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Report on the assessment of the workplace at United Nations Headquarters

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which is submitted pursuant to section II of General Assembly resolution [75/253](#) C, provides a forward-looking assessment of the workplace at United Nations Headquarters. The assessment incorporates the evolving needs and new work modalities of the Organization, considers lessons learned from the flexible workplace project and the adaptation of the physical and operational environment resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and prioritizes the health, occupational safety and well-being of all occupants.

It is concluded in the report that it remains critical that the workspace support current and future work methods and that there is a need to continue to observe trends and gather data in order to adjust the physical workplace to the evolving needs of the Organization and its personnel.

During the course of the flexible workplace project, a total of 22 floors had been reconfigured to a flexible workplace environment, increasing the capacity of the reconfigured floors by 1,291, from 1,880 to 3,171 staff members.

The report provides an evaluation of the Organization's current real estate portfolio in New York and future real estate needs, taking into account workforce projections and evolving working patterns. It outlines the approach of the Secretary-General, with further efficiencies through a reduction in the current real estate footprint being planned.

The General Assembly is requested to take note of the report.

* [A/78/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. Following its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters (A/75/342/Add.1 and A/75/342/Add.1/Corr.1), the General Assembly, in its resolution 75/253 C, paragraph 4, requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report that provided a forward-looking assessment of the workplace at United Nations Headquarters. Pursuant to that request, the present report sets out the evolving needs and new work modalities of the Organization, considering lessons learned from the flexible workplace project and the adaptation of the physical and operational environment resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and prioritizing the health, occupational safety and well-being of all occupants.

2. The report provides an evaluation of the Organization's current real estate portfolio in New York and future real estate needs, taking into account workforce projections and evolving working patterns, and outlines the planned approach of the Secretary-General. In that regard, further efficiencies are intended to be achieved by further reducing the current real estate footprint in New York.

II. Workplace industry trends post COVID-19

3. The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 had a widespread global impact on many economies, affecting most sectors. In many countries, it brought about fundamental changes in how and where work was conducted for an extended period of time. The office closures recommended by local public health authorities necessitated the establishment of remote working capabilities, including video meetings, which played a crucial role in ensuring business continuity and maintaining workforce productivity. Even in occupied offices, the workplace environment had to be adapted to accommodate the new circumstances.

4. The pandemic presented extraordinary human challenges and significant operational obstacles for businesses. In addition to disruptions in the supply chain and the impact on global trade and transportation, many organizations experienced a sudden shift to remote work. As a result, companies were compelled to swiftly adopt new technologies and establish robust virtual communication systems. Balancing employee productivity and morale and the need for data security and privacy became paramount concerns. Industries have now leveraged the lessons learned from this large-scale remote working experiment to reimagine work processes and redefine the role of offices in innovative ways.

5. With the end of the global health emergency, organizations are continuing to evaluate the workplace and associated policies based on various factors. Striking a balance between the advantages of flexible working arrangements¹ and the benefits of working in a physical office environment is a crucial consideration for many organizations. Many recognize the value of in-person collaboration, which promotes social connections, fosters teamwork, encourages employee engagement and provides mentorship within office spaces. Simultaneously, many workers prioritize organizations that offer flexible working opportunities.

6. A notable and enduring change in many industries post pandemic is the significant rise in hybrid meetings, where some employees participate from the office while others join remotely. It is crucial to ensure that office environments effectively support the requirement for hybrid meetings, while also facilitating collaboration and

¹ Flexible working arrangements at the United Nations are governed by Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2019/3](#).

focused work. This necessitates not only technological solutions, but also a reconsideration of office layouts and configurations. As part of the process, many organizations are also re-evaluating their overall real estate needs.

III. Evolving needs of the Organization

7. The Organization has had a policy on flexible working arrangements since 2003 ([ST/SGB/2003/4](#)), which offered the following options:

- (a) Staggered working hours;
- (b) Compressed work schedule (10 working days in 9 days);
- (c) Scheduled break for external learning activities;
- (d) Working away from the office (telecommuting).

8. A revised policy ([ST/SGB/2019/3](#)) was promulgated in April 2019. The policy introduced an additional option for the compressed work schedule (five working days in four and a half days) and increased the maximum number of telecommuting days from two to three per week under normal circumstances. It also clarified the parameters for potential telecommuting outside of the duty station for a limited period of time and its impact on the payment of allowances and benefits.

9. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of flexible working arrangements was less prevalent; staggered working hours and a compressed work schedule were the most commonly chosen options, whereas telecommuting was used primarily in an ad hoc manner to accommodate a specific short-time need and by fewer staff members.

10. The large-scale different way of working triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which first called for mandated alternate working arrangements, followed by increased telecommuting when compatible with exigencies of service, has changed this perspective. The progressive return to the physical workplace, which was initiated in August 2020 and followed several phases as the circumstances evolved, created different patterns of staff presence in the office.

11. In 2022, the Secretariat concluded its COVID-19 business continuity phase. With the cessation of alternate working arrangements in 2021 and the gradual increase in personnel on premises as enabled by flexible working arrangements, the Secretariat reflected on lessons learned and confirmed that its long-standing policy on flexible working arrangements had served the Organization well and was fit for purpose going forward. As such, the Organization proceeded with its journey towards the “next normal” hybrid workplace, reverting to the policy on flexible working arrangements in place since 2003 and revised in 2019 ([ST/SGB/2019/3](#)). Decisions on flexible working arrangements are subject to the Organization’s operational mandates and any exigencies of service that may require the staff member to come to the office on a particular day, including if telecommuting was planned and agreed upon for that day or more often than the minimum set in the policy.

Implementation of flexible workplace strategies at United Nations Headquarters

12. Flexible workplace strategies were first introduced to the General Assembly in 2013 when the Secretary-General presented the results of a study on the feasibility of implementing such strategies at United Nations Headquarters (see [A/68/387](#)). The findings outlined the potential benefits of a well-implemented flexible workplace, including greater staff productivity, enhanced collaboration in the workplace, improved business continuity and disaster recovery, improved staff retention and reduced real estate needs and costs. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in section IV,

paragraph 5, of its resolution 68/247 B for a business case, a pilot programme and further feasibility study on flexible workplace strategies were subsequently conducted. In his report on a comprehensive business case (A/69/749), the Secretary General stated that, with adjustments, a flexible workplace across Headquarters could be successful. The overall quality of the workplace environment could be improved by providing staff with workplace choice, flexibility and access to more natural light through the proposed approach. Furthermore, Headquarters could avoid significant long-term commercial real estate lease requirements and gain space efficiencies by taking on an up-front investment in implementing a flexible workplace programme.

13. The implementation of the flexible workplace project was approved by the General Assembly in December 2014 in its resolution 69/274 A. The original proposal was to reconfigure 26 floors by 2018 for a total capacity gain of 950 staff at a total cost of \$49.6 million. The project commenced in 2015 and was closed in 2021 before the completion of all planned floors owing to uncertainties created by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the close of the project in 2021, a total of 22 floors had been reconfigured to a flexible workplace environment at a cost of \$48.2 million and additional capacity for 1,291 staff had been gained.

Current workforce and projected evolution

14. Based on the information available at the time of preparation of the present report, there is no reason at this time to forecast either a significant reduction or expansion of the size of the workforce at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

IV. Office space

Lessons learned from the flexible workplace project

15. The lessons learned from the flexible workplace project (which led the implementation of flexible workplace reconfigurations at Headquarters from 2015 to 2021) that are considered to apply to similar future transformative office space projects include the following:

(a) **Change management.** The flexible workplace project implemented a comprehensive change management plan that included the establishment of clear expectations. While particularly crucial during the initial stages, a continuous change management campaign throughout the project played a vital role in dispelling misconceptions and supporting senior managers in promoting the overall strategy. The communication strategy included helpful guidance videos and visual aids to assist managers in effectively managing their staff in an unassigned work environment, enhancing their ability to function effectively in a flexible workplace. The introduction of new ways of working post pandemic will similarly require senior management engagement and prioritization of change management practices as personnel adapt to those new norms;

(b) **Client engagement.** Close coordination with clients both before and after space reconfiguration was integral to the success of the flexible workplace project and that collaborative approach should persist as the utilization of office space continues to evolve;

(c) **Communication.** The overall success of the project relied heavily on the implementation of an effective communication plan that was agreed upon by client offices and established early in the planning stages. This was achieved through open and consistent discussions, regular meetings, in-person town hall sessions, site visits and regular updates provided to end users. By articulating project goals and

expectations, the communication plan played a critical role in ensuring transparency, engagement and alignment throughout the project;

(d) **Departmental leadership.** It was crucial for departmental leadership to actively endorse and expect accountability for flexible workplace protocols and expected behaviours, including a clean desk policy, and consideration for others, in particular with regard to noise levels. That endorsement played a vital role in raising awareness and fostering acceptance among staff members. It is the managers in the respective workspaces who must assume a primary role as stewards of the protocols and in supporting floor operations, employing various methods to promote accountability. Surveys conducted during the project indicated that in areas in which management took ownership of ensuring adherence to the protocols, which are essential for the effective use of unassigned office space, staff satisfaction was higher. To assist managers in that task, the project team developed guidance videos and materials, including an onboarding video, to provide valuable support and guidance;

(e) **Space functionality.** The office space should cater to users' behaviour and functional needs, necessitating the implementation of more flexible spaces that facilitate working collaboration and social interaction. In addition, with the significant rise in hybrid meetings, it is crucial to integrate multipurpose small meeting rooms and phone booth-type installations into floor plans to accommodate such meetings effectively. These versatile spaces can also support individuals in their focused work activities. By incorporating such elements, the office environment becomes adaptable and conducive to a variety of work styles and interactions;

(f) **Technology.** The implementation of information and communications technology initiatives based on cloud technology and the deployment of web-based applications were fundamental to the ability of personnel to function effectively in a flexible workplace environment and to quickly transition to remote working during the pandemic. The office space must continue to support the use of developing technologies in the Organization;

(g) **Accessibility.** During the project, the conversion of the floor layout into an open and flexible workplace, coupled with the inclusion of height-adjustable desks, played a crucial role in promoting seamless and unobstructed movement throughout the floor. That layout not only facilitated accessibility for wheelchair users but also addressed various physical challenges. As future space reconfigurations are considered, it is essential to maintain a focus on ensuring that the designs continue to support accessibility for all individuals with disabilities.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on United Nations Headquarters office space

16. The COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 brought about significant challenges for the Organization and its operational functions at Headquarters. The onset of the pandemic compelled the Organization to swiftly adopt remote work arrangements for personnel whose functions did not require on-site presence. Simultaneously, facility services introduced building modifications and operational adjustments to prioritize the safety and well-being of all personnel working on site during the pandemic.

17. To ensure a safe work environment for those who continued to work in the Headquarters complex and other leased buildings during the pandemic and a safe return as restrictions necessitated by the pandemic eased, several measures were implemented, including:

- (a) Limitation of overall maximum occupancy to facilitate physical distancing;
- (b) Installation of signage to indicate safe, one-way routes and establishment of occupancy limits in areas such as conference rooms and elevators;

(c) Placement of hand-sanitizer stations throughout the complex and promotion of safe and hygienic behaviour through informative signage;

(d) Upgrading of air filtration systems and operational changes to heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems to enhance ventilation;

(e) Implementation of the use of masks in accordance with organizational guidelines.

V. Strategic assessment of the real estate portfolio in New York

Evolution of the real estate portfolio and rental obligations

18. A strategic focus of facilities management is to align the office space at Headquarters with the needs of United Nations Secretariat entities located in New York. During periods of growth in personnel, the real estate portfolio grew to include several off-site buildings and the workplace has been altered as requirements and industry trends have evolved. Over the past 10 years, the approach to office space, especially in the Secretariat Building, was transformed first with the adoption of an open-floor concept under the capital master plan and, subsequently, with the implementation of the flexible workplace project. The latter reconfigured the majority of the Secretariat Building into flexible workplace environments with largely unassigned workstations.

19. One of the stated goals of the flexible workplace project was to enable the Organization to avoid significant long-term commercial real estate lease requirements at Headquarters in New York and gain space efficiencies by taking on an up-front investment in implementing the flexible workplace programme. In that regard, the leased real estate obligations were significantly reduced between 2016 and 2022, by 22.6 per cent.

20. The evolution of the real estate portfolio from 2016 to 2022 is reflected in table 1.

Table 1
Evolution of rental obligations to landlords and area leased

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Building</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
1 United Nations Plaza (DC-1)	8 130	8 450	8 909	9 182	9 206	9 443	9 636
2 United Nations Plaza (DC-2)	14 966	14 954	15 762	16 885	16 376	14 593	15 926
305 East 46th Street (Albano)	12 418	11 642	10 551	10 915	11 277	11 355	11 696
304 East 45th Street (FF)	7 821	6 503	7 486	7 670	7 790	8 748	9 035
FF, 4th and 5th floors	2 006	2 100	2 152	2 185	1 220	–	–
30-00 47th Avenue, Long Island City (Falchi)	904	918	930	989	1 160	1 227	1 241
200 East 42nd Street (Daily News)	2 421	984	–	–	–	–	–
3 Court Square, Long Island City (Court Square)	3 608	3 723	1 270	–	–	–	–
300 East 42nd Street (Innovation)	9 140	9 271	6 605	–	–	–	–
Total obligations^a	61 414	58 545	53 663	47 826	47 029	45 365	47 533
Vacated	Court Square, Daily News Innovation FF, 5th floor FF, 4th floor						

^a Rental obligations to landlords include base rent at rates specified in the leases and operational/maintenance charges for services provided by the landlords, which are variables.

Current portfolio and projected rental obligations

21. The onset of the coronavirus disease pandemic and the impact that it had on ways of working, in particular the increased use by staff of pre-COVID-19 flexible working arrangements, reinforced the conclusion that the flexible workplace approach to office space was best suited to meet current needs. In that regard, the expiration of leases for the DC-1 and DC-2 Buildings in March 2023 provided a clear opportunity to re-evaluate the Organization's real estate portfolio. A thorough assessment was conducted to determine current space requirements, taking into account the evolving patterns of flexible working arrangements. Based on that analysis, it was decided not to renew the lease for the DC-1 Building and instead to explore alternative office space options to accommodate the personnel currently located there.

22. The vacation of DC-1 involved detailed consultations leading to agreements with the entities concerned to make the necessary adjustments to their office space assignments. Owing to the complex realignment of staff locations that was required, and some space reconfiguration, the project to vacate DC-1 required the implementation of a total of 1,848 personnel moves over several months. By the end of March 2023, some 850 Secretariat staff had been relocated to other locations, the majority through assignment to flexible workplace environments in the Secretariat Building.

23. At the time of writing, all floors of the DC-1 Building occupied by United Nations Secretariat staff had been vacated and the main terms and conditions for a new lease on the DC-2 Building lease had been agreed with the landlord, the United Nations Development Corporation. Final execution of the new lease is anticipated for the end of 2023, upon the completion of financing arrangements by the landlord. Following the execution of that lease, the real estate portfolio would be reduced to three office space buildings (DC-2, the FF and the Albano), noting that the Falchi Building, which is used as a repository for United Nations archives, will be vacated in December 2024. Based on current contractual terms and on the anticipated lease terms for the DC-2 Building, the estimated evolution of leased portfolio and related rental obligations to landlords from 2024 to 2027 is reflected in table 2.

Table 2

Projections of rental obligations to landlords and area leased

(Thousands of United States dollars)

<i>Building</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>2025</i>	<i>2026</i>	<i>2027</i>
DC-1	2 449 ^a	—	—	—	—
DC-2	15 926	21 798	21 798	21 798	21 798
Albano	12 023	12 260	13 046	13 693	10 496
FF	9 276	9 524	9 793	10 053	10 319
Falchi	1 255	1 255	—	—	—
Total obligations^b	40 929	44 837	44 637	45 544	42 613
Vacated	DC-1	Falchi			

^a Rent for DC-1 was due only for part of the year, from January through the end of March 2023.

^b Rental obligations to landlords include base rent at rates specified in the leases and operational/maintenance charges for services provided by the landlords, which are variables.

Synopsis of the office space capacity in New York

24. The current office space capacity is the result of efficiency gains achieved through the implementation of the flexible workplace project and the increased assignment of personnel to reconfigured floors to reflect present work modalities.

25. Table 3 shows the current office space real estate portfolio in New York, along with each building's respective capacity as of July 2023.

Table 3
Office space portfolio in New York as of July 2023

<i>Building</i>	<i>Seats^a</i>	<i>Maximum capacity^b</i>	<i>Assigned personnel^c</i>
Secretariat	3 573	4 664	4 664
DC-1	—	—	—
DC-2	1 232	1 343	1 343
Albano	750	750	650
FF	597	751	751
UNITAR	109	109	109
Total	6 261	7 617	7 517

^a The number of seats or working points on each floor, including unassigned desks and offices. Formerly defined as "staff capacity" in the report on the flexible workplace project.

^b The number of people that can be assigned to a floor, considering flexible working arrangements and absences owing to leave, travel, etc. This is calculated as the number of unassigned desks on the floor multiplied by the agreed ratio, to which the number of dedicated offices is added.

^c The number of posts assigned to the floor by each department. Formerly defined as "posts assigned" in the report on the flexible workplace project.

VI. Future office space needs

26. As noted in paragraph 14 above, based on the information available at the time of preparation of the present report, there is no reason at this time to forecast either a significant reduction or expansion of the size of the workforce at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It is also likely that the levels of telecommuting will continue to adjust following the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking those factors into account, a number of adjustments to the real estate portfolio are envisaged in the next several years.

Refurbishment of the DC-2 Building

27. Further to the vacation of the DC-1 Building, a new lease for the DC-2 Building is expected to be finalized by the end of 2023 or early 2024. In that context, significant building infrastructure upgrades will be undertaken by the landlord in the DC-2 Building. In addition, as is standard practice for a new long-term commercial lease, the United Nations would receive tenant improvement allowances sufficient to fund a building-wide interior renovation project, which is required to ensure that the building is modernized and fit for purpose for the period of the new lease.

28. The planned renovation would renovate 21 floors with office space layout; 4 floors for specialty operational functions, namely, court room and related support spaces for the Office of Administration of Justice; and 1 floor comprising a combination of bookable small quiet rooms and large conference rooms. The interior design will

take into account and incorporate lessons learned from the flexible workplace project in the Secretariat Building and post-COVID-19 space-use trends being implemented throughout organizations industry-wide. The new floor layout design proposed for the DC-2 floors will feature more and smaller enclosed meeting and focus booths, as well as various space sizes and configurations distributed throughout the floor; compartmentalize floors, reducing large open areas and minimizing noise levels; incorporate various means of acoustical control through material selection and architectural elements such as acoustical clouds and sound panels; provide flexibility of spaces that can function as offices or expanded areas for collaboration; and offer the use of individual “phone booths” for short confidential conversations.

29. The renovation of DC-2 would also increase the capacity of the building. The administration has developed a test-fit layout for DC-2 with the support of space planning consultants, which would provide an average of 80 workplaces per floor, including four enclosed offices for directors. Applying a conservative seat-sharing ratio of 1:1.56, which equates to an average of one day of telecommuting per week, to the majority of the 21 flexible workplace floors in DC-2 would result in a total headcount capacity for the building as a whole of 2,615 (see table 4). This reflects an increase of 1,272 compared with the current capacity level of 1,343.

Table 4
DC-2 renovation

<i>Floor types</i>	<i>Number of floors</i>	<i>Seats^a</i>	<i>Proposed seats</i>	<i>Maximum capacity</i>
Office space floors	21	1 208	1 680	2 571
Specialty operational functions	4	42	35	44
Conference floor	1	26	–	–
Total	26	1 276	1 715	2 615

^a This includes the 26th floor, which will be under the new DC-2 lease.

Reduction of real estate portfolio

30. As of April 2023, the Secretariat leases office space in three buildings, namely, the DC-2, Albano and FF Buildings. As noted above, a new lease is currently under negotiation for the DC-2 Building. The current Albano and FF Building leases are due to expire in September and December 2027, respectively. In terms of occupancy, the Albano Building has 650 personnel assigned, while the FF Building has 751 personnel assigned. In order for both commercial leases not to be renewed in 2027, some 1,400 personnel would need to be accommodated in other space locations. Based on current planning assumptions, notably, that there is no significant expansion of the workforce in New York and that the use of telecommuting remains at an average of at least one day per week, the discontinuation of both leases on expiry is considered feasible following the renovation of DC-2 and is planned. The vacation of both the FF and Albano Buildings at their lease termination dates in 2027 would yield a combined future annual cost avoidance of approximately \$25 million based on current lease rates, without taking into account the rental increases that are to be expected with lease renewals.

Renovation timeline for the DC-2 Building

31. While necessary to ensure that staff in DC-2 have modernized and fit-for-purpose workspaces, the timeline for the renovation takes into account the need to vacate all staff from the FF and Albano Buildings well ahead of their lease termination

date to allow proper decommissioning and removal of all United Nations-owned property (loose and connected furniture, all equipment and any special alterations) in compliance with the end-of-term lease obligations in order to avoid any potential holdover financial implications.

32. In that regard, the Facilities and Commercial Activities Service is initiating the procurement solicitation process for all the required contractual services. The goal is to have all design and construction documents completed by the second quarter of 2024, after which a separate solicitation exercise will be undertaken for the construction phase of the project. This phase is expected to be completed by mid-2027. The remainder of 2027 will be dedicated to the decommissioning and removal of all United Nations-owned property.

Incorporation of recommendations of internal auditors

33. In line with the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in its evaluation of the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters ([A/78/225](#)), the Department of Operational Support will engage with heads of entities and designated focal points to solicit feedback on the entities' current use of flexible working arrangements, any new requirements and views of staff, especially those with special needs, to determine optimal occupancy levels. The Secretariat will be guided primarily by business needs but will also consider lessons learned from the flexible workplace project as well as industry trends and best practices when reconfiguring office space and developing space assignment plans.

34. In order to address noise concerns and lack of privacy, the Department of Operational Support will develop updated workplace protocols, basic rules and a communication plan to support entities in the use of space. In addition, the administration, together with consulting experts, will assess industry trends for solutions, including the adjustment of architectural elements where feasible, in order to address any noise or lack of privacy issues identified.

VII. Implications for other duty stations

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

35. The COVID-19 pandemic came about shortly after the launch of the facilities renovation project. Open-floor workstations were accommodated with built-in separators to prevent the spread of the disease. Old carpet was replaced with vinyl flooring in open spaces for ease of cleaning and green plants were added to assist in air purification. Other measures included the distribution of masks, the placement of hand-sanitizer dispensers throughout the building, deep cleaning and fumigation, close follow-up with medical services on positive cases, and strict contact-tracing and quarantine and isolation in accordance with the requirements of the World Health Organization.

36. Staff were requested to resume on-site work, except for vulnerable cases, while taking the necessary precautions. Unassigned seating on a rotational basis and in-person meetings with 70 per cent capacity were authorized. Special seating arrangements and mitigation measures were implemented in cafeterias and walkways.

37. The pandemic expedited the adoption of new technologies to allow virtual and hybrid meetings with improved Wi-Fi and data connections that covered all the working areas.

38. The Commission was able to adapt its operations to the pandemic and maintain its deliverables despite the circumstances. This was secured through the working environment, the open space and flexible workspace arrangements.

39. The future workspace at the Commission will be a renovated space comprised of open, enclosed and flexible office spaces, allowing improved communication and collaboration. With an increased building capacity, the Commission will be able to attract more United Nations agencies, while implementing cost-sharing strategies. More conference rooms will be fully equipped to allow virtual and hybrid meetings using the required technologies and audiovisual systems.

United Nations Office at Nairobi

40. The United Nations Office at Nairobi is conducting a capital construction project involving office blocks A to J and, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, had established a target of 25 per cent increased office space utilization through the implementation of flexible workplace strategies. The pandemic demonstrated the staff's ability to successfully work away from the complex. Given the favourable year-round climate in Nairobi, the installation of outdoor work pods during the pandemic provided much-needed collaborative meeting and working environments, but with a reduced risk of COVID-19 infection.

41. The outdoor work pod concept has since migrated to a broader indoor-outdoor work concept at the Gigiri complex, but also continues to facilitate entities' post-COVID-19 return-to-office strategies. Staff at the Nairobi duty station have firmly embraced the indoor-outdoor work concept as one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic, and feedback has been very positive regarding the continuation of outdoor work options at the duty station.

42. It has also been demonstrated through lessons learned that furniture and technology solutions that support the hybrid-office work environment, including the provisioning of indoor pods and other options for individual phone calls and smaller team-collaboration spaces, with acoustic insulation, will be needed. Another specific outcome of both the pandemic and remote work is the need for office environments that specifically provide sufficient spaces to support face-to-face collaboration.

43. The Office will continue to take advantage of the favourable local climatic conditions in Kenya, with the ultimate intention being to provide at least one outdoor work pod per office block.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

44. Currently, the office space layout at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is the same as before the pandemic, but the occupancy rate in the compound has decreased owing to the flexible working arrangement authorized in 2022, which allows telecommuting two days per week and which remains in place, and to the blockage of workstations owing to the need for COVID-19 distancing.

45. At the present time, no changes in workplace layouts to accommodate flexible working arrangements have been implemented. However, transparent dividers for workstations, laptops, docking stations and chairs are being provided on request to support remote working. In the future, the Commission foresees the deployment of a new standard on indoor environmental quality with improved ventilation and natural lighting, along with enhanced building automation systems for management and monitoring.

Economic Commission for Africa

46. The approved flexible working arrangements allow for personnel to work from home two to three days per week. The desk/staff ratio is still 1:1 in accordance with the 2019 policy.

47. The Commission is currently starting construction on the second floor of the Niger Building to accommodate flexible and open-office workspace. The final layout, when completed in 2024, will increase the capacity of the floor from approximately 85 to more than 120 people. The leadership and staff union will review the project and apply lessons learned to improve the construction of other floors.

United Nations Office at Geneva

48. The United Nations Office at Geneva premises are currently under comprehensive renovation as part of the strategic heritage plan project. Most of the historic Palais buildings are closed. The impact of COVID-19 is therefore being assessed as the renovated buildings are reoccupied.

49. One of the future challenges in the context of post COVID-19 is to have a higher level of hygiene that makes occupants feel safe. This may result in the addition of hand-sanitizer dispensers and effective desk-cleaning products. The technologies that now have the greatest impact are Wi-Fi, laptops, tablets, smartphones, audiovisual systems, online meeting software and videoconferencing systems. Because building occupants are more and more connected in online meetings and conversations, the space would need to be designed so as to achieve adequate sound isolation. More meeting areas versus less office space also needs to be studied.

50. The Office envisions the future workspace as one that allows greater flexibility and interactivity and is conducive to collaborations, with more quiet spaces where work requiring focus and confidentiality can be performed.

United Nations Office at Vienna

51. The offices at the United Nations Office at Vienna were mostly closed during the height of the pandemic, in line with the host-country regulations.

52. During periods when a return to the Office was possible, common areas were fitted with hand-sanitizer dispensers, elevator occupancy was restricted and shared office space was arranged with dividers to minimize the risk of transmission. In the event of COVID-19 cases in the office environment, office spaces were closed and isolated and underwent special cleaning and hygiene measures. With respect to technological solutions, local tools and special connectivity have been provided for seamless online work and going forward, Internet/cloud connectivity will remain a key factor that needs to be ensured in crisis scenarios such as future pandemics, disruption of the Internet or the interruption of electrical services.

53. The sharing of office space was in place prior to COVID-19 and has increased as a result of having to accommodate more personnel given that the office space managed by the Office is confined to a finite area within the Vienna International Centre, with other United Nations system organizations occupying the other parts of the compound.

54. The future workspace post COVID-19 and in the “next normal” will feature increased office-sharing arrangements given the highlighted needs for office space.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

55. The premises of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific were fully occupied prior to COVID-19. During the first months of the pandemic, robust return-to-office planning for Thailand-based United Nations entities was developed through the COVID-19 Contingency Management Team, in full consideration of host-Government policies, United Nations Headquarters and World Health Organization guidance, duty-of-care commitments and business-continuity requirements. For the

Commission's premises, which house 29 United Nations system entities with diverse programmatic needs, return-to-office phases were designed and implemented with multilayered COVID-19 risk mitigation measures, while enabling business continuity tailored to programmatic needs, including the commencement of the construction phase of the seismic mitigation retrofit and life cycle replacements project during the pandemic period. This included the incorporation of alternate working arrangements and other flexible workplace strategies to enable required physical distancing for all occupants while achieving maximum space-efficiency ratios and striking the right balance to maintain rental income from non-Commission entities.

56. In view of the best practices and lessons learned from the above, early work (or preliminary steps) on incorporating the future working modalities within the current real estate portfolio has already been taken in the right direction. The Commission intends to undertake a full assessment of the current real estate portfolio pursuant to the completion of the seismic mitigation project construction and following the transition to the new office space, with pre-achieved 20 per cent gains in space-use efficiency through a holistic approach and with multiple parameters considered, including future working modalities, post-construction rentable space and duty-of-care commitments to meet diverse programmatic needs.

VIII. Conclusions

57. The provision of a suitable physical workspace environment that meets business needs is integral to supporting mandate delivery by the personnel of the departments and offices based at United Nations Headquarters. Over the past several years, the majority of the Secretariat Building itself has been modernized and converted to a flexible workplace environment. One of the benefits of that conversion has been an easier accommodation of minor adjustments in the workforce. The flexibility provided by the conversion has also enabled significant reductions in the commercial space leased to supplement the capacity within the Headquarters complex itself.

58. It remains critical that the workspace support current and future work methods, and the Secretary-General will continue to observe trends and gather data in order to adjust the physical workplace to the evolving needs of the Organization and its personnel.

IX. Action requested of the General Assembly

59. The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report.
