period, both departments supported field missions deployed in French-speaking countries by providing content in French. In addition, MINUSCA started providing content on its Facebook page in Sango.

78. In 2018, the Department of Public Information launched an integrated, multilingual and multimedia website called "UN News", which is now available in the six official languages, as well as Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese, with a view to improving consistency across languages. Its multilingual content is also available from a wide range of other websites maintained by Secretariat entities. The fully multilingual UN News application, which was improved during the reporting period

²⁰ Supplementary information is available at: www.un.org/Depts/DGACM/Multilingualism_report_supplementary.pdf.

to integrate video, audio and written content, now ranks as the most frequently downloaded United Nations application.

79. In the same spirit, to ensure strategic alignment of the Organization's various flagship social media accounts in various languages, the Department of Public Information's social media teams were placed under the same leadership in 2017. This reorganization, conducted within existing resources, resulted in enhanced collaboration between many areas of the Department across languages and the United Nations communications community at large. Such collaboration materialized through the localization and sharing by the Department's social media team of resources in multiple languages, including logos and visuals. Likewise, other entities such as UNODC have shared their multilingual social media content with the Department.

80. The Department of Public Information has also opted for new features offered by Facebook to enable content to be displayed in the user's preferred language (based on their Facebook settings). This move has resulted in a rebalancing of the overall audience across languages.

3. Internal communications

81. Internal communications affect our Organization's work culture and can be a powerful tool to instil an environment where staff feel encouraged to use a variety of languages, based on the needs of the respective communication contexts. It is in this context that a review of the existing policies and practices has been conducted.

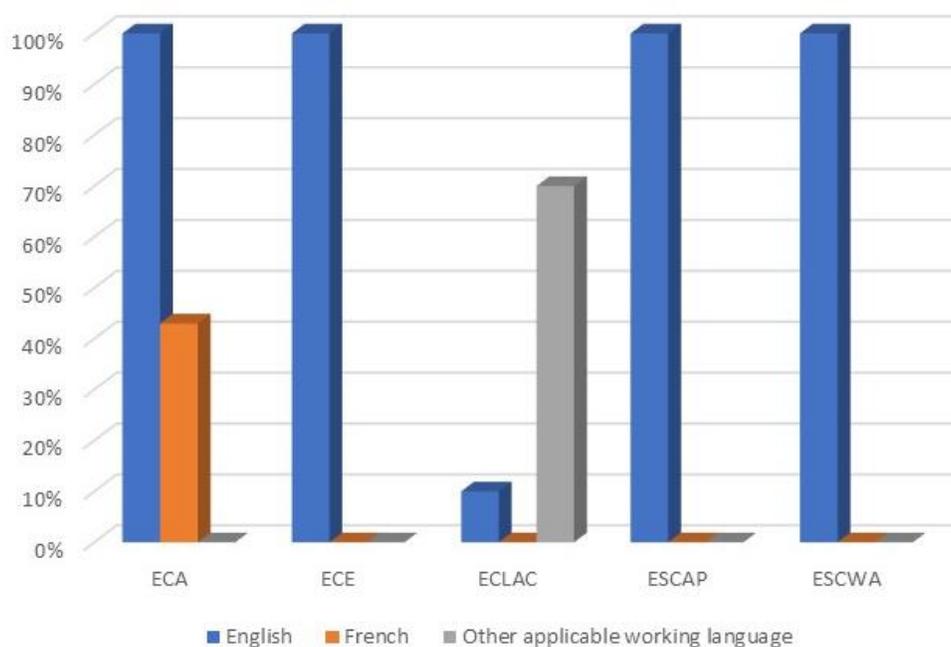
82. The Secretariat's internal communications platform, iSeek, is available in the working languages, English and French, in accordance with the request of the General Assembly. While the Department of Global Communications's iSeek team provides translations of "Staff stories" and "In the spotlight" articles to enable their simultaneous publication in the working languages, few authoring Secretariat entities have developed multilingual departmental iSeek pages.

83. During the reporting period, the Department of Public Information supported the development by the authoring departments of fully bilingual iSeek pages on priorities of the Secretary-General, such as the Organization's response to sexual exploitation and abuse, United Nations reform and multilingualism.

84. An analysis of intranet content was conducted across the Secretariat for the purpose of the present report. A total of 44 entities, including field missions, provided inputs on their respective intranets and their multilingual status. It was estimated that, on average, 98 per cent of the content was available in English and 13 per cent in French, with some variations, in particular in the regional commissions (see figure XII).²¹

²¹ The other applicable working languages vary across the regional commissions. ECA does not have a third working language, for instance. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has Russian, ECLAC has Spanish and ESCWA has Arabic. ESCAP has four working languages (Chinese and Russian, in addition to English and French). However, its intranet is only available in English.

Figure XII
Estimated percentage of intranet content available, by regional commission, by working language (as at 30 September 2018)



Source: Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among the regional commissions.

85. As examples of good practices, the Ethics Office and the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services provide information in the six official languages through their external websites, while at the United Nations Office at Geneva, all internal communications, including radio messages and broadcast messages, have been consistently issued in both working languages.

86. Many Secretariat entities noted that administrative forms and manuals were not available in all working languages. While on average 99 per cent of forms were reported to be available in English, as at 30 September 2018, it was estimated that only 43 per cent were available in French.

87. Owing to translation costs and budget constraints, most broadcast communications were sent to staff in the language of submission, with a translation provided only occasionally. The Department of Management, as the entity that supports the dissemination of broadcast messages to the global Secretariat staff, will continue to provide guidance in this regard to authoring entities.

88. In contrast, during the reporting period, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, MONUSCO, MINUSCA and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict conducted town hall meetings in English and French (with and without interpretation).

4. Publications and library services

89. During the reporting period, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library expanded its language offering by providing translations for 57 of its 107 online research guides; collaborated with ESCWA to introduce a research and reference service in Arabic; and delivered 53 training sessions in French and Spanish. The United Nations Digital

Library System also attracted a linguistically diverse audience. For instance, 19 per cent of downloads were in Chinese.

90. The Library at the United Nations Office at Geneva contains materials in 132 languages, German and Italian being the most widely represented among the non-official languages. During the reporting period, the Library regularly updated its research guide on multilingualism at the United Nations.

91. The United Nations iLibrary, launched by the Department of Public Information in 2016, has continued to expand its multilingual content, with resources now in nine languages. It serves a linguistically diverse audience: during the reporting period alone, users from 110 different countries registered on the platform.

92. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs started publishing the executive summary of its annual Global Humanitarian Overview in a range of languages. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of views of the flagship publication, which now ranks as the Office's second most-read document.

5. Audiovisual services

93. During the main part of the seventy-second and seventy-third sessions of the General Assembly, the Department of Public Information offered on-demand webcast videos in the six official languages for all plenary meetings of the Assembly, including the general debate, and public meetings of the Security Council. In addition, live webcast videos in the six official languages and from the floor were aired. The Department of Global Communications is currently exploring options to enable its search function in all official languages, bearing in mind that half of United Nations Web TV users are located in non-English speaking countries.

94. In 2017, the public information division of MONUSCO organized awareness-raising sessions, produced short documentaries and issued audio announcements in local languages. Radio Okapi, the United Nations radio station in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, also produced short documentaries in some of the official languages of the United Nations, while Mikado FM, its Malian counterpart, regularly broadcast in Arabic and French, as well as local languages such as Bambara, Peul, Songhai and Tamasheq. In the Central African Republic, Guira FM aired programmes in Sango and in French.

95. Also in 2017, the Department of Public Information expanded its audiovisual services to include Hindi, based on a partnership with the Government of India.

6. United Nations information centres

96. During the reporting period, the Department of Public Information's network of United Nations information centres continued to operate in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish daily, as well as in 97 additional local languages²² as needed. In 2017–2018, 16,000 communication materials were produced by the information centres. The information centres maintained websites and social media channels in as

²² Afrikaans, Akuapem Twi, Armenian, Asante Twi, Azerbaijani, Bafut, Bangla/Bengali, Bangwas, Basaa, Belarusian, Bemba, Bhojpuri, Chechen, Czech, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangbe, Danish, Dioula, Dutch, Ewe, Ewondo, Fante, Filipino, Finnish, Frisian (Frysk), Ffulde (Burkina Faso), Ffulde (Cameroon), Ffulde (Nigeria), Ga, Georgian, German, Gonja, Greek, Gumalcema, Hausa, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Idoma, Igbo, Ijaw, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Kanuri, Kaonde, Kazakh, Kiswahili, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Maithili, Malagasy, Mari, Moore, Ndebele, Nepali, Newari, Norwegian, Nyanja/Chinyanja, Nzema, Persian, Pidgin English, Polish, Portuguese, Quechua, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Shona, Shupamum, Sinhala, Siswati, Slovak, Slovene, Swedish, Tamang, Tamazight, Tamil, Telugu, Thauru, Tiv, Tonga, Tsonga, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Uzbek, Venda, Wolof, Xhosa, Yakut, Yoruba and Zulu.

many as 34 languages.²³ By translating the Sustainable Development Goals into 66 local languages, the information centres also played a key role in raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

IV. Key findings and way forward

97. Despite the progress made towards the mainstreaming of multilingualism in the Secretariat, some challenges remain. Below is a summary of the challenges brought to my attention, and measures that will be taken in response, where applicable.

98. Several departments and offices expressed an interest in receiving guidance regarding translation outsourcing, quality and productivity standards and quality control. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management is well positioned to share best practices and recommendations in these areas with other entities.

99. An analysis of the data received from Inspira regarding language requirements in job openings revealed that Secretariat entities have, by and large, required a command of only one language. In a universal Organization with a strong field presence, such minimal requirements may affect the ability of the Secretariat to fulfil all its mandates in an efficient, effective and transparent manner. In an effort to raise awareness of the status of multilingualism in the respective entities and to increase accountability, the Coordinator will present to senior management her detailed findings about language requirements across the Secretariat. All Secretariat entities will also be invited to give due regard to language requirements during post classifications, building eventually on the language proficiency levels to be developed in the United Nations Language Framework (see para. 38).

100. The Coordinator will continue to work with relevant Secretariat entities, including the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Human Resources Services Division of the Department of Operational Support, to assist in the finalization of the guidelines supporting hiring managers, without prejudice to their prerogatives, in setting language requirements in job openings that meet the needs of the Organization, while respecting the principle of language parity and all other applicable mandates, rules and regulations, as appropriate.

101. With the discontinuation, as of 1 January 2017, of the language incentives for Professional and higher categories, new methods for encouraging staff to expand their language skills will be considered. The Coordinator will, in particular, support efforts to ensure that language requirements are aligned with applicable mandates and the programmatic needs of the Organization, and that language skills are consistently and accurately assessed during staff selection processes to ensure that all eligibility criteria are fully met. Such measures, used cumulatively, would contribute to incentivizing staff to enhance their language proficiency.

102. While 40 per cent of the Secretariat entities that provided inputs for the present report collect language-disaggregated data in some areas, many still faced challenges in providing accurate and comprehensive data for the purpose of the report. The Coordinator will continue to raise awareness among Secretariat entities about the need for such data in order to better inform management and oversight bodies and will update the template for collecting data periodically. She will also continue to work with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance to receive

²³ Supplementary information is available at: www.un.org/Depts/DGACM/Multilingualism_report_supplementary.pdf.

periodic updates on language requirements in job openings and, where possible, on the language skills and mother tongues of staff members.

103. With regard to language proficiency, the harmonization exercise conducted by the Office of Human Resources Management and the United Nations Office at Geneva during the reporting period has the potential to ensure greater consistency in language learning, teaching and assessment, across the Secretariat and all official United Nations languages. During the next reporting period, the project will continue to progress in its various aspects, including a common definition of language proficiency levels, common assessment criteria for the Language Proficiency Examination, a common curriculum in the six languages and professional language assessment tools. In addition, when reviewing existing policies or developing new ones under the leadership of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, all human resources services will continue to give due regard to the importance of achieving a multilingual workforce and the principle of equality of the working languages of the Secretariat.

104. Building on the request made by the General Assembly to reflect language requirements when constituting interview panels, and on successful initiatives from Vienna, the executive offices of all Secretariat entities will be requested to maintain lists of staff trained in competency-based interviewing, specifying the official languages in which they can conduct such interviews. Where there is demand, need and capacity, training in competency-based interviewing will also be delivered in various United Nations languages.

105. In line with the proposed global human resources strategy for 2019–2021, which calls for a multilingual workforce, human resources services across the Secretariat will also be invited to continue to work towards the development of an inventory of staff members' language skills, building on the descriptors contained in the United Nations Language Framework (see para. 38).

106. In application of the decision by the Management Committee to review, by the end of 2019, how language skills are assessed during the staff selection process, the lead entities, the Office of Human Resources of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Human Resources Services Division of the Department of Operational Support, will continue to receive the support of the Coordinator, in particular through the sharing of best practices from similar organizational settings.

107. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution [71/263](#), the Coordinator will also continue to work to raise awareness about the importance of the equality of the working languages of the Secretariat and the importance of language skills in selection and training processes to ensure that the United Nations can interact with local populations in the field.

108. Considering the difficulty faced by hiring managers in searching for applicants by language in existing rosters, as reported by various entities, the Coordinator will support efforts to ensure that data in Inspira about applicants' language skills, in particular their main language, can be retrieved easily.

109. With regard to non-parliamentary publications, Secretariat entities will be invited to consider providing executive summaries in various languages so as to secure wider audiences and more inclusive products.

110. Bearing in mind the role played by senior leaders in achieving multilingualism as a driver for efficiency, performance and transparency, I will also continue to reinforce the accountability mechanisms, in particular through senior officials' compacts, with a view to strengthening multilingualism, and I will request my Office to consistently include language skills in senior leaders' appointment notices.

V. Recommendations

111. **The Secretariat recommends that the General Assembly:**

- (a) **Take note of the present report;**
 - (b) **Support the way forward presented by the Secretary-General in the report to mainstream multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, into the activities of the Secretariat, using existing resources, on an equitable basis and in compliance with existing mandates.**
-