



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
4 March 2021

Original: English

---

## Seventy-fifth session

Agenda item 129

### Multilingualism

## Multilingualism

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/346](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventy-fifth session, a comprehensive report on the full implementation of its resolutions on multilingualism.

The report reaffirms the Secretary-General's vision for a multilingual, field-oriented, agile and transparent United Nations. It provides a status update on the progress made, since the submission of the previous report on this subject, ([A/73/761](#)), towards the achievement within the United Nations of a coherent approach to multilingualism, a core value of the Organization, and towards the consistent mainstreaming of multilingualism throughout the operations of all Secretariat entities, as a means of improving the Organization's efficiency, performance and transparency. This report also presents the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and the measures taken to preserve multilingualism in these tumultuous times.



## I. Introduction

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the present report provides a summary of action taken from January 2019 to December 2020. Additional data reflecting the compliance of United Nations websites and social media accounts with multilingualism requirements is presented in the supplementary information to the present report.<sup>1</sup>

## II. Coordination of multilingualism

### A. Appointment and role of the Coordinator for Multilingualism

2. In its resolution 54/64, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to appoint a senior Secretariat official as coordinator of questions relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat. The Secretary-General appointed the current Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management as Coordinator for Multilingualism, effective 3 September 2019. The terms of reference for the Coordinator (see A/71/757, annex II), endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/328, remain unchanged.

### B. Coordination within the Secretariat

#### 1. Engagement of the network of focal points

3. A network of focal points<sup>2</sup> serves as a liaison between the Coordinator for Multilingualism and the focal points' respective entities.

4. Since 1 January 2019, as a result of the delegation of authority to heads of entity, the network expanded significantly, from 60 focal points representing 38 Secretariat entities as at December 2018, to 103 focal points representing 72 entities as at December 2020.

5. The geographical and quantitative expansion of the network led to a higher level of involvement and commitment on the part of all Secretariat entities in support of multilingualism, resulting in a record-high number of entities (67)<sup>3</sup> contributing to this report.

---

<sup>1</sup> Available at: [www.un.org/dgacm/sites/www.un.org.dgacm/files/pdf/Multilingualism/multilingualism\\_sg\\_report\\_supplementary\\_info\\_75th\\_session.pdf](http://www.un.org/dgacm/sites/www.un.org.dgacm/files/pdf/Multilingualism/multilingualism_sg_report_supplementary_info_75th_session.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> An updated list of the responsibilities of the multilingualism focal points is available in the supplementary information (see above).

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Global Communications, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Department of Operational Support, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Safety and Security, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Ethics Office, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the Office of Administration of Justice, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High

## 2. Raising awareness of multilingualism

6. As Chief Executive, the Secretary-General set the tone in the Organization by defining multilingualism as one of his priorities. He consistently delivered statements, recorded video messages, conducted bilateral meetings and accepted interviews in various languages (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese).

7. Heads of several entities also used a variety of languages on a daily basis, including when engaging with national authorities or the media, and personally initiated awareness-raising campaigns in order to create an enabling environment for multilingualism and to support the Organization's commitment to diversity.

8. In order to raise awareness among leadership, senior managers in the Secretariat periodically received briefings from the Coordinator, including on the status of multilingualism in staff selection, in partnership with the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources.

9. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recently developed markers to track and report on oversight work related to organizational priorities, including gender, disability and multilingualism.

10. In order to further promote multilingualism, language-related celebrations were consistently held during the reporting period and continued in a virtual format after the start of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Whenever possible, United Nations senior managers and the Secretary-General participated in such celebrations in order to set an example and foster an inclusive organizational culture. The Coordinator leveraged the internal resources of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and its partnership with the Department of

---

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, the Development Coordination Office, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), the United Nations Office to the African Union, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the United Nations Office at Vienna, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel – the United Nations support team to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

Global Communications (including information centres, website services and United Nations News sections) to promote language-day activities internally and externally.

11. Besides language-related celebrations, additional efforts were made at a number of duty stations to raise awareness of multilingualism. Many entities organized or supported awareness-raising campaigns. In August 2020, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) conducted a survey among ESCWA secretariat staff aimed at raising awareness of multilingualism, which had a response rate of about 40 per cent. The United Nations Office at Vienna and ESCWA organized the fourteenth and fifteenth editions of the Saint Jerome Translation Contest, an annual competition celebrating linguistic diversity and translation skills that is open to all United Nations personnel and students of partner universities of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. To promote the use of a wide range of languages, the United Nations Office at Vienna encouraged all staff at the duty station to indicate their language proficiencies in their email signature blocks.

### **3. Development of a coherent approach to multilingualism**

12. Multilingualism remained a high priority. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/328, a performance indicator on supporting efficiency, performance and transparency through multilingualism was included in senior managers' compacts (under the section on commitment to diversity) in 2018 and was monitored during the reporting period. The objective of this indicator was to produce a chain reaction throughout the Organization and encourage the mainstreaming of multilingualism.

13. The development of a strategic policy framework on multilingualism was delayed owing to multiple factors, including the impact of the pandemic. After the receipt in December 2020 of an extrabudgetary contribution from the International Organization of la Francophonie, the project moved into its next phase in early 2021. All relevant entities are expected to support this endeavour.

14. The Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Department of Operational Support and the United Nations Office at Geneva continued to refine the United Nations Language Framework, which serves as a standard for language learning, teaching and assessment across United Nations Secretariat entities and United Nations official languages, contributing to a more coherent and consistent approach to multilingualism. In the long term, the Framework will facilitate the mainstreaming of multilingualism into talent management.

15. In February 2019, the Coordinator, with the support of the Office of Human Resources, initiated a Secretariat staff survey on multilingualism and language skills, using the United Nations Language Framework as a guide for self-assessments. The survey, which received 3,613 full responses from United Nations Secretariat staff representing 243 duty stations, demonstrated the significant linguistic diversity of the staff and the usefulness of the Framework in generating detailed information in support of workforce planning. In their responses, Secretariat staff collectively declared more than 200 native languages, and nearly 90 per cent considered themselves to be bilingual or multilingual. More than 90 per cent of respondents stated that they had a high level of proficiency in English, and nearly 50 per cent indicated that they had a high level of proficiency in French. In addition to the Secretariat's working languages, 25 per cent of respondents stated that they had a high level of proficiency in either Arabic, Chinese, Russian or Spanish. The survey also revealed substantial differences in the use of these languages in a professional environment.

## C. Outreach to Member States and other stakeholders

16. Outreach to Member States and other stakeholders, such as international organizations and academia, intensified during the reporting period. The Secretary-General met on several occasions with interested Member States, groups of Member States and relevant international organizations to specifically address issues related to multilingualism, both at Headquarters and in Geneva. The Coordinator and his representatives also participated and coordinated the Secretariat's participation in meetings of large groups of Member States. Similar meetings were held locally at the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna.

17. In 2019, the Coordinator, as Chair of the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), also analysed the responses to a survey on multilingualism that had been initiated by his team to collect comparative information about multilingualism. The analysis revealed differences and similarities across member organizations. The detailed findings were shared with IAMLADP member organizations. In addition, in 2019, IAMLADP adopted the Brussels Statement on multilingualism,<sup>4</sup> which was made available in 27 languages.

18. The Coordinator and his office also continued to explore partnerships with civil society, including academia, in order to strengthen multilingualism at the United Nations.

## III. Integrating multilingualism into the Secretariat: status of implementation, key findings and way forward

### A. Information and communications

#### 1. Cross-cutting measures

19. Many Secretariat entities have drawn on analyses of their clients' language needs in order to develop good practices to mainstream multilingualism in their information and communications activities and overcome resource constraints.

20. Many Secretariat entities have also made it standard practice to provide communication materials in languages other than the six official languages of the United Nations.

21. As indicated in previous reports, however, such efforts to meet the language needs of constituents and provide services in multiple languages can only be effective if they are based on language-disaggregated data, in accordance with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere.

22. In some entities, efforts have been made, pursuant to General Assembly guidance, to mainstream multilingualism from the planning stage, in order to ensure the equitable allocation of budgetary resources across languages. Several entities also highlighted the need to take languages into consideration in preparing their budgets and formulating terms of reference for different functions, in order to maximize the mainstreaming of multilingualism.

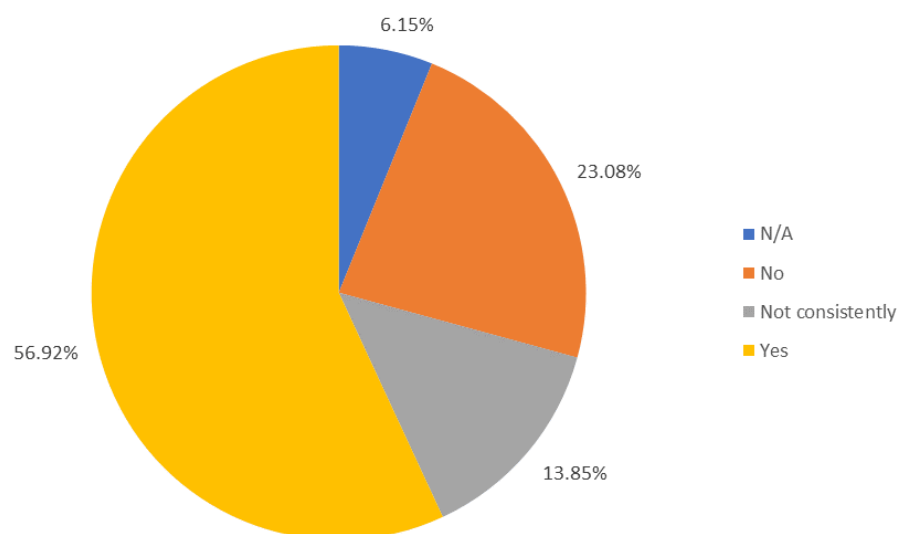
<sup>4</sup> Available at: [www.iamladp.org/sites/www.iamladp.org/files/iamladp\\_2019\\_brussels\\_declaration\\_on\\_multilingualism\\_-\\_en\\_compilation.pdf](http://www.iamladp.org/sites/www.iamladp.org/files/iamladp_2019_brussels_declaration_on_multilingualism_-_en_compilation.pdf).

## 2. Websites and social media

23. United Nations Secretariat entities continued to expand their multilingual online outreach, as reflected in the findings of the comprehensive review of their multilingual online presence, available in the supplementary information to the present report.

24. The minimum standards for multilingualism<sup>5</sup> on United Nations websites, developed by the Department of Global Communications to serve as a guide for website developers and managers, have yet to be consistently applied across Secretariat entities and their respective subdivisions. Current governance mechanisms provide for the vetting of websites developed under the un.org domain name, but websites under different domain names are outside their scope. The Secretariat entities that contributed to this report self-reported their compliance with the minimum standards, as reflected in figure I.

Figure I  
Secretariat entities' self-reported compliance with the minimum standards for multilingualism (as at 30 September 2020)



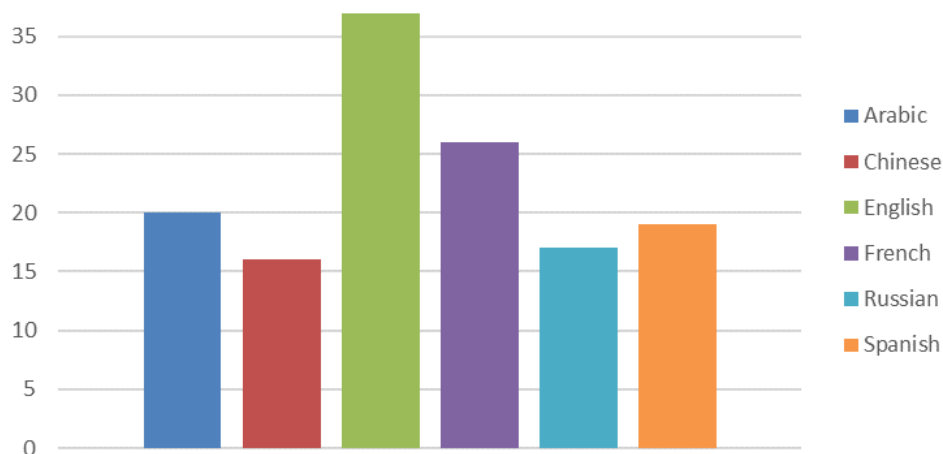
Source: Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among all Secretariat entities.

25. While 37 (57 per cent) of the responding entities reported that they were complying with the standards, they also showed diverse understandings as to how the standards should apply, indicating that they maintained websites with between only one and six (or more) language versions (see figure II), depending on whether such websites were regarded as catering to the needs of global or local audiences. Some entities<sup>6</sup> also reported that they maintained websites in non-official languages, and a few noted that the scope of the standards did not match their local realities.

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/web-governance/minimum-standards-multilingualism-united-nations-websites/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Global Communications, OHCHR, the Development Coordination Office, UNAMI, UNEP, UNMIK, the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the United Nations Office at Vienna/UNODC.

Figure II  
**Total number of language versions available, by official language, among the 37 entities which reported that they were complying with the minimum standards for multilingualism (as at 30 September 2020)**



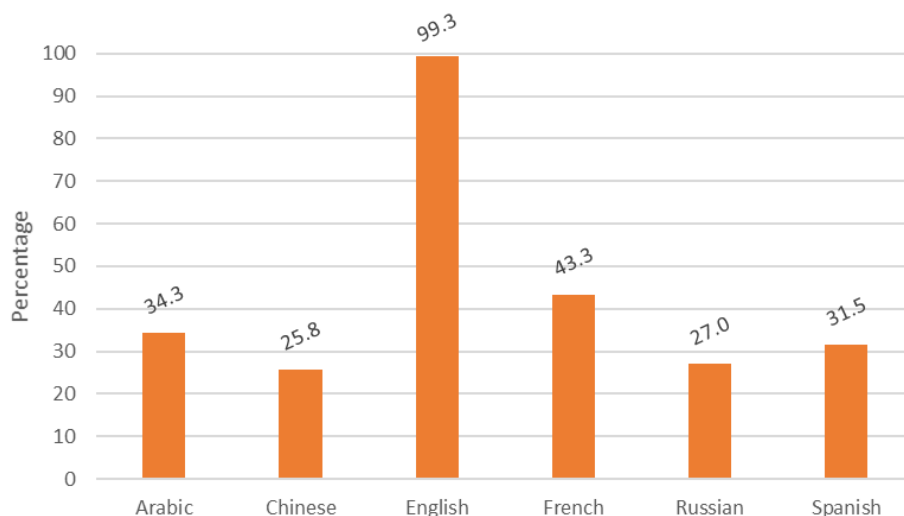
*Source:* Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among all Secretariat entities.

26. Further efforts will be made, when websites are launched and throughout their lifespans, to raise awareness of the minimum standards among United Nations Secretariat entities, with a view to reducing disparities among the official languages.

27. As part of the comprehensive review of the Secretariat's multilingual online presence, and as indicated in the previous report on multilingualism (A/73/761), the volume of content available in each language was also considered, as it may affect website usage, given that users tend to seek the most complete information.

28. The review revealed that websites under the purview of the Department of Global Communications were overwhelmingly compliant with the principle of the parity of official languages; 88.6 per cent of them are available in the six languages, with similar content available in each language. However, some entities, especially smaller ones, have faced considerable challenges in maintaining several language versions simultaneously, in the absence of dedicated budgetary or human resources to enable the translation and uploading of web content. While core content is generally available in multiple languages, news and other content with a short lifespan is often published only in the original language (generally English). Entities also observed that multilingualism needed to be taken into consideration at an early stage in order to allot time for translation and revision in all required languages and to enable simultaneous publishing, which was not always taken into account. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic had made it necessary to provide urgent online guidance to constituents, resulting in further discrepancies among language versions. Most Secretariat entities noted that the above-mentioned constraints had been impediments to implementing the multilingualism mandate in the area of information and communications. Figure III provides an overview of average content availability, by language, across entities.

Figure III  
**Estimated average percentage of external website content available, by official language (as at 30 September 2020)**



*Source:* Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among all Secretariat entities.

29. In order to overcome these challenges, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) established a position of coordinator for the Office's multilingual website. To reduce disparities between the language versions of its website (English and French), the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi decided, as an initial step, to conduct a comprehensive review of its existing website content. Similarly, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), which currently maintains a monolingual website, will review its content in order to expand language coverage. The Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services conducted a clients' needs analysis, which revealed that there was growing demand for web content in Arabic and Spanish. In 2020, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management launched its new website, whose content reflects the parity of the six official languages. In 2020, the United Nations Office at Geneva replaced its bilingual website with a new web platform fully capable of operating in the six official languages, and strongly encouraged web writers and editors to provide content in as many languages as possible (although most of the content is currently available in English and French only). These solutions are best practices that other entities may wish to consider adopting.

30. Social media have continued to grow as channels for communication with United Nations audiences. In recognition of the Secretariat's growing social media presence, a Secretary-General's bulletin ([ST/SGB/2019/5](#)) was issued to provide a legal and operational framework for the institutional use of social media. The bulletin mainstreams multilingualism and is expected to trigger a chain reaction within the Secretariat, as it calls on heads of entities to consider paragraph 36 of General Assembly resolution [69/324](#) on multilingualism when establishing new social media accounts. In accordance with the bulletin, the Department of Global Communications now maintains a database of all accounts managed by Secretariat entities, which includes information about the language(s) of operations.

31. Overall, it was found that Secretariat entities primarily produce social media content in English, but sometimes rely on their staff's language skills to provide



translations when required, in order to meet the needs of a specific target audience. However, entities that measure engagement rates disaggregated by language, such as ESCWA, observed that social media posts in the local language at the duty station (Arabic, in the case of ESCWA) enjoyed higher engagement levels than those in other languages. Accordingly, the United Nations Office at Geneva established a separate Twitter account in 2020 to engage its French-speaking audiences. Some entities, such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Development Coordination Office, relied on their regional or country offices to provide content in a variety of languages. Several entities applauded the efforts made by the social media team of the Department of Global Communications to share aggregated multilingual content from various parts of the United Nations, as a cost-effective solution.

32. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the demand for online engagement with the United Nations, including through social media, at a time when the language staff of the Department of Global Communications was facing severe challenges due to the pause both in the recruitment of consultants and in the filling of vacancies. The number of followers of accounts managed by the Department's social media team across all languages and platforms grew steadily, from 32 million in August 2018 to 42 million in August 2020. The team was instrumental in supporting the Organization's campaign against misinformation relating to COVID-19, using all official languages, as well as Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese, to reach a wider audience.

33. However, several entities reported that their multilingual social media presence had been negatively affected by the pandemic. For the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the halt on internship onboarding had been particularly detrimental, as interns had proven to be a significant asset in support of multilingualism on social media. Other entities had relied on different strategies, such as using United Nations Online Volunteers, in order to meet the need for multilingual content.

34. In order to increase impact and make the best use of limited resources, the social media team of the Department of Global Communications will continue to serve as a central hub across entities and languages, enabling field entities to further enhance engagement with their constituents, as a matter of priority, in the language(s) of the host country, especially when it is an official language of the United Nations.

### **3. Audiovisual and multimedia services**

35. Audiovisual and multimedia services continued to serve as key enablers of outreach to linguistically diverse audiences around the world.

36. United Nations News produced original content daily in nine languages during the reporting period, following the addition of Hindi in 2018 based on extrabudgetary funding received from the Government of India. United Nations News continued its real-time multilingual reporting on the work of the principal organs of the United Nations, including meetings of the General Assembly and the Security Council held in a virtual format. Traffic to United Nations News platforms increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, from 20 million page views in 2019 to 70 million in 2020, with United Nations News Spanish registering a 265 per cent increase in page views between January and August 2020. United Nations News and United Nations Video rose to the challenges of the pandemic, showcasing, in a variety of languages, examples of how misinformation was being dispelled and supplies were being delivered worldwide. United Nations News teams stepped up their collaboration with United Nations resident coordinator offices to create, in various languages, multimedia stories of groundbreaking work being done at the country and regional levels. United Nations News was also instrumental in promoting linguistic diversity

at the United Nations, disseminating stories, podcasts and videos on language-related celebrations, including language days and the International Year of Indigenous Languages (2019).

37. During the main parts of the seventy-fourth and seventy-fifth sessions of the General Assembly, the Department of Global Communications offered, on its United Nations Web TV website, live webcast videos, in the six official languages, of all plenary meetings of the General Assembly, including the general debate, and of public meetings of the Security Council. The Department continues to explore options to ensure the availability of multilingual metadata to enable search functions in all official languages. Although the Department of Global Communications, the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management are working to connect separate software systems in the context of these efforts, the Department of Global Communications noted that dedicated language staff would need to be made available to review and approve metadata in the respective languages.<sup>7</sup>

38. Although the General Assembly had approved the establishment of six new positions to enable the United Nations Information Service in Geneva to deliver its services in all official languages, five of those positions remained vacant in 2020, as a result of the hiring freeze and cash-flow restrictions. However, the technical infrastructure enabling audio streams to be webcast in multiple languages from several rooms at the United Nations Office at Geneva was upgraded in 2020. In addition, in order to provide more open access to the debates of the Social Forum of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR voluntarily reallocated extrabudgetary resources earmarked for air travel in order to enable broadcast coverage of the debates and the archiving of the webcast recordings in the six official languages.

39. Several entities also strategically produced video programmes to support mandate delivery. For instance, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) regularly broadcasts video messages in Greek and Turkish with English subtitles, while the Office of Legal Affairs, which oversees the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, encourages speakers to record lectures in several United Nations official languages.

40. Radio programmes continued to be broadcast in a wide range of official and local languages at the main duty stations and in field locations, with the aim of reaching the most isolated areas and overcoming connectivity and literacy barriers. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), for instance, reported that the local radio station Radio Miraya had occasionally broadcast programmes in Arabic as well as English, and had aired interviews in local languages, providing translations into English or Arabic. In the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Radio Okapi airs programmes in Kikongo, Kiswahili, Lingala and Tshiluba, in addition to French. In the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Mikado FM airs programmes either in French or in certain locally used languages, such as Arabic, Bambara, Tamasheq, Peulh and Songhoi. At the United Nations Office at Geneva, in addition to a dedicated weekly segment in English on World Radio Switzerland, a “week in review” podcast in French was launched by the United Nations Information Service.

---

<sup>7</sup> Resources have been approved under the 2021 budget of the Department of Global Communications to strengthen services, but their provision will be subject to recruitment and liquidity considerations.

#### 4. Publications and library services

41. Publications and library services at the various duty stations also continued to contribute to the mainstreaming of multilingualism at the United Nations, including through innovative practices.

42. During the reporting period:

- The Department of Economic and Social Affairs published the Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish editions of the 2020 United Nations E-Government Survey through pro bono arrangements with partners in various sectors, from academia to government, in the United Arab Emirates (Arabic), China (Chinese), Kazakhstan (Russian) and Argentina (Spanish).
- The Department of Global Communications collaborated with Soochow University (China) to facilitate the translation into Chinese of a special edition of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*.
- The *UN Chronicle* was published simultaneously in the six official languages for the first time, following its conversion to an online-only format. The liquidity crisis negatively affected the ability of the Department of Global Communications to continue to provide coverage in the six languages, however.
- The Office of Legal Affairs continued to publish the *United Nations Treaty Series*, one of the Organization's most multilingual publications, containing the text of treaties in more than 100 languages.
- The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) continued to ensure that training materials were translated into Arabic and presented to stakeholders in the relevant language.
- The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) published posters communicating measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 which, with the support of minority groups, were published in six local languages, in addition to Arabic, English and Kurdish.
- The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) consistently issued publications and press releases in local Darfur Arabic, in addition to English, to increase the uptake of information by local media.
- The United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime issued publications in all official languages, as well as Bahasa Indonesia, Italian, German, Macedonian, Portuguese, Slovene, Urdu and Vietnamese.

43. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continued to provide online research guides in the six official languages, as well as access to multilingual research databases. The Library expanded its "Ask Dag" service to include a Chinese language version, and made steady progress in implementing its in-house digitization project, aimed at uploading documents to the Official Document System and the United Nations Digital Library System.

44. The Library at the United Nations Office at Geneva continued to host regular events in and about various languages. Individual events were held in one or more of a variety of languages, including the six official languages, Croatian, Filipino, German, Hebrew, Icelandic, Korean, Portuguese, Serbian, Slovak and Thai. The Library's print collection includes volumes in 123 languages, and its online collection includes volumes in 85 languages.

## 5. United Nations information centres and visitor centres

45. The network of United Nations information centres has been instrumental in conveying United Nations messages across the globe in a variety of languages, often working directly in the target language. The 59 operational information centres use 27 languages on a regular basis and, at times, use up to as many as 124 languages.<sup>8</sup> As at 30 September 2020, United Nations information centres had translated the Sustainable Development Goals and related materials into 104 languages. The centres played a key role in making the statements of the Secretary-General available in local languages. The United Nations information centre in Nairobi, for instance, has striven to provide its local audiences with materials translated into Kiswahili. United Nations information centres were also actively involved in language-related celebrations: during the reporting period, the centres organized 20 activities, in up to 31 languages, to mark these occasions. In addition to producing content in multiple languages, information centres have also contributed to the local dissemination of multilingual communications products from other entities, such as promotional materials developed by OHCHR for the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

46. In the framework of United Nations development reforms, 44 United Nations information centres were integrated into resident coordinator offices, and many of their websites and social media accounts were merged with those of United Nations country teams. To date, more than 100 such integrated country team websites offer high-quality content in a total of 21 official and local languages, with more language versions being launched as content is consolidated and translated, and the integrated social media accounts disseminate information in a total of 32 official and local languages. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, United Nations information centres and resident coordinator offices also played a key role in translating prevention materials into various languages in order to facilitate outreach to indigenous peoples, migrants and various ethnic groups.

47. In the four main duty stations (New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi), tour guides also contributed to a multilingual United Nations by offering tours in 23 languages<sup>9</sup> on a regular basis and in additional languages on special occasions.<sup>10</sup> In 2019, nearly 500,000 visitors were hosted. While in-person guided tours were suspended in early 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, visitor centres across the United Nations swiftly developed new formats to enable them to continue to reach out to visitors in multiple languages. They also relied on their personnel's language skills in order to design video messages and other informational materials.

## 6. Internal communications and communication with Member States

48. When responding to written communications from Member States, many entities use the language of the incoming correspondence, provided it is an official language of the United Nations. The visitor centre in New York and the social media team of the Department of Global Communications also take this approach when responding to questions received from the general public. When disseminating correspondence, Secretariat entities generally use the language indicated in the United Nations Blue Book as the language of correspondence, and United Nations

<sup>8</sup> See tables 4 to 7 of the supplementary information.

<sup>9</sup> Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Kiswahili, Korean, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swiss German, Turkish and Urdu.

<sup>10</sup> On International Mother Language Day, the United Nations visitor centre in Nairobi offered tours in Kikuyu, one of the languages spoken in the host country. On International Sign Language Day, the visitor centre in Geneva offered tours in International and French Sign Languages.

information centres often use local languages. To ensure a smoother workflow and more effective use of the Organization's limited resources, staff at all entities will continue to be encouraged to operate directly in the target language, especially when it is a working language of the Secretariat.

49. Internal communications can have an impact on the Organization's work culture and serve as powerful tools by creating an enabling environment for staff to use the various languages they have, depending on the situation, or by inspiring them to acquire additional languages, if necessary.

50. On the intranet sites of Secretariat entities, an average of 98 per cent of the content is available in English (a proportion that has remained unchanged since 2018), and 16 per cent is available in French (an increase of 23 per cent since 2018). Entities will be made aware of the language functionalities offered by SharePoint, a Microsoft tool that was introduced during the reporting period as a replacement for the decommissioned Unite Connections. While the integration of field missions into iSeek has resulted in more content being available in French, there remains an overall imbalance between the working languages in internal communications which will need to be reduced in order to foster an inclusive and welcoming working environment, in accordance with the minimum requirements for staff recruitment established by the General Assembly in its resolution 2480 (XXIII). Efforts to better reflect the Organization's commitment to multilingualism internally will continue to be made, especially in order to achieve more effective outcomes. The Office of Information and Communications Technology, with the assistance of the Coordinator for Multilingualism, will raise the profile of existing communication tools in support of multilingualism.

51. Since the transfer of responsibility for the dissemination of broadcast messages from the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance to the Department of Global Communications in April 2020, all such messages have been made available in English, and about half have been made available in French. The iSeek team of the Department of Global Communications consistently encourages entities to submit their drafts in both working languages and sets an example by publishing its own messages in both working languages. The Department of Operational Support also disseminated COVID-19 guidance in English and French. In response to the request made by the General Assembly, the Secretariat continued to provide Member States with access to the multilingual information available through iSeek by revamping its delegate-facing site ([un.org/delegate](https://un.org/delegate)).

52. While most entities reported using only English during staff-management meetings, a few used English and French interpretation or addressed questions interchangeably in either language,<sup>11</sup> and others used additional languages during their town hall meetings<sup>12</sup> in order to engage with all staff categories.

<sup>11</sup> BINUH, the Department of Operational Support, the Department of Peace Operations, MINUSMA, MINUSCA, MONUSCO, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel – the United Nations support team to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission.

<sup>12</sup> ECLAC, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia used Spanish; MINUSCA used Sango; UNAMID and UNMHA used Arabic; the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia used Russian; and UNEP and UNISFA used other local languages.

## B. Management

### 1. Cross-cutting measures

53. Since 2018, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/328, senior managers' compacts, including those of special representatives of the Secretary-General in field missions, have included requirements related to multilingualism and/or language considerations.

54. Of the 64 entities that submitted inputs on this topic, 20 field missions<sup>13</sup> reported that they had integrated multilingualism into their planning and budgets, and 35 non-field entities<sup>14</sup> reported that they had integrated multilingualism into their workplans.

55. Nine entities<sup>15</sup> reported that their senior managers had included additional objectives in support of multilingualism in their compacts. As a result, multilingualism has been fully incorporated into the applicable divisional workplans.

56. Numerous examples in the Secretariat demonstrate how multilingualism has been mainstreamed into the daily work of various entities, including through thorough analyses of constituents' and clients' language needs, starting at the planning stage.

57. Measuring progress towards multilingualism also requires access to language-disaggregated metrics to support data-driven decision-making, in line with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere. Many Secretariat entities have developed tools for this purpose. However, not all entities currently maintain language-disaggregated metrics, and it will remain a priority of the Organization to seek the opportunity to improve decision-making and policy advice by harnessing the potential of data.

<sup>13</sup> BINUH, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, UNAMI, UNAMID, UNDOF, UNFICYP, UNIFIL, UNISFA, UNMIK, UNMISS, UNMOGIP, the United Nations Office to the African Union, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

<sup>14</sup> The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Global Communications, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Department of Operational Support, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Safety and Security, ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, the Ethics Office, the Office of Administration of Justice, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, OHCHR, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, OIOS, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, UNCTAD, the Development Coordination Office, UNEP, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the United Nations Office at Vienna/UNODC.

<sup>15</sup> The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Global Communications, the Department of Operational Support, UNAMI, UNMIK, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the United Nations Office at Vienna/UNODC.

## 2. Conference management

58. An update on innovations made in conference management at the four main duty stations can be found in report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/75/89).

59. The COVID-19 pandemic and liquidity constraints severely affected conference services throughout the Secretariat. With regard to multilingual intergovernmental documentation services, considerable disruptions to workload planning occurred, as numerous unplanned documents related to the pandemic were submitted for processing. That additional workload further increased the pressure on documentation services, whose capacity had already been affected by the hiring freeze imposed as a result of the liquidity constraints. Overall, translation and support services were able to continue to deliver their work, as the main production tools used by those services were already web-based and language staff could access them remotely. A number of work-sharing arrangements across duty stations and occupational groups<sup>16</sup> were also put in place in order to better utilize capacity. The goal was to achieve the simultaneous distribution of official documents in all mandated languages, although mandated deadlines could not always be met. While this effort demonstrates the professionalism and dedication of language staff under the most difficult circumstances, it should also be noted that this approach is not sustainable in the long term.

60. The online language tools developed in-house by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management proved instrumental in ensuring the delivery of high-quality multilingual content at the global level. For instance, the adoption by the World Health Organization of eLUNA, the computer-assisted translation tool developed by the Department, and the United Nations Terminology Database (UNTERM) made relevant COVID-19-related terminology in the six official languages available to all organizations and to the general public, contributing to the quality and consistency of multilingual documentation across the United Nations system. Interpreters from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and staff from the Department of Global Communications received access to and training in eLUNA and the eLUNA search function so that they could assist with the translation of large volumes of COVID-19-related content produced in the six official languages for the United Nations website, including the newly developed COVID-19 response portal (<https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus>).

61. With regard to meeting services, the immediate impact of the measures restricting in-person meetings was significant, as they resulted in massive cancellations and postponements of calendar meetings. Once meetings were allowed to resume, room capacity was drastically reduced in all duty stations as a result of the social-distancing protocols in place, posing a significant challenge to meetings management.

62. In 2020, to ensure business continuity, interpretation services, in collaboration with the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the Procurement Division, successfully introduced remote working methods, on relatively short notice, which was made possible owing to the prevalent culture of innovation and agility. Interpretation services representing several duty stations<sup>17</sup> actively engaged in the testing of remote meeting and interpretation platforms, in the context of their procurement, and developed guidelines for conducting virtual meetings. Also in 2020,

---

<sup>16</sup> Before virtual meetings started, interpreters, for instance, leveraged their diverse language skills by providing written translations of a number of COVID-19-related documents and materials.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Headquarters, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna, and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as well as ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA, participated in this testing phase.

interpreters designed online tests and training courses for freelance interpreters and other audiences as part of their succession planning efforts.

63. Notwithstanding those efforts, OHCHR noted complaints received from the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other treaty bodies regarding the lack of accessibility for persons with visual impairment of remote simultaneous interpretation platforms. OHCHR also pointed out the costs involved in operating the platforms. Commercial vendors who own the platforms have been provided with feedback and have demonstrated commitment to improving their services.

64. In addition, at the Secretariat level, it was noted that, irrespective of resource availability, translation was not always a realistic option, especially for technical and/or time-sensitive documents. The Department of Safety and Security noted that it was difficult to identify translators working into local languages with specialized knowledge of security matters, even when resources were available. MINUSMA noted that high illiteracy rates were an obstacle to the effectiveness of written materials translated into local languages. In addition, entities that rely heavily on extrabudgetary funding pointed out that securing voluntary contributions for translation, especially in the six official languages, was particularly challenging, and that setting priorities was consequently necessary. Donors often required translation to be performed only into their language and/or the language perceived as most relevant for project implementation. Most entities reported a lack of dedicated human or budgetary resources for translation of unofficial documents and materials, in particular web translations, which resulted in priority being given to languages that were most relevant for communication purposes. Others mentioned that information security concerns should be taken into account when outsourcing translations. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management indicated its availability to continue to provide professional advice to various entities in order to help them optimize their translation projects.

65. In order to overcome such challenges, Secretariat entities have developed different strategies. Some entities have fully integrated multilingualism into their activities and plan ahead for language needs, while others make provisions for translation or interpretation as part of extrabudgetary project implementation. Other entities use automated translation tools, rely on United Nations Volunteers or consultants, or procure translation services on the private market. Several noted they would benefit from a corporate contract available for all Secretariat entities, access to professional tools used by United Nations translators and/or more consistent funding mechanisms for unofficial translation and interpretation needs. Some entities partnered with academic institutions, non-governmental organizations or international organizations to have their communications translated on a pro bono basis, while others conducted workshops, training and technical cooperation directly in the local language.

66. In 2020, leveraging the opportunities offered by new technology and artificial intelligence, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management produced the first set of machine-readable General Assembly resolutions in the six official languages. These were made available to the general public and served as raw material for the automatic generation of volume I of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session ([A/75/49 \(Vol. I\)](#)), accelerating the simultaneous issuance of the volume in all six languages by six months.



### 3. Human resources management

#### Policies

67. Whether in the area of information and communications, in substantive areas of work or in management, staff are central to the mainstreaming of multilingualism throughout the Organization. Staff buy-in enables the collective cultivation of an organizational culture that nurtures multilingualism as a core value and upholds the language arrangements in place at the United Nations, from within existing resources. This enabled the Organization to address the language needs of constituencies, including United Nations bodies, Member States and host countries, and civil society at large.

68. Accordingly, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, with the support of the Coordinator, is mainstreaming multilingualism into several ongoing strategic human resources projects, including by revising the United Nations competency framework, developing a new approach to mobility, implementing a strategic workforce planning framework and developing a global learning strategy.

69. In parallel, the Division of Operational Support and the United Nations Office at Geneva, in consultation with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, fine-tuned the United Nations Language Framework which provides a common definition of the four levels of language competence – levels I through IV – in use in the United Nations. These levels will support the use of common assessment criteria for language proficiency examinations, inform career development activities and aid recruitment, and also make a common curriculum in the six official languages possible. Efforts have been made to raise awareness of the Framework among the relevant stakeholders and the staff. The new assessment criteria for the examinations have been established based on the descriptors of level III of language competence, and the language learning catalogue is being gradually aligned with the aforementioned language competence levels. The Framework is expected to be formalized in a Secretary-General's bulletin in 2021, paving the way for the alignment of related human resources processes.

70. Following the staff survey on multilingualism and language skills initiated by the Coordinator with the support of the Office of Human Resources in 2019 (see paragraph 15 above), the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Division of Operational Support initiated a pilot project to demonstrate how multilingualism can be used in talent management. The project built on the language competence levels defined in the United Nations Language Framework to develop a consistent methodology for defining language requirements and identifying gaps in language skills. The ultimate objective was to gather information about the workforce's language skills and to support the respective entities in decision-making.

71. Several Secretariat entities expressed interest in such initiatives, while others, such as the Department of Safety and Security, the Ethics Office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services and UNIFIL, had already established ad hoc mechanisms to identify their staff's language skills and any capacity gaps.

#### Recruitment and placement

##### *Language requirements*

72. As the Secretary-General stated in his report entitled "Global human resources strategy 2019–2021: building a more effective, transparent and accountable United Nations" (A/73/372), a strong United Nations, staffed by an agile, multidisciplinary, multilingual and independent international civil service, is needed more than ever.

Recruitment and staff development have traditionally been the main instruments for nurturing a multilingual workforce possessing the adequate language skill set to overcome the challenges of the twenty-first century, which call for increased flexibility, adaptability and client orientation. With the discontinuation of language incentives for the Professional and higher categories as of 1 January 2017, in line with General Assembly resolution [70/244](#), recruitment is becoming the leading tool for shaping the Secretariat's multilingual workforce. Making language competence a requirement at the recruitment stage can also incentivize staff to acquire additional languages to expand their career opportunities. In the absence of comprehensive data on the language skills of staff, language requirements in job openings are a useful indicator for assessing the status of multilingualism in the Secretariat and the progress made towards building a multilingual workforce.

73. The detailed analysis contained in the previous report on multilingualism ([A/73/761](#)) has been updated below using 2019 as the reference year for the current cycle.<sup>18</sup> Although the General Assembly reaffirmed the need to respect the equality of the working languages of the Secretariat in its resolution [71/263](#) on human resources management, and in previous resolutions on the same subject, only a minority of vacancy announcements require either English or French (68 openings in 2019, or 1.13 per cent of all openings<sup>19</sup> published in 2019). Based on information collected from Inspira, it also appears that knowledge of the official language(s) spoken in host countries of field entities is not always required for hiring staff across or within duty stations. Of 103 distinct entities inventoried in Inspira for the year 2019,<sup>20</sup> 47 (45.6 per cent) did not require knowledge of languages other than English in their job openings, while 90 (87.4 per cent) required English for all their job openings, sometimes in addition to other languages.<sup>21</sup> Overall, the imbalances observed across working or official languages in the previous report<sup>22</sup> deepened in 2019, with all languages stagnating or declining except English, as shown in figure IV. This trend is also observed at the four main duty stations, including in Geneva,<sup>23</sup> where French was required in 14.9 per cent of the openings published in 2019 (a 13.62 per cent decline since 2017). There were also discrepancies between entities, depending on the job family, including in the field missions where knowledge of multiple languages has traditionally been required. A field mission in a French-speaking country with over 40 per cent of local staff, for instance, required both French and English in 2019 for 100 per cent of its openings in the political, peace and humanitarian field, but for only 38 per cent of openings in management and administration and 9 per cent of openings in the logistics, transportation and supply chain field.

<sup>18</sup> The annual figures may be distorted owing to the temporary recruitment freeze implemented in 2019 in response to the Secretariat-wide liquidity crisis.

<sup>19</sup> Including job openings, temporary job openings, competitive examination announcements and internship announcements.

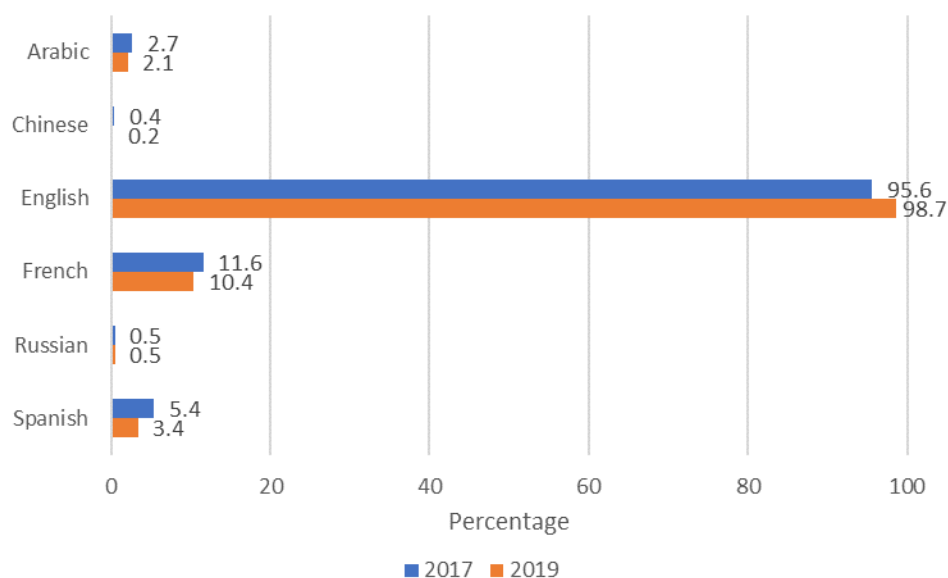
<sup>20</sup> The number of entities is higher in Inspira than in the Secretariat at large because some field missions closed and new offices opened during the reporting period.

<sup>21</sup> The following 14 entities issued one or more job openings in 2019 which did not require English: BINUH, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Global Communications, the Economic Commission for Africa, ECLAC, ESCAP, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OHCHR, UNCTAD, the Development Coordination Office, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Office at Geneva.

<sup>22</sup> [A/73/761](#), paras. 42–49.

<sup>23</sup> Geneva includes all posts stationed in the city, not only the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Figure IV  
**Language requirements in all openings published in 2017 and 2019, by official language required (by percentage)**



Source: Inspira.

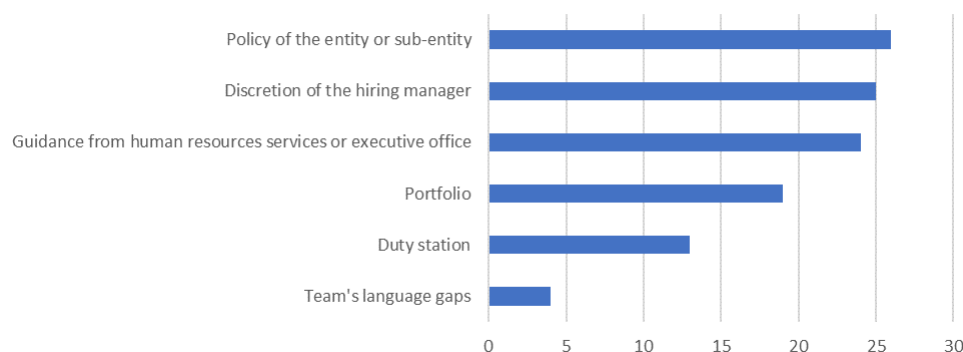
Note: The percentages reflect the total number of distinct job openings published, where job openings that required competence in more than one language were counted under each of the required languages.

74. In line with the delegation of authority which became effective on 1 January 2019, senior managers will be regularly updated on the status of multilingualism in recruitment in their respective entities, in an effort to raise their awareness, improve accountability and prompt corrective measures where necessary. As Chief Executive of a field-oriented organization with a universal membership, the Secretary-General will continue to exercise his authority to encourage greater linguistic diversity in the workforce to foster a nurturing environment for all, generate efficiency gains, increase transparency and enhance the Organization's overall performance.

75. In recognition of the responsibility that senior leaders have for setting the tone for achieving multilingualism within the Organization and of the role language skills play in establishing working relationships and implementing mandates, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General will continue to include information about language proficiency in notices of senior appointments.

76. As previously observed, Secretariat entities reported using a wide variety of criteria when setting language requirements. In some entities, human resources services adopted a proactive approach to ensure that hiring managers adequately reflected language requirements in vacancy announcements. In others, no specific guidance was received, other than the guidance shared by the Office of Human Resources in its Staff Selection System Manual, while still others reported that only knowledge of English was required for all positions at the entity. Figure V presents a summary of the factors used, at times cumulatively, to determine language requirements in job openings by Secretariat entities.

Figure V  
**Factors determining language requirements in job openings, by number of responding Secretariat entities (as at 30 September 2020)**



Source: Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among all Secretariat entities.

77. During the reporting period, the Office of Human Resources updated both the English and the French versions of the Staff Selection System Manual, including the guidelines on setting language requirements in job openings. In view of hiring managers' authority in setting language requirements in job openings and in recognition of the role that individual decisions play in shaping a multilingual workforce, the Office of Human Resources will continue to provide Secretariat-wide guidance in this area and to align its existing materials with the newly developed United Nations Language Framework.

#### *Language assessments*

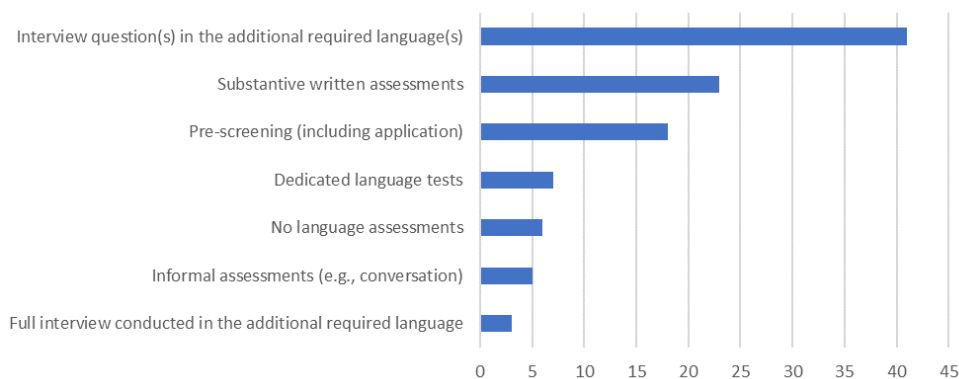
78. When a certain level of proficiency in a language is strictly required in a job opening, the language requirement constitutes an eligibility criterion. The staff selection process must establish that applicants meet all eligibility criteria. By contrast, when proficiency in a language is regarded as desirable, or an asset or advantage, this may be used to establish a candidate's suitability for the position, but need not be assessed during the staff selection process.

79. On the basis of information received from Secretariat entities, it appears that hiring managers tend to follow a restrictive approach when setting eligibility criteria to be included in job openings. Language requirements are often used to determine suitability and to shortlist applicants, where applicable.

80. Secretariat entities have continued to use diverse methods to assess language proficiency, sometimes cumulatively, as summarized in figure VI. The inclusion of one or more questions in the required languages during the competency-based interview is still the preferred method, which poses practical challenges, as described in the previous report (A/73/761, para. 59). Several entities have put strategies in place to overcome such challenges. In the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, for non-language posts, when no assessment panel members are available who have the required language skills, hiring managers are advised to incorporate the language skill assessment into technical tests. ESCWA, which regards a multilingual staff as a precondition to executing its mandates, has developed innovative language assessment tools: applicants to non-language positions complete a preliminary assessment through video interviews and online essays using third-party platforms, which ensure the equal treatment of applicants and ensure that only those

who meet the eligibility criteria of the job opening are admitted to the next step of the selection process.

Figure VI  
**Methods of assessing language skills in the staff selection process in the Secretariat, by number of responding entities (as at 30 September 2020)**



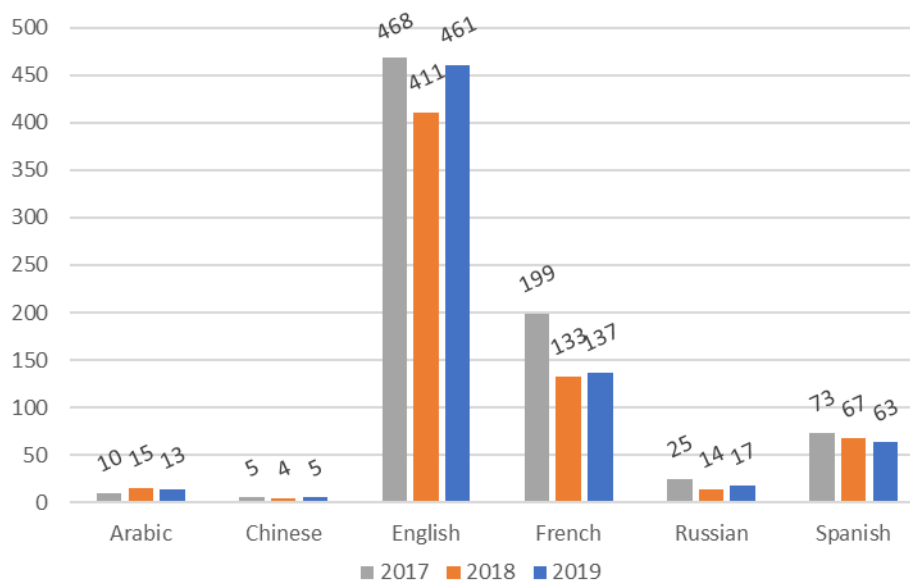
Source: Survey conducted by the Coordinator for Multilingualism among all Secretariat entities.

81. In order to achieve a multilingual workforce at the Secretariat, all entities will be encouraged to be consistent when assessing the required (and, wherever possible, the desirable) language skills of applicants, including in the applicable working language(s) in accordance with resolution 2480 B (XXIII) (para. 1 (a) (i)), using the new United Nations Language Framework as a reference guide. The Division of Operational Support and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance will be expected to continue to provide guidance in this area, including on the composition of interview panels, assessment methodology and available tools.

82. One such tool is the language proficiency examination, an internal language proficiency test designed to assess staff members' knowledge of an official language other than their mother tongue. Passing the examination entitles staff in the General Service and related categories to the payment of language allowances and, prior to 2017, resulted in the payment of language incentives to staff in the Professional and higher categories.<sup>24</sup> The examination was revised substantially during the reporting period. The Division of Operational Support, which now administers the examination, with the support of the Office of Information and Communications Technology, automated the delivery of the examination using an online platform. As a result of these improvements, the number of applications increased significantly for all languages in 2020, including from staff members stationed in remote locations. The online format also made it possible to continue to administer the examination despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure VII provides an overview of the examination's continued appeal among United Nations Secretariat staff members despite the discontinuation of language incentives.

<sup>24</sup> The language incentives were discontinued as of 1 January 2017, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/244.

Figure VII  
**Number of candidates invited to take the language proficiency examination, by language**



Source: Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (2017 and 2018) and the Division of Operational Support (2019).

Note: The full data set for 2020 will become available later in 2021.

### Training

83. Along with recruitment and placement, training and staff development provide an important avenue for cultivating and developing a multilingual workforce.

#### *Onboarding*

84. The Division of Operational Support, recognizing that welcoming multilingual staff starts from the moment they are selected, developed a new Inspira user interface in English and French for the onboarding process, with support from the Office of Information and Communications Technology. OHCHR organized coffee briefings in the Organization's official languages as part of the Office's peer learning programme, while the Development Coordination Office has consistently underlined the importance of multilingualism in all information and communications activities in its induction webinars for newly recruited communications and advocacy officers.

#### *Substantive and mandatory training*

85. Multilingualism has also been increasingly mainstreamed in substantive training, including mandatory training activities,<sup>25</sup> many of which are available in English and French, in line with a long-standing commitment made by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, and in other languages whenever possible, such as the BSAFE training course developed by the Department of Safety

<sup>25</sup> I Know Gender; BSAFE; Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Abuse by United Nations Personnel – Working Harmoniously; Ethics and Integrity at the United Nations; Information-Security Awareness Foundational; Preventing Fraud and Corruption at the United Nations; United Nations Human Rights Responsibilities; HIV/AIDS in the Workplace Orientation Programme; and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

and Security, which is available in the six official languages. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs sought to make learning and development activities available in multiple languages, building on staff capacity at Headquarters and at field locations. OHCHR organized field-based training activities in the relevant languages, with assistance from local trainers. The Office of Legal Affairs conducted substantive training in English, French, Spanish and occasionally Russian, and even in local languages, with the help of local interpreters, as appropriate. The Development Coordination Office organized language-specific training and webinars for United Nations country teams. The Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services reported that their services are consistently provided in those languages that are required by the recipients. The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia provided training to locally recruited staff in Russian, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon made in-person training available in Arabic and English, and the International Narcotics Control Board in Vienna developed e-learning modules in Spanish.

### *Language training*

86. The Secretariat's language training programmes, which also play a key role in the development of a multilingual workforce, went through significant changes, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during the reporting period:

- At some forerunner locations (Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva in particular), course curricula were completely redesigned to align them with the new United Nations Language Framework.
- Language training programmes at the various duty stations diversified their catalogues by offering a mix of in-person and online (tutored or self-paced) courses<sup>26</sup> in both longer and shorter formats and by scheduling courses at different times of the year<sup>27</sup> or the week to meet the needs of a diverse workforce. While the language programmes at Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva offer courses only in the six official languages, other entities have offered courses in non-official languages to support staff performance and integration: the United Nations Office at Vienna offers German; the Economic Commission for Africa – Amharic; ECLAC – Portuguese; MINUSCA – Sango; MONUSCO – Lingala and Kiswahili; and the United Nations Office at Nairobi – Kiswahili and Portuguese. Also in 2019 and 2020, MINURSO launched a new language learning programme for both civilian and uniformed personnel and a similar programme was offered by troop-contributing countries at UNIFIL. In addition to language courses in the strictest sense, some field missions also offer training on points of culture of the host country.
- After many United Nations premises closed temporarily in early 2020 in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, language training programmes at various duty stations quickly reconfigured their learning catalogues to support business continuity,<sup>28</sup> building on their previous experience with online training (as described in [A/73/761](#), paras. 61–65). As a result, this enabled more Secretariat staff members, from more diverse locations, including remote field missions, to

<sup>26</sup> During the reporting period, online language learning licences continued to be in use. In 2019 alone, 696 licences were distributed to staff members.

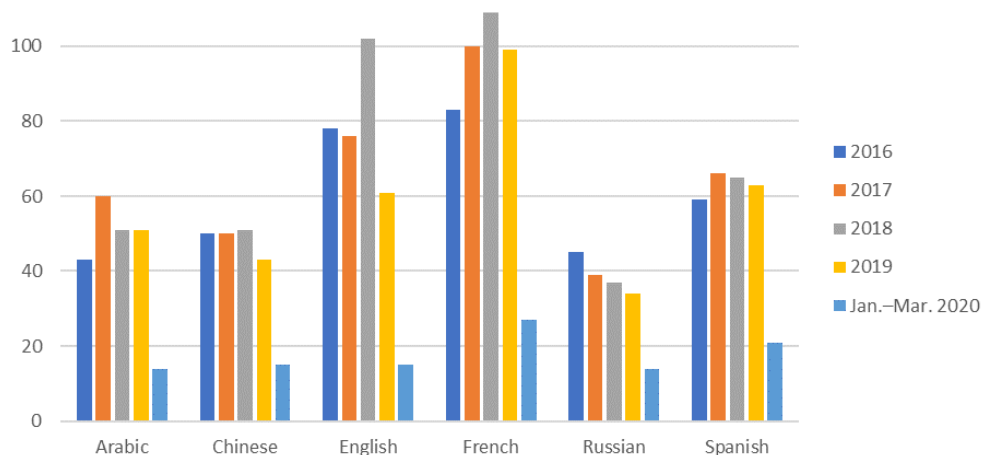
<sup>27</sup> At the United Nations Office at Nairobi, for instance, a summer Chinese language course was introduced during the reporting period.

<sup>28</sup> Some language programmes, such as the programme at MINURSO, closed altogether, however, and have yet to reopen, while others, such as UNIFIL, had to cancel all their in-person training programmes.

benefit from language learning opportunities than ever before. Staff members whose portfolios were significantly affected by the pandemic were encouraged to avail themselves of existing language learning opportunities. Language day celebrations at the United Nations were consistently used to promote the Secretariat's language learning programmes.

87. Statistical information about language learning activities and language learners at Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva since 2018, and about associated resources,<sup>29</sup> is presented in figure VIII to figure XIII.

Figure VIII  
**Number of face-to-face language training activities offered at Headquarters, by language**



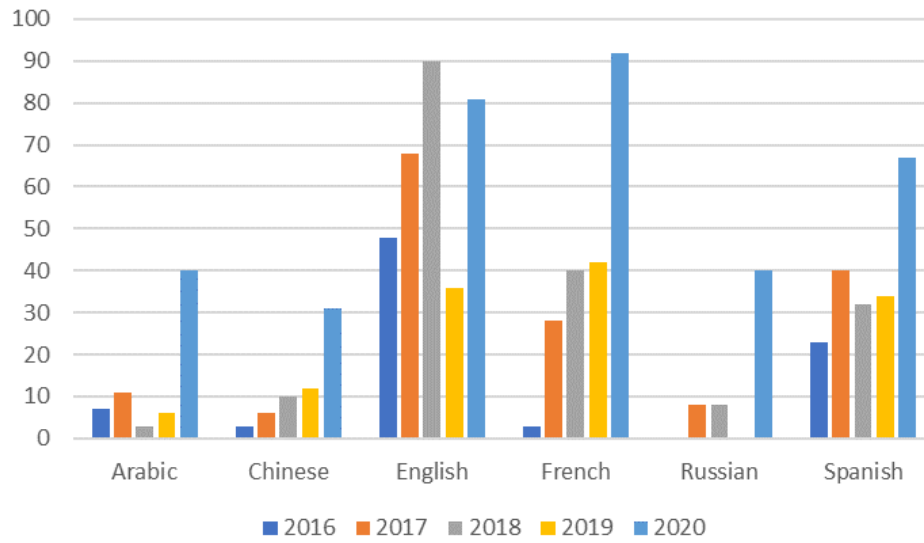
Source: Division of Operational Support

Note: Face-to-face customized training activities conducted in 2019 and 2020 are not included.

<sup>29</sup> During the reporting period, the Language and Communication Programme at Headquarters, which was previously under the authority of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, was reorganized as the Language and Communications Training Unit, and transferred to the Department of Operational Support.



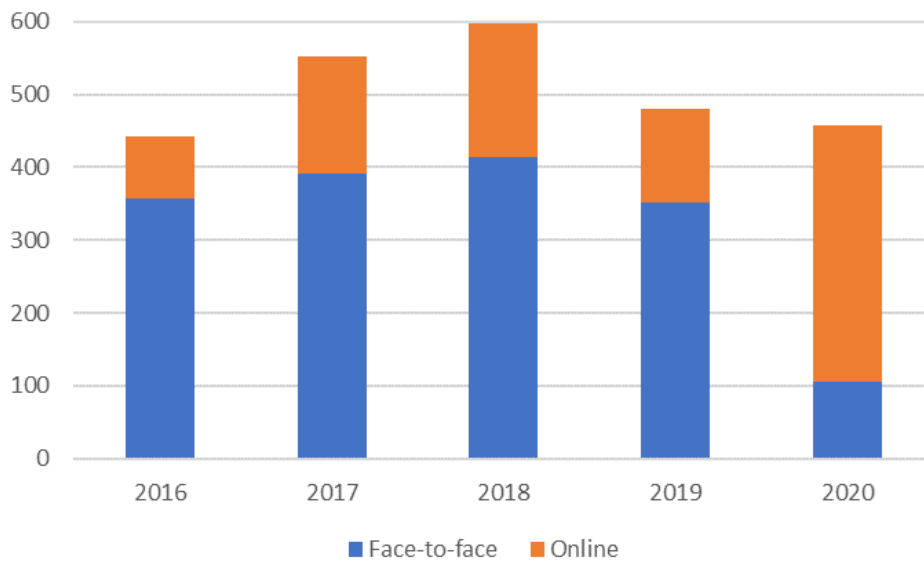
**Figure IX**  
**Number of online language training activities offered at Headquarters, by language**



Source: Division of Operational Support.

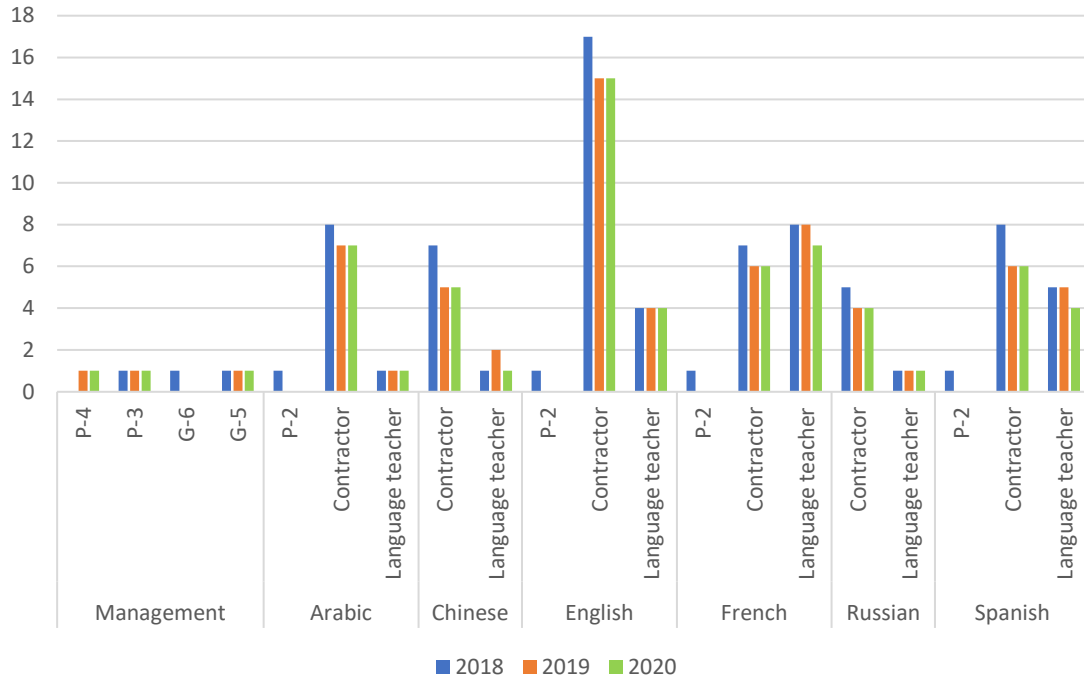
Note: Customized training activities conducted online in 2019 and 2020 are not included.

**Figure X**  
**Number of language training activities offered at Headquarters, by year**



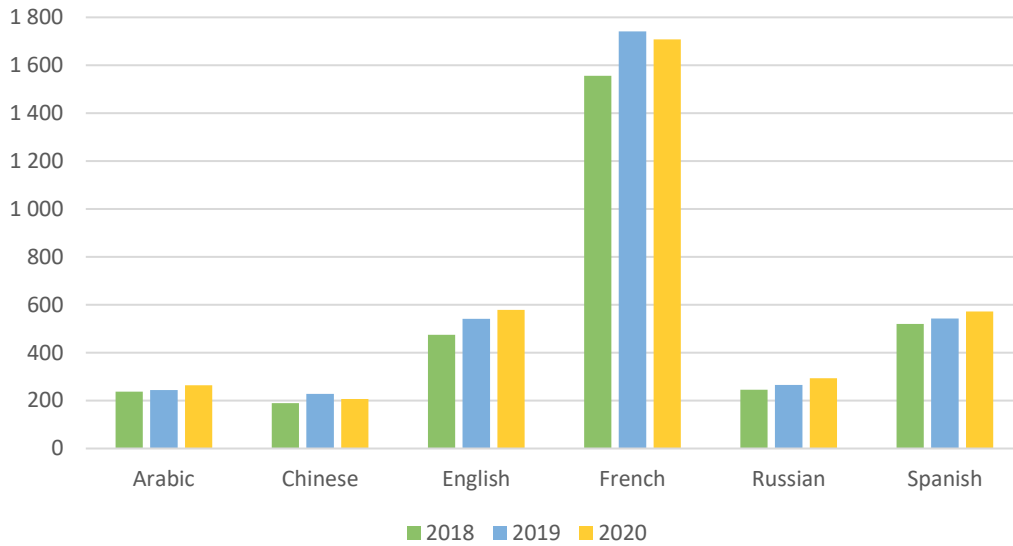
Source: Division of Operational Support.

**Figure XI**  
**Number of personnel assigned to conduct language training at Headquarters, by language and category or grade**



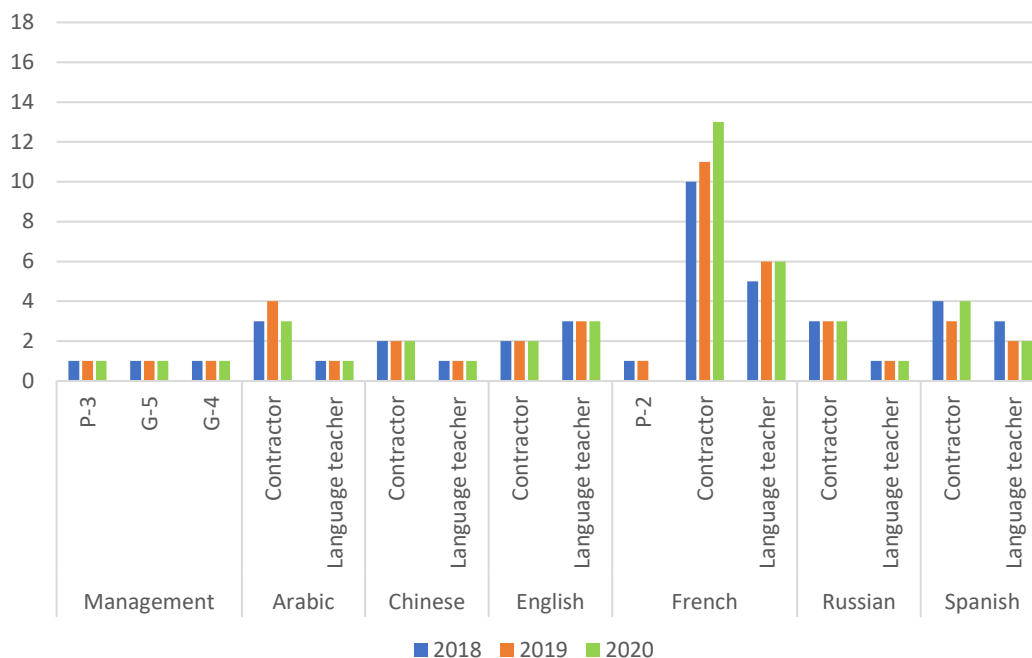
Source: Division of Operational Support.  
 Note: The P-3 position in 2020 is a new, temporary appointment.

**Figure XII**  
**Total number of participants in language learning activities hosted by the United Nations Office at Geneva, by language**



Source: United Nations Office at Geneva.

Figure XIII  
**Number of personnel assigned to conduct language training at the United Nations Office at Geneva, by language and category or grade**



Source: United Nations Office at Geneva.

## IV. Recommendations

88. **The Secretariat recommends that the General Assembly:**

- (a) **Take note of the present report;**
- (b) **Support the approach presented by the Secretary-General in the report to mainstream multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, into the activities of the Secretariat, using existing resources, on an equitable basis and in compliance with existing mandates.**