



General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 June 2022

Original: English

Seventy-seventh session

Item 142 of the preliminary list*

Pattern of conferences

Pattern of conferences

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to resolution [76/237](#) and previous resolutions on the subject and responds to the mandates addressed to the Secretary-General contained therein. It also provides information on procedures and activities relating to the pattern of conferences in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2021.

* [A/77/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. In 2021, the resilience of the Secretariat's conference and intergovernmental services in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi continued to be tested by the practical challenges arising from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Notwithstanding the continued difficulties and the resultant mitigation measures necessary to safeguard the health and safety of meeting participants and United Nations personnel, in 2021 the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management successfully delivered uninterrupted, high-quality conference services, thus ensuring the business continuity of the intergovernmental process in the main conference-servicing duty stations and at conferences and meetings held under the auspices of the United Nations at other locations.

2. Resilience, adaptation and innovation, including in line with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere, were key to the results achieved in 2021. The aim was to improve conference services and to continue to explore technological and other innovations that advance effectiveness and efficiency, within an overarching strategy of enhancing and mainstreaming integrated global management. Improvements were recorded across the four duty stations in nearly all key performance indicators relating to workload and productivity in meetings and documents management.

3. Although the total number of meetings held in 2021 did not reach pre-pandemic levels, it increased in comparison with 2020. The servicing of meetings, including the timely provision of documentation, was made possible by capitalizing on the Department's long-term strategy of continuous modernization in all areas of its work, which was further enabled by the automation and virtualization of technological solutions developed internally or procured commercially. The Department's efforts in this regard reflect its commitment to ensuring multilingualism while advancing the sustainability of its operations and the overall accessibility of its services.

4. The present report provides an overview of relevant statistics and conference-servicing indicators pursuant to the requests from the General Assembly. It also highlights a range of lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic from a conference management perspective. Specifically, the adversity of the past two years has resulted in the acquisition of new knowledge, the development of new skills and the application or adaptation of new technologies. Those lessons, together with a continued focus on client satisfaction, pave the way for achieving optimum utilization of conference facilities and services in line with the expectations of Member States.

II. Meetings management

Continued impact of COVID-19 on meetings management

5. The continuing restrictions on travel and in-person gatherings associated with the pandemic once again caused a huge proportion of meetings to be cancelled or postponed at all four duty stations in 2021. At Headquarters, during the main part of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, only meetings of the Assembly, its Main Committees and the Security Council, as well as a limited number of other calendar meetings, were held in person. In Geneva, while mandated United Nations meetings were serviced, pandemic-related restrictions led to a curtailed programme of work, and a lower-than-usual number of in-person meetings were requested and serviced. Calendar meetings approved by the Assembly were given priority for the use of conference facilities and services, whose availability for extrabudgetary and ad hoc clients was thus reduced.

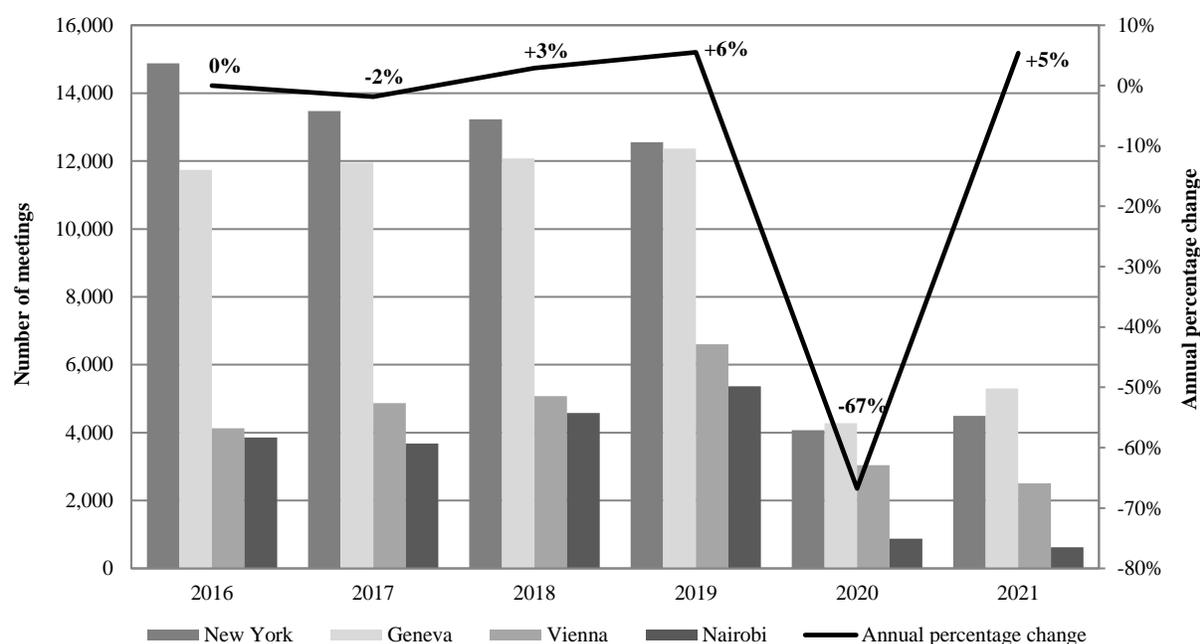
6. The Vienna International Centre remained open for meetings throughout 2021, but with reduced in-person attendance owing to physical distancing requirements. Vienna received fewer requests for extrabudgetary and external client meetings than during the pre-pandemic period but was able to accommodate many such requests while prioritizing meetings directly related to intergovernmental processes. In Nairobi, the general lockdown of conference facilities lasted until the end of September 2021. The United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme held the first part of its fifth session in a virtual format in 2021, to be concluded during a resumed part in 2022, while other meetings were held in a hybrid format. A number of non-calendar bodies held partial virtual sessions, to be concluded in-person in 2022.

7. There was a 5 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of meetings held globally, as shown in table 1 and figure I, in part because a number of meetings and conferences were postponed from 2020 to 2021, but the numbers remained well below pre-pandemic levels at all duty stations.

Table 1
Number of meetings held, global totals, 2016–2021

Number of meetings	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Global total	34 604	33 975	34 962	36 892	12 266	12 924

Figure I
Meetings workload at the four main conference-servicing duty stations, 2016–2021



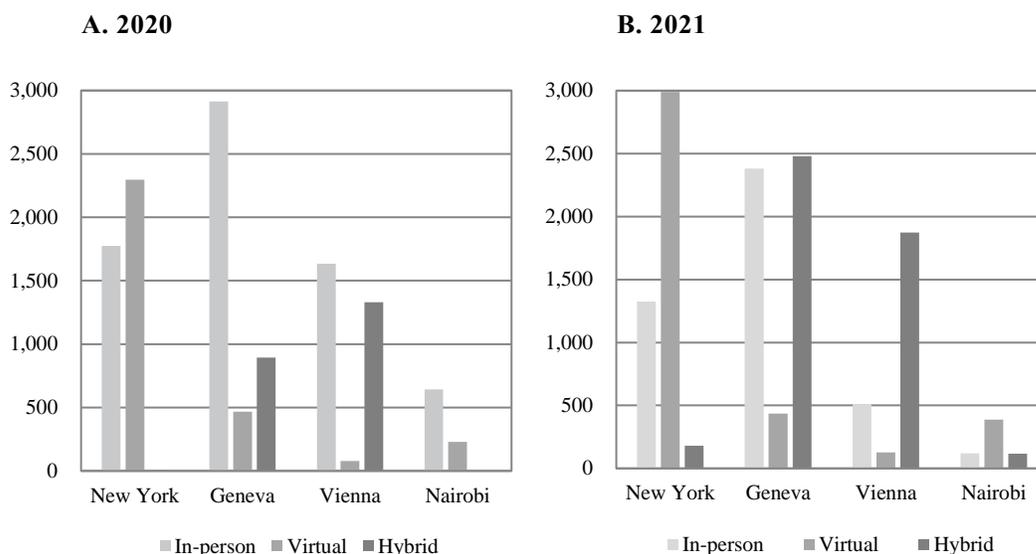
8. Non-calendar meetings accounted for 58 per cent of meetings in 2021, compared with 67 per cent in 2020 (and 82 per cent in 2019). The number of non-calendar meetings was 7 per cent lower than in 2020, while the number of calendar meetings was 31 per cent higher than in 2020.

9. The tools, structures and procedures put in place in 2020 and further developed in 2021 have ensured that the Secretariat's meeting services can adjust to sudden

fluctuations in the meetings management workload and switch quickly to remote or hybrid formats as and when required. For example, the fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in Kyoto, Japan, was serviced on site by a reduced Vienna conference team, while interpretation was for the first time provided remotely by teams in Vienna and New York. Despite problems with connectivity and audio and video quality, the teams were successful in servicing meetings and valuable lessons were learned for the future. In Nairobi, conference services officers performed new roles, such as moderating meetings on remote simultaneous interpretation platforms.

10. The number of in-person, virtual and hybrid meetings held by each duty station in 2020 and 2021 is shown in figure II. The proportion of virtual meetings increased notably in New York, whereas the proportion of hybrid meetings rose significantly in Geneva and Vienna. The increase in the number of meetings and the new meeting formats adopted while in business continuity mode resulted in a heavier conference-servicing workload compared with 2020. The proportion of meetings supported with interpretation increased by 70 per cent compared with 2020, while the proportion of meetings arranged without interpretation fell by 13 per cent over the same period. The servicing of hybrid and virtual meetings poses technical, logistical and capacity challenges and has generated health-related issues. In June 2021, the Division of Health-Care Management and Occupational Safety and Health indicated, in its assessment of workplace risks occasioned by the pandemic, that interpreting in dispersed (from home) mode posed an evident health hazard. The risk assessment outlined steps that should be taken to improve sound quality and protect interpreters' health and well-being. Accordingly, the reduced interpretation workload implemented at the onset of the pandemic was maintained in 2021 as a mitigating measure. This meant that, for meetings serviced with remote simultaneous interpretation, the duration of interpreters' assignments was reduced, and thus, at times, additional interpretation teams had to be assigned to cover three-hour meetings so as to lessen exposure to the challenging working conditions. In addition, staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management raised awareness of the importance of having the recommended equipment and connectivity for virtual and hybrid meetings by producing a series of infographics and videos on the technological requirements for participants. Geneva launched the awareness-raising campaign in December 2021, with material in English and French, while New York developed visuals and videos in the six official languages, rolled out in January 2022. The intention was to promote good practices and share tips through the Department's social media accounts and website, as well as other forums. Despite those efforts, poor sound quality and Internet connectivity problems persisted, placing an additional cognitive load on interpreters.

Figure II
Formats of meetings held at the four main conference-servicing duty stations, 2020 and 2021



11. Even when operating under the business continuity arrangements imposed by the pandemic, quality standards in interpretation provided by both in-house and freelance staff have been upheld through regular assessments of performance, training and other activities such as pre-session briefings by substantive secretariats. Workload standards and quality requirements and expectations in interpretation, verbatim reporting and production editing are equally applicable for all staff and in all official languages.

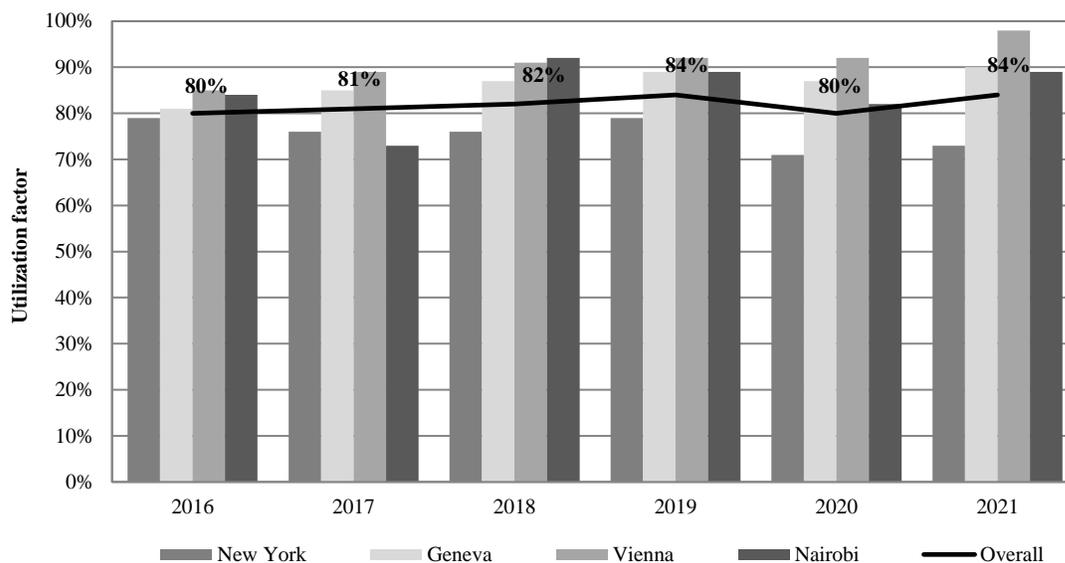
A. Adoption of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2023, requests for exceptions and intersessional departures

12. The Committee on Conferences will review, at its substantive session in September 2022, a draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2023 as prepared by the Secretariat ([A/AC.172/2022/L.2](#)) and transmit its recommendations to the General Assembly in its report for 2022 ([A/77/32](#)). Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of Assembly resolution [40/243](#) to meet during the main part of the seventy-seventh session of the Assembly had been received from seven bodies at the time of preparing the present report. In accordance with established practice, the requests will be reviewed by the Committee, which will make a recommendation to the Assembly. The Committee approved 12 requests for intersessional departures in 2021.

B. Utilization of conference-servicing resources by United Nations organs

13. All four duty stations continued efforts to optimize the interpretation utilization rate in accordance with the relevant provisions in resolutions of the General Assembly on the pattern of conferences, including by engaging with relevant intergovernmental and expert bodies. The overall utilization rate in 2021 was 84 per cent, 4 percentage points higher than in 2020, as shown in figure III.

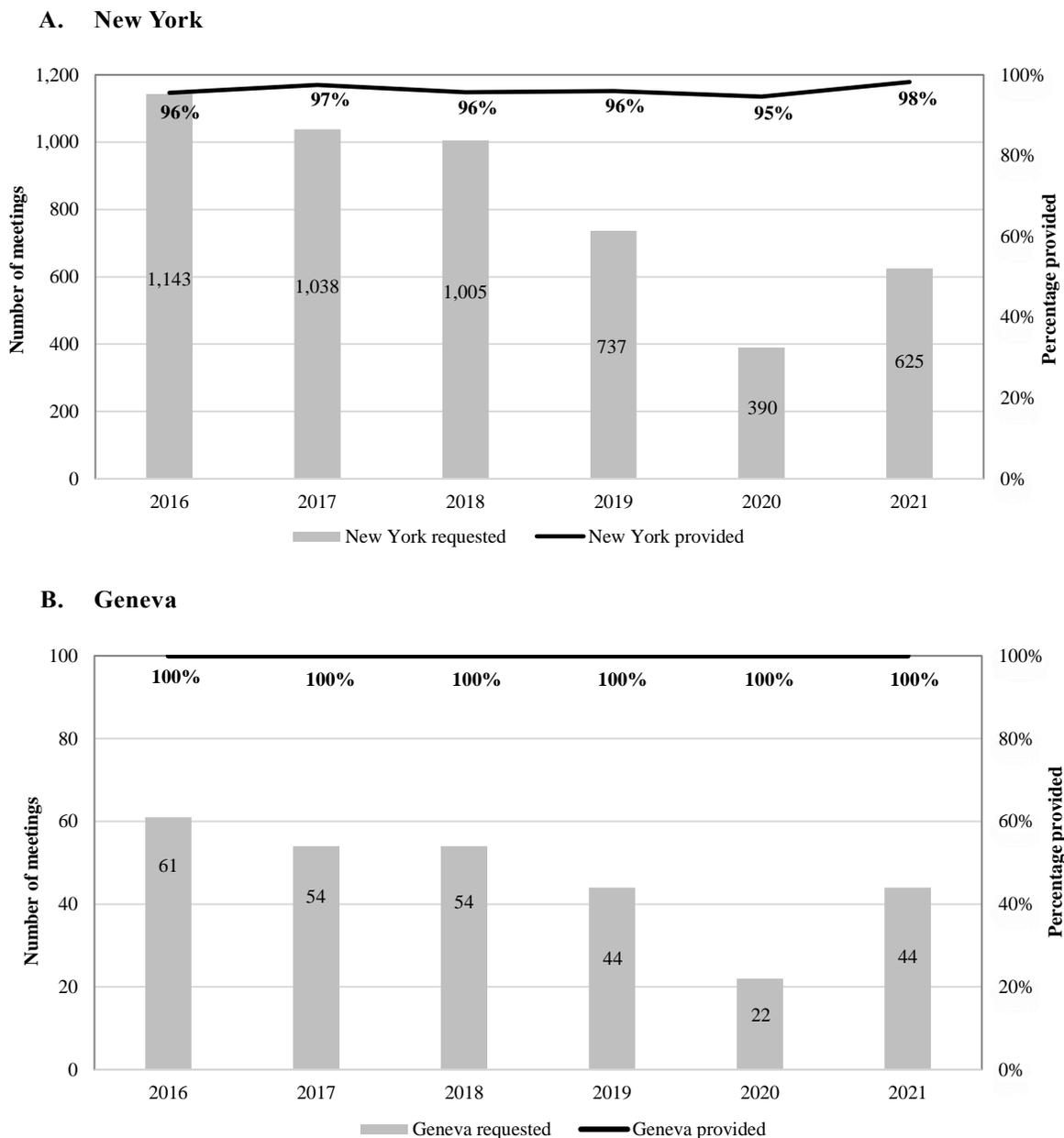
Figure III
Interpretation utilization factor of all calendar bodies, 2016–2021



C. Provision of interpretation services to bodies entitled to meet “as required”

14. The provision of interpretation services to bodies entitled to meet “as required” is shown in figure IV for New York and Geneva. Even though the conference-servicing dynamics during the pandemic have been significantly different from those in previous years, in New York the percentage of such requests that were met in 2021 was 98 per cent, an increase from 95 per cent in 2020. In Geneva, the only body entitled to meet “as required” is the Human Rights Council, and all its requests for interpretation services and meeting rooms were met. In 2021, Geneva processed human rights treaty body documentation and provided interpretation for all programmed meetings in the languages requested by the bodies concerned, in line with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. There are no bodies entitled to meet “as required” in Vienna or Nairobi.

Figure IV
Provision of interpretation services to bodies entitled to meet “as required”,
2016–2021



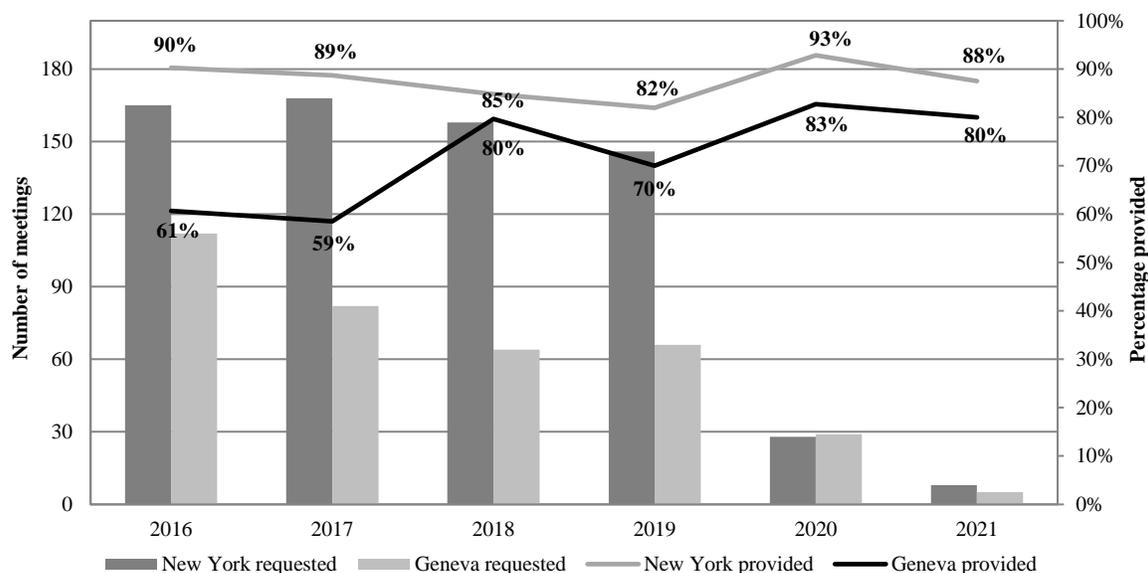
D. Provision of conference services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

15. All requests for meetings made by regional and other major groupings of Member States in 2021 were accommodated in the same year. Both New York and Geneva received even fewer requests for meetings with interpretation services in 2021 than in 2020. The proportion of such requests that were met was 88 per cent in New York and 80 per cent in Geneva, as shown in figure V.

16. In Nairobi, coordination meetings were held for regional and other major groupings of Member States to optimize the use of the interpretation capacity that was made available owing to the drop in the overall number of meetings. A total of 31 requests for meetings with interpretation services were made in 2021, all of which were met; in 2020, no requests had been made. In Vienna, there were no such requests in 2021.

Figure V

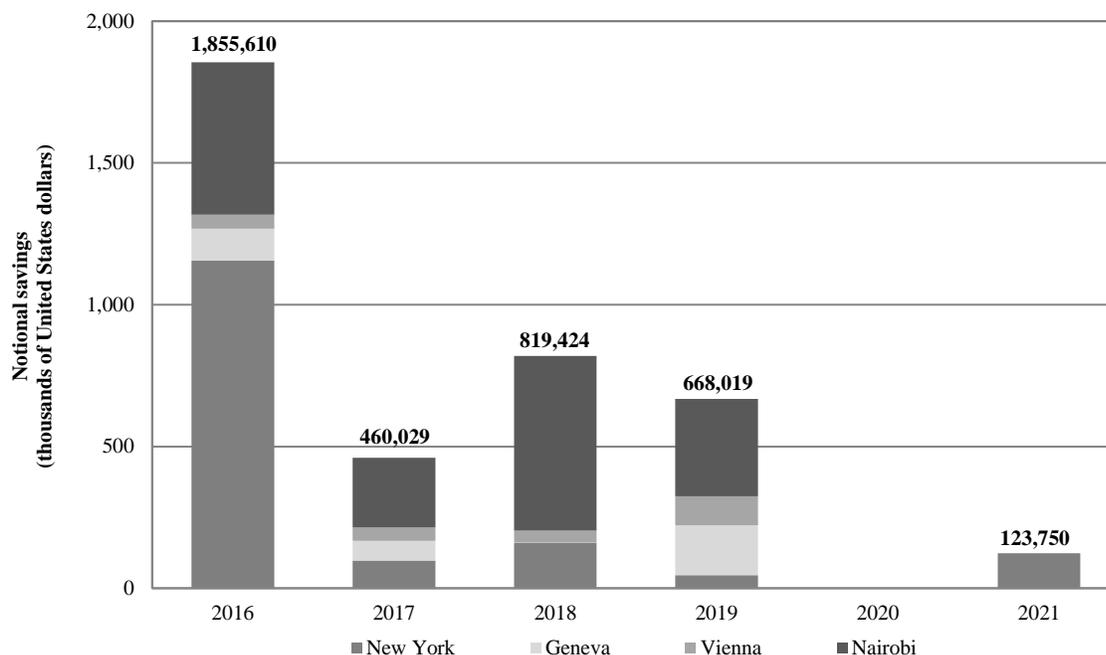
Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States in New York and Geneva, 2016–2021



E. Meetings held away from established headquarters

17. The introduction of remote simultaneous interpretation platforms has generated new possibilities for servicing meetings held away from established headquarters but has also increased workload and complexity for the servicing duty stations. The savings for 2021 shown in figure VI were generated by the second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference, held in Beijing, which was coordinated and serviced by New York, with interpretation provided remotely by Vienna. A total of 54 staff members provided services but only 2 actually travelled to the conference venue, with the rest working remotely.

Figure VI
Notional savings from shared services of meetings held away from established headquarters, 2016–2021



F. Innovations in meetings services in 2021

18. In addition to analysing the impact of COVID-19 on conference service provision and on the needs and expectations of clients beyond the immediate business continuity measures, enhancements were made to the conference management systems supported by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

19. Letters from the President of the General Assembly addressed to Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations in New York are now posted on the Plenary Place in the e-deleGATE portal rather than sent by email. After successful integration of the *Journal* with gMeets and gDoc, the *Journal* team is collaborating with the Security Council Affairs Division and the e-deleGATE team to automate summaries of meetings in the *Journal of the United Nations*. The *Journal* team also automated the retrieval of multilingual data with respect to the agenda from gText, thereby enhancing the ability to reuse multilingual data across conference management systems.

20. The eRegistration system, used by permanent missions in New York to register delegates for meetings, was launched on the e-deleGATE platform in May 2021, leading to cost savings and reduced security risks. In Geneva, the Indico.UN registration tool was extended to additional United Nations system meetings. The tool also now serves as an entry point to the virtual kiosk, a new digital documentation service, as well as to digital recordings of meetings and fully automated speech-to-text (FAST) transcripts, and was used for mandatory COVID-19-related contact tracing. For its part, Vienna introduced a system of QR codes for paperless contact tracing.

21. In 2021, new features were added to gMeets to allow Member States and Secretariat entities to request virtual and hybrid meetings easily and efficiently, including a new option to book virtual rooms at all duty stations. New planning and management features were introduced to facilitate the work of conference-servicing

teams. The system also automatically indicates dates, such as official holidays, on which bodies are requested to avoid holding meetings. Work began on improvements to the gMeets user interface, and efforts to modernize the architecture and infrastructure of the system continued. All the above-mentioned solutions have been designed, developed and technologically supported by the Department.

22. Under the project to integrate conference and event management applications with Inspira and Umoja Extension 2 (known as CEM-UE2-Inspira), the Department has identified opportunities to integrate its enterprise conference, documentation and event management applications with Inspira and Umoja so as to enhance its language capacity planning, rostering, recruitment and performance management, facilitate the administration of short-term and contractual capacity and the processing of payments, and efficiently recover the costs of conference services delivered for extrabudgetary clients to support the effective global delivery of conference services.

23. In line with the Secretariat-wide information and communications technology strategy and the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere, gData 2.0, an enterprise system that will harmonize and facilitate data collection across all four duty stations, has been developed in an integrated manner with gDoc, the Secretariat's documentation workflow management tool, gMeets, the meetings management system, and eAPG, the system for the assignment of interpreters to meetings. The gData 2.0 project team has implemented the utilization of the key performance indicators relating to workload and productivity in meetings and documentation; the next phase of the project will involve completing the harmonization of those indicators across the four duty stations.

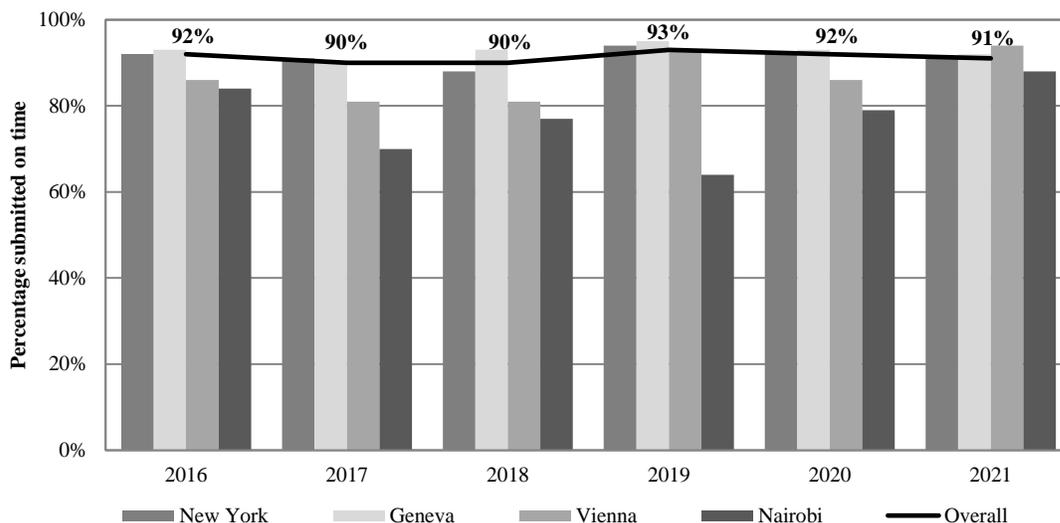
III. Documents management

24. The Department continued to deliver high-quality documentation in a timely manner, including during periods of mandatory telecommuting.

A. Timely submission, processing and issuance of documents

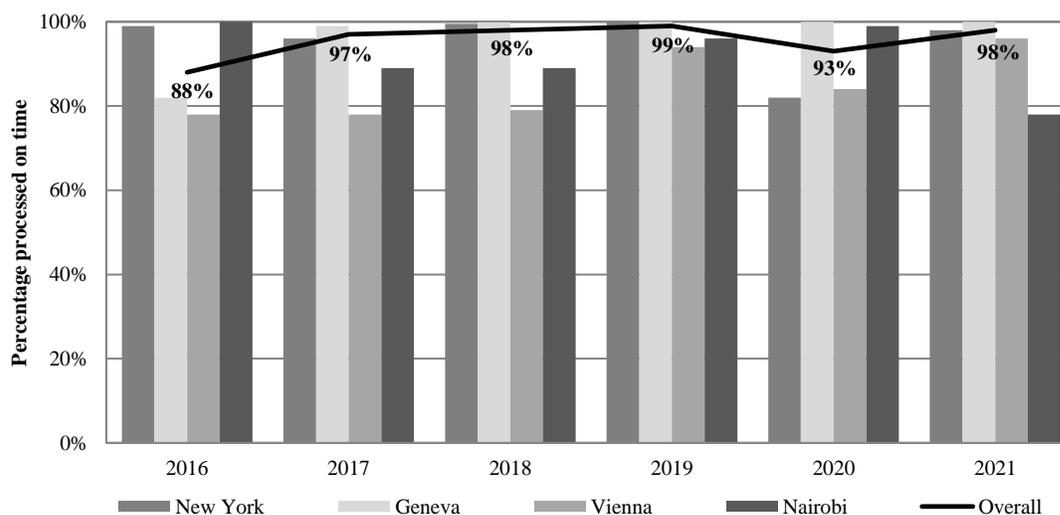
25. Overall compliance by author departments with the deadlines for submitting slotted documents for processing (editing, translation and formatting) decreased from 92 per cent to 91 per cent (figure VII).

Figure VII
Timely submission of slotted documents, 2016–2021



26. During the year, across the four duty stations, 98 per cent of documents (2,965 of a total of 3,035) submitted on time and within word limits were processed in a timely manner, a notable increase from 93 per cent in 2020, as shown in figure VIII. The rates increased in New York and Vienna, remained practically unchanged in Geneva and decreased in Nairobi. In New York, consultations continued with author departments to ensure compliance with slot dates to the extent possible. The lengthy budget-related reports for the Fifth Committee were accorded priority so as to be processed and issued as quickly as possible. An indicator on documentation timeliness and volume was included in the senior managers' compacts with the Secretary-General for both 2021 and 2022.

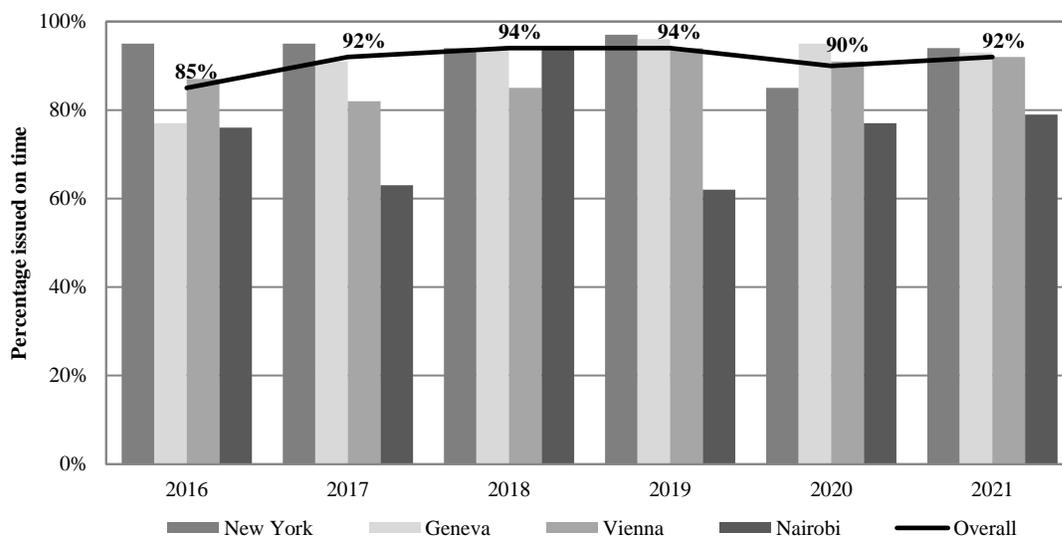
Figure VIII
Timely processing of slotted documents, 2016–2021



27. Overall compliance with issuance deadlines rose from 90 per cent in 2020 to 92 per cent in 2021 (see figure IX). Specifically, year on year, timely issuance increased from 85 to 94 per cent in New York and from 91 to 93 per cent in Vienna, but declined slightly from 95 to 93 per cent in Geneva, owing to a higher volume of documents submitted late. Timely issuance in Nairobi improved over the same period, from 77 to 79 per cent, but remained comparatively low, largely owing to departmental corrections being received while documents were in process. Furthermore, some language units in Nairobi experienced a vacancy rate of 33 per cent for most of the year, which had a serious impact on the capacity for timely issuance of parliamentary documents.

28. The established practice of staggering the submission of documents for intergovernmental bodies with long sessions, such as the Human Rights Council, continued throughout the year in Geneva. All General Assembly and Economic and Social Council supplements submitted on time were issued in a timely manner. Three sessions of the universal periodic review were held in 2021, with 44 outcome reports issued in the six official languages. All reports were issued before the opening of the session for which they were required.

Figure IX
Timely issuance of slotted documents, 2016–2021

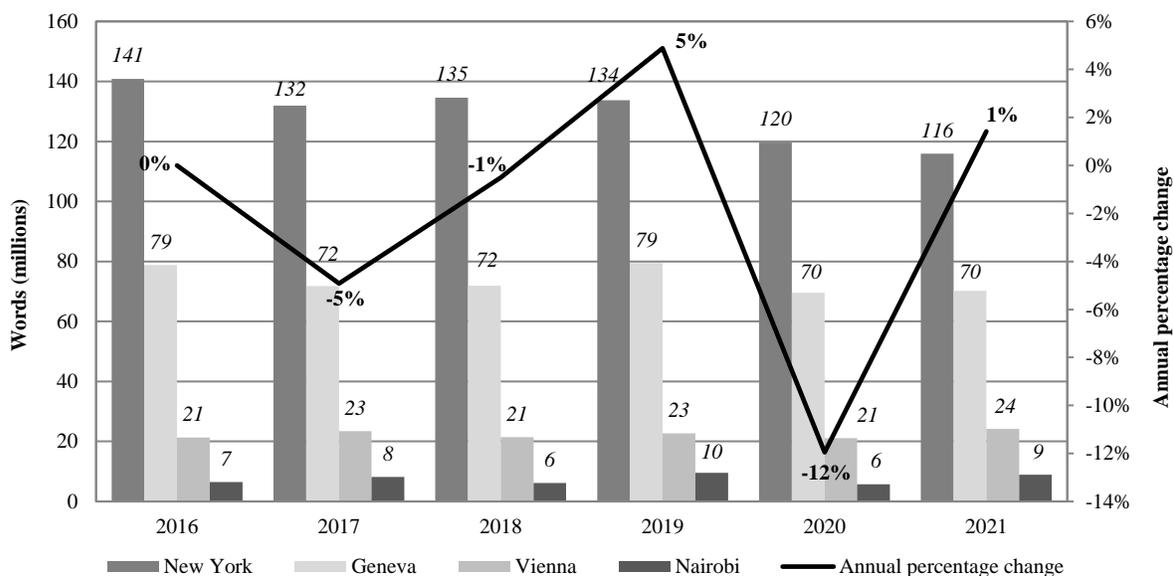


29. In 2021, a major effort was launched to clear the backlog of international treaties deposited with the United Nations that required translation. The backlog had been accumulating since 2015, mainly owing to capacity and budget constraints that existed at the time. The Documentation Division and the Documents Management Section in New York, in close cooperation with the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs, coordinated the workload, and the full backlog, amounting to approximately 1 million words of translation into English and 5 million words into French, was cleared by the end of March 2022. This was achieved through considerable effort on the part of the English Translation and Editorial Service in New York, which coordinated the translation of treaties from not only the six official languages, but also 16 non-official ones, and on the part of the French Translation Service in New York, which was responsible for most of the volume translated.

B. Control and limitation of documentation

30. The number of words submitted globally for translation increased to just over 219 million in 2021, from 216 million in 2020, representing a 1 per cent year-on-year increase, as shown in figure X.

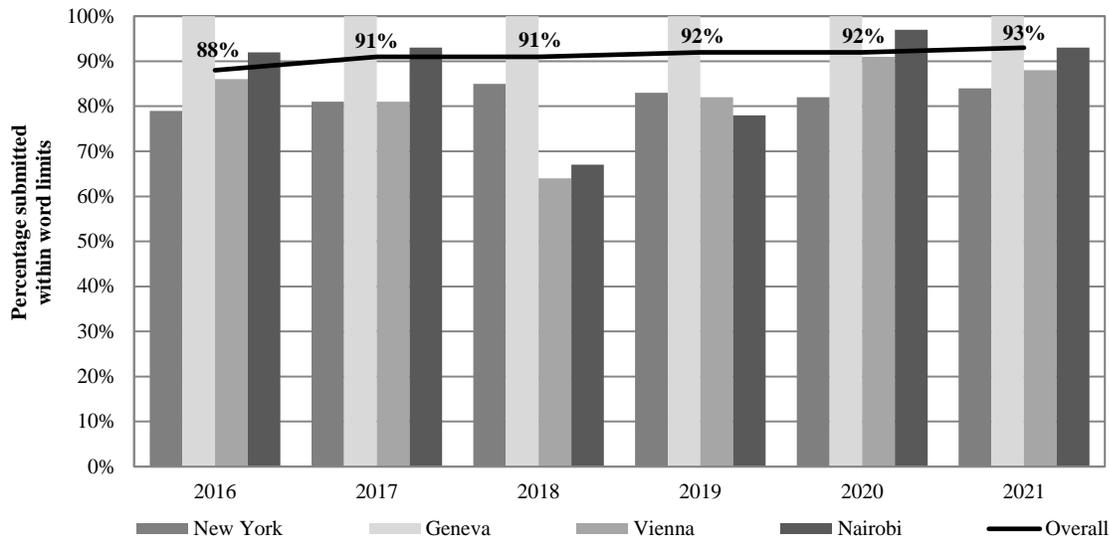
Figure X
Translation workload, 2016–2021



31. The proportion of documents submitted for processing within agreed word limits increased slightly, from 92 to 93 per cent (see figure XI). In New York, the 2021 translation workload was around 116 million words, compared with over 119 million in 2020. The percentage of slotted documents that complied with the agreed word limits increased from 82 per cent in 2020 to 84 per cent in 2021. The number of waiver requests submitted for documents that exceeded the word limit increased, from 12 in 2020 to 20 in 2021, to accommodate Member State input, representing 90,000 words that had to be processed in addition to the planned workload. Consultations continued with author departments and offices to explore alternative options to ensure that Secretariat reports were kept within the mandated word limits.

32. Since 2012, Geneva has been strictly implementing the word limits for all slotted documents and monitoring submissions from the human rights treaty bodies for compliance with the word limits and the number of languages for translation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/268. Waivers were granted only for four reports of the Joint Inspection Unit. In Vienna, the percentage of documents that complied with the word limits was 88 per cent, compared with 91 per cent in 2020. In Nairobi, the length of submissions by non-calendar bodies funded through extrabudgetary resources is not subject to controls. Earlier-than-usual slot dates were negotiated for budgetary and technical or legal documents that exceeded the mandated word limits.

Figure XI
Documents submitted for processing in line with the mandated or agreed word limits, 2016–2021



C. Productivity

33. The throughput productivity of the translation services, that is, the total number of words processed divided by the staff days spent translating them, for 2017–2021, is shown in table 2. It should be noted that, owing to further refinement of the methodology applicable to New York, the 2021 figures, unlike previous years, do not include the additional workload generated by parallel processing. Parallel processing is the practice of simultaneously editing and translating documents in order to minimize processing time and is used in New York because of time pressure and limited editorial capacity. If editorial changes were included, throughput productivity for New York in 2021 would be 7.4 pages per staff member per day rather than the 6.1 pages shown in table 2. For 2022, the Department will review the gData methodology utilized for reporting translation throughput productivity to provide Member States with an even more granular measure of the efficiency of its translation operations.

Table 2
Throughput productivity of the translation services, 2017–2021

(Pages per day)

<i>Duty station</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>
New York	5.9	6.1	6.2	6.6	6.1 ^a
Geneva	5.0	5.3	5.5	5.8	6.4
Vienna	5.2	5.4	5.9	6.7	7.5
Nairobi	5.3	4.9	5.8	5.5	6.7

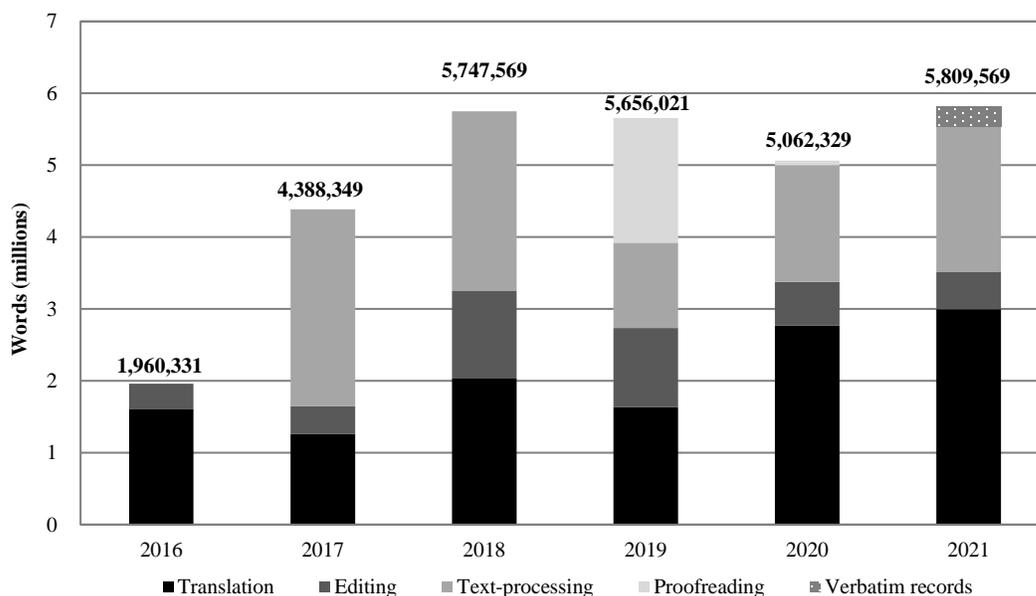
^a If editorial changes were included, throughput productivity for New York in 2021 would be 7.4 pages per staff member per day rather than the 6.1 pages shown in the table (see para. 33).

D. Workload-sharing

34. Workload is shared in order to fully utilize internal capacity across duty stations and minimize the number of documents sent for external processing. It is greatly facilitated by the global nature of the documentation management and processing tools produced and supported by the Department. The volume of workload shared among the duty stations reached the highest level ever recorded in 2021, as shown in figure XII. A substantial portion of that increase was due to workload-sharing among Chinese translation services, which accounted for more than half of the translation volume shared. A portion of the shared workload processed by Geneva included translation work for the Verbatim Reporting Service in New York (see para. 36), labelled as “verbatim records” in figure XII. The Secretariat will be conducting a self-evaluation of workload-sharing among its documentation services in 2022.

Figure XII

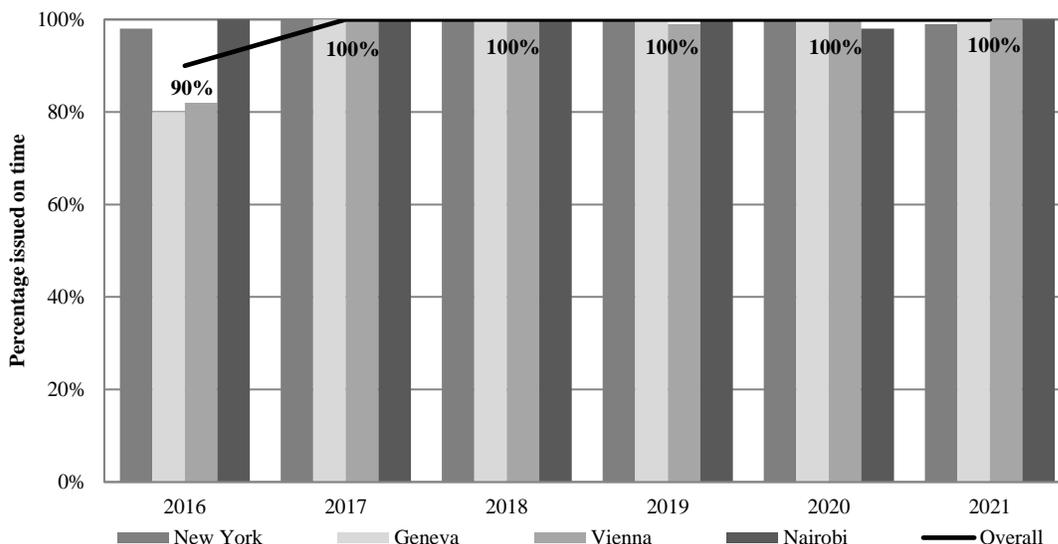
Workload-sharing among duty stations, 2016–2021, in words and by type



E. Simultaneous issuance of documents

35. One of the pillars of multilingualism is the simultaneous issuance of documents in the mandated official languages. Overall, full compliance was achieved with this mandate in 2021, as shown in figure XIII.

Figure XIII
Compliance with the simultaneous issuance requirements, 2016–2021



Issuance of verbatim and summary records

36. The Security Council held virtual meetings from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 until mid-2021. During that period, traditional verbatim records were replaced by letters from the President of the Council to which compilations of written statements were annexed. A total of 167 meetings were held in 2021, 88 of which were virtual meetings for which such letters were circulated. The Verbatim Reporting Service drew on the assistance of the Department's language staff in the Documentation Division in New York and at the United Nations Office at Geneva (see para. 34) to translate these letters; there remains a backlog to translate in 2022 because priority has been given to the issuance of traditional verbatim records since the resumption of in-person meetings. For its part, the General Assembly decided to authorize the submission of pre-recorded statements to be played in the General Assembly Hall, a compilation of which was annexed to the verbatim record of relevant meetings.

37. A total of 130 summary records were issued in New York in 2021, a decrease from 169 in 2020, while the number issued in Geneva rose from 177 in 2020 to 401 in 2021. The number of records in New York largely reflects the number of meetings held by the General Assembly during the last quarter of the previous year. For Geneva, it should be noted that the number of summary records issued in 2020 was abnormally low owing to the period of shutdown that lasted several months, during which no meetings were held. The number issued in 2021 still did not reach the pre-pandemic level of over 500 per year.

F. Digitization and uploading of important older United Nations documents

38. The Department of Global Communications presented to the Committee on Information at its forty-third session a mass digitization and preservation project proposal prepared by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, outlining, inter alia, the definition of important older United Nations documents, as well as the scope and estimated quantity, cost and time frame. The project would involve the preservation

of 1 million documents that are currently in dire condition. The Department continued to explore avenues for funding the project, including voluntary contributions and support from other stakeholders, and will report regularly and extensively on progress to the Committee on Information.

G. New developments in documents management and processing in 2021

39. In order to implement the new workload standards for translation services adopted by the General Assembly in resolution [75/252](#), a working group on workload standards was established, consisting of representatives of the four duty stations. Following a consultative process that included information sessions for all staff in the translation services and a series of meetings with staff representatives, the working group delivered a report with recommendations on the new workload standards for different types of assignments (translation, monitored self-revision, self-revision and revision). The approach taken was to apply the same coefficients used for those types of assignments in 1999, when the workload standards were last reviewed. The only exception was for revision, where the coefficient was adjusted to acknowledge that revisers are now requested to provide detailed feedback and categorize errors so as to accelerate the progress of new recruits towards self-revision. The working group also recommended a review of processes and working methods in other areas where opportunities for improvement were identified: translation quality and evaluation processes, learning and knowledge management, and the harmonization of some recording practices to facilitate the comparability of individual and service-level productivity across duty stations. The reviews were conducted by task forces comprising experts in documentation management.

40. In order to allow staff to adjust to the new workload standards in the context of the ongoing pandemic, the working group recommended a temporary accommodation, which was granted by the Department's management. Recycled text was credited as new text for one year, pending the redefinition of reprise (segments identified as having been translated in other documents) in the light of the capabilities of current translation technologies. Through eLUNa, the web-based computer-assisted translation tool, recycled text is automatically identified and provided to translators with an indication of any changes that may have been introduced. In 2021, the Department completed a pilot to assess the quantity of previously translated text in its documentation. The data collected was analysed by an ad hoc task force created in the framework of the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) in early 2022 to fairly assess the effort of revising recycled sentences that are automatically identified by eLUNa.

41. In addition, in May 2021, a business transformation programme framework was adopted to assess and further leverage the benefits delivered by gText, the suite of tools used in documents processing, which includes eLUNa and the United Nations Terminology Database (UNTERM). Under the framework, user experience assessments are performed to understand better how translators use the gText tools and to identify opportunities for improvement in work practices so as to facilitate the implementation of the new workload standards for translation services without sacrificing quality and while ensuring work-life balance.

42. eLUNa offers the same functionality in all official languages. Language specificities are taken into consideration when developing or enhancing features, and the neural machine translation engines integrated with eLUNa are language-specific. The machine translation engines are commercial applications selected on the basis of blind testing conducted by staff translators.

43. In 2021, UNTERM continued to be supported by the Department and actively used by the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, contributing to the quality and consistency of multilingual documentation across the United Nations system. The number of organizations hosting and sharing their terminology in UNTERM continued to grow with the addition of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). ITU thus joins the four duty stations, the regional commissions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Meteorological Organization in the coordination of terminology codification globally, based on their fields of specialization, to ensure the harmonization of terms in all official languages. Common guidelines and standard operating procedures relating to terminology were established, and new terms, once validated, are shared both internally and with the public through the UNTERM portal.

44. Following the successful use of the eLUNa converter to support the automatic compilation of volumes I and III of the resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly during its seventy-fifth session, the use of the tool was extended to volume II in 2021. As a result, volumes I and II of the resolutions and decisions adopted at the seventy-sixth session were published simultaneously in January 2022, several months earlier than the usual publication date. Use of the converter was also extended to Security Council resolutions, and machine-readable versions of both Assembly and Council resolutions were published in online dashboards. In 2022, the resolutions of the Economic and Social Council will be converted into machine-readable format and a new multilingual dashboard will be launched to display Assembly decisions.

45. The development of gDoc, the Secretariat's system for managing multilingual documentation in support of the intergovernmental process, continued in 2021: the new version, gDoc 2.0, which has been conceived as a global system covering all stages of the documentation workflow, from pre-forecasting to issuance, will be launched at the four duty stations in mid-2022 and at interested United Nations system organizations thereafter. gDoc 2.0 is integrated with the Official Document System (ODS) and other key tools and resources, such as eLUNa, the *Journal of the United Nations* and gData 2.0, and will be integrated with Umoja. By harmonizing document management practices across duty stations and thus facilitating workload-sharing and data analysis, gDoc 2.0 is expected to create opportunities for improved resource utilization and service delivery.

46. Quality assurance and control activities continued in 2021. The Athena knowledge hub was leveraged to share subject-specific knowledge and guidelines for editing and translation. To support the delivery of high-quality documentation in all six official languages and German, the Documentation Division in New York developed a translation quality evaluation tool to rate systematically the quality of the work done by translators on the path to self-revision, on the basis of agreed criteria, and provide feedback to translators to support their progress. The data collected through the tool are used to inform managerial decisions on training, coaching, mentoring and performance management. A separate tool was developed to evaluate the quality of text-processing work on the basis of common quality standards and to provide feedback to staff on their performance.

47. In 2021, the generic job profiles for translators, editors and revisers were updated to address new challenges, including the expectation that new recruits produce self-revised work by the end of their probationary period. The performance of candidates recruited through the new combined competitive examinations introduced since 2017 shows that this goal is achievable.

IV. Staffing

Vacancies, recruitment and outreach to potential applicants

48. The vacancy rates by duty station in key occupational groups as at 31 December 2021 are presented in table 3. The easing of the liquidity constraints in 2021 made it possible to fill some vacancies that had previously been subject to the hiring freeze. In Nairobi, there was a higher-than-usual vacancy rate in some language units, which was offset through short-term and contractual support. As in the past, despite the Department's global outreach efforts, Nairobi has experienced considerable difficulty in attracting and retaining staff, which presents a major challenge, given the small size of the teams. Language services continued to fill vacancies as expeditiously as possible while maintaining the required vacancy rate.

Table 3

Vacancy rates in key occupational groups as at 31 December 2021

(Posts)

	<i>New York</i>		<i>Geneva</i>		<i>Vienna</i>		<i>Nairobi</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Interpretation services	17	13	4	4	5	19	3	14
Translation services	53	16	23	13	5	12	5	23
Text-processing units	17	14	13	18	4	11	–	–
Editing services	2	8	2	10	1	17	–	–
Verbatim Reporting Service	5	10	–	–	–	–	–	–

Recruitment

49. Competitive examinations for language positions are scheduled in accordance with the succession-planning needs of the language services. Competitive examinations for French translators, editors and verbatim reporters and for German translators were held in 2021. Competitive examinations for Arabic translators, editors and verbatim reporters and for English translators, précis-writers, editors, verbatim reporters and linguists are planned for 2022. Competitive examinations for Arabic, Chinese and English interpreters are also to be held in 2022, and for French, Russian and Spanish interpreters in 2023.

50. The process to establish a new single global roster of language professionals deemed suitable for employment by the Department on a temporary or per-assignment basis and a review of the profiles of those already employed by the four duty stations were finalized in 2021. Examinations for placement on the roster for English interpreters and French interpreters were held in 2021, and for English editors and English translators/précis-writers in 2022. All recruitment examinations for language professionals are conducted entirely remotely, making them accessible to all qualified candidates anywhere in the world. Targeted outreach campaigns aimed at a wide range of stakeholders were conducted in 2021 to encourage applications from suitable candidates from all regions.

Outreach to potential applicants

51. The amount of time spent on outreach activities by language staff decreased by 64 per cent in comparison with 2020. It should be noted, however, that the figure for 2020 was unusually high, largely as a result of the temporary suspension of in-person meetings with interpretation, which allowed interpreters to spend much more time

than usual on outreach. At the same time, the number of training and professional institutions benefiting from outreach activities rose to 74 in 2021. As in 2020, cooperation with universities in 2021 was mainly focused on interpretation. Outreach for translation tends to be more intense in the lead-up to competitive examinations. Most outreach activities were conducted online in 2021 owing to the pandemic. The Department continued to use social media in the six official languages in support of its outreach programme. The number of its followers on Twitter and YouTube, for instance, increased during 2021 by 13 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.

Outreach to Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean

52. The Secretariat continued its efforts to reach out to language professionals from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean in particular. Special efforts were made to increase diversity among applicants for the competitive examination for French translators, editors and verbatim reporters held in 2021 and to promote the participation of qualified candidates from French-speaking Africa and the Americas. Outreach materials were shared with relevant partner universities, professional organizations and United Nations information centres and country teams, and the examination was publicized through the Department's website and social media channels and through an announcement made to permanent missions and observer missions in New York. The Spanish translation and interpretation services organized around 20 outreach events with professional associations and higher education institutions in Latin America, reaching some 2,000 people across the region, while French interpreters participated in a presentation for French-language universities, with a special focus on those in underrepresented regions.

53. One of the outcomes of IAMLADP for 2021, held in virtual format, was a declaration on the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation and a proposal to establish a task force to work on a road map for the continuation of the project, to be led by a member organization of IAMLADP based in Africa. Calls for the nomination of volunteers to chair the task force have not yet met with success.

Internships

54. The continued impact of the pandemic on travel and on the Organization's hosting capacity further limited the number of interns hosted by language services in 2021 (21 interns, compared with 34 in 2020 and 80 in 2019). Of those, over 76 per cent were current students or recent graduates of partner universities. Efforts aimed at recruiting interns from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean also continued despite the challenges of the pandemic: 28.6 per cent of all interns hosted by United Nations language services in 2021 were nationals of Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean, compared with 32.4 per cent in 2020 and nearly 40 per cent in 2019. In addition to internships, United Nations language services continued to offer remote practicums to students enrolled in universities that have signed a remote practicum agreement with the Organization. One new such agreement was signed in 2021 and two others are being finalized, all with universities located in Latin America and the Caribbean.

V. Facilities and accessibility

A. Facilities

55. The third report of the Secretary-General on addressing the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference services facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi ([A/76/400](#) and [A/76/400/Corr.1](#)), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/253 B](#), contained a comprehensive review of the cost

estimates for the two scalable options for renovation and expansion of the conference facilities, options A and B, presented in the previous report. Subsequently, in resolution 76/246 A, the Secretary-General was requested to further refine the scope options. An amount of \$1,839,800 was appropriated for the project in 2022 under sections 29G and 33 of the programme budget for 2022.

56. In New York, the majority of language staff (translators, editors, production editors, text processors and desktop publishing staff) are accommodated in the Albano Building, while verbatim reporters are accommodated in the UNITAR Building. Neither building has been fitted with flexible workspace. The interpreters working in the conference rooms in the General Assembly and Conference buildings continue to use the lounge area configured for their specific requirements on the twelfth floor of the Secretariat building.

57. In Geneva, extensive consultations were held with language staff in the context of the strategic heritage plan, and their requirements were taken into account for the planning of future office space. An interpreters' lounge similar to that in New York is planned for Geneva. Language staff in Vienna and Nairobi are not subject to flexible workplace strategies.

58. The Secretary-General was requested in General Assembly resolutions 69/274 A and 71/272 A to assess the impact of the flexible workplace pilot on productivity. However, this did not apply to language staff, who will continue to be accommodated in the current configurations for the immediate future.

B. Accessibility

59. At Headquarters, 55 meetings were serviced with remote sign language interpretation, a significant increase from 20 in 2020. The Department collaborated with the Office of Information and Communications Technology to ensure that the teams were able to work remotely for both virtual and hybrid events. Among the meetings provided with sign language interpretation were those of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Commission on the Status of Women and the multi-stakeholder hearings held at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS. Live captioning was provided for 113 meetings, compared with 35 in 2020. With the resumption of on-site meetings, the Accessibility Centre at Headquarters resumed Braille printing on demand and the provision of assistive devices. Accessible seating continued to be provided to those delegations requesting it, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/341. In December 2021, the Department cooperated with organizations of persons with disabilities to hold an awareness-raising event that was open to all Secretariat staff. The Department also participated in a panel discussion on advancing employment for persons with disabilities, which was convened by the Office of Human Resources in the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, on 3 December 2021.

60. In Geneva, 62 meetings were provided with sign language interpretation, a significant increase from 21 in 2020. The sign language interpreters worked in a fully remote manner, as they had done since the onset of the pandemic, supported by a multiservice team that managed and coordinated the complex arrangements required. The meetings provided with sign language interpretation included the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth sessions of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, panels of the Human Rights Council at its forty-sixth to forty-eighth sessions, and the fourteenth session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A total of 244 hours of live captioning was provided in English, 40 hours in French and

18 hours in Spanish. The disability inclusion team organized events to mark accessibility-related days, such as World Braille Day, as well as workshops on aspects of accessibility. Under the strategic heritage plan, facilities for sign language interpretation will be incorporated into some of the conference rooms that are being renovated.

61. In 2021, the Department of Global Communications launched the English version of the new United Nations Web TV website (webtv.un.org) and upgraded its database engine, thereby improving performance. The versions of the website in the other five official languages are being developed. The Department provided live multilingual streaming coverage of 2,513 United Nations meetings and events, held in virtual, hybrid or in-person formats in various locations, including New York, Geneva, The Hague and Rome. A total of 11,486 new webcast recordings were made available, bringing the total number of webcast videos available for on-demand access by global audiences to 111,769. The Department is committed to multilingualism and is making great efforts to address disparities between the six official languages. To that end, it has recruited multilingual staff (one per language), who are responsible for the live and on-demand webcast coverage and related language metadata of open, numbered General Assembly, Security Council and Economic and Social Council meetings, in all six official languages.

62. In 2021, the United Nations Information Service in Geneva provided live and on-demand webcast coverage of 966 meetings on the United Nations Web TV website, including meetings of the Human Rights Council and the human rights treaty bodies. Since June 2021, with the upgrade to the new United Nations Web TV platform and the increased technical capacity for multilingual webcasting in Geneva, treaty body meetings have been webcast in English, French, the original language and, at the discretion of each treaty body's secretariat, in additional languages (Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish) when available, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [73/162](#). Nairobi produced digital recordings of 264 meetings, and the first part of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly was also streamed on United Nations Web TV.

63. In Geneva and Vienna, formal and informal meetings are digitally recorded upon request by the client. In 2021, Geneva produced digital recordings of 2,019 meetings, or 38 per cent of the total meeting workload. The Geneva digital recording portal will be made fully accessible and multilingual in 2022 and will also be integrated with the fully automated speech-to-text (FAST) system and UN Azure Active Directory (AD). In Vienna, three intergovernmental bodies continue to receive digital recordings by default as a replacement for unedited transcripts; 223 meetings of those bodies were digitally recorded in 2021. In addition, the United Nations Information Service in Vienna provided webcasts of three events. In New York, all open formal meetings are recorded by default in the media asset management system.

VI. Enhancing integrated global management and measuring the quality of conference services

64. On 3 February 2021, the Secretary-General promulgated a bulletin on the organization of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management ([ST/SGB/2021/3](#)), which replaced the previous bulletin ([ST/SGB/2005/9](#)), and which describes the collective mandate of the conference management operations at the four duty stations to provide conference services in a globally integrated manner. The planned new bulletins describing the organization of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi will be fully aligned with bulletin [ST/SGB/2021/3](#) in ensuring the integrated management of conference services financed centrally under

section 2 of the programme budget. In October 2021, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management initiated a discussion and convened a meeting with the Directors-General of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi with a view to aligning the delineation of responsibilities with the delegation of authority framework.

65. A cost-recovery mechanism has been established at all four duty stations for meetings, conferences and events that are not integral to mandated intergovernmental processes and for which provision is not made in the programme budget of the Department. Cost parameters were developed and rates for conference services were established so that financial transactions associated with the recovery of costs related to extrabudgetary events can be performed and monitored in Umoja. An enhanced cost-recovery module to automate processes and workflows managed by conference services is also planned. Connection of gMeets, gDoc and eAPG with Umoja is also envisaged.

66. In One-Stop Shop (gMeets), a new module was deployed to produce cost estimates for services and facilities for non-intergovernmental meetings, and new features for virtual and hybrid meetings and remote simultaneous interpretation were added. The inclusion of these new features increased the complexity of integration with other gProjects, such as eAPG, Indico.UN and the *Journal of the United Nations*, and ultimately with Umoja. Preparatory activities began for the integration of gMeets with Umoja to allow for the generation of a single bill for all services associated with an event. The Department is working closely with the Department of Operational Support and the Enterprise Resource Planning Solution Division to ensure coordination and avoid duplication of effort.

67. To monitor the provision of high-quality conference services to Member States, the Secretariat collects feedback through annual informational meetings held at the four duty stations, ad hoc surveys and the global e-survey that is available throughout the year in the official languages. There were 141 responses to the global survey, compared with 213 in 2020; 89 per cent of respondents rated the conference services provided as either “good” or “very good” in 2021, an increase from 86 per cent in 2020. The 21 respondents to a survey of Bureau members of the Main Committees in New York rated the overall quality of the assistance provided by secretariats as “good” or “very good”. Meanwhile 52 compliments and three complaints addressing inaccuracies or inconsistencies in translated documents were received through the feedback database that is maintained independently from the e-survey. Immediate action was taken to address the complaints.

68. In Geneva, 87 per cent of respondents to a local survey rated conference services there as “good” or “very good” overall in 2021. In addition, 18 compliments and one complaint pertaining to the quality of interpretation during a recent session of the Human Rights Council were received from clients for the meetings held that year.

Informational meetings with delegations in 2021

69. The informational meetings with delegations organized by the four conference-servicing duty stations in 2021 focused on the continued impact of the pandemic; the ongoing recovery from the liquidity crisis; the technological tools in place to facilitate remote working and their limitations; innovations in staff management, such as the introduction of the global roster of language professionals; and measures to increase the accessibility of United Nations documentation. Representatives of Member States expressed their appreciation for the efforts made by the meetings and documentation services in that regard.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

70. In 2021, the Department built on the new and adapted working methods and technological innovations of 2020 to maintain the delivery of high-quality conference services despite continuing pandemic-related pressures and the additional complexity of servicing meetings held using different meeting modalities. Almost all key performance indicators showed an improvement in comparison with 2020. The resilience and adaptability of staff were fundamental to this achievement. Further innovations in 2021 improved both the efficiency of conference management operations and the quality of client-facing services. Advances were also made in accessibility, with an increase in the number of meetings provided with sign language interpretation and live captioning, as well as continued efforts to expand webcast coverage of meetings and the provision of digital recordings.

71. The easing of the liquidity constraints helped to address some of the capacity challenges faced in 2020. The lifting of the hiring freeze made it possible to fill some vacancies, and a number of examinations were held to recruit both for staff positions and for the global roster of language professionals qualified for freelance work, thereby positioning the Secretariat for the continued delivery of multilingual meetings and documentation services and their ongoing enhancement in support of the deliberations of Member States.

B. Action recommended of the General Assembly

72. **The Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly take note of the present report.**
