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Executive Board of the United Nations

Human Settlements Programme

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Action by UN-Habitat to address geographical and  
gender imbalances in the composition of its staff

## Staffing of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme as at 31 December 2019

### Report of the Executive Director

#### Addendum

### Recruitment, equitable geographical distribution and gender parity

#### I. Introduction

1. By paragraph 6 of its decision 2019/2, the Executive Board, at its resumed first meeting, in November 2019, requested the Executive Director to submit to the Executive Board at its first session of 2020 a comprehensive report on human resources, with a focus on equitable geographical representation and gender balance in the Programme, including progress in the achievement of its gender parity target for positions financed through all sources of funding. The present report supplements the information on human resources set out in the report of the Executive Director on the staffing of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) as at 31 December 2019 (HSP/EB.2020/3).

#### II. Equitable geographical distribution

2. As the present report responds to the request made in decision 2019/2, it is useful to recall what the principle of equitable geographical distribution means to Member States and how it is applied in practice. The report of the Secretary-General entitled “Human resources management reform: comprehensive assessment of the system of geographical distribution and assessment of the issues relating to possible changes in the number of posts subject to the system of geographical distribution” (A/65/305/Add.2) states:

The representation of their nationals in the staff of the United Nations Secretariat has been a major concern of Member States since the beginning of the Organization. This concern is reflected in Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, which governs the selection of staff:

“The paramount consideration in the employment of staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of

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\* HSP/EB.2020/1.

efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.”

The first resolution of the General Assembly on the issue of the principle of geographical distribution (resolution 153 (II) of 15 November 1947) reaffirmed the principle of recruiting staff on as wide a geographic basis as possible. The third preambular paragraph of that resolution referred to the international character of the Organization and stated that 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.

In paragraph 2 of the same resolution the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to: (a) examine the recruitment policy with a view to improving the geographical distribution of posts within the various departments; (b) take the necessary steps with a view to engaging staff members from those countries that did not yet have any of their nationals in the Secretariat; and (c) take all practicable steps to ensure the improvement of the geographical distribution of the staff, including the issuance of such rules and regulations as might be necessary to comply with the principles of the Charter.

Pursuant to the same resolution, the Secretary-General submitted a report entitled “Composition of the Secretariat and the principle of geographical distribution” (A/652), in which the principles that determined his policy in this respect were set out.<sup>1</sup>

The concept expressed in the second sentence of Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter — “due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible” — is the basis of the principle of equitable geographical distribution. Defining what constituted equitable geographical distribution of the Secretariat and establishing a yardstick for measuring progress towards that end were first addressed in 1948 through the introduction of the concept of “desirable ranges” for Member States, in response to General Assembly resolution 153 (II).

Under this system, specific posts would not be distributed to Member States, but rather a range of posts was established within which each Member State would be adequately represented as a guideline for recruitment priorities. General Assembly resolution 1559 (XV) of 18 December 1960 confirmed the system of desirable ranges and linked the concept of geographical appointment status of staff with the concept of budgetary posts set aside for this purpose.

Until 1962, only one factor was used to determine the desirable ranges: the contribution of each Member State to the regular budget of the Organization. General Assembly resolution 1852 (XVII) of 19 December 1962 added two other factors: membership in the United Nations and the population of the Member State.

From 1962 until 1988, the importance, or weight, of each factor varied according to successive General Assembly resolutions, but preference was always, and continues to be, given to the contribution factor. Discussions among Member States about the changes in the factors for equitable geographical distribution have been characterized by two main points of view. One group of Member States, composed largely of developing countries, wanted more weight to be given to the membership factor, or alternatively to the population factor, whereas another group, composed mainly of Member States with high rates of assessment, wanted to keep the greater weight on the contribution factor.

In its resolution 41/206 C of 11 December 1986, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit updated calculations on desirable ranges for all Member States, taking into account, inter alia, criteria such as (a) the desirability of the base figure for the calculations being related to the actual number of posts subject to geographical distribution; (b) the movement towards the establishment of parity between the membership and contribution factors; (c) the direct allocation of posts subject to the population factor in proportion to each Member State’s population; and (d) the need for flexibility upward and downward from the midpoint of the desirable ranges. This resulted in the adoption of resolution 42/220 A of 21 December 1987, introducing as from 1 January 1988 the current regime for the system of desirable ranges.

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<sup>1</sup> See A/652, paras. 7-9.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 42/220 A, requested the Secretary-General to base the desirable ranges, with effect from 1 January 1988, on the following criteria:

- (a) The base figure for the calculations would initially be 2,700 posts;
- (b) The weight of the membership factor would be 40 per cent of the base figure;
- (c) The population factor, which would be allotted a weight of 5 per cent, would be directly related to the population of Member States, and posts subject to that factor would be distributed among Member States in proportion to their population;
- (d) The contribution factor would be based on the distribution of the remaining posts among Member States in proportion to the scale of assessments;
- (e) The upper and lower limits of each range would be based on flexibility of 15 per cent upward and downward from the midpoint of the desirable range, but not less than 4.8 posts up and down, the upper limit of the range being not less than 14 posts;
- (f) The base figure would be adjusted whenever the actual number of posts subject to geographical distribution increased or decreased by 100, the weights of the three factors being maintained.

Since 1988, the system's basic criteria for the definition of desirable ranges have remained unchanged. The weight of the factors taken into account for the distribution of geographical posts remains at 55 per cent for contribution, 40 per cent for membership and 5 per cent for population.

3. Administrative instruction ST/AI/2010/3, on the staff selection system, describes geographic status as the "status given to staff in the Professional and above categories on initial appointment for one year or longer against a position subject to 'equitable geographical distribution' and to the application of the system of desirable ranges, namely, a regular budget post in the Secretariat at the Professional level or above (except language positions up to and including P-5)."
4. Staff considered to be holding appointments with geographic status are those appointed by the Secretary-General for a period of at least one year to posts funded under the regular budget of the United Nations at the Professional and higher categories under the system of desirable ranges.
5. The criteria referred to in General Assembly resolution 42/220 A were last submitted to States Members of the United Nations in 2018 for their review and comment, together with combinations of factors to reassess how to apply the principle of "equitable geographical distribution" for the staffing of the United Nations Secretariat (A/73/372/Add.3). To date, there has been no decision by Member States to alter the provisions established in resolution 42/220 A of 21 December 1987.

### III. Gender parity

6. The term "gender parity" refers to equal representation of women and men, in this case among the staff of the United Nations. The initial goal, which was not met, was to reach gender parity among Professional level staff by the year 2000. Over the years, several legislative and procedural provisions have been introduced into the recruitment process with the aim of supporting the achievement of gender parity, with varying degrees of success.
7. The current Secretary-General of the United Nations has committed himself to the achievement of gender parity at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant-Secretary-General levels by the end of his current five-year term of office, in 2022. He was instrumental in the adoption of a United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity as a policy document in October 2017.<sup>2</sup> In addition, he has introduced a number of measures in the United Nations Secretariat that are intended to increase the number of qualified female staff members in the Secretariat. Such initiatives provide general guidance for UN-Habitat and other United Nations entities.
8. UN-Habitat is committed to making deliberate efforts to increase the interest of networks of female human settlements professionals in its work and to circulating all professional vacancy announcements to those networks. UN-Habitat will re-evaluate the modalities for the participation of the gender focal point in the recruitment process with a view to enhancing it.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org.gender/files/gender\\_parity\\_strategy\\_october\\_2017.pdf](https://www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org.gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf).

9. UN-Habitat will evaluate the positions of female professionals, in particular at the P-3 and P-4 levels, in order to find ways of enhancing their professional exposure to prepare them for higher-level duties and posts. Such activities will be undertaken with due consideration to the professional aspirations of serving male colleagues at those levels.

#### **IV. Recruitment**

10. Three main factors have a significant impact on the ability of UN-Habitat to address geographical and gender imbalances:

(a) The existing staff membership, contractual tenure of staff members, staff turnover and staff retirements, which all have an impact on recruitment to existing posts;

(b) The possibility of creating additional posts, which is directly linked to the availability of funding to create and advertise posts;

(c) In terms of gender parity, the ratio of female applicants to advertised posts, which, over recent years, has averaged about 30 per cent of applicants.

11. Five professional posts have been advertised since the beginning of November 2019. Three of those were temporary vacancy announcements, of which two have been filled (one with a male candidate and the other with a female candidate). The two regular job openings, which are project posts, will close at the end of January. Senior positions that have been filled recently on a temporary basis to support the restructuring process include the acting Director of the Strategy, Planning, Knowledge, Advocacy and Communications Division (formerly the Office of External Relations), with a female candidate, and the position of acting Director of the Management Advisory Compliance Division (formerly the Management and Operations Division), with a male candidate. The position of Chief of Staff was advertised earlier, in October, and is in the final stages of recruitment.

12. Temporary appointments are not subject to the principle of “equitable geographic distribution” (see para. 5 above). Posts that have been filled on a temporary basis will gradually be filled under longer-term contracts by means of standard recruitment processes.

13. UN-Habitat will work with the Office of Human Resources at United Nations Headquarters and with the Executive Board to ensure the widest possible circulation of vacancy announcements in order to attract a broad variety of suitably qualified candidates from as many Member States as possible. An outreach campaign will also ensure that vacancy announcements are disseminated to human settlements-related professional networks, with specific emphasis on circulation to networks of female human settlements professionals.