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# FINANCE COMMITTEE

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**Action Plan for the achievement of equitable geographic distribution  
and gender parity of FAO staff**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This document presents the Organization's efforts in achieving equitable geographic distribution and gender parity of FAO staff.
- The document illustrates the institutional framework, the current trends and the measures identified by the Organization to achieve equitable geographic distribution and gender parity of FAO staff.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

- The Committee is invited to take note of the information presented in this document.

1. At its 159th Session, the Council requested “*the Director-General to present to the next Council session a detailed action plan on the achievement of equitable geographic distribution, and gender parity of FAO staff.*”

2. This document outlines the institutional framework, the progress towards targets, and measures being undertaken to pursue both the equitable geographic distribution, as well as gender parity, of FAO staff, within the context of the primordial consideration of merit in appointment.

### **A. Equitable geographic distribution of FAO staff**

#### *Institutional framework*

3. The importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible, as laid down in article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations<sup>1</sup>, is stated in the FAO Constitution, Art. VIII.3: In appointing the staff, the Director-General shall, subject to the paramount importance of securing the highest standards of efficiency and of technical competence, pay due regard to the importance of selecting personnel recruited on as wide a geographical basis as is possible.

4. In 2012, the Joint Inspection Unit recommended that “the principle of equitable geographical distribution is embedded in organizational culture, staff regulations and recruitment strategies, policies, guidelines, procedures and practices”<sup>2</sup>.

5. The Organization, in line with the JIU recommendation, reiterated the principle in the Staff Regulations<sup>3</sup> and in the Guidelines for Professional Recruitment: The paramount consideration in the appointment, transfer, or promotion of the staff shall be the necessity for securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

6. Therefore, FAO, in taking decisions on recruitment, has always followed the criterion of merit to ensure the selection of the best qualified candidates; at the same time, in line with guidance provided by the Governing Bodies, continues to give due attention to ensure an equitable geographic representation of member countries.

7. Recruitment practises and procedures reflect the principle in the different phases of the process as a corporate effort toward the equitable geographic distribution of FAO staff. In 2015, the Organization introduced a revised process for the selection of international professional staff, to increase the transparency and efficiency of the process. Some of the new measures also supported the Organization in meeting geographic targets.

8. Previously, the kernel of the recruitment process for professional staff was a single, centralized Professional Staff Selection Committee (PSSC), which would entertain submissions from individual departments and offices. Shortlisting and interviews of candidates was undertaken solely by the recruiting unit, without expertise from other areas within or without the Organization, nor with the support of HR division. Thereafter, the central PSSC, based in headquarters, would review the

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<sup>1</sup> *The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.*

<sup>2</sup> Staff recruitment in United Nations system organizations: a comparative analysis and benchmarking framework Gender balance and geographical distribution, JIU/NOTE/2012/3,

[https://www.unjui.org/sites/www.unjui.org/files/jiu\\_document\\_files/products/en/reports/notes/JIU%20Products/JIU\\_NOTE\\_2012\\_3\\_English.pdf](https://www.unjui.org/sites/www.unjui.org/files/jiu_document_files/products/en/reports/notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_NOTE_2012_3_English.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> FAO Manual, 301.4.2

submissions, and decide on recommendations for appointment. However, the PSSC would generally not have a representative of the recruiting unit during its review.

9. Intense internal discussions within HR, management, and long consultations with the professional Staff Representative Body were undertaken to tackle the shortcomings of the recruitment process. The revised process abolished the centralized PSSC and introduced decentralized PSSCs for each Department at headquarters and each of the Regional Offices in the field. These new PSSCs are composed of members of the recruiting unit, thus ensuring the requisite technical overview; as well as representatives from other units, elected representatives of staff, and of OHR, thereby providing transparency and representation of corporate interests. The new PSSCs are involved in the shortlisting process, undertake interviews, and make recommendations for appointment directly to the Director-General.

10. This has resulted in important improvement in the quality of recruitment by giving a greater role to the recruiting divisions, and enabling more alignment with the technical needs for the respective positions. Moreover, the centralization of the appointment decisions allowed the Organization to better monitor the geographic representation levels and to enhance efforts toward the equitable geographic distribution of FAO staff.

11. In addition, the PSSC Guidelines indicate that candidates should be presented in the first page of the reports in alphabetical order as opposed to the past practice where candidates were listed in order of preference. While no longer ranked in order of preference, the text that accompanies each candidate explicitly indicates the selection panel's findings and judgement. It should be noted that the UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity recommended as a good practice to enforce the removal of ranking of recommended candidates to allow for greater latitude in the final selection process, and compare candidates' qualifications to job vacancy requirements, rather than against one another.

#### *Progress toward targets*

12. Thanks to continuous efforts, the Organization has reduced, to a considerable extent, the number of non-, under- and over-represented countries in the Secretariat, as a result increasing the number of equitably-represented countries. Many countries, that were chronically non and under-represented, such as Brunei, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Laos, Monaco, Namibia, Russian Federation and Singapore are now becoming equitably represented.

13. Table 1 shows the trends in geographical representation from 2011. Following the revised policy on recruitment introduced in 2015, the number of non-represented countries considerably decreased and consequently, the number of under- and equitably-represented countries increased. Improvements were made also in the number of over-represented countries. As of October 2018, following the completion of the new recruitments<sup>4</sup>, the percentage of non-represented countries is 8.8%, of under-represented countries is 3.6%, and of equitably represented countries 86.1%.

14. The Organization continues to monitor the trends in geographical representation and, from July 2018, following on a request of the Committee<sup>5</sup>, the Organization publishes information, on a monthly basis, relating to geographic representation of staff, including information about the geographical distribution formula on the Members Gateway.

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to appointments already finalized with signed Terms of Employment, but with an *entre on duty* date after 25 October 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the 170th Session of the Finance Committee (21-25 May 2018) CL 159/4  
[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/CL\\_159/MV892\\_4/MV892\\_CL\\_159\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/CL_159/MV892_4/MV892_CL_159_4_en.pdf)

**Table 1:** Trends in geographical representation

Year (as at 31 Dec.)	Non- Represented		Under- Represented		Equitably- Represented		Over- Represented		Member States Total
	No of Member States	%	No of Member States	%	No of Member States	%	No of Member States	%	
2011	31	16%	12	6%	139	73%	9	5%	191
2013	40	21%	17	9%	130	68%	4	2%	191
2015	43	22%	22	11%	123	64%	6	3%	194
2017	24	12%	17	9%	149	77%	4	2%	194
2018 (Oct.)	18	9%	7	4%	166	86%	3	2%	194

*Measures to achieve equitable geographic distribution of FAO staff*

15. The Organization recognises the importance of continuing its focus to achieve equitable geographic distribution. Therefore, further to requests from the Committee<sup>6</sup> and the Council<sup>7</sup>, a detailed action plan on the achievement of equitable geographic distribution of FAO staff has been formalized.

16. The main areas of interest of the action plan, available in Annex 1, are concentrated in the outreach activities. The applications received by the Organization are the starting point of the selection process and, in an effort to increase the number of equitably represented countries, increasing the number of applications received from qualified candidates from non and under-represented countries is essential.

17. Outreach activities have been intensified to promote job openings through different channels in order to attract highly-qualified candidates and foster geographical representation. In particular, the Organization is reviewing its online presence to align it with the employer branding strategy promoted through the employment page, specialized websites and social media. The Organization is evaluating the launch of online targeted campaigns addressed to non and under-represented countries in 2019. Partnerships with sectorial periodicals are also under review.

18. The Office of Human Resources is reinforcing its internal staff with talent acquisition specialists that are supporting the corporate outreach activities with innovative approaches, based on their experiences in other UN agencies and in the private sector.

19. The Organization has also begun development of the FAO network as an principal channel to disseminate Vacancy Announcements and to increase FAO outreach messages. The involvement of FAORs, Regional Representatives and Permanent Representatives in these activities is crucial to ensure better means for contact with local candidates and to promote FAO as a top-level employer around the world.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the 170th Session of the Finance Committee (21-25 May 2018) CL 159/4  
[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/CL\\_159/MV892\\_4/MV892\\_CL\\_159\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/CL_159/MV892_4/MV892_CL_159_4_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Council of FAO (4-8 June 2018) CL 159/REP  
[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/CL\\_159/CL159\\_Report/MX075\\_CL\\_159\\_REP\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/CL_159/CL159_Report/MX075_CL_159_REP_en.pdf)

20. In addition, targeted programmes are being elaborated to attract qualified candidates with internships and fellowships opportunities from chronically non- and under-represented countries. The main goal is to increase the awareness about the work of the Organization in these countries and provide opportunities to local professionals to be exposed to the FAO work environment and FAO selection processes.

21. In 2017 and 2018, the Organization attended recruitment and career fairs, in liaison with host countries and other UN agencies. These events enabled FAO to increase contacts with well targeted potential candidates and to share with them information about the Organization, career opportunities, selection criteria and procedures. FAO is planning to increase its participation in these initiatives in 2019 and is working to identify appropriate career fairs, international events and partners, and to set up ad hoc activities to attract qualified candidates and increase its impact during the event.

## **B. Gender parity of FAO Staff**

### *Institutional framework*

22. The UN is committed to achieving gender parity in its workforce at all levels. The Charter of the United Nations was the first global treaty calling for equality of men and women, and this principle has been taken up by all United Nations system organizations. In 1970, the General Assembly of the United Nations promulgated the first resolution<sup>8</sup> concerning the employment of women by the organizations of the United Nations system, urging them to take appropriate measures to ensure equal opportunities for qualified women in senior and other professional positions.

23. FAO recognizes that achieving equal gender representation amongst the workforce is a fundamental goal and a necessary condition for the achievement of UN objectives. The Organization is accordingly committed to promoting gender equality in its technical work and gender parity in staffing at the Professional and higher levels. This commitment was reinforced by 139th session of the Council, in May 2010, with the endorsement of the UN-wide target of 50% female representation at professional and higher levels in FAO.

24. The Organization bases its efforts to achieve the gender parity of staff on the principles of transparency and merit in staff recruitment and promotion, working to remove systemic and cultural barriers that perpetuate inequalities in gender representation and to improve policies and practices which contribute to an inclusive workplace and address harassment and discrimination based on gender.

25. In January 2017, the United Nations Secretary-General established a Gender Parity Task Force, consisting of staff from over 30 entities, to come up with a clear roadmap, with benchmarks and timeframes, aimed at achieving parity across the system. After an eight-month effort, the System Wide Strategy on Gender Parity<sup>9</sup> (“the Strategy”) was launched: it takes into account good practices and lessons learned from past efforts.

26. The Task Force focused on the following key areas when recommending actions to guide the system-wide strategy: setting targets and monitoring progress, special measures and recruitment issues, senior appointments, mission settings and creating an enabling environment. The Task Force, upon review of the current situation, decided that the overall goal for parity across the system at all levels should be set for 2028. The goal, however, is not just about hitting the numbers, but “about transforming our institutional culture so that we can access and capitalize on our full potential. It is

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution 2715 (XXV) (1970) urged the United Nations, including its special bodies and all intergovernmental agencies in the United Nations system, to take or continue to take appropriate measures to ensure equal opportunities for the employment of qualified women in senior and other professional positions.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/gender/content/strategy>

about creating a working environment that embraces equality, eradicates bias and is inclusive of all staff”, as the Secretary-General underlined.

27. Given FAO’s nature as a UN system specialized agency, it supports the development of a customized action plan which is informed by the Organization’s specific context and challenges, thus pursuing recommendations outlined in the UN System-Wide Gender Parity Strategy through its relevant pathway.

*Progress toward targets*

28. The Organization continues its efforts toward gender parity in the workforce. As shown in Table 2, female staff accounted for 36% in professional positions at the beginning of 2012. In October 2018, thanks to continued and expanding recruitment outreach efforts to a plethora of professional institutions and universities within selected countries, as well as attention paid by the selection authority to gender balance, this figure rose to 43%. Another notable improvement that should be observed is the increase of female staff in senior positions, that accounted for 21% at the beginning of 2012; now they encumber 26% of senior positions.

**Table 2:** Trends of female representation in FAO's workforce

Category	1-Jan-12	1-Jan-14	1-Jan-17	15-Oct-18
D and above	21%	22%	24%	26%
Professional	36%	37%	41%	43%
General Service	66%	66%	66%	67%
National Professional Officers	36%	41%	40%	43%
Associate Professional Officers	69%	61%	66%	53%
Consultants	32%	36%	42%	49%
Contractors (PSA.SBS)	44%	42%	49%	49%
National Project Personnel	29%	26%	29%	31%
National contractors and other	33%	32%	36%	40%
Other	26%	43%	54%	58%
Total	42%	38%	41%	43%

29. Table 3 shows a significant different in practice of hiring by headquarters and the practice of our decentralized offices. While female employees at headquarters represent 58%, they are only 35% in decentralized offices. This difference is caused also by the different working conditions that allow headquarter to attract more female candidates.

**Table 3:** Percentage of female employees in FAO's workforce as at 15 October 2018

Category	Headquarters	Decentralized Offices	Total
D and above	29%	21%	26%
Professional	50%	32%	43%
General Service	72%	61%	67%
National Professional Officers		43%	43%
Associate Professional Officers	57%	33%	53%
Consultants	60%	36%	49%
Contractors (PSA.SBS)	58%	40%	49%
National Project Personnel		31%	31%
National contractors and other	58%	39%	40%
Other	74%	52%	58%
Total	60%	37%	43%

30. Table 4 below presents the progress that FAO has been made over the last two years. While it is clear that there are still areas to be improved, in particular for the levels D2 and above, the Organization is aware that increasing the proportions of women leaders, both through improved hiring rates for leadership positions, as well as building strong internal pipelines for promotion, would be the start of a virtuous circle which will lead to the achievement of gender parity in the workforce.

**Table 4:** Percentage of female employees in FAO by grade

Level	% Female in 2016	% Female in 2017	% Female in 2018
DDG	50%	33%	33%
ADG	20%	18%	18%
D2	24%	26%	23%
D1	22%	27%	28%
P-5	22%	24%	24%
P-4	36%	39%	39%
P-3	53%	54%	53%
P-2	66%	68%	67%
P-1	61%	62%	60%

31. While the ultimate goal set by the UN System-Wide Gender Parity Strategy is 50/50 parity, the strategy recognizes that sustainability at this number is unlikely, therefore for the purposes of the UN System-Wide Gender Parity Strategy, parity is considered to be within a 47%-53% margin, with the goal of reaching parity by 2028.

*Measures to achieve gender parity of FAO staff*

32. The action plan to achieve gender parity of FAO staff, available in Annex II, focuses on three key areas, in alignment with the UN Strategy:

- Leadership and accountability
- Recruitment, retention, progression and talent management
- Enabling environment / organizational culture / policies related to work environment



33. The dedication and the support from senior management is essential to effectively implement the action plan. Therefore, the Organization is expounding different measures to ensure that hiring managers are fully aware and responsible of their role in achieving gender parity.

34. As for the recruitment and progression policies, FAO already allows all staff to apply for positions where they fulfil the requirements with no obstacles other than qualification and meeting minimum criteria, in contrast to the system of other UN agencies of only allowing staff members to apply to positions one grade higher. This approach facilitates merit-based career progression in alignment with the principles of the Organization. In addition, FAO is implementing measures to eliminate unconscious bias in different steps of the selection process. For example, recruitment policies ensure the balanced composition of interview panels and the Organization is working to mask personal information, such as marital status and number of children, during the recruitment process and to review the text of the vacancy announcements to ensure gender-neutral wording.

35. As the challenge to achieve gender parity is a shared one, the Organization is collaborating with other Rome-based agencies for the creation of a shared database and pipeline of qualified female candidates. This approach will reinforce targeted outreach campaigns and will support the efforts to achieve gender parity in senior positions.

36. The Organization has already endorsed the Enabling Environment Guidelines for UN System and is committed to maintain and reinforce specific measures to create a working environment that prizes diversity and flexibility, provides equal opportunities, recognizes that staff are also family and community members, and ensures a safe environment in which to work. Policies for the prevention of harassment and abuse of authority, ethics, conflict resolution and protection against retaliation are in place and implemented, and FAO is actively involved in the CEB task force on addressing sexual harassment in the organizations of the UN system. FAO has already implemented a breastfeeding policy and introduced flexible work arrangements, such as flexible work schedules, teleworking, part-time employment, compressed work schedules and phased retirement.

**Annex I****Action plan on the achievement of equitable geographic distribution of FAO staff**

<i>Section</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
<i>Employer Branding</i>	Defining the employer branding strategy	Work in progress	January 2019
	Hiring of Talent Acquisition Specialists	Work in progress	January 2019
<i>Outreach Activities</i>	Revamp of the employment website	Assessing costs and timeframe	Q1 2019
	Revamp of FAO online presence	Phase 1 completed	February 2019
	Partnership with specialized recruitment websites	Phase 1 completed	February 2019
	Partnership with sectorial periodicals	Assessing costs	February 2019
	Partnership with local recruitment service providers	/	March 2019
	Recruitment Events	Assessing costs and timeframe	On a case-by-case basis
	Targeted online campaigns	Work in progress	March 2019
<i>FAO network</i>	Involvement of FAORs and Regional Representatives	Ongoing	During PWB planning
	Involvement of Permanent Representatives	Work in progress	Started
<i>Targeted programmes</i>	Designing internships and fellowships opportunities	Work in progress	Started

**Annex II****Action plan on the achievement of gender parity of FAO staff**

<i>Section</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
• <i>Leadership and Accountability</i>	Issuance of revised Guidelines to reinforce the role of hiring managers as responsible of the gender target in different steps of the selection process	Work in progress	January 2019
	Specific e-learning for senior manager on how to promote a Gender-Equal Workplace	Assessing costs	Q1 2019
• <i>Recruitment, Retention, Progression</i>	No personal information during the recruitment process	Work in progress	February 2019
	Gender-neutral wording in VAs	Work in progress	February 2019
	Coaching programmes	Assessing costs	2019
	Shared database and pipeline with RBAs	Work in progress	March 2019
<i>Enabling environment</i>	Targeted outreach campaigns	Work in progress	March 2019
	Policies for the prevention of harassment and abuse of authority, ethics, conflict resolution and protection against retaliation	Implemented	/
	Flexible work arrangements	Implemented	/
	Breastfeeding policy	Implemented	/