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Update on the Human Resources Strategy 2018–21

Agility, engagement and efficiency

Purpose of the document

At its 331st Session (October–November 2017), the Governing Body approved the ILO's Human Resources (HR) Strategy for the period 2018–21. In line with the ILO's Strategic Plan for 2018–21, the HR Strategy is aimed at strengthening and developing an efficient, effective and results-based HR function for an agile and responsive ILO.

The purpose of this document is to provide an update on progress in the implementation of the HR Strategy and to seek guidance from the Governing Body (see the draft decision in paragraph 42).

Note: This paper is a further update to document GB.340/PFA/12, submitted to the Governing Body at its 340th Session (October–November 2020).

Relevant strategic objective: None.

Main relevant outcome: Enabling outcome C: Efficient support services and effective use of ILO resources.

Policy implications: None.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: The Governing Body will provide guidance to the Office on future reporting, and on the preparation of the Human Resources Strategy 2022–25.

Author unit: Human Resources Development Department (HRD).

Related documents: [GB.328/PFA/1](#); [GB.331/PFA/13](#); [GB.337/PFA/11](#); [GB./340/PFA/12](#).

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► Introduction

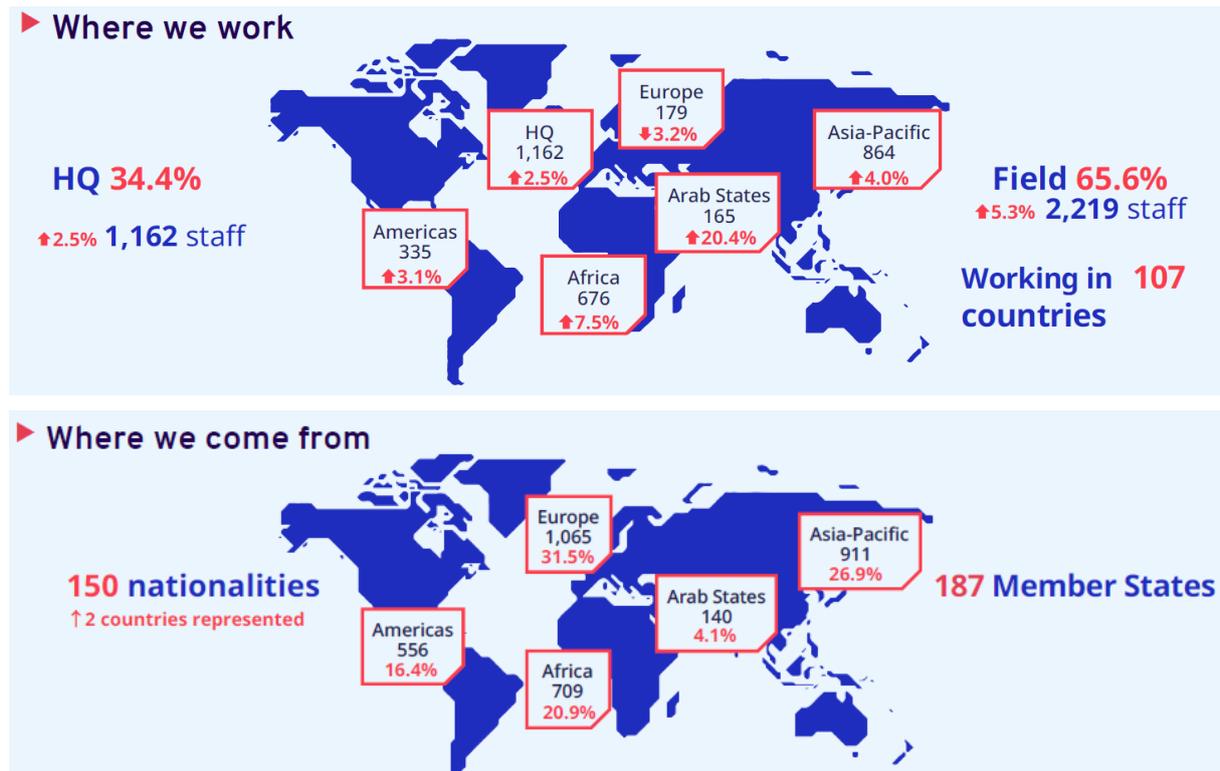
1. At its 331st Session (October–November 2017), and in line with the ILO’s Strategic Plan 2018–21, the Governing Body approved the ILO’s Human Resources (HR) Strategy for the period 2018–21. ¹ The HR Strategy aims to achieve changes in organizational management based on three pillars, namely:
 - (a) enhanced organizational agility and workforce management through the alignment of the workforce with the ILO’s strategic objectives and priorities;
 - (b) engaged employees through effective recruitment, talent development and an enabling work environment; and
 - (c) an enabling HR function that enhances efficiency and operational responsiveness.
2. At its 337th Session (October–November 2019), and in the framework of the HR Strategy, the Governing Body adopted an action plan for improving the diversity of the ILO workforce. ² The action plan and the guidance provided by the Governing Body at that session have been reflected in actions undertaken to implement the HR Strategy.
3. This progress report is part of the monitoring and accountability framework through which the Office reports to the Governing Body. It covers the first three years of the period covered by the HR Strategy. It describes how the Office has made significant and measurable progress towards achieving the outcomes of the HR Strategy, including during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is structured as follows: the first section provides a snapshot of key trends and highlights the overall progress made by the Office; the subsequent three sections provide details on progress made under the three pillars of the HR Strategy; and the last section presents lessons learned thus far from the ongoing implementation in respect of achieving the HR Strategy’s objectives.

► The ILO staff at a glance



¹ GB.331/PFA/13.

² GB.337/PFA/11.



Note: Comparisons always refer to the previous year. Figures as at 31 December 2020.

► Enhanced organizational agility

Ensure a mobile and fit-for-purpose workforce

4. Progress was made in strengthening workforce planning to leverage the benefits of functional and geographical mobility. The existing ILO mobility policy provides opportunities for staff members to gain more exposure to the constituents' needs and diverse work experiences. It encourages all staff members to expand their skills and experience by applying for positions involving functional or geographical mobility or for temporary mobility assignments. During the period 2018–20, 125 staff members changed duty station and 320 staff members experienced functional mobility. The Office is currently assessing how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the implementation of its mobility policy, in particular with regard to transfers from headquarters to ILO regional and field offices.
5. The Office has increased learning and development opportunities for all staff and continues to reinforce the integration of discussions regarding functional and geographical mobility into the performance appraisal process to encourage mobility assignments. In addition, calls for expressions of interest for director positions now also highlight that previous field experience is desirable.
6. A review of the generic job descriptions for regular budget positions in the National Professional Officer and General Service categories in duty stations outside headquarters was completed and, as a result, a new collective agreement was signed between the ILO and the ILO Staff Union on 25 July 2019. In September 2019, 505 staff members across all regions were provided with new, up-to-date and relevant job descriptions, which are aligned with the job classification standards of the United

Nations (UN) common system, ensuring consistency of grades and job families with other agencies of the UN system. With the completion of this review, the Office is now in the first stages of the review of generic job descriptions for the job families covering Professional staff worldwide and General Service staff at headquarters.

7. In line with the Office's plan of action 2019–20 to maximize the opportunities of UN development system reform for the ILO and tripartite constituents, presented to the Governing Body at its 335th Session (March 2019),³ the job descriptions of ILO country directors have been revised to better reflect the relationships within UN country teams. The revised templates for field office director positions both at country offices and in decent work technical support teams have been uploaded into the ILO's online recruitment platform, ILO Jobs.
8. As part of its commitment to further enhance mobility and support organizational agility, the Office plans to develop a new employment contract framework in close consultation with the Staff Union. This process will build on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and on the report to be published by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce.

▶ **Indicator 1.1: Functional and geographical mobility**

Measurement	Target	Results
Number of staff on regular budget positions who change position or duty station for one year or more in 2018–19 and 2020–21	20 per cent increase per biennium Baseline 2016–17: 327	2018–19: 325 (–0.6 per cent) 2020: 120

Strengthen internal governance and accountability

9. The Office has strengthened performance management with a particular emphasis on recognizing high performers and on managing underperformance. New initiatives continue to be implemented to enhance the quality and timeliness of performance appraisals and compliance with the Performance Management Framework.
10. Since 2018, all staff, except those on probation, have followed a one-year performance cycle with a five-point rating scale (prior to this, regular budget staff followed a two-year cycle, with a three-point rating scale). Setting objectives for one year enables staff to be more agile in the face of change and supports interagency mobility, as one-year appraisals are standard in the UN common system. The five-point rating scale allows for greater differentiation and makes it easier to acknowledge high performers and to manage underperformance.
11. The merit increment exercise (internal reward mechanism) has been aligned with the timing of the performance cycle. To be eligible, staff must have received an overall performance rating of four or five (out of five). This exercise was complemented by a process conducted in 2018 to offer non-monetary ILO Recognition Awards, with 17 teams being nominated for the Innovation Award, 29 teams being nominated for the Teamwork Award and 24 eligible staff members being nominated for the Leadership

³ GB.335/INS/10.

Award. The Director-General presented six awards (two per category) during the 2019 ceremony.

12. The online performance appraisal form has been simplified and made easier to complete. The current form allows staff members to record progress and status updates throughout the year without waiting until the end of the year to complete the form. This is proving to be particularly timely in the current COVID-19 context, as the Office continually adjusts its objectives and work plans for 2020–21.
13. The managerial output for staff with supervisory responsibilities was revised in early 2020 to strengthen the measures of performance relating to staff development and to include measures linked to ensuring a respectful, safe and inclusive workplace and encouraging innovation. This output emphasizes the manager's key role in driving cultural change and supporting organizational priorities.
14. Following a staff survey carried out in 2019, the upward feedback process was reviewed and enhanced in early 2020. The elements of the new upward feedback questionnaire now match those of the revised managerial output. The process for 2020 was launched in December. The Office saw an increase in staff participation and expects that managers will be in a position to better integrate the feedback into their appraisals.
15. Since 2018, internal communication campaigns to promote awareness of the importance of performance management and compliance with the framework have been launched and have included internal newsletter articles, webinars, posters and targeted messages to staff around the submission deadlines.
16. In sum, increased compliance with the Performance Management Framework has resulted in the better management of underperformance and an improvement of staff performance.

► **Indicator 1.2: Overall compliance with the Performance Management Framework**

Measurement	Target	Results
Percentage of performance appraisals for staff (all sources of funds) having End of Cycle (EoC) reports completed within one month of the deadline.	85 per cent for 2018–19 90 per cent for 2020–21	2018 EoC compliance was 86 per cent 2019 EoC compliance was 85 per cent 2020 EoC compliance: as at December 2020, 89 per cent

► **Engaged employees**

Attract, recruit and onboard diverse and qualified staff

17. In the context of the action plan for improving the gender balance and geographical diversity of the ILO staff, the Office remains committed to respecting the principle of recruiting staff of the highest standards of competence, efficiency and integrity. The Office is implementing the activities foreseen under this action plan with the necessary adjustments driven by the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment and selection files were digitalized and electronic platforms were created to facilitate the transmission of files among the relevant stakeholders.

- 18.** The recruitment prospects for the period 2021–24 are encouraging, due to the number of staff who will reach the mandatory age of separation during that period. Unfortunately, over the period 2019–20, the number of staff reaching that age in the Professional and higher categories has been low (four in 2019 and two in 2020), as a result of the rise in the mandatory age of separation to 65 which took effect on 1 January 2018. Taking into account the low staff turnover, the reduced number of retirements and the desirability of career progression for internal staff, the current context has significantly limited the scope of the Office to improve the gender balance and increase geographical diversity during 2019 and 2020. Moreover, as foreseen under the action plan, the ongoing outreach initiatives must be coupled with the necessary changes in the existing recruitment and selection procedures in order to streamline the relevant diversity components in the Office’s competitive recruitment system.
- 19.** The Office has continued to invest significantly in strengthening its outreach efforts to attract qualified candidates, taking into account the need to ensure geographical and gender balance. The online recruitment platform (ILO Jobs), implemented in April 2018, continued to play an important role. By December 2020, this platform had over 3.5 million visitors, including over 220,000 potential candidates who either created a profile or signed up for email alerts on job postings. Over 2,100 vacancies (including internships) were posted on the site, attracting more than 175,000 applications. This platform is critical for ensuring diversity among the pool of candidates.
- 20.** The Office has also increased its collaboration with relevant online job boards such as ImpactPool and social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter, and has focused on targeted advertising. It continues to maintain an active network of contacts with the permanent missions in Geneva and encourages managers to use their own networks with the aim of achieving the targets laid out in the HR Strategy. The reporting and tracking tools included in the ILO Jobs online recruitment platform make it possible to monitor progress towards achieving gender balance and improved geographical distribution across the ILO workforce.
- 21.** The Office has developed guidelines and training activities for managers and staff to effectively address unconscious biases that may impede efforts to ensure diversity in the recruitment and selection of staff. Considering that currently 80.5 per cent of Professional staff are from adequately or over-represented countries, advisory support and relevant data are provided to managers to increase awareness and reinforce their commitment to promote diversity in recruitment.
- 22.** Recruitment for development cooperation projects has been monitored, not only to reduce recruitment timelines for key project positions in the Professional category but also to improve diversity. The average number of calendar days between the posting of vacancies for key project positions and the selected candidate’s start date has decreased consistently over the period under review from 190 days in 2018 to 132 days in 2020. The average timeline from selection decision to start date has followed a similar pattern (from 110 days in 2018 to 68 days in 2020). Competitions continue to be run for development cooperation vacancies to ensure that the best qualified candidates are recruited, including during the pandemic.
- 23.** In line with the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018–21, the Office continued to make progress towards parity between women and men and equality of opportunity and treatment of all ILO staff including in training and other relevant activities. In the period 2018–19, 59 per cent of ILO job descriptions for vacant positions included gender-related skills or duties and 100 per cent referred to gender sensitivity. The figures for 2020 were 60 per cent and 100 per cent respectively. In 2018–19, 60 per cent of participants in ILO

management and leadership workshops were women; this remained the case in 2020. The number of female mentees participating in the ILO Mentoring Programme rose from 49 per cent in 2018 to 65 per cent in 2020.

24. The Office piloted five initiatives using a facilitative approach to build and strengthen diversity and to foster inclusion, in addition to existing policies on maternity, paternity, adoption, family and emergency leave, breastfeeding and childcare. These were:
- the Champion Gender Equality campaign;
 - the joint Programme for Emerging Women Leaders (EMERGE), tailored to women at the P3 level based in Geneva;
 - the Special Emerging Leaders Programme for Women at P3 level based in the field (including a career management workshop);
 - awareness sessions on unconscious bias for the senior management; and
 - workshops on unconscious bias in recruitment and selection for panel members and hiring managers.

► **Indicator 2.1.1: Average time required to recruit staff in development cooperation projects (Professional positions)**

Measurement	Target	Results
Average number of calendar days required to recruit Professional staff on key Professional project positions from project approval by the donor to assignment start date	120 days Baseline: 200 days	Average number of calendar days over 2018, 2019 and 2020: 155 days

► **Indicator 2.1.2: Representation of less-than-adequately represented nationalities in the geographically distributed positions**

Measurement	Target	Results
Number of staff from less-than-adequately represented nationalities recruited in the geographically distributed positions	Increase by 25 per cent by 2021 Baseline (2017): 2	2018: 12 (+600 per cent) 2019: 6 (+300 per cent) 2020: 9 (+450 per cent)

► **Indicator 2.1.3: Gender equality in Professional and senior positions**

Measurement	Target	Results
Percentage of ILO Professional positions (P1–P4) held by women	Gender equality within 5 per cent of parity (45:55 per cent) in Professional and senior positions	Biennium 2018–19: P1–P4: 53.65 per cent
Percentage of ILO senior positions (P5 and above) held by women		P5 and above: 36.45 per cent 2020: P1–P4: 54.0 per cent P5 and above: 36.3 per cent

Develop staff and leaders

25. During the biennium 2018–19, the Office allocated approximately US\$10.3 million to the training and development of 2,998 staff members in areas ranging from languages, governance, personal and team effectiveness, communication, leadership and management. Capability-building initiatives are being enhanced through a strengthened learning coordinator network, through increased cooperation with the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin, and by leveraging the opportunities offered by new technologies. Learning and development have been made easily accessible to all staff. An expanded range of e-learning programmes provided global opportunities for induction, language and governance training, while the LinkedIn Learning library offered ILO staff worldwide immediate, on-the-job access to video-based courses for improving their effectiveness at work. Staff were strongly encouraged to undertake ILO online training. In 2018, 1,197 staff members were using the online platform. In 2019, that figure fell to 675 (2019 was the year of transition from Lynda.com to LinkedIn Learning) and, in 2020, the figure rose again to 1,452, demonstrating a growing interest in online learning.
26. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office has remained a learning organization by converting learning programmes – including all language courses – from face-to-face to virtual formats where possible. Leadership programmes related to performance management, such as workshops on giving and receiving feedback and on professional development conversations, were also converted from face-to-face to virtual formats. The possibility of converting further learning programmes, including in the areas of conflict management, presentation skills and communications skills, is being explored.
27. The Office also published online learning programmes on LinkedIn Learning to address the emerging needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic situation. These included programmes for managers and staff on teleworking at the ILO and on mental health and well-being. A new programme containing courses on adult learning and the future of work was launched in June 2020. The first three topics in the series – transformative technologies, green economy and diversity and belonging – were published in 2020. Three further courses on demographics, behavioural insights and the gig economy will complete the series in 2021.
28. As a result of the Office's efforts, there has been a significant monthly increase in 2020, as compared to 2019, in the completion of online courses such as those on ILO ethics (monthly average of 8.5 completions in 2020, compared to 3 in 2019), the inclusion of people with disabilities (monthly average of 8 completions in 2020, compared to 3 in 2019) and mainstreaming gender equality and non-discrimination (monthly average of 6.5 completions in 2020, compared to 6 in 2019).
29. The mentoring programme is increasingly successful, with 41 mentoring relationships being established in 2018, 93 in 2019 and 119 in 2020.

► Indicator 2.2.1: Relevance of training and development to the needs of an evolving workforce

Measurement	Target	Results
Percentage of staff members who indicate that they receive the training and development they need to be effective in their jobs	Increase by 25 per cent by 2021 Baseline 2015: 33 per cent	2018–19: 38 per cent (+15 per cent)

► **Indicator 2.2.2: Staff perception of their managers as positive drivers of change**

Measurement	Target	Results
Percentage of staff responding to the upward feedback questionnaire in the Performance Management Framework who indicate that they “agree” or “absolutely agree” that their manager is driving change positively, and helping others to understand the benefits of change	75 per cent by 2019 80 per cent by 2021 Baseline 2017 performance: 77 per cent	Result in 2018: 77 per cent Result in 2019: 75 per cent Result in 2020: 81 per cent

Engage and retain staff

30. In March 2018, in order to promote a respectful working environment in the ILO, the Director-General launched an Office-wide campaign to prevent sexual harassment and misconduct, thereby promoting a safe working environment and a culture of mutual respect across the Organization. The Office has also participated actively in the UN system-wide task force to address sexual harassment within the entities of the UN system, which has developed outputs and resources to ensure a consistent approach to preventing harassment from occurring and addressing it if it does. A second campaign, "Gender equality: Take action", was launched to provide all staff with ideas and actions to help make the ILO a more gender-responsive and inclusive workplace as a means of realizing gender equality and women's empowerment.
31. Following on from the adoption of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), several internal communication initiatives were launched to encourage the desired cultural and behavioural change with regard to how the Office collectively deals with violence and harassment in the workplace. A set of tools is being developed for this purpose and a review of the current administrative framework and disciplinary process is ongoing to ensure that they are fit for purpose in the light of Convention No. 190.
32. The psychosocial aspects and mental health considerations of the COVID-19 pandemic for individual staff members and teams have been acknowledged and embedded in the Office's overall crisis response since the onset of the pandemic. Specific guidance and recommendations for staff and managers, including for the return to offices phase, have been developed with the aim of boosting individual and collective resilience in times of mandatory teleworking and social isolation.
33. Also since the onset of the pandemic, the Staff Welfare Officer and external collaborators have engaged in regular interactions with staff and have disseminated, through a dedicated website, thematic educational materials on psychosocial well-being and mental health. In addition, a series of global, regional and team-based webinars were organized to assist teams and managers in coping with the various stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Peer Support Volunteer field network was also mobilized to assess immediate psychosocial needs and facilitate the provision of timely support to vulnerable staff members.
34. During the mandatory teleworking period due to the pandemic, the Office, in consultation with staff representatives, undertook a joint survey to contribute to its response to the COVID-19 crisis. A large number of staff participated in this survey. The majority of respondents expressed appreciation of the measures put in place by the Office. Some of the concerns expressed through the survey were taken into account in implementing the phased return to offices strategy. Others are being considered in the

context of the possible review of the Office's flexible working arrangements. A number of other initiatives have been taken to address staff concerns during the pandemic, including targeted webinars for the regional offices and reinforced individual support.

- 35. The existing training module on minimizing stress in the workplace for managers was revised and its scope expanded through the design of an additional chapter for all staff.

► **Indicator 2.3: An improved culture of respectful and inclusive behaviour across the Office**

Measurement	Target	Results
An increased number of staff who consider that Office culture positively influences behaviour at work	Increase by 15 per cent by 2019 Increase a further 15 per cent by 2021 Baseline (2017): 45 per cent	2018–19: 45 per cent

► **An enabling HR function**

Improve HR services through digitalization

- 36. Since 2018, through the digital transformation process, the Office has continued to implement a range of new HR tools, processes and procedures in order to achieve an increasingly enabling HR function. These include:
 - the online recruitment platform, ILO Jobs, launched in April 2018;
 - the migration to a Sharepoint environment for the totality of HR-related web information;
 - the setting up of a computer interface with the host country (Switzerland) for the processing of accreditation formalities for staff based at headquarters;
 - the development and implementation of the Staff Health Insurance Fund online claim system for active staff and retired insured members worldwide;
 - the development and implementation of the leave dashboard;
 - the development and the implementation of the regular teleworking process in the IRIS leave module;
 - the digitalization of education grant submissions and claims;
 - new tools to improve performance management, which has resulted in the better management of underperformance and the improvement of staff performance; and
 - the variety of distance language learning options available to staff in the field.

► **Indicator 3.1: Increase in the use of HR digital services and tools across the Office**

Measurement	Target	Results
Percentage of key HR processes that transition from paper to digital	Increase of 40 per cent by 2021	As of 2018–19: No. of hits on HRD web tools, average for 2018–19: 392,400 (+20 per cent)
Percentage of users of digital HR services	No. of hits on HRD web tools, average for 2016–17: 327,000	2020: 235,870
	No. of HR processes subject to IT developments in 2016–17: 3	No. of HR processes subject to IT developments in 2018–19: 7 2020: 6

Sound HR metrics to inform strategic policy decisions

- 37.** As part of the implementation of the action plan for improving the diversity of the ILO workforce, the annual report on the composition and structure of the ILO staff published in February 2019⁴ was reviewed by HRD in March 2020 to include new HR metrics. The updated document contains information on the composition and structure of the staff of the Office as at 31 December 2019. It provides an overview of the staff composition according to category, place of assignment, type of contract and source of funding. Furthermore, it provides specific information regarding gender, age and geographical diversity as well as staff mobility patterns in line with the outputs provided for in the HR Strategy.
- 38.** A comprehensive dashboard for managers across the Office integrating HR data was implemented in 2020. This new tool gives managers easy access to key information, such as staffing tables, including an overview of gender distribution and nationality representation, absence calendars and information on the status of performance appraisal, strengthening their capacity to manage their workforce and track and monitor the compliance status of their teams and helping them improve the diversity of their workforce.

► **Indicator 3.2: HR metrics and workforce analytics**

Measurement	Target	Results
Percentage of HR metrics, analytical tools and dashboards regularly used by managers to guide their workforce planning, talent management, staffing trends and absence management	10 per cent increase per biennium Baseline 2017: 100 users	2020: 650 users (+650 per cent)

⁴ GB.335/PFA/11.

▶ Lessons learned and conclusion

39. Continued internal social dialogue is a critical factor for the successful implementation of the HR Strategy. Open and constructive dialogue between the Office Administration and staff representatives has been instrumental in supporting the achievement of the changes foreseen under the key HR Strategy outcomes. The Joint Negotiating Committee has been meeting regularly and has established a list of priorities for the negotiation of policy changes aligned with the HR Strategy outcome. In the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office and staff representatives worked together closely to provide comprehensive information to all staff across the Office and ensure that all major HR concerns were duly taken into account. Extensive internal consultations were held on aspects relating to the safe return to offices and other occupational safety and health aspects. These exchanges were essential to maintain a conducive and productive work environment during these difficult times.
40. There will be an assessment of the HR policy changes that are required to respond to the existing and future needs of the Office, including in the area of flexible working arrangements and working methods. In this context, while progress was made in the implementation of the HR Strategy, some of the outputs may require review, subject to further guidance and decisions from the Governing Body and depending on the future development of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the overall activities of the Office and its workforce.
41. The implementation of the HR Strategy takes into account the recommendations made by the external auditors in their most recent report on the ILO's HR management function. In addition, the Office continues to participate actively in the work of the CEB Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce, under the leadership of the High-Level Committee on Management.

▶ Draft decision

42. **The Governing Body requested the Office to take into account the guidance provided in the further implementation of the Human Resources Strategy 2018-21 and in the preparation of the Human Resources Strategy 2022-25.**