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FINANCE COMMITTEE

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Human Resources Management

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Committee is presented with major achievements in human resources management at FAO, for information.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

- Members of the Finance Committee are invited to take note of major achievements of human resources management.

Draft Advice

- **The Committee welcomed the major achievements in human resources management at FAO.**

Major achievements

1. The major improvements in the area of human resources policy and management brought about since 2012 follow a vision based on four main drivers: (i) recruitment and development of the highest calibre of employees; (ii) alignment of HR management to the strategic and programmatic needs of the Organization; (iii) reflection of FAO's nature as a United Nations system specialized agency; and (iv) increased efficiency in HR processes and procedures.

Recruitment and development of highest calibre employees

a) Professional staff recruitment

2. Improvements to the recruitment of professional level staff has led to more transparency, more direct involvement of recruiting units, and faster recruitment than before.

3. 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 outside of the Organization, nor with the support of the HR division. Thereafter, the central PSSC, composed of a large number of staff from across the Organization, and based in headquarters, would review the submissions, and decide on recommendations for appointment. However, the PSSC would generally not have a representative of the recruiting unit during its review.

4. 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. It was agreed that the previous regime lacked transparency due to the narrow overview of the shortlisting and interviewing stage, and at the same time lacked due expertise in the PSSC, which thus was not armed with sufficient capacity to undertake optimally informed reviews and decisions. In addition, the centralized nature of the PSSC added considerable time to the process of recruitment.

5. Therefore, the centralized PSSC was abolished and decentralized PSSCs were created 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, thus providing transparency. Elections for new elected representatives of staff took place in January 2017, with a record participation of more than 50% of staff in all headquarters departments and regional offices.

6. The new PSSCs are involved in the interviews of candidates, their shortlisting and endorsement for the position, and make recommendations for appointment directly to the Director-General.

7. 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 of the respective positions. It has made the recruitment process much quicker by removing an additional layer, and with the introduction of i-recruitment, the new PSSCs have enabled a reduction of nearly 70% in the overall recruitment time, from one year to four months.

8. In addition, this streamlined process has facilitated the endorsement of shortlisted candidates for analogous positions as they become vacant, creating a professional roster that is instrumental in further reducing the recruitment time.

b) General Service recruitment

9. A new approach has also been adopted for the recruitment of General Service staff in the Organization that is considered the most innovative and forward-looking in the entire UN system, by opening up the previous "closed shop." The limit of recruitment of GS staff from within a commuting area has been abandoned. Now, the application for GS positions in FAO is opened up globally, with a view to recruiting the best possible candidates, with diverse backgrounds, from a global marketplace, fit for a UN-system international organization like FAO. Out of the 47 persons recruited to GS positions under the Global Call scheme since 2015, eleven have been external (non-FAO) applicants.

10. In addition to launching the Global Calls for Expression of Interest for GS positions at headquarters and in the Regional Offices, the General Service Staff Selection Committee (GSSC) was recast with much simpler processes, as well as a new composition, which includes elected representatives of General Service staff from staff in each department and region. This has replaced the previous practice of the Union of General Service Staff (UGSS) serving on all meetings of the GSSC.

11. The revised procedures have not only resulted in a much faster selection process and considerable reduction of recruitment time, but also in greater transparency and competition, leading to greater diversity and the appointment of highly qualified candidates from all over the world.

12. To capitalize on the experience gained during these first years, a review was conducted, in consultation with the staff representative bodies, to identify strengths of the process and areas of improvement to be implemented.

13. To elaborate an accurate analysis, internal and external experts collected feedback from the different stakeholders involved in the process and studied data, providing a comprehensive, detailed and objective examination of the main factors affecting the GSSC process.

14. Following the outcomes of this review, improvements in the recruitment process have already been introduced. In December 2016, a single call for expression of interest was issued to create one GS Roster in HQ, from G-2 to G-6 grades, which allows the Organization to better manage it and share with GSSC up-to-date and useful information for the selection process.

15. Moreover, work has been undertaken on the harmonization of the language assessment process for external and internal candidates, allowing applicants to submit language proficiency certificates from UN accredited external providers to demonstrate their level of knowledge.

16. Regional Offices have been fully supported with the introduction of the revised process and they have successfully finalized their GS Rosters, managing GSSC processes to recruit GS staff regularly.

17. The latest Global Call for GS positions closed at the end of January 2017, and an updated GS roster is available as of March 2017.

c) FAO Representatives (FAORs)

18. Significant progress has been made in the appointments of FAO Representatives. Since June 2012 and in line with DGB 2012/25, candidates for FAOR positions need to have a positive outcome of a compulsory assessment of their financial and human resources management capabilities.

19. In this regard, the FAOR profile was updated to reflect the duties and accountabilities expected from FAO Representatives. The assessment of managerial and leadership competencies is now an integral part of the recruitment process for FAORs and Senior Managers. Since 2012, about 100 candidates to FAOR positions (both internal and external) have undergone an assessment of their leadership competencies.

20. The Virtual Assessment Review (carried out by an external company) consists of a series of online tests and personality questionnaire, combined with a solid competency based interview against FAO leadership competencies and the FAOR profile. The VAR report is one of the elements taken into account during the recruitment process to ensure that future appointees possess the required managerial and leadership competencies for the position.

Year	Total VARs	Assessed for position of FAOR
2012	23	23
2013	47	39
2014	33	18
2015	15	5
2016	29	15
Total	147	100

21. The composition of the selection panel for FAORs has also changed since 2012. In the past, the two DDGs and an ODG representative were on the panel, together with the Director, OSD. Nowadays, the Panel consists of the ADG/TC, the ADG/RR of the specific region and the Director, OSD.

d) Director-level recruitment

22. The procedure for the selection of candidates for D-1 and above-level positions has also been strengthened with, inter alia, a reconstituted Interview Panel that includes the DDG or ADG of the department concerned, as appropriate, a senior external expert and an HR representative. In the specific case of positions for the Secretary of Article XIV bodies, the interview panel includes two representatives of Members designated by the bodies, in line with the decision of the FAO Council. An important feature of the selection process is the assessment of managerial abilities of candidates by an external company, by means of the VAR. A roster of qualified candidates was also established in line with the one for Professional positions.

e) Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and young professionals

23. Another area of progress has been the Junior Professional Officers (JPs), which has rejuvenated the Organization's workforce, with highly qualified staff, well prepared for a career in the UN system. Since the introduction of the JP Programme, 49 JPs have been recruited of which 29 were women and 28 from under and non-represented member states.

24. The Organization continues to make strong efforts to ensure a high level of retention of former JPs, subject to individual performance. To date, more than two-thirds (67%) of the JPs recruited between 2011 and 2014 have been retained under different contractual arrangements at the end of their initial two-year assignment under central funds. This has been done following careful performance assessment of the individuals concerned.

25. As for the 21 JPs who are currently on board, three of these come from non-represented and seven from under-represented countries. As for their academic qualifications, four candidates have a PhD and 16 a Masters degree. Regarding their knowledge of official UN languages, two candidates are competent in four languages (with full proficiency in at least two), six in three languages (with full proficiency in two) and the other candidates in two languages. This means all candidates appointed have at least two official languages.

26. In addition to the JPs mentioned above, the Organization has recently recruited 31 professional staff at P-1 level from the professional roster created through the JP selection process. These new young professionals have joined departments and regional offices in many technical areas, contributing to the rejuvenation of the workforce and the refreshment of FAO's technical knowledge.

f) Career progression

27. Measures have been introduced to ensure that career progression within the Organization is transparent and merit-based. The previous process of "job growth" has been replaced almost exclusively to promotion by means of a competitive process.

28. Accordingly, promotion to higher grade levels is now undertaken by competing in an open and transparent process relating to vacancy announcements or global calls, against tangible and well-defined criteria.

g) Vacancy announcements and outreach

29. In addition to the global and regional calls for expression of interest for GS staff, the Organization has made concerted efforts to increase and target its outreach for good quality candidates against vacancies at the professional and higher level.

30. The search for candidates against senior level positions has included advertisement in relevant global publications, as well as the use of external, professional recruitment companies, to support outreach activities. Similarly, all vacancy announcements for professional level positions are reinforced through regional and country offices to increase local and global level outreach.

31. These outreach efforts have resulted in a significant increase in the number of applicants against vacancy announcements. The average number of applicants for professional level positions has increased in the period 2012-2016 by 170%, from 127 to 216, and the below table shows the breakdown by grade level. In 2016, the number of applicants for Director level positions exceeded 600 in some cases, and for some professional positions the number was greater than 300.

Number of applicants - change from 2012 to 2016, by grade

Professional VAs	2012	2016	Increase
P-2	263	367	140%
P-3	155	273	176%
P-4	117	197	169%
P-5	75	139	186%
Total	127	216	170%

h) Professional Vacancy status

32. From 2012, flexibility was imbued by means of non-staff and other contractual instruments in order to optimally support the adjustments in priority areas within the context of adjustments to the strategic direction of the Organization as approved by the members. Following consolidation of transformational changes, and a concomitant strategic workforce planning exercise, the recruitment against professional positions was accelerated in 2016. This has led to the appointment by the Director-General of 217 professional staff against PWB positions since January 2016. Considering also further recruitment processes that are already in progress, the vacancy rate is expected to fall to around 13%, in keeping with the agreed target of not greater than 15%. The recruitment exercise was carried out in a manner to ensure that all individual organizational units, in particular technical areas, also achieved the target vacancy rate.

i) Use of non-staff resources (NSHR)

33. Guidelines on the employment of International Consultants and PSA Subscribers were introduced in late 2013 covering all aspects of servicing of these categories of employees, including selection, recruitment, remuneration (categories A, B and C), performance evaluation, accountability and oversight, as well as reporting to management and to governing bodies. Likewise, guidelines on the employment and servicing of National Project Personnel and locally recruited PSA Subscribers were issued in 2014. One of the main objectives of these initiatives is to adopt a more consistent and

transparent approach across the Organization in dealing with these categories of employees that represent a large share of the Organization's workforce, particularly in field duty stations.

34. Further to the review of the NSHR category and its servicing by the OIG, OHR has started work on a set of agreed recommendations, in collaboration with the Shared Services Centre (SSC) and the Legal Office. The guidelines on the servicing of consultants and subscribers holding personal service agreements, which had been updated in 2015, following consultations with managers throughout the Organization, were further revised taking into account agreed actions, subject to management review.

35. The Internship Programme provides FAO with the assistance of qualified young graduates specialized in various professional fields. At the same time, the Internship Programme aims to offer recent graduates the opportunity to supplement their academic knowledge with practical work assignments in a field related to the work of the Organization.

36. The HR policy and procedures governing the use of Interns have been revised and revamped based on lessons learned to date, prioritizing internships through agreements with academic institutions. The new Internship programme provides for a greater involvement of OPC in activities related to the identification of academic institutions for the establishment of partnerships and of networks of experts, to facilitate discussions and research in areas of interest to FAO, and to negotiate and approve sponsorship arrangements with universities or other academic institutions that will ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

37. As outlined in the draft report of the Independent Assessment of FAO's Technical Capacity¹, the Organization continues to rely on NSHR in supporting the delivery of its programme of work in all locations. As of 1 March 2017, a total of 2350 consultants² were under contract with FAO, equally balanced between headquarters and decentralized offices.

¹ See document C 2017/26

² For the purposes of this document, consultants include those NSHR in the categories COF.REG and PSA.SBS, which are the categories used for regular consultants. It excludes other types of NSHR such as translators, graphic designers, interns, etc.

Table 2: Regional grouping of NSHR by nationality

Region of nationality	Total length-in-service (years) since first assignment with FAO							
	0 - 1	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 7	8 - 9	> 10		(%)
	Headquarters						Total	
Africa	22	11	9	6	2	10	60	5%
Asia	18	7	7	6	1	8	47	4%
Europe	256	153	110	104	56	157	836	71%
Latin America and Caribbean	42	14	12	8	4	5	85	7%
Near East	8	3	2	1	2	2	18	2%
North America	40	25	13	6	5	14	103	9%
Southwest Pacific	9	4	2	4		2	21	2%
	395	217	155	135	70	198	1170	100%
	34%	19%	13%	12%	6%	17%	100%	
	Decentralized offices						Total	
Africa	63	20	36	19	19	51	208	18%
Asia	36	19	18	4	11	22	110	9%
Europe	189	64	86	38	29	105	511	43%
Latin America and Caribbean	46	24	24	12	12	30	148	13%
Near East	8	6	7	4	1	9	35	3%
North America	44	19	11	11	4	19	108	9%
Southwest Pacific	24	11	2	2	2	19	60	5%
	410	163	184	90	78	255	1180	100%
	35%	14%	16%	8%	7%	22%	100%	
	All locations						Total	
Africa	85	31	45	25	21	61	268	11%
Asia	54	26	25	10	12	30	157	7%
Europe	445	217	196	142	85	262	1347	57%
Latin America and Caribbean	88	38	36	20	16	35	233	10%
Near East	16	9	9	5	3	11	53	2%
North America	84	44	24	17	9	33	211	9%
Southwest Pacific	33	15	4	6	2	21	81	3%
Total	805	380	339	225	148	453	2350	100%
	34%	16%	14%	10%	6%	19%	100%	
Headquarters	34%	19%	13%	12%	6%	17%	100%	
Decentralized Offices	35%	14%	16%	8%	7%	22%	100%	
Total	34%	16%	14%	10%	6%	19%	100%	

38. From *Table 2*, it is noted that about 20% of FAO consultants have been in a contractual relationship with FAO for more than 10 years, thus contributing substantially to retention of the technical capacity of the Organization. From a geographic perspective, nationals of European and North American countries account for two-thirds of the overall number of consultants currently employed by FAO, with only 7 countries representing more than half of the number, as shown in *Table 3*. The standardization of the selection process for international consultants is a priority of the Organization and efforts are under way in that direction, with the preparation of a roster of approved candidates after their screening and evaluation.

Table 3: Countries whose nationals account for more than 50% of total NSHR

No.	Nationality	Headquarters	Decentralized Offices	Total	(%)	Accumulated %
1	ITALY	501	58	559	23.8%	
2	UNITED STATES	74	78	152	6.5%	30.3%
3	FRANCE	70	79	149	6.3%	36.6%
4	UNITED KINGDOM	44	74	118	5.0%	41.6%
5	SPAIN	43	36	79	3.4%	45.0%
6	GERMANY	34	38	72	3.1%	48.0%
7	CANADA	29	30	59	2.5%	50.6%
8	Other nationalities	375	787	1162	49.4%	
Total		1170	1180	2350	100%	

j) Introduction of selection procedures for international consultants (COF.REG)

39. Given their status as officials of the Organization, as well as their financial impact on the budget, a revised process for the selection and evaluation of International Consultants (COF.REG) is being introduced.

40. The table below presents the distribution of international consultants by category for 2016.

	Level A	Level B	Level C	N/A	TOTAL
Decentralized Offices	434	837	420	12	1703
Percentage	25%	49%	25%	1%	100%
Headquarters	90	374	706	13	1183
Percentage	8%	32%	59%	1%	100%
Total	524	1211	1126	25	2886
Percentage	18%	42%	39%	1%	100%

41. As can be seen, there were 1703 International Consultants hired in the Decentralized Offices and 1183 in headquarters. Regarding the category, it is noted that in Decentralized Offices 25% of consultants are in category A (more than USD 450 per day), while in headquarters only 8% (for a total of 18%).

42. The Organization has started introducing a more uniform, transparent and rigorous selection and evaluation process for international consultants, 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.

43. International Consultant Rosters, covering the most frequently needed profiles/fields of expertise, will be created by consolidation of existing databases for each level. In addition, the issuance of Calls for Expression of Interest will be introduced through dedicated outreach efforts, increasing channels of communication and the usage of better targeting tools, to reach experts worldwide and to increase the diversity and the quality of the recruited profiles.

Alignment of HR management to the strategic and programmatic needs of the Organization

a) Performance management, development and learning

44. The implementation of the revamped policy on Performance Evaluation and Management System (PEMS), which was launched in February this year, is proceeding well. The performance management system has been simplified and improved in 2016. The main changes include an improved online system, simpler and better quality work plans, emphasis on more timely, higher quality feedback and the move from a 4-point to a 5-point rating scale.

45. The PEMS has been reviewed and improved continuously since 2012, in internal management discussions, and consultations with the Staff Representative Bodies. For examples, it was ascertained that a rating scale with an even number of points led to difficulties by managers to ascribe accurately the performance of staff, particularly given the absence of a central point for satisfactory performance.

46. Similarly, internal discussions and consultations revealed that over-elaborate work plans with a large number of objectives and indicators are not effective for both staff and managers. Accordingly, it was deemed more appropriate to simplify and allow greater flexibility in the elaboration of work plans against which performance could be measured.

47. Furthermore, streamlined automated processes are progressively being put in place for evaluations, which were previously paper-based, bringing in a more harmonized approach to performance evaluation.

48. Regarding staff development, continued efforts have been made to offer online solutions when they represent the most cost-efficient option. The Organization is also encouraging the use of existing online resources, developed by universities and other UN agencies. In parallel, FAO is increasing synergies with academic institutions and international recognized partners, facilitating access to important resources for the upcoming developmental needs of the Staff.

49. The Organization is also involved in an overall assessment of administrative skills, to identify the areas that need the implementation of dedicated training. For instance, a series of e-learning modules have been launched, starting with the Project Budget Holder course - a mandatory course for new and existing project budget holders. Other e-learning, which have a primary focus of building the operational capacity of staff, aimed at improving managerial competencies, understanding of accountability and promoting alignment to the FAO results framework, are progressively being released. In this respect, it should be noted that the expensive offsite senior level training was discontinued, in favour of more cost effective and better tailored options which include webinars, online options and coaching.

50. The availability of a larger number of FAO-specific courses aimed at building the operational, programmatic and administrative capacity of staff now make it possible for FAO to establish meaningful learning paths for specific roles. The number of webinar series delivered as part of blended learning programmes is increasing. Webinars are currently delivered by the Community of Policy Practitioners, South-South Cooperation and Resource Mobilization Division. Other webinar series are at various stages of preparation ranging from European Funding PGoDA, Combatting Child Labour in Agriculture, Free Prior and Informed Consent, to name a few. OHR supports subject matter experts in the design and also in building their capacity to design, facilitate and deliver their webinar sessions.

51. The Food Security, Food Systems and Nutrition Programme, which brought together Strategic Programme teams (at headquarters and regional offices), as well as key staff across all locations, yielded good results in terms of reshaping FAO's thinking on food security, food systems and nutrition. Similar initiatives are currently under review by the Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development Division, in collaboration with academia.

b) Introducing new staff to FAO's mission and values

52. A new service, called HR-Link, has been launched to help new staff members in their process of joining the Organization by providing assistance in logistical aspects connected to their assignment and putting them in contact with their divisions and units. A welcome meeting to new staff in headquarters took place in February 2017 with the participation of the Director-General. In addition, a new Orientation toolkit has been launched to help all new employees to acquire essential knowledge and tools to assist with their orientation to the Organization in the first weeks upon entry on duty. The programme is available to all employees across the globe.

c) Relations with Staff Representative Bodies (SRBs)

53. There has been continuous and substantive engagement with the Staff Representative Bodies – Association of Professionals in FAO (AP-in-FAO) and the Union of General Service staff (UGSS) – since the beginning of 2012. This has led to greater clarity in the respective roles of management with regard to the taking of managerial decisions, and of the Staff Representative Bodies in providing constructive comments through a consultation process.

54. A dedicated Staff Management Consultative Committee (SMCC) has been introduced which holds regular meetings between Representatives and Management. For example, in 2015, 27 meetings were held, and in 2016 the SMCC met 20 times. The level of cooperation and understanding with the Staff Bodies has improved, which has a salutary effect on the Organization as a whole. In addition, each Staff Representative Body has been afforded a permanent, dedicated area on the front page of the Organization's intranet, where the SRBs can post their own information.

d) Short-term contracts

55. In 2015, an overall limit to the maximum length of employment possible under short term appointments of 55 aggregate months of service was introduced through an administrative circular. The aim was to ensure that short-term appointments are properly used and that short-term personnel are recruited for temporary periods of time, to cover temporary needs due to peak workload, absence of regular staff or vacancies. It follows that there should be no expectation of extension of appointment or rehire under a short-term appointment. The Administrative Manual Section on short-term personnel has been revised and amended *inter alia* to include this maximum employment limit.

56. In an effort to rationalize the use of short-term contracts, for the professional and general service categories, new administrative procedures were issued in October 2016 concerning the appropriate use and maximum duration of these type of contracts (55 months). Similarly, to maximize the efficiency of their use, the alignment of contract breaks during periods of low activity, such as December and August, will be progressively introduced.

Reflection of FAO's nature as a UN system specialized agency

a) Implement measures and track progress in achieving corporate geographic representation targets

57. In taking decisions on recruitment to International Professional positions, the criterion of merit has always been followed to ensure that the Organization is able to fill all positions with the best qualified candidates.

58. At the same time, in line with guidance provided by the Governing Bodies, due attention has been given by senior management to ensure an equitable geographic representation of member countries in the Secretariat of the Organization as far as the PWB-funded posts are concerned.

59. With continuing efforts pursued in this regard, it has been possible to reduce, to a considerable extent, the number of non-, under- and over-represented countries in the Secretariat of FAO, thus increasing the number of equitably-represented countries.

60. Following the completion of the new recruitments, the portion of the equitably represented countries stands at 76% (148 countries out of 194).

Number of Member Nations by representation status

	January 2012		March 2017	
Non-represented countries	31	16%	26	13%
Under-represented countries	18	9%	16	8%
Equitably-represented countries	137	72%	148	76%
Over-represented countries	5	3%	4	2%
Total	191	100%	194^(*)	100%

() Member Nations not considered that joined during the period: Singapore (under-represented); South Sudan (equitably-represented); Brunei (not-represented). These three countries joined in January 2014*

b) Improved gender representation

61. Between 2012 and 2016, the overall combined percentage of women at all staff categories (Directors, Professionals, JPOs, APOs, NPOs and General Service staff) steadily rose from 51% to 52%. Although the absolute number of total staff was reduced by 22% since 2012, the Organization continued its efforts focusing on hiring more women for the workforce and we can affirm that over half of all FAO staff members are already women.

62. With regard to the international professional category (P-1 to DDG), the gender representation has moved in a positive direction. Women accounted for 36% at the beginning of 2012. By October 2016, 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 40%.

63. Another notable improvement that should be observed is the increase of women in the NPO and JPO categories. Indeed, the percentage of women NPOs between 2012 and 2016 has risen from 36 to 40% and in the JPO category (P1 grade), from 61 to 72%. With the new JPO recruits in the pipeline, FAO will have a total of 33 JPOs, 22 of which are women. In this latter category, the same anticipated results on overall gender representation are expected in the medium and long term as for professional staff.

c) Corporate mobility

64. A corporate Geographic Staff Mobility Policy has been developed in the Organization and yearly mobility exercises have been undertaken beginning in 2014. Prior to that date, geographic mobility cases were voluntary, low in number, and ad hoc in nature, and there was no coherent policy in this regard.

65. In 2014, a policy was introduced for mandatory geographic staff mobility, reflecting the international nature of FAO, and with the aim of oxygenating the Organization. This policy was further refined following internal discussion and consultation with SRBS, and promulgated by means of DGB 2015/07.

66. The related programme involves all Departments, Divisions and Offices at headquarters and in the field, with minimum targets set for each on a yearly basis. Since 2014, the Programme has been fine-tuned based on the feedback of the previous years and the number of mobility transfers has increased from 15 in 2014, to 34 in 2015 and to 50 in 2016.

67. During the November 2016 session of the Finance Committee, members stressed the importance of the mobility programme as a mechanism to oxygenate the Organization and foster the sharing of technical knowledge. Accordingly, the 2017 geographic mobility exercise was initiated in December 2016.

68. The exercise was concluded successfully at the end of February thanks to advance planning, and a more streamlined internal process, leading to the approval of 54 mobility transfers for 2017.

69. The success of FAO's corporate Geographic Staff Mobility Policy has already attracted the attention of sister UN-system organizations. The manifold beneficial impact of the Mobility Policy on both the Organization and the staff members are increasingly becoming evident, enhancing the technical capacity of the Organization as a whole, bringing the knowledge from headquarters to the field and vice-versa.

d) Promotion of multilingualism

70. Based on the landmark United Nations General Assembly resolution 50/11 and subsequent ones on multilingualism, several steps were taken to promote multilingualism within the Organization, particularly amongst international professional staff. All international professionals were requested to provide evidence of their language skills in two official languages and those who did not meet the basic requirements had to take courses to improve their knowledge. As a result, less than 4% staff member (on PWB positions) still need to acquire the knowledge of a second language at least at intermediate level. Furthermore, in the context of selection and appointment procedures, the language skills of candidates, internal and external, are closely considered. The selection of a candidate who does not possess the minimum language skills requires a waiver and is subject to the candidate reaching the required level within a given period.

71. The role of Member States is also crucial for adopting a clear position on multilingualism, expressed through their participation in the legislative bodies of the different United Nations system organizations, and for supporting its implementation by endorsing all the necessary measures to achieve it, for example by developing national capacities to promote language professional curricula up to the standards required by international organizations.

e) Streamlined process for the provision of aggregated information on staffing

72. To better satisfy the information needs of permanent representations, the Organization consulted with other Rome-based Agencies to standardize the reports providing HR information. This exercise is leading to a consistent approach to the provision of the same information by RBAs, ensuring comparable data and an improved response time.

Increased efficiency in HR processes and procedures

a) Transformation of the HR function and units and of the Shared Service Centre (SSC)

73. The SSC has been transformed into a cross-cutting structure, with client service, monitoring and transaction processing and an organizational structure resilient to staff turnover, in addition to improving effectiveness and quality in services provided.

74. In these past 12 months, the SSC team has made significant progress. From streamlining the NSHR payroll process, to strengthening over 60 individual processes in HR services, the transformation exercise has improved communications and validations.

75. In addition, a new contact centre team has been put in place to improve service quality. From this point forward, all requests to the SSC will now be met with confirmation of receipt, expected deadlines for completion, and notification to all relevant parties, once action is taken.

76. Work continues to update and rationalise relevant instruments, as well as the rules and procedures, in the human resources area. The entire Human Resources section of the Administrative Manual has been reviewed and significantly improved. A first revision and preliminary consultations with internal stakeholders of nearly all manual sections on human resources issues and entitlements and benefits have been completed.

77. The HR provisions in the FAO Administrative Manual, which serves as a source material for HR policies and procedures, have been reviewed thoroughly with a view to revising and reorganizing the content and ensuring that they reflect the most recent information in a clear, transparent and user-friendly manner. In parallel, an online user-friendly FAO Handbook was launched in December 2013. A major exercise has been undertaken to update the Manual with rules previously held in a multitude of administrative issuances in order to consolidate them, as far as possible, in a single source. As a result of the complete review and streamlining of existing administrative issuances, circa 360 reference administrative documents (HR Key Information Circulars, Policy Directives and Administrative Circulars) were abolished and the remaining ones were reviewed and included in the FAO Handbook.

78. Two self-service HR/administrative tools were released to HR servicing staff during the course of 2016: the certificate of employment and a rental subsidy calculator have contributed to reduce the workload of HR/administrative staff.

79. A new GRMS functionality has been developed to automate and standardise globally all major staffing actions related to position management (e-PM) and an HR Help Desk in Budapest created to support users in the new functionality. This tool has resulted in reduction of processing time and enhancing increased transparency.

80. The management of sick leave has been enhanced through greater internal collaboration between OHR and the Medical Office. An improved automated process by means of the existing GRMS allows for more efficiency in the processing of sick leave requests. Greater fairness and oversight, as well as cost-effectiveness, has been instituted with the use of an external provider from the Organization's medical insurer, in order to support the Medical Office in reviewing requests for extended sick leave, including by means of home visits when required.

b) Streamlining and standardization/automation of HR processes

81. Automation of the Payroll system has brought many significant benefits to different areas of HR servicing that include, inter-alia, Leave Management, Separation Payments, Travel time and Stopovers, and NSHR Management.

82. Most of the major HR-related procedures have been reviewed, analysed and organized into updated Standard Operating Procedures (140 SOPs implemented). These SOPs have proved to be extremely useful in carrying-out HR processing work and ensuring consistency and transparency throughout the HR units, as well as to support knowledge transfer.

Reprofiling of professional positions

83. Taking into account the requirements of the consolidated programme management arrangements approved in November 2016, 58 new technical posts (of which 8 D-level and above, 47 professional and 3 general service) were included in the PWB 2018-19.

84. The new posts were offset by a net of 59 posts abolished through restructuring, streamlining and efficiency measures in the Shared Services Centre; the Conference, Council and Protocol Affairs Division; and the Corporate Services Department.

85. As part of the post review exercise, 76 professional posts were downgraded in order to allow the recruitment of highly qualified younger professionals, resulting in a reduction of the Professional grade point average from 3.52 to 3.43.

Outside activities

86. The involvement of FAO staff in outside activities was lacking a clear policy framework that could take into consideration the implications for staff time, commitments towards partner organizations, and potential conflict of interest. Instructions were issued inter alia by means of a dedicated Administrative Circular regarding the involvement of FAO staff in outside activities. As a result, about 70 staff members were granted approval to conduct these activities and a proper record will now be monitored so these opportunities could be used to foster the work of the Organization and not only on the basis of individual decisions by staff members.

Rationalization of Official Holidays

87. A review of data for the last few years has shown that on average, 50 percent of staff at headquarters, including senior management, took leave during 25-31 December, producing a slowdown in activity that translated into significant operational costs to the Organization with a reduced output. The possibility of concentrating the official holidays at headquarters during this period was reviewed and implemented for 2016, with estimated savings of around 1 USD million. Normal contingency and other planning will ensure that the Organization is able to respond to unexpected emergencies or calls for action, since adequate procedures for these extraordinary circumstances were and are in place. Following consultation with the Staff Representative Bodies, the experience of having official holidays during 25-31 December will be repeated in 2017, both in headquarters and in Budapest (REU/SSC).

Conclusion

88. Thanks to the new procedures introduced in the recruitments processes, the Organization has reached an elevated standard in terms of transparency, fairness, composition of the selection committees, responsiveness to the needs of the hiring units, recruitment time and quality of appointments. The recruitment teams in headquarters and in the decentralized offices have now fully incorporated the changes, adapting their internal workflows and guidelines.

89. The Organization has significantly improved the distribution of geographic representation, drastically ameliorating the status of under-represented countries. Moreover, many countries, that were chronically under-represented, such as the United States of America, Republic of Korea and Iran, are now equitably represented.

90. Management is committed to continuing to support an open and constructive dialogue with the staff representative bodies, as demonstrated by the positive outcomes resulted from the initiatives recently introduced, as the Staff Management Consultative Committee (SMCC) and the dedicated areas on the front page of the Organization's intranet. Starting 2017, a work plan of items for consultation is being discussed among the SRBs and management at the first meeting of the year, with the purpose of using it as a roadmap and consequently focusing the consultation process towards priority items.

91. The Organization has concentrated its efforts regarding the staff's capacity to absorb changes and improvements related to HR management. This is being done by maintaining an open dialogue in both directions: the staff has always been fully informed of the new procedures through different communication channels and, in parallel, the staff has been encouraged to share suggestions and opinions. The Working-Well-Together initiative is an example of this philosophy: all FAO employees were invited to write suggestions and solutions to help the Organization become less bureaucratic and more efficient.

92. From the above, it appears clear that the Organization's Human Resources (HR) policies and management are designed to support FAO's work in ensuring a world free from hunger and malnutrition in a sustainable manner. Since 2012, the HR function has been a priority element in the transformational change of the Organization. This is manifest in the improvements made to the HR capacity and reporting line, and the major achievements accomplished as a result.

93. Commensurate with the importance placed on the HR function, an iterative enhancement since 2012 has led to coalescence of the core HR capacity within the Office of Human Resources (OHR)

placed in the Apex, alongside rationalization of transaction-related functions within the Shared Services Centre and the transfer of ancillary functions to units in a better position to handle those responsibilities. Responsibilities regarding internships and related agreements have been transferred to OPC, and all legal, administrative and HR policy aspects transferred to LEG, with OHR reducing the number of positions from 40 to 34 (a net reduction of 15%). The new OHR is more efficient, focused and results-oriented, with the adequate capacity to the new HR challenges faced by the Organization.

94. The Director OHR now reports directly to the Director-General, in contrast with the previous two layers of management in the reporting line. The management team of OHR has been bolstered with a high level Special Advisor for the past 3 years, who along with the Director and Deputy Director, meets regularly with the Director-General on HR matters.

95. The close attention paid to the function has led to major achievements in HR at FAO since 2012, which have been repeatedly recognized by the Governing Bodies, and have also placed FAO at the vanguard of innovation within the context of the UN common system.

96. Authority on matters pertaining to human resources policies and management is primarily a matter for the Director-General, in particular as it is the Director-General who appoints, manages the staff and establishes HR policies and procedures, as set out in the Basic Texts of the Organization.

97. The role of the Governing Bodies in respect of matters pertaining to management of staff is limited to general oversight. It does not extend to day-to-day management of the staff, detailed review of HR matters and policies within the managerial authority, and is not within the overall spirit and purpose of the FAO Reform, which led to greater clarity in the relations between governance and management.

98. This need for adherence to respective roles and responsibilities was recognized by the Finance Committee at its sessions in May and November 2016, and it is within this spirit that achievements made in the area of HR management and policies are hereby presented to the Finance Committee for its information.