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## United Nations System Staff College

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [60/214](#). It demonstrates the progress made by the United Nations System Staff College in the 2019–2020 biennium in response to Economic and Social Council resolution [2019/12](#), in which the Council encouraged the Staff College to further develop its learning portfolio in the areas of economic and social development, peace and security and internal management of the United Nations system.

In the period under review, Staff College courses, services and products grew by 22 per cent compared with the previous biennium, reaching over 57,000 beneficiaries globally. The Staff College delivered a total of 281 learning activities. The overall recommendation rate of learning products, captured through post-course evaluations, was 96 per cent – a measure of course relevance and the Staff College’s demand-driven methodologies.

The Staff College continues to strive to meet the needs of the United Nations system, Member States and partners by offering programmes and services that are innovative, adaptable, multidisciplinary and focused on helping the United Nations system deliver on its mandates.

As for all United Nations entities, 2020 was a challenging year owing to disruptions resulting from the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. When United Nations staff and partner entities began working remotely in early 2020, the Staff College pivoted and began providing its learning offerings online, thus advancing its mandate and becoming for the first time a full-fledged online learning institution.

The Staff College continues to act and grow as a principal inter-agency institution of knowledge management, learning and training. This has been validated by the Joint Inspection Unit, which has recommended a strengthening of the Staff College’s role as a central learning hub of the United Nations system.



The Staff College reported strong financial results for the biennium. This was due to increased demand for its learning programmes and to the efficiency of its business operations.

## I. Introduction

1. The present report has been submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [60/214](#), in which the General Assembly reaffirmed the role of the United Nations System Staff College as an institution for system-wide knowledge management, training and continuous learning for the staff of the United Nations system, in particular in the areas of economic and social development, peace and security and internal management. The report provides a description of the progress made during the biennium 2019–2020 in response to Economic and Social Council resolution [2019/12](#), in which the Council encouraged the Staff College to further develop its learning portfolio in the areas of economic and social development, peace and security and internal management of the United Nations system.

2. Created by the General Assembly in 2002, the Staff College offers learning to further a basic yet fundamental goal: fostering a world where everyone thrives in peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet. The Staff College has played an integral role in putting learning and training at the service of United Nations system mandates to create a more sustainable, just and equitable world. In 2019–2020, the Staff College was guided by its strategic plan for 2018–2021, in which the Staff College is called upon to deliver state-of-the-art learning solutions so that the United Nations system and its wide array of partners are well equipped to deliver on their organizational mandates.

3. The Staff College is headquartered in Turin, Italy, with its Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development in Bonn, Germany. The mission of the Staff College is to contribute to a more effective, results-oriented and agile United Nations through learning, training and knowledge dissemination. In order to deliver on that mission, the Staff College's learning methodologies combine academic research with practical experience gained at the United Nations, a combination that fosters deep critical thinking and creative problem-solving. The Staff College spurs learning participants to collaborate across the United Nations system to break down organizational and functional silos. Participants from civil society, academia and the private sector and other actors learn alongside United Nations personnel – leading to a vibrant setting for crafting new solutions.

4. The regular Staff College portfolio spans residential courses, blended programmes, e-learning courses, knowledge-sharing platforms and knowledge assets, including case studies, primers and video-based content. In addition, tailor-made learning programmes are developed and delivered to meet the specific requirements of United Nations organizations and partners. Its efforts benefit from the fact that the Staff College is the only United Nations learning provider with an inter-agency mandate. This allows the Staff College to serve the needs and demands of the United Nations system as a whole.

5. The present report demonstrates how the Staff College has delivered on the call from Member States to develop its programme portfolio. The report contains sections on: key programmatic achievements of the Staff College over the past two years (section II); how the Staff College rose to the challenge of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (section III); how the Staff College's learning initiatives support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (section IV); how the Staff College has contributed to building and sustaining peace, as well as United Nations management reform and change culture (sections V and VI); how the Staff College has been recognized as an important institution that Member States and United Nations entities should further strengthen (section VII); and the recommendation that Member States and United Nations entities continue to provide full support to the Staff College.

## II. Overview of key programmatic achievements

6. Since its inception – and with regular financial support from Italy, Germany and Sweden – the Staff College has actively worked to meet the needs of the United Nations system, Member States and partners by providing programmes and services that are relevant, contemporary and multidisciplinary.

7. In the 2019–2020 period, a total of 281 learning activities were delivered directly by Staff College trainers, an increase of 18 per cent over the previous biennium. Staff College courses, services and products reached 57,542 beneficiaries around the globe, with 15 per cent percent of those working outside the United Nations. This figure marks a 22 per cent rise compared with the previous biennium, a significant level of growth. The overall quality of learning products provided, as indicated in after-course evaluations, continued to be highly rated, with an average recommendation rate of 96 per cent.

8. In the period under review, the Staff College reported strong financial results, stemming from its ability to keep expenditures below revenues. Benefiting from its efficient operations, the Staff College was able to increase its staffing in key strategic areas (such as instructional design). Furthermore, it expanded its learning programmes and invested in new technologies – areas that all experienced growth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## III. Rising to meet the challenge posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

9. In 2020, the Staff College delivered learning offerings by adapting quickly to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global lockdown increased the demand for digital learning in general as United Nations staff and other multilateral partners boosted their online learning uptake. At the same time, the Staff College faced increased competition as learners across the globe could choose from numerous e-course providers. Against this backdrop, the Staff College was able to dramatically increase the number of direct participants, reporting a 241 per cent increase over the number in 2019 – reaching a historical high.

10. By swiftly reinventing its portfolio and discontinuing all face-to-face offerings for 2020, the Staff College became for the first time in its history a full-fledged online learning provider. Its ability to produce engaging, high-quality e-learning solutions and its understanding of United Nations needs positioned the Staff College as a leading provider of digital learning solutions. As a result, in 2020 the Staff College turned its traditional business model upside down. Online learning grew from about 24 per cent in 2019, to over 85 per cent of total activities in 2020.

11. The Staff College made investments in new technology in order to adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Despite the pressure to contain expenses, investments in ICT equipment were made to deliver synchronous e-learning sessions. The Staff College accelerated ongoing development projects and planned investments to enhance its own learning management environment solution, the application UNKampus<sup>30</sup>. The successful launch of “Blueline”<sup>1</sup> – a global learning hub designed by the United Nations, for the United Nations, wherein United Nations staff can choose from a suite of free, self-paced learning pathways – produced a surge in enrolment in 2020.

<sup>1</sup> [unssc.org/about-unssc/blue-line-global-learning-hub-designed-un-un/](https://unssc.org/about-unssc/blue-line-global-learning-hub-designed-un-un/).

12. A range of online learning products on timely topics such as “Helping teams navigate uncertainty” and “United Nations leadership in times of uncertainty” were successfully developed and delivered. In addition, the Staff College built upon its own experience on digitizing learning solutions. It emerged as a leader in e-learning design with requests for support for developing online courses coming from other United Nations entities. The Staff College also increased the number of its free online offerings for United Nations staff and partner entities from 4 per cent in 2019 to over 28 per cent of total activities in 2020.

13. In 2020 there were 3,500 registrations for over 40 free webinars hosted by prominent experts. The webinars served to share knowledge and ideas, particularly in the area of peace and security. The most popular sessions, attended by nearly 200 participants, were on the following themes: “Data and climate security: how climate security data analytics can support integrated analysis for sustaining peace”, “Navigating uncertainty: your stories – learning for future resiliency”, “Climate security for sustaining peace”, “The future of multilateralism in a post-COVID-19 world” and “Sustaining peace in a climate change world: why climate change matters to conflict mediation”.

14. The results achieved in 2020 advanced the reputation of the Staff College as an institution for system-wide knowledge management, training and continuous learning for the staff of the United Nations system and, increasingly, United Nations partners. It did so by advancing system-wide knowledge about the 2030 Agenda, sustaining peace and management reform.

#### **IV. Advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through learning**

15. The 2030 Agenda is the most ambitious agenda ever adopted by States Members of the United Nations. It requires the United Nations system and partners to work across sectors, strengthening and expanding partnerships in which collaboration and synergy are key. In his remarks at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in September 2019, the Secretary-General called upon all sectors of society to mobilize a “decade of action” to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Staff College has helped to advance the 2030 Agenda by putting learning at the service of this broader objective.

16. In order to strengthen the common Sustainable Development Goals knowledge base, the Staff College, together with the Development Coordination Office, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, developed a foundational certification on sustainable development for resident coordinators and an e-course entitled “Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” for all interested development practitioners and Member States.

17. The Staff College, together with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, launched “UN SDG: Learn”, an online platform that hosts learning opportunities on sustainable development. The effort is aimed at scaling learning opportunities that promote holistic thinking and integrated approaches as well as foster collaborative partnerships. The platform offers more than 400 courses and microlearning modules designed and developed by more than 150 organizations and institutions. By the end of 2020, the platform had 65,852 users.

18. The achievements of UN SDG: Learn were recognized in a report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination and convergence” ([JIU/REP/2020/2](#)), in which it noted the

platform's ability to curate learning solutions on sustainable development for interested learners, individuals or organizations. The Unit also encouraged participating organizations to contribute their learning programmes and to use the courses or microlearning available while working collectively to improve the three main components of "UN SDG: Learn" – the platform, the partnership and the programme.

19. In order to support the roll-out of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – the most important United Nations instrument for planning and implementing United Nations development activities at the country level in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda – the Staff College developed a training package for United Nations country teams together with the Development Coordination Office. Altogether, 41 such training courses were delivered to United Nations country teams, to help to promote a more cohesive, effective and efficient United Nations development system – a key priority of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.

20. With the aim of enhancing an understanding of the importance of partnerships for sustainable development, the Staff College fostered critical knowledge of topics such as: the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement; challenges and opportunities regarding partnership development; policies, guidance and tools that facilitate partnerships between the United Nations and stakeholders; and how to build substantive and sustainable partnerships.

21. Free-of-charge courses proved popular in 2020. Thanks to the contribution of the Federal Government of Germany, the Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development was able to offer the entirety of its portfolio of facilitated and tutored online courses free-of-charge, registering on average over 150 participants per edition. Course titles included "Unleashing the power of the private sector for the 2030 Agenda", "The Paris Agreement on Climate Change as a development agenda", "Policy coherence for sustainable development", "Circular economy and the 2030 Agenda" and "Anti-corruption in the context of the 2030 Agenda".

22. The Staff College provided coherent and effective support to countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The support occurred in several ways: by strengthening the leadership skills, knowledge and capacities of United Nations resident coordinators and senior members of United Nations country teams; by enhancing the skills of country teams to lead collaboratively and deliver a whole-of-the-system United Nations response to a country's sustainable development priorities; by building the knowledge, skills and capacities of the offices of United Nations resident coordinators and United Nations development system country-level staff within the United Nations development system repositioning process. The Staff College also supported scaling up implementation of the 2030 Agenda by building the knowledge, capacities and leadership skills of civil servants to deliver sustainable development curricula.

23. The Staff College is committed to building the capacity of the next generation of leaders, who will bring the world closer to a sustainable future. To that end, partnerships have been forged with leading academic institutions. One of these, the Master's in International Development, has been developed with the IE School of Global and Public Affairs in Madrid in order to inspire a renewed commitment to multilateralism among the next generation of leaders.

24. Recognizing the key role played by the evaluation function in measuring progress in the context of the 2030 Agenda, the Staff College strengthened its offerings to build the evaluation capacity of United Nations entities. Learning in this area focused on three elements including: enabling a conducive evaluative culture that promotes evidence-based evaluation as a tool for decision-making; expanding

opportunities for professional growth through mentoring and coaching systems; and improving individual, technical and managerial capacity in evaluation.

## **V. Supporting the integration of the United Nations system to build and sustain peace**

25. Connected to the 2030 Agenda are the twin General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In these resolutions, States Members of the United Nations call for comprehensive, coordinated approaches to enhancing the skills and capacities of societies to address root causes of conflict and build and sustain peace through non-violent means. In the period under review, in order to help to deliver on these twin resolutions, the Staff College offered learning designed to contribute to sustaining peace objectives and to enhancing the skills of United Nations staff for operating in complex environments. The Staff College also worked to ensure that its learning offerings would support the knowledge requirements and shift in thinking required by the Secretary-General's reform of the peace and security pillar, in which he has called for greater coherence in United Nations approaches to country and regional settings through an increased focus on regional and joint analysis and overcoming institutional silos to increase synergies for prevention.

26. It is critical that United Nations personnel are grounded in the complexity of the current global landscape and the changing nature of conflict and violence. The building of analytical skills and use of integrated approaches are core to the Staff College's numerous offerings, which include courses on conflict analysis, analysing and understanding non-State armed groups, macroeconomics for peace, decentralized governance, human security, the humanitarian-development-peace collaboration, and working at the nexus of human rights and conflict transformation. A new offering, "Integrated analysis for sustaining peace writing course," was piloted in July 2020 and included as part of a skills enhancement training package for staff offered during the lockdown period. In line with broader United Nations efforts to develop a long-term approach to sustaining peace by ensuring that climate security concerns are mainstreamed across its analysis and programming for peace-building, an online course on "Climate-sensitive programming for sustaining peace" was launched in November 2020.

27. The Staff College and the Centre for International Peace Operations brought together deputy special representatives of the Secretary-General to examine the implications of United Nations reform for peacekeeping operations, to explore current practice in peace operations in moving from early warning to early action and to foster women's participation in peace processes.

28. Implementing peace resolutions in complex environments requires specialized operational knowledge. In partnership with the Department of Safety and Security, the Staff College delivered modules to enhance security awareness skills through a programme entitled "Safe and secure approaches in field environments. The learning was maximized through train-the-trainer programmes for United Nations security personnel and affiliated organizations, enabling personnel to be deployed swiftly to volatile and dangerous areas.

29. The Sustainable Development Goal targets reflect the explicit commitments of countries to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020, to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems and to improve road safety for all. The Staff College road safety modules received international accreditation from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

30. In the light of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), and the fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), the Staff College, with the generous support of the Government of Italy, conducted the Virtual Torino Forum for Sustaining Peace in support of Italy's third national action plan on women and peace and security. During the week-long event, 400 United Nations and non-United Nations participants interacted with 70 speakers on critical topics for the advancement of the women and peace and security and youth and peace and security agendas. The continued support of the Staff College for the full implementation of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) included an online immersion course on the youth and peace and security agenda for United Nations staff.

## **VI. Supporting management reform and a United Nations culture conducive to change**

31. The United Nations system leadership framework and management reform are critical elements for delivering results for Member States. Both of these require United Nations personnel to develop a new way of working. In 2019, the Staff College offered progressive learning paths for United Nations personnel at all levels and tools to support a new way of working. The United Nations Leaders Programme was one such learning opportunity. Entering its eleventh year, the course has been attended by hundreds of senior United Nations officials and has featured over 200 noted speakers. It is the official Leadership Development Programme of the United Nations Secretariat.

32. In an effort to measure how United Nations teams, departments and entities demonstrate the key competencies of the United Nations system leadership framework, the Staff College developed the Leadership Culture Assessment Tool. The tool provides an important platform to drive behavioural change and assess leadership culture across the United Nations system. In this way, it supports the United Nations in narrowing the gap between current and desired leadership cultures, revealing key opportunities for leadership development, effectiveness and efficiency at all levels.

33. In 2019, in collaboration with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Staff College delivered a programme for senior leaders. Participants were immersed in a leadership development journey that challenged them to transform facets of their life and work environments. A third learning offering for senior leaders, the "Leadership, women and the United Nations" programme, promoted women in leadership across and beyond the United Nations system to advance the United Nations system leadership framework. The learning programme offered United Nations personnel an opportunity to explore themes critical for transformative and charismatic leadership.

34. In order to help drive transformational change rooted in an innovation mindset, the Staff College became the curator of the "UN Innovation Toolkit". Initiated at the behest of the Secretary-General under the leadership of the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the toolkit was developed with the "UN Innovation Network" and partners. It was entrusted to the Staff College in 2019 to be integrated into learning programmes as a means of scaling up innovation system-wide.

35. With the aim of fuelling change management to support United Nations reform, the Staff College offered learning on designing and managing organizational change. The United Nations Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK) was created by the Staff College to promote a culture of change and innovation across the United Nations system. Under the auspices of UNLOCK, the Staff College has continued to offer initiatives designed to drive change and support the United Nations family. This effort had a particular impact in 2020, as people's priorities and ways of



working shifted. Change management advisory services were focused on supporting United Nations entities with the assessment, review and implementation of various change programmes resulting from the United Nations reform.

36. Change management capacity- and capability-building continued to support all levels of staff – from General Service and related categories to the level of Assistant Secretary-General, as well as resident coordinators and members of United Nations country teams – in creating awareness, understanding and knowledge of how to apply change management principles within their areas of work. In addition, working with the Development Coordination Office, the Staff College built customized learning programmes in support of the efficiency agenda of the Secretary-General, specifically on the business operations strategy. This work will continue in 2021 with e-learning for common premises and common back offices.

37. In collaboration with five United Nations entities, the Staff College released its fifth UNLOCK case study, which was focused on change agent networks in the United Nations system. Under the leadership of the Staff College, the team of advisors examined implementing, managing and leveraging change agent networks in the United Nations.

38. The Staff College participated in the “New ways of working” work stream of the High-level Committee on Management Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce. These activities are part of a larger effort by the Staff College to support the High-level Committee on Management to enable new ways of working.

39. The Joint Inspection Unit acknowledged the work of the Staff College in its report on the review of change management in United Nations system organizations (JIU/REP/2019/4), indicating that UNLOCK could play a much greater role in transformation across the United Nations system if it were properly resourced and supported.

## **VII. Staff College recognized as a key learning institution for the United Nations system**

40. The Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations recognized the Staff College as an important United Nations institution to support system-wide learning in a 2020 report entitled “Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination and convergence” (JIU/REP/2020/2). The strengths of the Staff College identified by respondents to a Joint Inspection Unit survey quoted in the report included most notably the cultivation of a unifying United Nations identity, the integration of guidance on leadership and management practices and its readiness to customize programmes for agencies. The openness of the Staff College to collaboration and the co-design of content were also cited.

41. In the report, the Joint Inspection Unit identified the Staff College as one of three main institutions that could decisively drive the United Nations system towards more coherence, coordination and convergence, potentially bringing overall savings at systemwide level and more efficient spending of Member States’ assessed or voluntary contributions.

42. The exponential growth of the Staff College was driven by its strong performance over recent years, as noted by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions 2019/12 and 2017/5. That growth is the litmus test showing that the Staff College is well placed to perform a central function as a hub of learning and knowledge management within the United Nations system, as recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit.

## **VIII. Conclusions and recommendation**

43. In the period under review the Staff College expanded its programmatic portfolio and displayed a high level of agility in continuing to offer learning despite the pandemic by taking its offerings online. The Staff College remained committed and responsive to the needs of its beneficiaries, including by offering new learning programmes to meet the needs of United Nations staff and partner entities amid the pandemic.

44. The impact of the pandemic on multilateralism requires a new generation of international civil servants that can further the goals of international cooperation, as well as build a better future for all. With its array of learning products and its inter-agency mandate, the Staff College can make a key contribution to building the capacity of the future workforce of the United Nations system.

45. The support of Member States is pivotal for the Staff College to continue to develop and implement quality learning for United Nations staff and partner entities, as mandated by the United Nations System Staff College Statute.

46. It is recommended that Member States and entities of the United Nations system continue to provide full support to the Staff College in its efforts to build the capacity of the present and future workforce of the United Nations system and of its partners.

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