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FINANCE COMMITTEE

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Geographical Balance of Consultants

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FC170

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This document presents the Organization's efforts in having a workforce reflecting the geographic diversity of the membership while, at the same time, maintaining merit as the primordial criterion for recruitment.
- The document illustrates the current trends in the use of consultants at FAO, the geographic balance of this important element of the Organization's workforce, and the measures taken as part of the introduction of merit-based selection processes for the recruitment of consultants in August 2017. Additional measures taken to improve the geographic balance of consultants in the recruitment process, following the guidance of the Council, are presented in detail.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

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

1. At the 158th session of the Council in December 2017, the members “encouraged Management to take into account the need for geographical balance of consultants in the recruitment exercise, consistent with geographic distribution for staff members, for more effective delivery of programmes and activities, whilst retaining merit as the primordial criterion for recruitment, and requested the Secretariat to submit a comprehensive document for geographical balance of consultants to the next session of the Finance Committee, taking into account the points raised by the Council at this session”¹.
2. This document presents the Organization’s efforts in having a workforce reflecting the geographic diversity of the membership while, at the same time, maintaining merit as the primordial criterion for recruitment.
3. The document illustrates the current trends in the use of consultants at FAO, the geographic balance of this important element of the Organization’s workforce, and the measures taken as part of the introduction of merit-based selection processes for the recruitment of consultants in August 2017.
4. As requested, additional measures taken to improve the geographic balance of consultants in the recruitment process, following the guidance of the Council, are presented in detail.

Employment of consultants in FAO

5. The Organization continues to rely on consultants for the delivery of its programme of work in all locations. As observed by the Independent Assessment of FAO’s Technical Capacity: “There has been a significant increase (33 percent) in the use of GF-funded NSHR in this period [2014-2016], reflecting in part the flexible use of resources released through vacancies. This has contributed to an increase in total GF-funded technical capacity by 275 posts or 15.3 percent between 2014 and 2016.”² In particular, this increase was accounted for by the engagement of consultants for technical work, which grew by 55.7 percent from 2014 to 2016.

Data on employment of consultants

6. The Organization has collected data on the employment of consultants, to analyze the current situation and the trends of the last years. In particular, the data under consideration relate to the geographic and gender representation of consultants.
7. Available figures show that often a significant part of consultants originates from a limited number of western countries.

¹ Report of the Council of FAO, December 2017 – CL 158/REP

² Independent Assessment of FAO’s Technical Capacity, page 10,

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PermRep/files/FAO_Assessment_of_Technical_Capacity.pdf

Table I. Share of the top nationalities of origin of consultants (COF/REG)

	2013 30 June	2015 30 June	2017 30 June	2018 May
Regular Programme				
Countries represented	82	110	119	109
Share of top 5 nationalities (%)	54.8%	48.7%	46.7%	46.7%
Share of top 10 nationalities (%)	67.3%	61.3%	56.6%	58.3%
Total	449	739	999	721
Female	40.8%	43.7%	44.8%	46.3%
ALL FUNDING				
Countries represented	124	132	149	135
Share of top 5 nationalities (%)	50.38 %	46.65 %	44.87 %	44.14%
Share of top 10 nationalities (%)	62.31 %	60.16 %	56.17 %	56.22%

8. As shown by the data above, the geographical imbalance risks undermining the international character of the Organization. Even if the location of the offices may determine, to a certain extent, the diversity of the workforce (as consultants are often recruited locally where services to be provided), this does not explain the lack of diversity at the level of the whole Organization, where five nationalities represent nearly 50% of all consultants for the Organization.

FAO attempts to improve geographic balance of consultants

9. 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 Nations³, has been a constant preoccupation of the Member States. The preamble to the General Assembly's resolution 153 (II) of 1947 mentions the reasons of the principle of geographical distribution:

10. *"In view of its international character and in order to avoid undue predominance of national practices, the policies and administrative methods of the Secretariat should reflect, and profit to the highest degree from, assets of the various cultures and the technical competence of all Member nations."*

11. The principles above are reflected in the Organization's policies concerning geographical representation of staff. In 2012, a Review of Individual Consultancies in the United Nations System by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2012/5)⁴ found that the governing bodies of some organizations requested that the geographical distribution and gender balance of external expertise should be enhanced by selecting consultants on a wider geographical basis and by considering more women. In

³ "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."

⁴ Review of Individual Consultancies in the United Nations System - JIU/REP/2012/5.
<http://undocs.org/JIU/REP/2012/5>

the light of the substantial number of consultants used in the organizations, it would be relevant to consider the geographical diversity and gender balance for this segment of the workforce as well.

12. This was reflected in Recommendation 9 of this report that states that “The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should ensure that geographical diversity and gender balance are addressed in the consultancy policies of their respective organizations and promoted proactively.”

13. In June 2014, the FAO Council was informed⁵ that Members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination supported the need to ensure geographical and gender balance when selecting consultants, as called for by the Joint Inspection Unit in recommendation 9. At the same time, FAO confirmed that strongly supported all the substantive recommendations contained in the report and incorporated them into the corporate guidelines for the employment of consultants issued in November 2013.

14. Reports on the status of geographical balance of consultants were presented to the Finance Committee at its 166th session⁶ in March 2017 and to the 158th session of the FAO Council in December 2017⁷

15. The Council in December 2017 was informed of the new policy on recruitment and evaluation of consultants, and encouraged Management to take into account the need for geographical balance of consultants in the recruitment exercise, consistent with geographic distribution for staff members, whilst retaining merit as the primordial criterion for recruitment⁸.

The revised policy on recruitment and evaluation of consultants

16. In August 2017, the revised policy on recruitment and evaluation of consultants was released and presented to the Finance Committee at the 169th session⁹. The document presented to the Finance Committee explained that an internal audit review of the various aspects of the employment of Consultants and Subscribers to Personal Services Agreements (PSAs) led to the identification of a number of shortcomings and bad practices that needed to be addressed.

17. As a result, the Organization introduced a revised policy for the recruitment of non-staff human resources in line with the recommendations of the Office of the Inspector General. The purpose of the changes was to streamline and rationalize the procedures involving the selection and employment of Consultants and PSA Subscribers.

18. For instance, the recruitment of Consultants at headquarters and in decentralized locations requires now a double approval, in this way, an improved and more transparent process ensures the hiring of a qualified individual. A first approval by the immediate supervisor of the consultant is followed by approval from the budget holder of the concerned organizational unit. In the event that the immediate supervisor is the budget holder, then higher order approval is required from the supervisor of the budget holder.

19. This dual process is also applied to the performance evaluation of Consultants at the end of their assignment using Quality Assessment Reports. These adjustments improve quality assurance, avoiding inconsistencies and enabling a more centralized control.

20. In parallel, the revised guidelines have strengthened the recruitment and selection procedures, to guarantee competitive processes and the recruitment of the best talents. The Organization has

⁵ FAO Council, June 2014 – CL 149/INF/6

⁶ FC 166/9 Rev.1

⁷ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/CL_158/CL158_InfoNotes/MV463e-1Dec17.pdf

⁸ Report of the FAO Council, December 2017 - CL 158/REP

⁹ Human Resources Management, November 2017 - FC 169/9

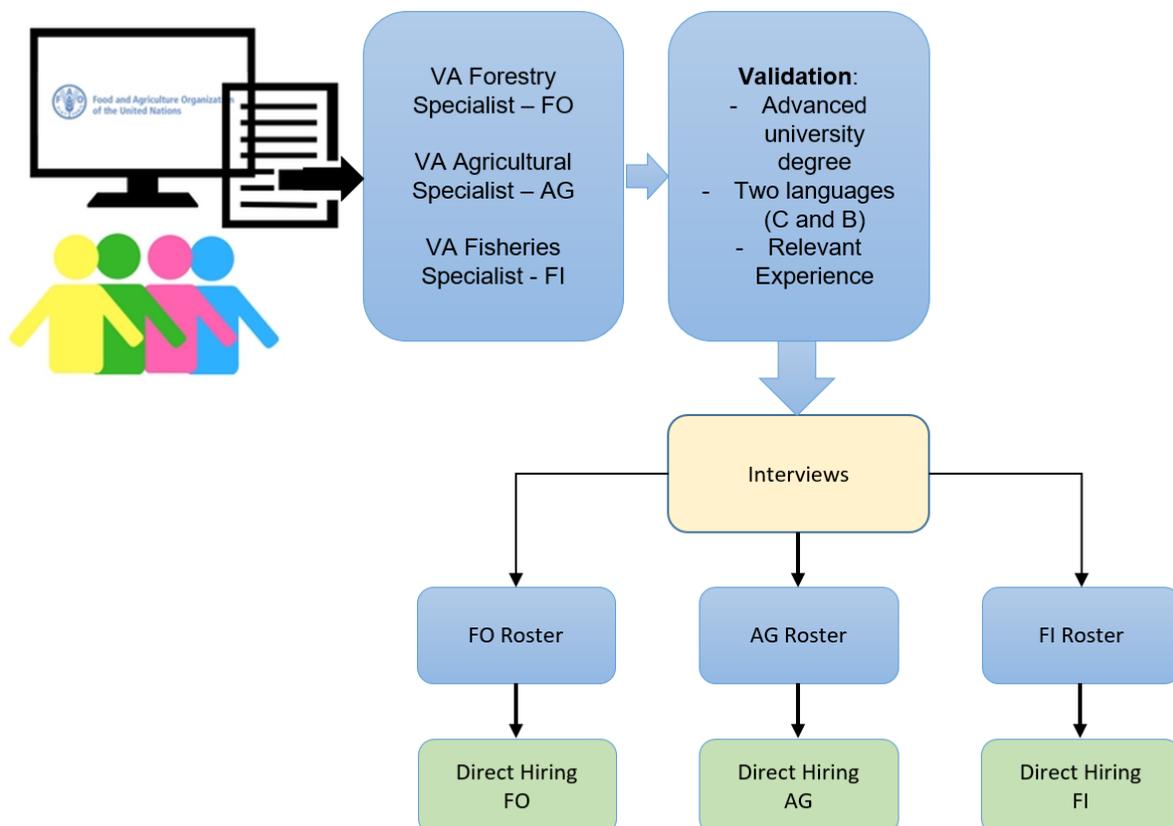
introduced a more uniform, transparent and rigorous selection process for consultants and PSAs, to ensure that value for money is obtained in all cases and that the use of the Organization's financial resources is effective and transparent. The changes are aimed also to strengthen the research of experts worldwide and to increase the diversity and the quality of the individuals recruited for the various profiles.

21. The revised selection process requires the issuance of Calls for Expression of Interest, covering the most frequently needed profiles/fields of expertise, to populate Organizational Rosters of Consultants and PSAs at Departmental, Regional and strategic team level.

22. Candidates are validated regarding their educational background, knowledge of FAO languages and previous experience. Subsequently, a dedicated panel interviews the qualified candidates and submits a written report for the endorsement of suitable candidates to relevant head of organizational unit. Candidates endorsed through this process are included in the Organizational Rosters of Consultants and PSAs and can receive offers for assignments in FAO.

23. Thanks to this process, the recruiting offices can directly hire the suitable candidates from the Organizational Rosters of Consultants and PSAs, without the need to undertake additional steps.

24. The illustration below shows the main steps of the revised selection process and the functioning of the rosters.



Principles for improving the geographic balance of consultants

25. As requested during the discussion of this topic at the FAO Council, to take into account the need for geographical balance of consultants in the recruitment exercise, the Organization considers the following elements:

- The primordial criterion of merit in the recruitment exercise while expanding the base of potential consultants meeting the minimum requirements;
- The need to avoid disruption of projects and programmes by introducing adequate flexible arrangements;
- The lower cost and added value of local employees for several projects, where the knowledge of the local work environment is fundamental, particularly for South-South cooperation;
- The application of a methodology consistent with geographic distribution for staff members for those international consultants hired using general fund resources.

26. It should be noted that consultants financed by the Regular Programme perform highly technical work and, especially at country level, they represent the Organization and play a key role in the delivery of the FAO programme.

Implementation

The primordial criterion of merit in the recruitment exercise while expanding the base of potential consultants meeting the minimum requirements

27. As mentioned above, merit is considered the primordial criterion in the selection and hiring of consultants. This is one of the main changes in the revised guidelines issued in 2017 that introduced a mandatory competitive selection process for consultants.

28. The starting point is the issuance of a Vacancy Announcement that should reach out as many applicants as possible in order to create larger rosters. Having a dynamic roster policy is an important element for improving both geographical diversity and gender balance, as it would provide managers with a larger pool of qualified candidates for selection. This could be achieved through various methods, including planning consultancy needs well in advance so as to be able to expand consultancy pool, and exploring more innovative ways to reach out to candidates from not-widely represented countries.

29. It is proposed that Job openings that fail to yield a minimum 20% of applications from not-widely represented countries will require written justification from the hiring manager on the positive outreach measures taken to attract applicants. In the absence of a strong justification, job openings will be extended or reopened.

30. Geographic and gender balance should be also ensured in the lists of candidates to be interviewed and in the final shortlists of candidates recommended for selection. The approach adopted will be similar to the one used by the UN Secretariat and documented in Administrative instruction ST/AI/2013/4, issued in 2013, whereas *“For each assignment, every effort shall be made to shortlist for consideration a minimum of three candidates from the widest possible geographical basis¹⁰. “*

31. To implement this approach, shortlists shall comprise three to five candidates with a wide geographic spread, with no more than two candidates from any one country and at least one candidate from a not-widely represented country, unless qualified candidates from not-widely represented

¹⁰ Para 4.3 Administrative Circular of the UN Secretariat, Consultants and individual contractors, issued in December 2013, ST/AI/2013/4

countries are not identifiable. In this last case, a justification should be included in the selection report. The shortlists should also include at least one female candidate.

*The need to avoid disruption of projects and programmes
by introducing adequate flexible arrangements, including on FAO languages*

32. In February 2018, further refinements of the selection of Consultants were introduced. The application of the policy, indeed, should consider the involvement of the Organization in a wide range of programmes and projects that implies the understanding of different working realities with different needs and requirements. Therefore, the Organization has implemented a flexible approach especially for the language requirements and the use of short-term assignments.

33. In particular, for consultancies funded by voluntary contributions the minimum requirements for languages could be more flexible, when considering in particular the duty station and the specific tasks to be performed. For national projects, moreover, the knowledge of local languages could be considered an asset.

34. As for the use of short-term assignments, to allow the Organization to deploy consultants with a larger flexibility answering to urgent requests and unexpected events, there is a fast track procedure applicable to assignment of maximum of 100 calendar days in every 12 months.

The lower cost and added value of local employees for several projects

35. Due consideration should be given to recruitment of consultants that are nationals of the regions, particularly when the knowledge of the local work environment is fundamental, notably for South-South cooperation. The table below, with data as of April 2018, shows that additional efforts are needed in expanding the rosters of consultants to include nationals of the region, particularly in RAP and RNE.

Table II. Percentage of consultants funded by RP working in Regional Offices

	RAF	RAP	REU	RLC	RNE
Total consultants	20	27	23	23	17
From the region	13	10	21	18	4
% From the region	65.0%	37.0%	91.3%	78.3%	23.5%

The application of a methodology consistent with geographic distribution for staff members

36. The achievement of a geographic balance in the recruitment of consultants requires a similar or greater balance in the geographic diversity of the organizational rosters, as these are the source of potential candidates for assignments funded by the regular programme and voluntary contributions.

37. The Organization has done considerable efforts in the advertisement of consultancy opportunities in the FAO website and through promotion with social media channels, resulting in more than 400 calls for expression of interest for consultancies advertised since August 2017.

38. Since their creation, there is a continuous monitoring of the geographic balance of the departmental and regional Rosters. Departments and Regional Offices receive monthly reports of the geographic distribution of their rosters and indications to improve the geographic balance when needed.

39. From the introduction of the new guidelines, the related selection processes have resulted in 1479 candidates from 136 countries included in the Organizational Rosters (see Annex 1). As it can be noted, the outreach efforts have given results but additional efforts such as the ones below are planned:

- Increased communication and outreach of vacancy announcements through decentralized offices in general and regional offices in particular;
- Meeting with representatives of not-widely represented countries to discuss improved communication channels;
- Publication of vacancy announcements in local professional media or specialized websites or via social media, as well as their dissemination among professional networks in relevant countries and among member States.

40. The existence of geographically varied rosters will allow that in the recruitment of consultants financed by the Regular Programme, the Organization, as a matter of general policy, pays due regard to geographic distribution. As far as practicable, the policy is based on relevant principles and methodologies approved by the Conference¹¹, with the necessary adjustments. This is not applied to consultants financed by Trust Funds.

41. It should be noted that while the methodology of geographic distribution for regular programme positions is based on a fixed number of established professional and above positions during the biennium, its application to consultants' assignments, which are short in nature and of different duration each one, requires adjustments to consider a dynamic situation evolving in time and decentralized in nature.

42. In this respect, as the number of RP positions subject to geographic representation in the PWB 2018-19 is 1298, which is a number close by excess to the number of consultancies funded by the RP at any given time (see Table I), it is proposed to apply the same ranges of equitably representation to the assignments of consultants, with a quarterly monitoring of over-represented countries to be distributed to departments and regional offices.

43. By applying the methodology above, as of 4 May 2018, the following countries would be considered overrepresented: Chile, Colombia, Italy, Spain and Ukraine.

44. To further incentive the geographic balance, the average between the number of consultants and the nationalities represented at departmental and regional level will be monitored on a quarterly basis. It is considered also that no possible additional hiring of nationals of one country could be done once the number of consultants of that country exceed by 30% the top of the range for the country

¹¹ Conference Resolution 15/2003

ANNEX 1**Number of endorsed candidates for each Organizational Rosters and related geographic balance (May 2018)**

	number of candidates	number of countries represented	Number of consultants (RP)	number of countries (RP)
APEX	178	58	82	35
DDO	82	35	89	28
DDP	379	86	189	54
ES	230	62	135	45
AG	157	54	37	18
CB	16	37	34	24
FI	82	33	32	18
FO	109	38	13	7
RAF	84	34	20	17
RAP	92	46	27	19
REU	51	37	23	17
RLC	20	14	23	16
RNE	44	29	17	13
TOTAL	1479*	136	721	109

* Some candidates are included in more than one roster.