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Programme questions: evaluation

Evaluation of the Office of Legal Affairs

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Office of Legal Affairs of the Secretariat is responsible for the provision of unified central legal services for the Secretariat and the principal and other organs of the United Nations; the progressive development of international public and trade law and its codification; the registration and publication of treaties; and the strengthening, development and effective implementation of the international legal order for the seas and oceans. It does this through its three functional pillars, namely, through: (a) supporting intergovernmental processes and technical and expert bodies; (b) the provision of capacity-building, advisory services and dissemination of information; and (c) the provision of legal advice and support to the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations in accordance with international law.

The evaluation covered all areas of the work of the Office of Legal Affairs for the period from 2015 to 2018 and assessed relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and cross-cutting issues.

The work programme of the Office of Legal Affairs was aligned with its diverse, complex mandate. The Office responded to the needs of its stakeholders and beneficiaries, who valued the specialized legal skill set, institutional memory, credibility and neutrality it provided in delivering its mandate. The Office effectively delivered its work programme and achieved significant outcomes in all functional areas. However, some gaps remained in the strategies, visibility, dissemination, and monitoring and evaluation of its work.

The Office of Legal Affairs also efficiently delivered its work programme, with increased demands for its services. However, information technology, knowledge management and information-sharing practices created inefficiencies and failed to maximize opportunities for consistency in output delivery. While the partnerships that

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** E/AC.51/2019/1.



the Office created strengthened its work, particularly in the technical assistance realm, at times, they were not fully leveraged and good practices were not replicated. The Office supported the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 14 and 16 but did not systematically integrate all relevant Goals into its work programme.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services made seven important recommendations, namely, that the Office of Legal Affairs:

- Develop technical cooperation strategies more systematically, on the basis of comparative advantages and partnership opportunities
- Review standard operating Procedures, manuals and guidelines across functional areas and divisions
- Establish formal mechanisms across functional areas for the sharing of information, best practices and lessons learned
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation
- Adopt a new case management system and enhance visibility (website)
- Review the impact of the Secretary-General's reform and integrate all Sustainable Development Goals into its work programme
- Fill vacancies

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Office of Legal Affairs of the Secretariat for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment designed to identify Secretariat evaluation priorities for 2017–2019. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the Office of Legal Affairs for consideration at its fifty-ninth session, to be held in June 2019 (see [A/72/16](#)). The General Assembly endorsed the selection in its resolution [72/9](#).

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions [48/218 B](#), [54/244](#) and [59/272](#) and in Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/273](#), which authorizes OIOS to initiate, carry out and report on any action it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. Evaluation by OIOS is provided for in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.¹

3. The overall evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Office of Legal Affairs during the period from 2015 to 2018. The decision to undertake a full programme evaluation emerged from a risk assessment described in the evaluation inception paper produced at the outset of the evaluation.² The evaluation was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system.³

4. The comments of the Office of Legal Affairs were sought on the draft report and taken into account in the final report. The response of the Office is included in annex I to the present report.

II. Background

A. Mandate, role and stakeholders

5. The mandate of the Office of Legal Affairs emanates in part from the Charter of the United Nations, particularly with respect to the provisions relating to the progressive development of international law and its codification;⁴ the registration and publication of treaties;⁵ and the juridical status and privileges and immunities of the Organization, its officials and the representatives of the States Members of the Organization.⁶ Numerous General Assembly resolutions (see [A/71/6/Rev.1](#)) have led to, inter alia, the establishment of the Office of Legal Affairs (see resolution 13 (I)) and the corresponding subsidiary bodies of the Assembly mandated to develop international law.

6. The goal of the Office of Legal Affairs is to support the accomplishment of the objectives of the United Nations by providing legal advice to the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and by promoting among Member States a better understanding of and respect for the principles and norms of international law (see [A/72/6 \(Sect. 8\)](#)). The Office seeks to achieve this goal by providing a unified

¹ [ST/SGB/2018/3](#), regulation 7.2.

² See IED-18-008, OIOS-IED inception paper, Office of Legal Affairs, 27 July 2018.

³ Reissued by the United Nations Evaluation Group in 2016.

⁴ Article 13.

⁵ Article 102.

⁶ Articles 104 and 105; Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, General Assembly resolution 22 A (I) of 13 February 1946.

central legal service for the Secretariat and the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations; supporting the development of international justice; contributing to the progressive development and codification of international public and trade law and the promotion and strengthening of the international legal order for the seas and oceans; promoting the teaching, study, dissemination and wider appreciation of international law; registering and publishing treaties; and performing the depositary functions of the Secretary-General.

7. The Office delivers outputs and services in three main functional areas by:⁷

(a) Supporting intergovernmental processes and technical expert bodies and facilitating intergovernmental decision-making by the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly; the International Law Commission (Assembly resolution 174 (II)); the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization; the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals; subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, such as the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects (Regular Process), and the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea; the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (resolution 72/249); the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and the Review Conference on the Fish Stocks Agreement; the Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; and the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) (resolution 2205 (XXI));

(b) Delivering technical assistance in support of international law, including services that enhance Member State capacity, to facilitate action and decision-making and to promote the dissemination, appreciation and use of general international law, international trade law and ocean affairs and the law of the sea;

(c) Supporting and defending the legal interests of the Organization by providing expert legal advice, opinions, studies and support in respect of founding arrangements, constitutional and procedural questions, interpretation of the Charter and privileges and immunities, and legal coordination and representation, including on matters affecting the operations and activities of the Organization and its, funds and programmes.

8. The Office has custody of, registers and publishes treaties. The Treaty Section discharges the Secretary-General's depositary functions regarding multilateral treaties and analyses, registers, files, records and publishes treaties and other international agreements pursuant to Article 102 of the Charter.

B. Structure

9. The work of the Office is guided by its strategic framework and programme budget,⁸ which reflect the programme structure, describe its context of operations and challenges and provide a framework for its work. The Office has six subprogrammes implemented by five divisions and one section, which deliver the services and outputs outlined above (table 1).

⁷ See [ST/SGB/2008/13](#) and [A/71/6/Rev.1](#).

⁸ See [A/69/6 \(Prog.6\)](#) and [A/72/6 \(Sect. 8\)](#).

Table 1
Objectives of the Office of Legal Affairs

<i>Division</i>	<i>Subprogramme</i>
Office of the Legal Counsel	Provision of legal services to the United Nations system as a whole
General Legal Division	Provision of general legal services to United Nations organs and programmes
Codification Division	Progressive development and codification of international law
Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea	Law of the sea and ocean affairs
International Trade Law Division	Progressive harmonization, modernization and unification of international trade law
Treaty Section	Custody, registration and publication of treaties

C. Management

10. The Office is headed by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel. The Legal Counsel is accountable to the Secretary-General and is assisted by the Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, who heads the Office of the Legal Counsel. The Office of Legal Affairs consists of an Executive Office, five divisions and one section (figure I).

Figure I
Organizational structure of the Office of Legal Affairs



Source: ST/SGB/2008/13 and A/72/6 (Sect. 8).

D. Governance arrangements

11. Member States exercise corporate governance of the Office through their participation in the sessions of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, where the strategic framework and programme budget are approved. The Office reports on its work through the Sixth Committee of the Assembly or, in the case of oceans and the law of the sea and sustainable fisheries, to the General Assembly plenary.

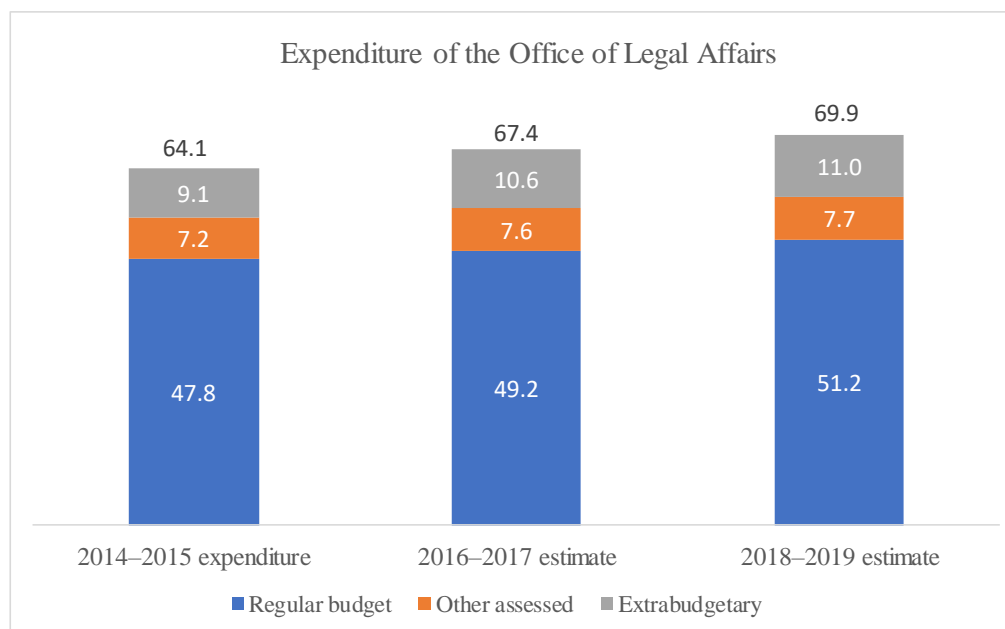
E. Resources

12. The regular budget accounts for most of the budget of the Office of Legal Affairs (figure II). The proposed budget for the Office amounts to \$69.9 million for the 2018–2019 biennium, which is almost 4 per cent higher than expenditures in the previous biennium and a 9 per cent increase from the 2014–2015 biennium.

Figure II

Distribution of the financial resources of the Office by source of funding, 2014–2019

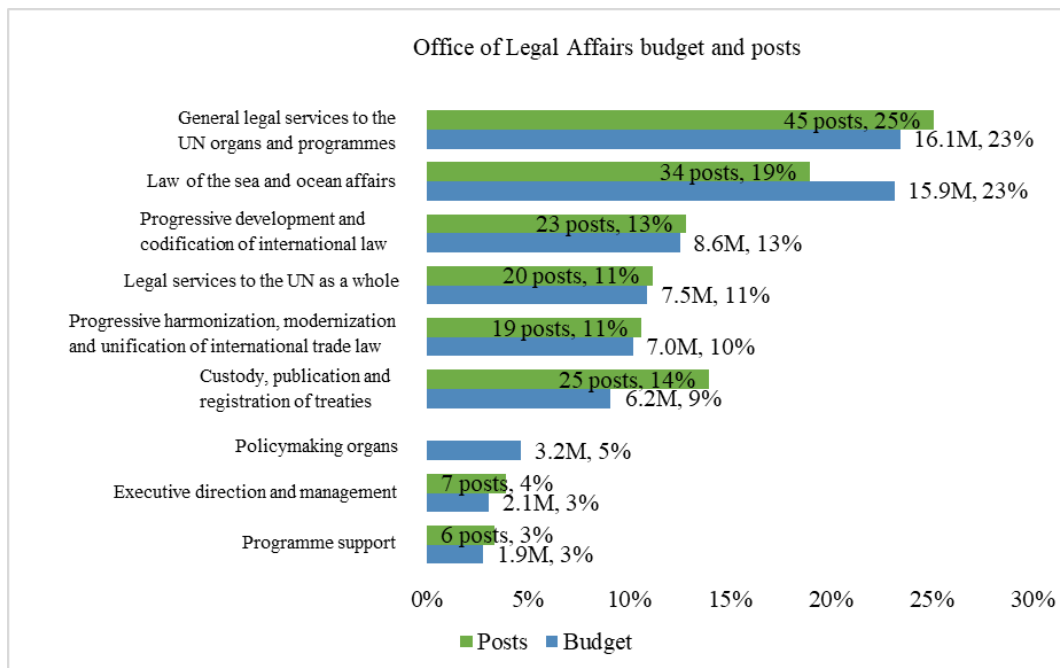
(millions of United States dollars)



Source: A/72/6 (Sect.8). Synthesized by the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.

13. The Office has a total of 144 established staff posts under the regular budget (92 Professional and higher and 52 General Service), 19 positions funded from the support account for peacekeeping operations and 14 posts from extrabudgetary sources (figure III).

Figure III
Percentage of the total Office budget and posts apportioned to each programme component, 2018–2019



Source: A/72/6 (Sect.8). Synthesized by the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.

F. Scope and purpose

14. The evaluation covered all areas of the work of the Office from 2015 to 2018 and addressed relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and cross-cutting questions.

III. Methodology

15. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach featuring the following data sources:

(a) Structured document review of reports of intergovernmental and expert and technical bodies, including the Sixth Committee (seventieth to seventy-third sessions), relevant General Assembly resolutions, UNCITRAL reports and numerous Office publications and reports;

(b) Secondary analysis of Office databases and programme performance and budgetary data, for example, the case management system of the General Legal Division and the Prodigio case management system of the Office of Legal Counsel; the Integrated Management and Document Information System; the proposed programme budgets; reports on the status of contributions to Office funds; relevant reports of the Secretary-General; and General Assembly resolutions and relevant technical reports;

(c) Analysis of web analytics for the websites managed by the Codification Division, the Treaty Section and the Office of the Under-Secretary-General;

(d) Web-based surveys of 171 staff representing all operational units of the Office;⁹ 118 clients of the General Legal Division and the Office of Legal Counsel;¹⁰ and 1,374 stakeholders covering the services and support provided by the Office with respect to treaties, technical assistance, and secretariat support to intergovernmental and expert bodies;¹¹

(e) Semi-structured interviews with 152 individuals, including 69 staff, representing all organizational units of the Office; 41 Member State representatives/government officials; 16 representatives of technical and expert bodies; 7 United Nations system partners and stakeholders; and 19 external partners and stakeholders;

(f) Direct observations of eight bodies or events serviced by the Office¹² and six technical assistance activities¹³ led or supported by the Office, encompassing all functional and thematic areas of its work.

16. The evaluation faced two main limitations: (a) the absence of outcome data on the effectiveness of technical assistance activities; and (b) the unreliability of Prodiagio, the Office case management system, which contained data on the Office's work processes. The evaluation addressed the first limitation by triangulating information from interviews with survey results and observations of a sample of technical assistance activities. The second limitation was addressed by staff interviews with the users of Prodiagio.

IV. Evaluation results

Relevance

A. **The Office of Legal Affairs has responded to the needs of its stakeholders and beneficiaries, who have valued its specialized legal skill set, institutional memory, credibility and neutrality in delivering on its diverse and complex mandate**

The Office of Legal Affairs delivered a complex and multifaceted work programme consistent with its mandate and responded to the needs and priorities of stakeholders

17. The Office of Legal Affairs was highly relevant to the United Nations and its diverse constituency. Its activities were consistent with its complex and multifaceted mandate, which included three broad, functional areas discussed separately below: (a) support to intergovernmental processes and technical and expert bodies; (b) delivery of technical assistance in support of international law; and (c) supporting and defending the legal interests of the Organization. These wide-ranging activities

⁹ 66.1 per cent response rate.

¹⁰ 48.3 per cent response rate.

¹¹ 24.7 per cent response rate.

¹² Committee on Relations with the Host Country, Sixth Committee of the General Assembly, International Law Commission, Preparatory Committee on an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction, Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, UNCITRAL, United Nations Legal Adviser Network, panel discussion at World Oceans Day 2018; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

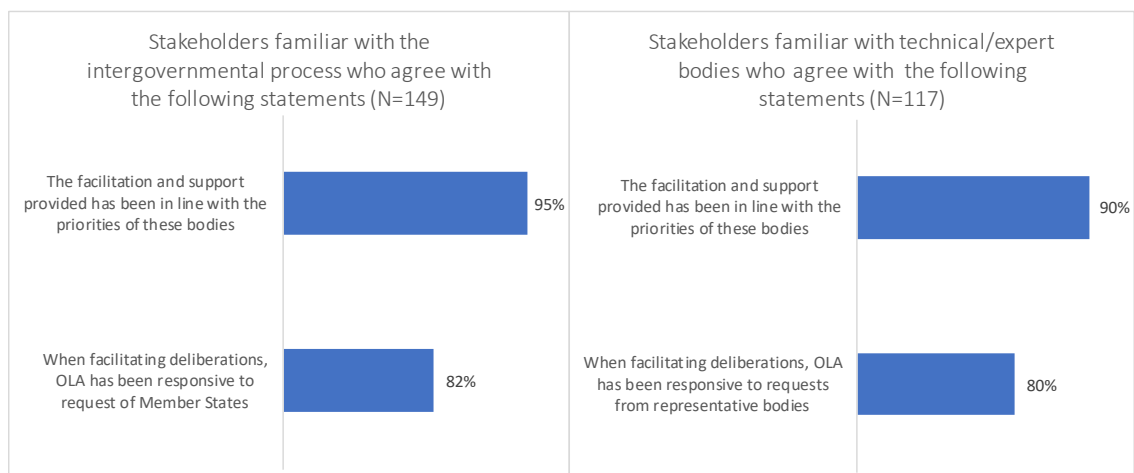
¹³ International Law Fellowship Programme 2018, United Nations Regional Course in International Law for Asia-Pacific 2018, treaty law and practice seminar, Regular Process workshops, Alternative Dispute Resolution Conference.

were critical to the effective functioning of the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and the rule of law globally (see annex II).

18. In providing support to a broad range of intergovernmental and expert bodies and processes, the Office responded to their needs and priorities. Delegations interviewed consistently praised the facilitation of meetings and support by the Office secretariat, also noting the availability and willingness of the Office staff to respond to their needs and requests. The Office provided considerable substantive support to 15 bodies, servicing approximately 400 meetings annually. Similarly, General Assembly resolutions consistently reaffirmed the indispensable role of the Office in supporting technical and expert bodies, notably the International Law Commission and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf,¹⁴ which included approximately 80 meetings of the International Law Commission and 200 meetings of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

19. Most survey respondents agreed that the facilitation and support provided by the Office to intergovernmental, expert and technical bodies were consistent with their priorities and that the Office responded to requests by body members. Figure IV illustrates delegations' assessments of the facilitation provided by the Office.

Figure IV
Stakeholder assessments on the responsiveness of the Office to the needs of intergovernmental and technical/expert bodies



Source: Stakeholder survey.

20. The Office supported and implemented technical assistance and capacity-building activities primarily aimed at supporting developing countries to facilitate action and decision-making on international law, international trade law and the law of the sea. General Assembly resolutions recognized the relevance and importance of the Office in furthering United Nations rule of law programmes and activities and reaffirmed the increasing demand for training and dissemination activities in international law,¹⁵ international trade law¹⁶ and ocean affairs and the law of the sea.¹⁷ Responding to increased demand, the Office continued to expand certain

¹⁴ International Law Commission: General Assembly resolutions [73/265](#), [72/116](#), [71/140](#) and [70/236](#); Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea: resolutions [73/124](#), [72/73](#), [71/257](#) and [70/235](#).

¹⁵ Resolutions [73/201](#), [72/115](#), [71/139](#) and [70/116](#).

¹⁶ Resolutions [73/197](#), [72/113](#), [71/135](#) and [70/115](#).

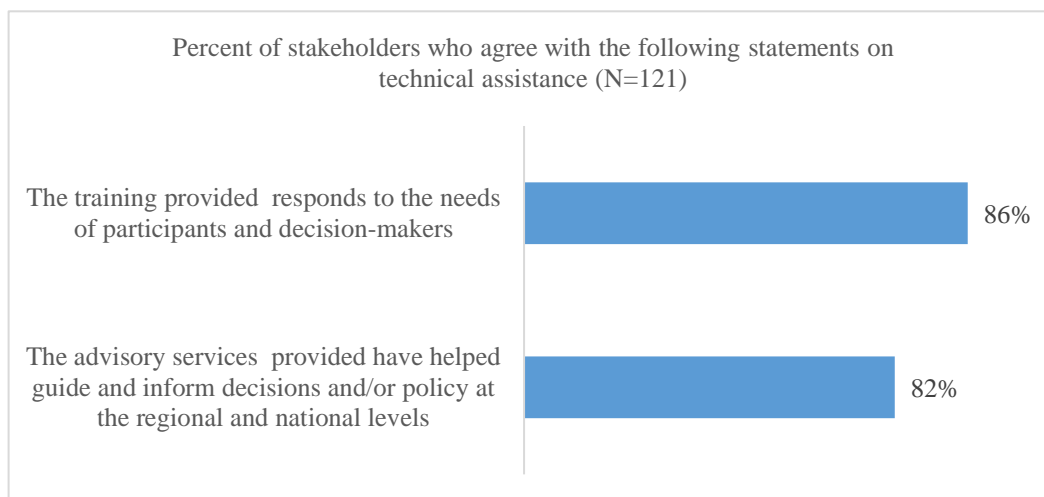
¹⁷ Resolutions [73/124](#), [72/73](#), [71/257](#) and [70/235](#).

programmes, including through electronic means, for example, the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law initiative.

21. In interviews, Member State representatives and participants in technical assistance activities of the Office indicated that Office fellowships and capacity-building programmes fulfilled a need and, together with advisory services, enabled Member States to better engage in intergovernmental processes in the areas of international law, international trade law and ocean affairs and the law of the sea. Stakeholders wished to see these programmes and activities continued and expanded. Survey evidence (figure V) confirmed that these programmes met the needs of participants and decision-makers.

Figure V

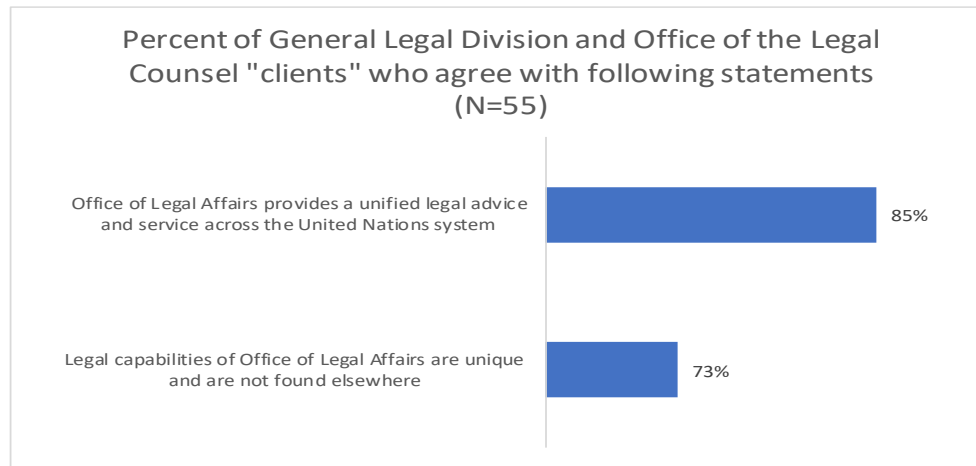
Stakeholder assessments on technical assistance meeting their needs



Source: Stakeholder survey.

22. The Office supported and defended the legal interests of the Organization. This functional area included the provision of legal support and advice to a wide array of stakeholders in the Secretariat and the broader United Nations system. Stakeholder interviews and survey results confirmed that the work of the General Legal Division and the Office of the Legal Counsel is critical to the effective functioning of the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and the rule of law globally. Stakeholder survey respondents and external interviewees noted in particular the expertise of the Office in the areas of the privileges and immunities of the Organization and host country agreement matters, with 98 per cent rating the quality of advice given in that area as high quality. Most survey respondents agreed that the legal capabilities of the Office were unique and not found elsewhere and that it provided unified legal advice and service across the United Nations system (figure VI).

Figure VI
Stakeholder assessments on the uniqueness of the legal capabilities of the Office and the consistency of its advice

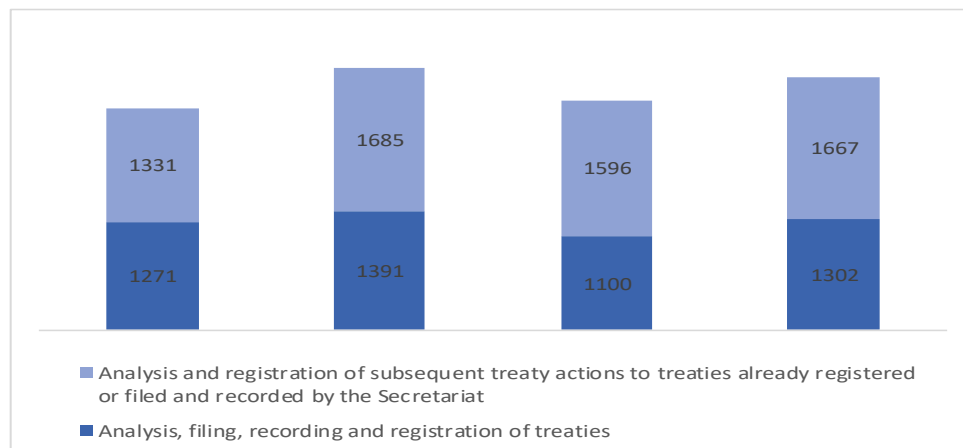


Source: Stakeholder survey.

23. Lastly, the Treaty Section of the Office performed duties derived from Articles 98 and 102 of the Charter of the United Nations, which mandates the depositary functions of the Secretary-General and the registration, custody and publication of treaties. In fulfilling these functions, the Treaty Section supported Member States and international organizations by providing treaty law advice and technical assistance. The General Assembly has reaffirmed the importance of treaties in developing international law and the international legal order and noted with appreciation the role of the Treaty Section in implementing the obligations under Article 102 of the Charter (see resolution [73/210](#)).

24. Delegates interviewed uniformly agreed that the Treaty Section fulfilled a need, noting its unique technical knowledge and functions and the critical role of treaty registration and publication in the rule of law globally. Figure VII shows that between 2015 and 2018, the Treaty Section received more than 11,000 requests for treaty registration and subsequent treaty actions.

Figure VII
Number of requests received for treaty registration and treaty actions, 2015–2018



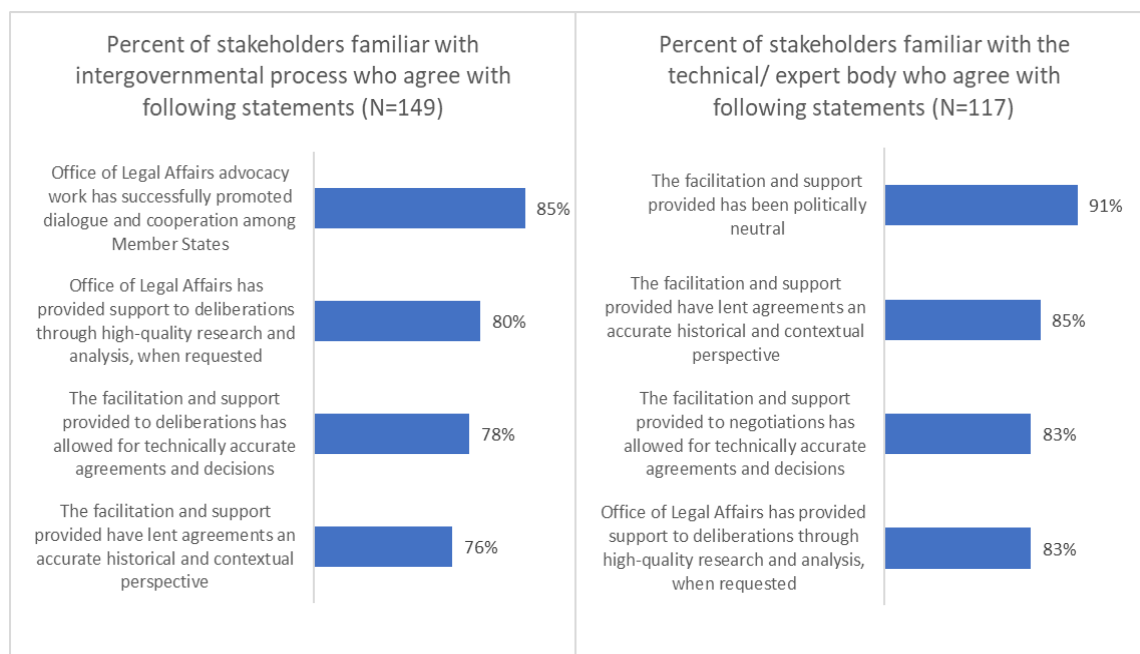
Source: Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System.

The value added of the Office of Legal Affairs included its neutrality, technical skill set, institutional memory and credibility in delivering its mandate

25. Stakeholders interviewed uniformly agreed that the Office provided critical secretariat support to intergovernmental deliberations and technical and expert bodies. Interviewees noted that the work of the Office in support of such bodies could not be entrusted to other departments or offices owing to the highly specialized expertise needed and substantive knowledge required to facilitate meetings, prepare documents and conduct research (for example, studies for the International Law Commission, support for the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf). Stakeholders, especially those familiar with technical and expert bodies, frequently mentioned the neutrality of the Office as an asset. Interviewees also valued its institutional memory, which Member States relied on to facilitate the work of such bodies and which helped to promote dialogue and cooperation among Member States, often informally. Survey evidence corroborated these findings (figure VIII).

Figure VIII

Stakeholder assessments on the value added of the support of the Office of Legal Affairs to intergovernmental processes and technical and expert bodies



Source: Stakeholder survey.

26. Interviewees widely recognized the unique position of the Office to provide capacity-building activities consistent with its mandates. Interviewees identified the respect and credibility the Office and the Organization enjoyed, which allowed it to deliver technical assistance by establishing productive partnerships and attracting world leading experts and academic institutions to contribute with minimal cost to the Organization.

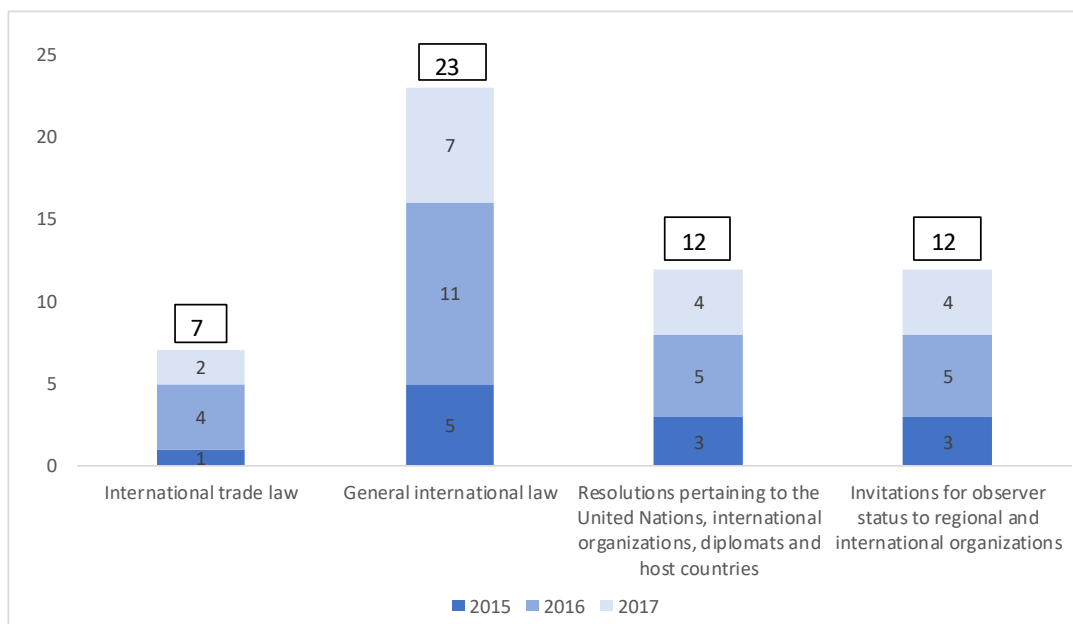
Effectiveness

B. The Office of Legal Affairs has effectively delivered its work programme and achieved significant outcomes in all functional areas; however, some gaps remain in the strategic approach, visibility, dissemination and monitoring and evaluation of its work

The Office of Legal Affairs has facilitated intergovernmental discussion, consensus-building and the approval of norms and standards in the promotion of international law

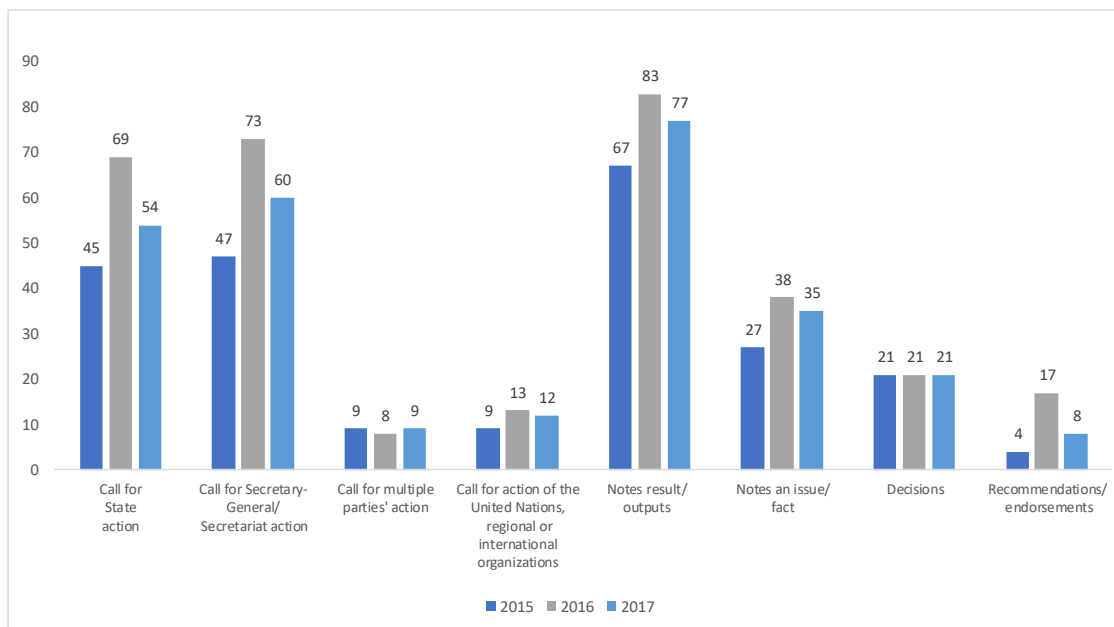
27. Through its secretariat support and under the deliberations of the Sixth Committee, the Office facilitated the adoption of approximately 54 General Assembly resolutions concerning international law. These resolutions included approximately 827 action points: 63 decisions, 168 points calling for action by Member States, 180 points calling for action by the Secretariat, 60 points calling for action by multiple actors (including international and regional organizations), 227 action points noting progress on outputs and outcomes, 100 action points acknowledging issues, and 29 recommendations. Figure IX shows resolutions by thematic area and Figure X details the action points by category and year. 227 action points noting progress on outputs and outcomes, 100 action points acknowledging issues, and 29 recommendations.

Figure IX
Types of Sixth Committee resolutions, 2015–2017



Source: Sixty-eighth to seventy-second sessions.

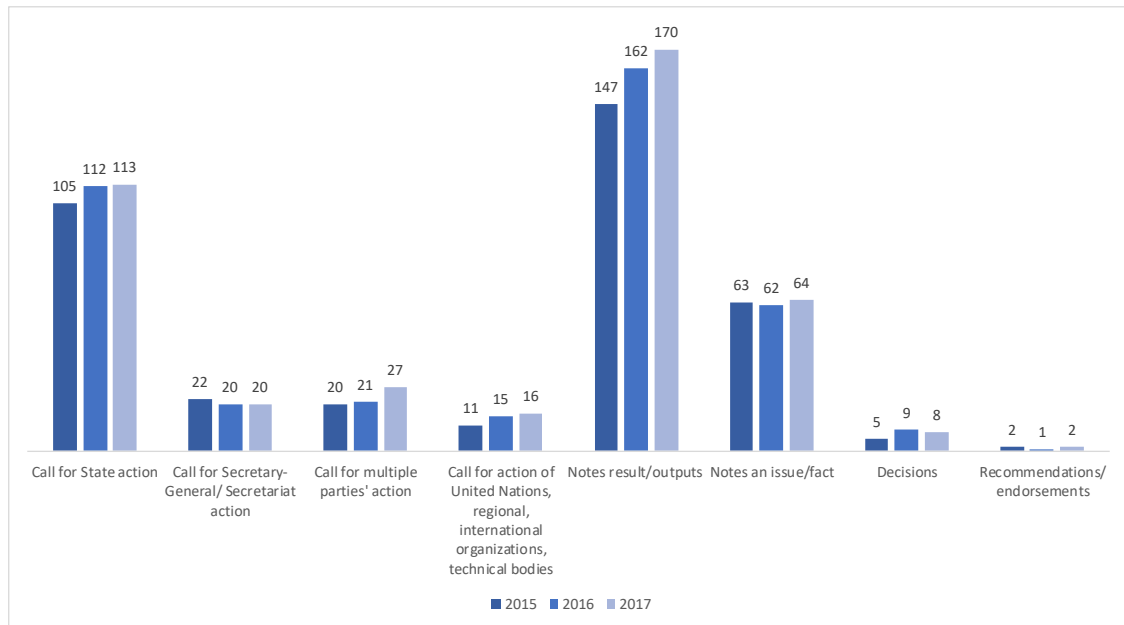
Figure X
Sixth Committee action points by type, 2015–2017



Source: Sixty-eighth to seventy-second sessions.

28. Regarding ocean affairs and the law of the sea, between 2015 and 2018, the Office facilitated 12 General Assembly resolutions, which included 2,034 actions regarding sustainable fisheries, the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the process relating to the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. (resolution [72/249](#)). The most prominent action points are calls for action by Member States (74) and acknowledgement of results and outputs (617). Most action points increased in number, while calls for action by the Secretary-General or the Secretariat decreased slightly. Figure XI shows the action points by type.

Figure XI
Action points relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, 2015–2017

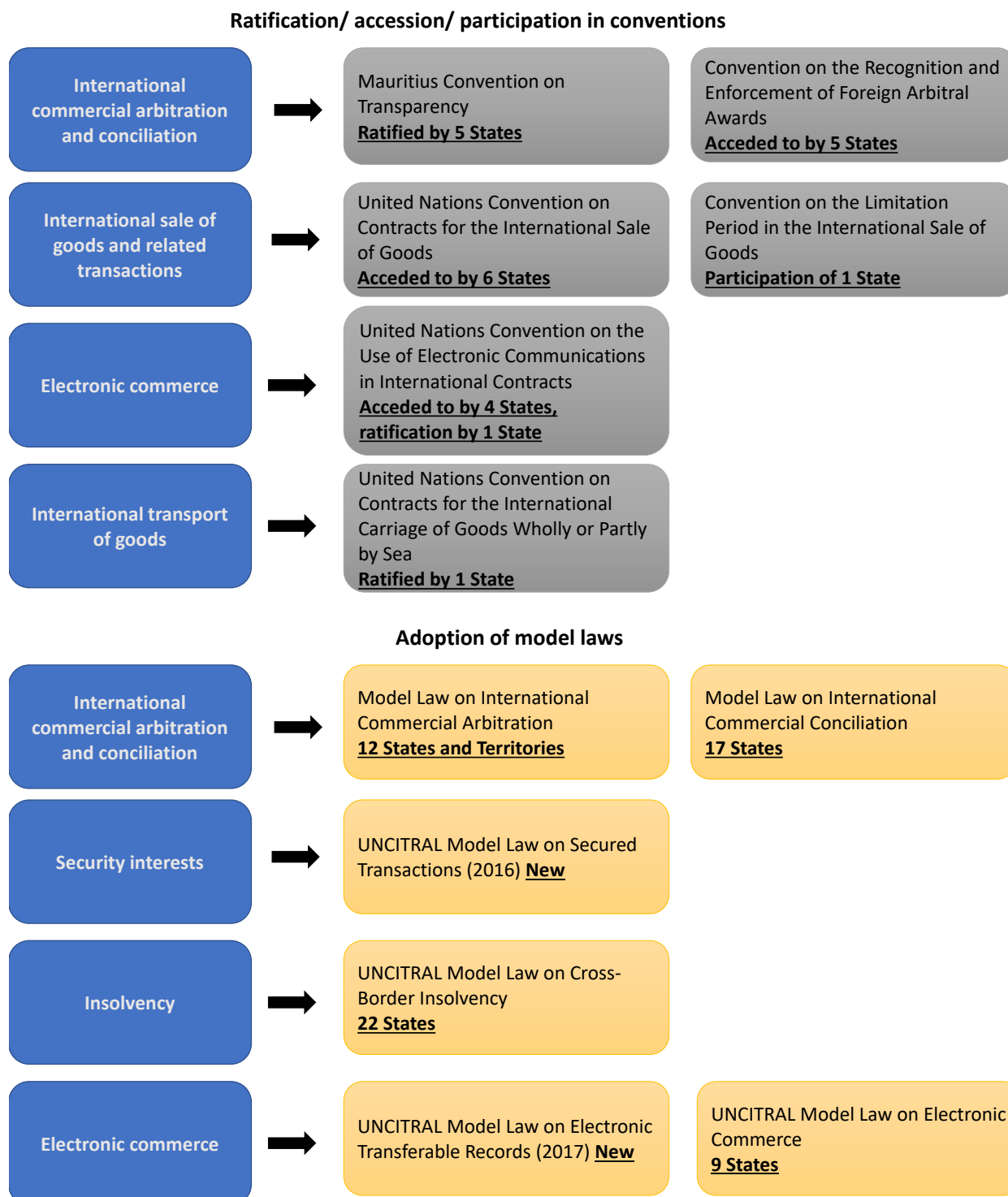


Source: General Assembly resolutions (2015–2017).

29. On international trade, the Office facilitated the adoption of the United Nations Convention on Transparency in Treaty-based Investor-State Arbitration (Mauritius Convention on Transparency) (2017)¹⁸ and finalized a draft convention on international settlement agreements resulting from mediation (Singapore Convention), which opened for signature in 2019. Regarding arbitration, the ratification and accession of the New York Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards reached 159 parties, with eight States acceding to it between 2015 and 2018. Concerning the six UNCITRAL working groups, the Office facilitated the issuance of two new model laws on secured transactions and electronic transferable records and a legislative guide on secured transactions. It also finalized a draft model law on the recognition and enforcement of insolvency-related judgments. Overall, there were 23 State ratifications, accessions and acceptances for six conventions. Legislation based on and influenced by model laws facilitated by the Office's International Trade Law Division were adopted in 60 instances, against a target of 65. Figure XII shows accessions to conventions and the adoption of model laws and legislative guidelines used by Member States.

¹⁸ The Convention was adopted in 2014 and entered into force in 2017.

Figure XII
Accession to conventions and adoption of model laws, by Member State, 2015–2018



Source: Treaty Section, UNCITRAL/International Trade Law Division website.

30. Overall, stakeholders agreed that the facilitation provided had been effective and useful to intergovernmental deliberations. Delegates interviewed across the various intergovernmental processes serviced considered that the Office provided

useful and essential support towards facilitating consensus and decision-making. The Office was especially helpful in navigating political sensitivities and facilitating compromise. Across the different thematic areas, Member States rated the quality and response of the servicing by the Office as professional, of superior quality, timely, and critical to deliberations. They considered the substantive inputs to be coherent, analytical, scientific and fundamental to their work.

31. Similarly, the Office of Legal Affairs facilitated the deliberations and reports of technical bodies (International Law Commission and Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf) that are central to advancing the codification and progressive development of international law, delineating the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles and solving inter-State disputes. While some Member States expressed concern about the lack of agreement on any major convention that advanced international law, they positively noted recent promissory progress on the draft conclusions on subsequent agreements and subsequent practice in relation to the interpretation of treaties and the draft conclusions on the identification of customary international law and encouraged their dissemination (see [A/C.6/73/SR.20](#)). Furthermore, the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice and universities frequently referenced reports and analysis by the International Law Commission, which demonstrates the relevance and usefulness of the Commission's products. Commission members acknowledged the invaluable assistance of the Office of Legal Affairs on its reports, its servicing and overall support (see [A/73/10](#)). Members of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf also expressed satisfaction with the support provided by the Office. Overall, 85 per cent of International Law Commission and Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf stakeholders considered its facilitation and support to be effective and useful.

32. Regarding the Office's registry and depositary services, stakeholders agreed that the Office provided effective services and advice that enabled stakeholders to exercise their duties under the Charter of the United Nations. Significant examples of success noted by Member States include:

- Skillful support provided regarding the Paris Agreement
- Assistance received on the final stages of the Singapore Convention
- Advice provided on the first ever agreement facilitated by a regional commission on Principle 10¹⁹

33. Ninety per cent of stakeholders considered information shared through the treaty website and other means of dissemination aimed at making treaties accessible and promoting their registration and publication to be helpful, and 91 per cent found communications regarding treaty registration and notification useful. However, Member States mentioned challenges with respect to the backlog of treaty publication and translation in all United Nations official languages.

The Office of Legal Affairs has contributed to raising awareness and promoting the learning of international law, including the national adoption of relevant model laws on trade-related issues; however, its interventions were sometimes unsystematic and lacked a focused strategy to effectively deliver its technical assistance work

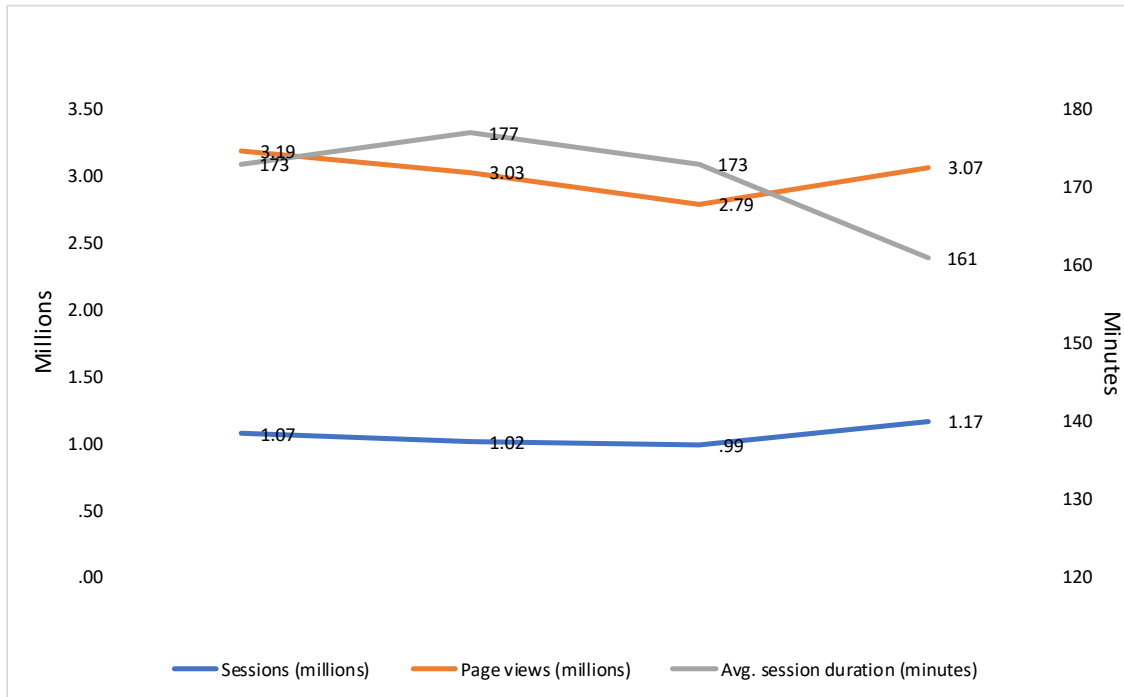
34. Consistent with its mandate, the Office helped to raise the awareness of and promoted the wider appreciation and utilization of international law through prominent capacity-building initiatives, including the United Nations Programme of

¹⁹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, the United Nations-Nippon Foundation of Japan Fellowship Programme, the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship on the Law of the Sea, the Regular Process and treaty law workshops. Document review and observation of Member State deliberations corroborated the overall satisfaction of Member States with the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law (A/73/557) and the capacity training provided by the Office across different areas, including the fellowships (see resolution 73/124), with Member States noting that the Office brought benefit to lawyers, legal systems and regions worldwide and allowed recipients to effectively contribute to decisions pertaining to their relevant specialized areas.

35. In the most recent biennium, technical cooperation services provided by the Office benefited approximately 1,213 participants and at least 44 countries. Overall, 98 per cent of Office stakeholders and beneficiaries surveyed agreed that its capacity-building interventions had helped to enhance awareness of relevant issues and 94 per cent agreed that the Office's training had helped to enhance the capacities of the participants and stakeholders. Further, 92 per cent of users of depositary and registry services found the assistance provided on registering a treaty, including notification of treaty action, to be useful and 85 per cent who attended capacity-building events on treaty law found them beneficial. Regarding the utility of its services, the Treaty Section website was the most visited.²⁰ Figure XIII indicates that between 2015 and 2018, the website averaged more than 3 million page views annually.²¹

Figure XIII
Treaty Section web analytics



Source: Office of Legal Affairs web analytics.

²⁰ Data from the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea are not available.

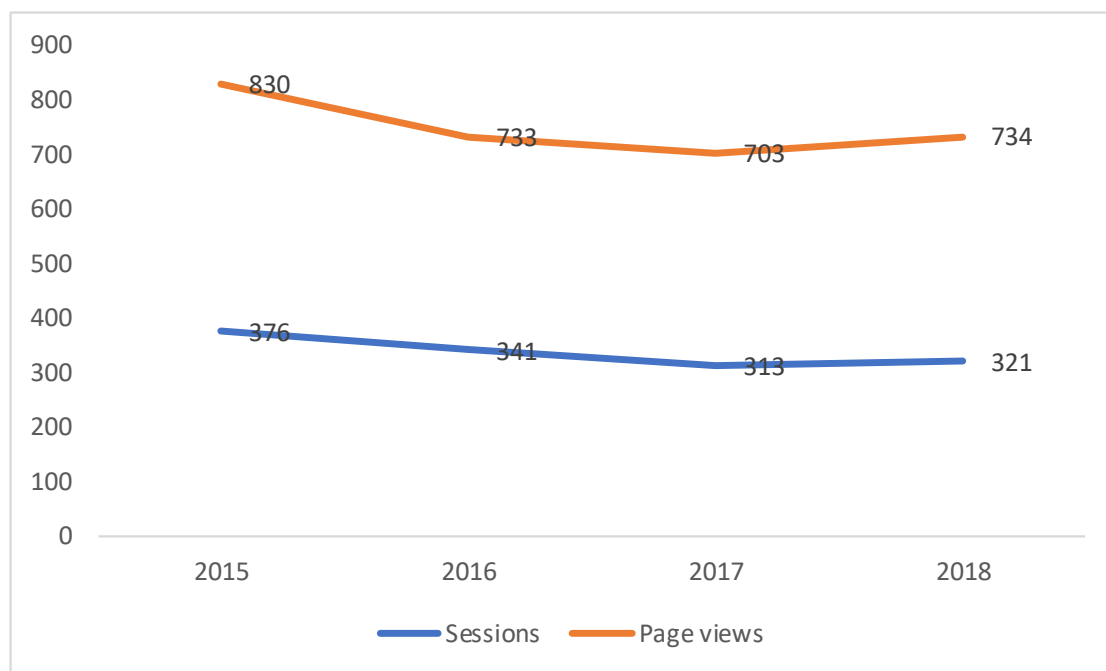
²¹ See <https://treaties.un.org/>.

36. Participants and beneficiaries interviewed further acknowledged the utility and significance of the Office's training in the various areas, especially the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, which recipients found practical, complementary to other training and applicable to their work. To expand and meet the increasing demand for training in international law, the Office enhanced the Audiovisual Library to bring lectures and podcasts to wider audiences. Users and practitioners consulted were satisfied with the contents and quality of the Library and 80 per cent agreed that it was an effective promotional and knowledge tool. While they appreciated the high-quality lectures on pertinent topics and the effort to have a multilingual library, they considered that the website needed to be more user-friendly and that further effort was needed to promote its use. Website analysis (figure XIV) corroborates this assessment, showing a declining trend in its use from 2015 to 2017 and a slight improvement in 2018.²²

Figure XIV

Web analytics for the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law

(Thousands)

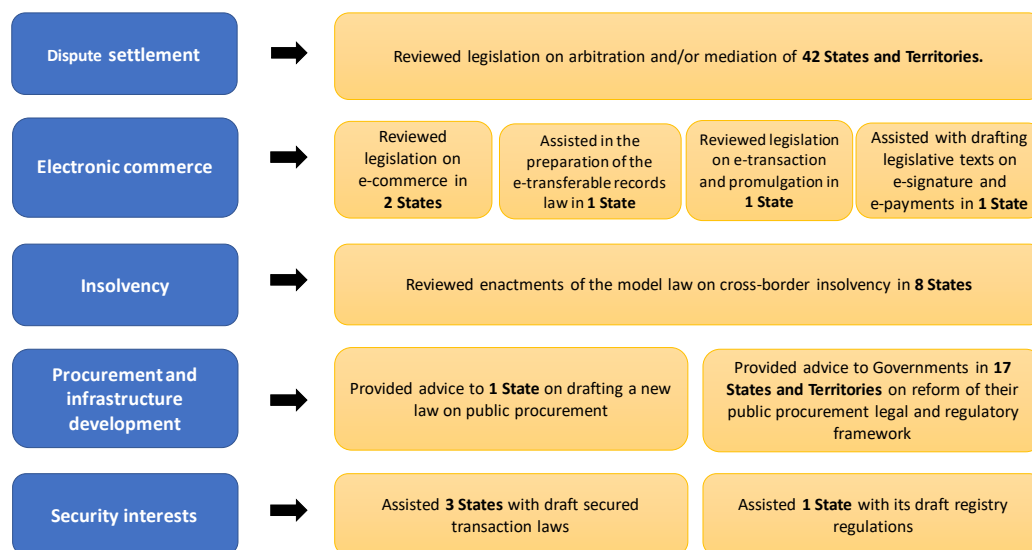


Source: Office of Legal Affairs web analytics.

37. Lastly, on international trade issues, the Office promoted the adoption of model laws and legislative guidelines. Between 2015 and 2018, the International Trade Law Division provided advice and reviewed national legislation in 77 instances (figure XV), some of which was reportedly adopted (figure XII).

²² See http://legal.un.org/avl/intro/welcome_avl.html.

Figure XV
Assistance by the Office of Legal Affairs on national trade legislation



Source: Technical cooperation and assistance note by the Secretariat to UNCITRAL (2015–2018).

38. Despite the immediate satisfaction with and results of most of the Office's technical assistance, the lack of a focused strategy, combined with uneven dissemination plans, and the lack of monitoring and evaluation hindered the Office from having a greater impact. For example, while the Office made efforts to promote the World Ocean Assessment,²³ its dissemination effort was not effective in influencing policymakers at all levels. A dissemination strategy focused on targeting other relevant policymakers would enhance the effectiveness of the Office. On international trade law, the Office's approach to delivering advisory services was neither strategic nor responsive to an analysis of priorities at the regional, national or thematic levels. There was no analysis of the comparative advantages and value added of the Office relative to other organizations and how each contributes to the objectives of Member States or to maximize the Office's response and the use of limited resources.

39. Beyond adopting model laws, countries required assistance with implementation; they wished to receive more information and see greater promotion of International Trade Law Division activities at the regional and national levels. Continued and sustained capacity-building efforts, including through knowledge exchanges and virtual means, were needed. Furthermore, on dissemination, the uneven quality and management of the Office web pages made the Office's technical assistance less visible and effective. Overall, Office beneficiaries indicated insufficient dissemination, promotion and capacity-building.

The Office of Legal Affairs was effective in providing legal services and advice across the United Nations system and protecting the legal interests of the Organization

40. The Office supported the effective operation of the United Nations and protected the legal interests arising from its activities and operations by providing effective legal advice and services. For the period from 2015 to 2018, the Office reported having negotiated claims against the Organization valued at \$103.50 million, with a

²³ See www.un.org/regularprocess/content/first-world-ocean-assessment.

total settlement value of \$8.23 million (8 per cent of the initial value claimed), saving the Organization \$95.3 million. Table 2 illustrates some key data points that demonstrate the Office's support to the Organization.

Table 2
Support to the Organization by the Office of Legal Affairs

<i>Claims and Arbitrations</i>	2015	2016	2017	2018
Percent of United Nations Administrative Tribunal (UNAT) judgments where the SG prevailed	89%	70%	89%	89%
Amount of liability the Organization reduced due to GLD defending commercial claims against the Organization (not in arbitration) (in millions)	\$0.50	\$88.10	\$0.30	\$6.80
Percentage of decisions against the SG at the UNDT appealed by the SG	38%	38%	62%	59%
Liability of the Organization reduced as a result of OLA appeals to the UNAT (in millions)	\$1.30	\$1.40	\$1.20	\$75.40
UNAT judgments reviewed for advice on implementation and trends	114	101	99	86
UNDT judgments reviewed for advice on litigation and trends	126	221	100	137
Institutional Issues				
Cease and desist letters issued to protect UN name and emblem	26	33	43	41
Partnership agreements created	223	222	216	247
Contracts negotiated/drafted	124	105	70	117
Servicing of select Committees				
Headquarters Committee on Contracts ("HCC")	99	103	101	95

Source: Analysis of General Legal Division data by the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.

41. The Office also contributed to the rule of law and international justice frameworks by supporting the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations. The Office was effective in creating and supporting the negotiations of important documents that were highly relevant to the *raison d'être* of the Organization. In the period from 2015 to 2018, the Office of the Legal Counsel supported 56 peace operations documents, including status-of-forces agreements, status-of-mission agreements, transit agreements, standard operating procedures and rules of engagement. Without these, peacekeeping and political missions could not operate. Table 3 shows the support provided by the Office in this area.

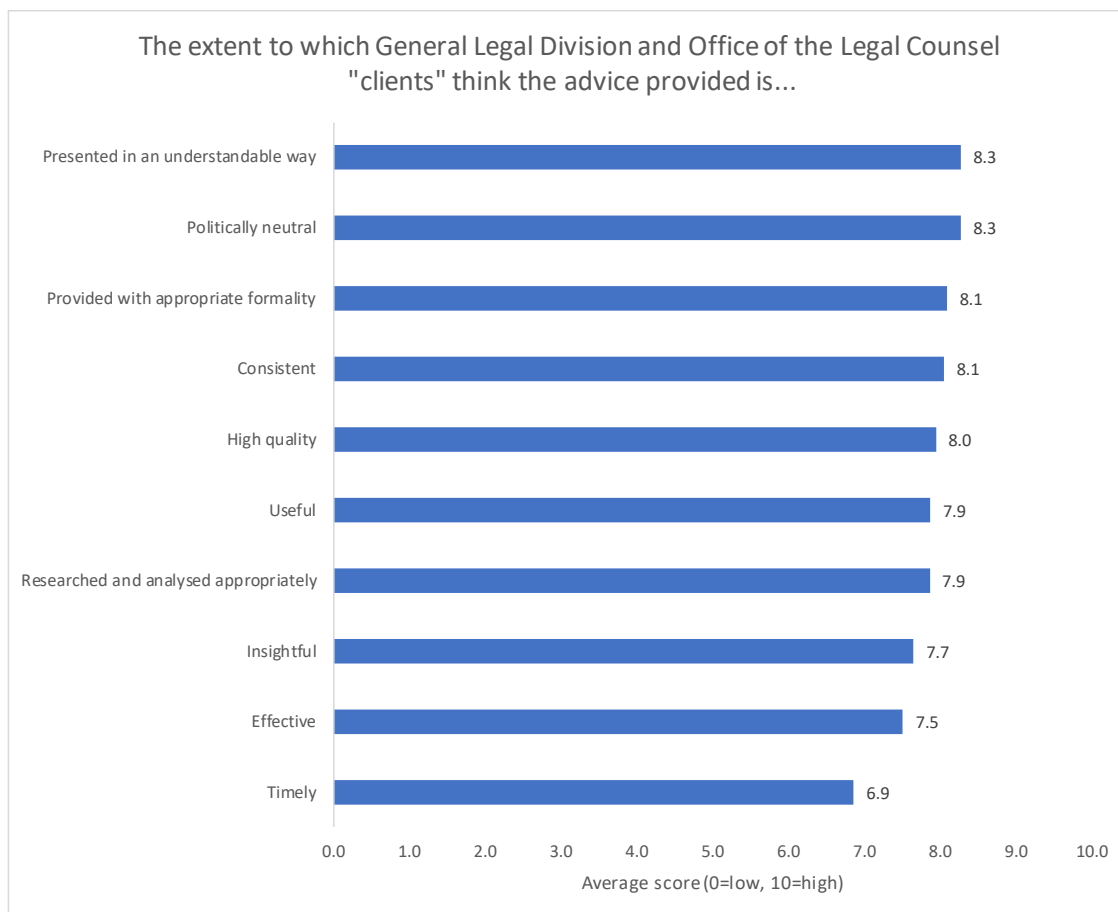
Table 3
Support by the Office of Legal Affairs on legal documentation

<i>Type of Document Supported by OLA/OLC</i>	<i>Biennium</i>	
	2015–16	2017–18
SOFAs, SOMAs, & Transit Agreements	4	5
Other agreements necessary for the work of PKOs & SPMs	5	7
Rules of Engagement and Directives on the Use of Force	3	7
Military and Police Concepts of Operations	2	3
SOPs, policies & guidelines	11	9
Total	25	31

Source: Analysis of Office of the Legal Counsel data by the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.

42. Office stakeholders surveyed reported an overall very high level of satisfaction with legal services and advice. Considering various aspects of advice, clients gave average ratings ranging from 8.3 for the advice being presented in an understandable way to 6.9 for timeliness. Comments provided in the survey point to timeliness of advice sometimes being a challenge. Figure XVI illustrates stakeholder responses on the legal services received.

Figure XVI
Client opinions of the General Legal Division and the Office of the Legal Counsel



Source: Stakeholder survey.

The Office of Legal Affairs has made some progress in strengthening self-evaluation, but monitoring and evaluation practice is still nascent

43. The Office's monitoring and evaluation of its results were uneven. The Office lacked systematic, tangible outcome-level data on the utility of its capacity-building interventions across divisions. Outcome data on the utility of its services and assistance (International Trade Law Division, General Legal Division and Office of the Legal Counsel), including on whether the Office's assistance had contributed to increasing awareness or informing decision-making or policymaking were limited and mostly anecdotal. On legal service and advice, mechanisms to track user feedback were inconsistent or unreliable. Even at the output level on some technical assistance delivered and/or legal services provided, the Office manually produced or recreated implementation and delivery reports. It lacked an in-house evaluation function and spent \$59,680 on evaluation, less than 0.08 per cent of its total budget. This made it

difficult for the Office to consistently identify results, learn lessons and modify its processes to improve its work.

44. The Office management recognized the importance of and need for consistent monitoring and self-evaluation. The Legal Counsel's leadership on this issue has been key to the implementation of recent initiatives on strengthening monitoring and advancing self-evaluation. The Office recently issued a self-evaluation strategy and an evaluation workplan, which included self-evaluations of the International Trade Law Division and the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. In 2017, the Office produced its first in-house evaluation of the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law and in 2018, it conducted an internal review of its information management practices. However, this was not yet a customary practice across functions and divisions. Given the amount of work delivered in support of Member States, the current capacity in the divisions to assess their outcomes was very limited, hindering the ability of the Office to grasp the full impact of its activities, learn from implementation, adapt and improve as a result. The current management reform by the Secretary-General provides a fresh vision on strengthening self-evaluation focused on results and accountability (see [A/72/492](#)).

Efficiency

C. The Office of Legal Affairs delivered its work programme with increased demands for its services. However, information technology, knowledge management and information-sharing practices created inefficiencies and failed to maximize opportunities for consistency in output delivery

The Office of Legal Affairs successfully responded to increased demand for its services

45. Integrated Management and Document Information System data showed that the Office consistently achieved a high implementation rate (91 per cent), with the remaining 6 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively, having been terminated or postponed for legislative reasons. In the 2016–2017 biennium, the Office:

- Facilitated intergovernmental processes (1,150 outputs/sessions; 380 parliamentary documents)
- Delivered 70 technical assistance outputs and 77 activities promoting dialogue/awareness-raising events and created approximately 200 publications for those purposes
- Provided legal service and advice on at least 34 service clusters

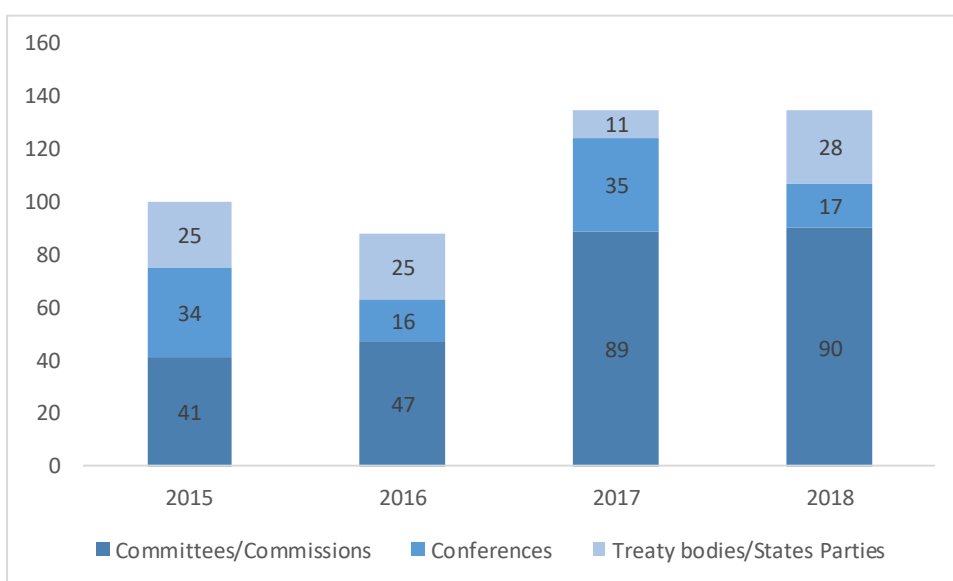
46. The Office has contended with an evolution and broadening of its activities in response to new mandates and requests for services from Member States in all functional areas. Under the facilitation of intergovernmental processes stream, for example, the Office was tasked with providing support and secretariat services to the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (see resolution [72/249](#)), a process that will include the conference meeting in four sessions between 2018 and 2020. Sustained demand for capacity-building in international law culminated with the General Assembly putting the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider

Appreciation of International Law, including the Audiovisual Library, under regular budget programming in the current biennium. Consequently, since 2017, the regional courses in international law have been consistently delivered and the Audiovisual Library staff have worked to increase the regional and linguistic diversity of available lectures. Lastly, the growing demand for workshops to support the Regular Process on the production of the World Ocean Assessment was supported and met.

47. On the legal service and advice stream, the Office delivered more services within existing resources. Analysis of data provided by the Office shows that in 2017–2018, it provided procedural support to 44 per cent more meetings of committees and commissions (for example, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council) than in the previous biennium (figure XVII).

Figure XVII

Number of meetings serviced by the Office of the Legal Counsel, by type of meeting, 2015–2018

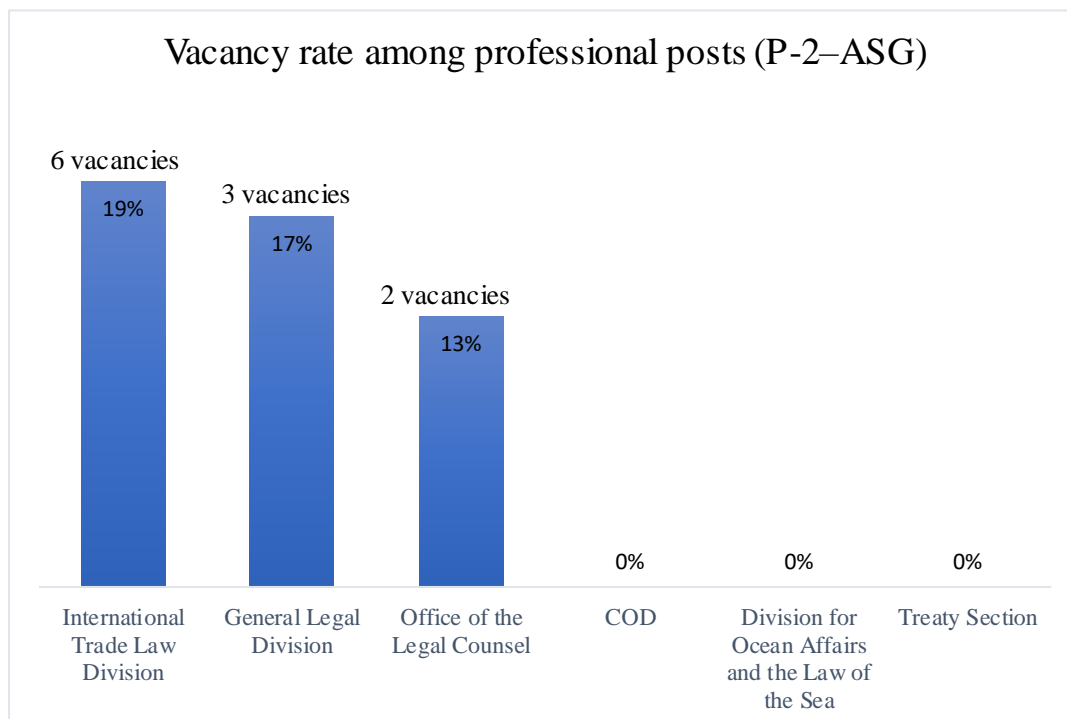


Source: Analysis of Office of the Legal Counsel data by the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division.

48. In addition, table 3 shows that the Office of the Legal Counsel increased its creation of legal documents by 24 per cent between 2015–2016 and 2017–2018. While the Office does not systematically track the time of its lawyers, which would help to determine how much time a particular legal document incurred, given the importance and high profile of such documents, the workload of the Office has likely increased, particularly regarding documents on rules of engagement and directives on the use of force.

49. Within the Office, units differ in their ability to efficiently use the Professional post resources allocated to them. The Office had a vacancy rate of 9 per cent, with a total of 11 vacancies. A high vacancy rate in Professional posts (figure XVIII) in some divisions likely contributed to the high number of average hours worked per week (48 on average) and challenges in providing timely advice.

Figure XVIII
Vacancy rates of the Office of Legal Affairs



Source: Office of Legal Affairs incumbency report as at 31 December 2018.

Uneven collaboration across some functional areas and knowledge management approaches hamper opportunities for improving the delivery of its work

50. While 70 per cent of staff surveyed indicated that collaboration between and among organizational units of the Office was adequate, interviews with Office staff indicated that although some information was shared informally, formalized mechanisms for information-sharing across organizational units were mostly weak or non-existent. This was particularly notable in the functional areas of technical assistance and normative work where the different organizational units of were engaged in the delivery of similar outputs, despite differing modalities for that delivery. Four organizational units provided secretariat support to various intergovernmental and technical bodies.

51. In addition, knowledge management approaches differed across organizational units and functions. While some organizational units developed guidelines, manuals and standard operating procedures to capture knowledge and ensure consistency in conducting and supporting meetings of intergovernmental and technical bodies, others either did not have, or unevenly documented or updated, essential information and processes.

52. Similarly, on technical assistance, documentation revealed inconsistencies in approaches to organizing, planning and implementing technical assistance. Technical assistance outcomes were variably assessed. Sometimes, participant feedback was solicited, while other times, no assessment occurred, and the quality of the instruments used varied considerably. Initiatives instituted by some organizational units, such as the creation and support of alumni networks, which present an opportunity to improve the assessment of long-term outcomes of training, had not been replicated by other units. OIOS understands that steps are currently being taken to support such networks at the request of the General Assembly (see resolution

73/201). The lack of mechanisms to share information hindered peer-to-peer learning, the identification of good practices and the sharing of lessons learned and ultimately limited improvements in the implementation of the work programme across the Office.

Information management and information technology of the Office were inefficient and hindered its ability to follow precedent and speak with one voice

53. The Office's case management software, Prodagio, was established to track matters and their progress. Prodagio was not state-of-the-art and the Office of Information and Communications Technology no longer supported it. Its weaknesses compared with the case management software large law firms typically use negatively impacted the efficiency of the General Legal Division and the Office of the Legal Counsel. Prodagio did not automatically incorporate or number documents and emails, resulting in uncertainty regarding progress in a matter; included only documents that staff manually uploaded and documents created post-2008; and was not seamlessly integrated with work processes. The incompleteness of Prodagio and its inability to perform proximate word searches motivated staff to use imperfect, time-intensive approaches to search for precedents and documents, increasing search time and uncertainty about the completeness of search results.

54. Staff at all levels indicated that they would save time and operate at a substantively higher level with a state-of-the-art information technology system. Many staff developed workarounds to avoid or compensate for Prodagio, which duplicated work and inhibited collaboration. Staff saved documents in different places, increasing digital storage expenses and the probability of error in updating matters. The system reaffirmed an overreliance in the Office on printed documents. Most General Legal Division and Office of the Legal Counsel staff found Prodagio "clunky", "slow" and incomplete. Seventy-seven percent of General Legal Division and Office of the Legal Counsel staff surveyed did not agree that the Office's information technology system allowed them "to work efficiently".

55. In addition, the Office did not provide staff with rigorous information technology/information management training, both during onboarding and as ongoing training. A lack of shared information technology/information management practices created differences in how staff treated sensitive information, how they worked with the shared drive (for example, creating, naming and sharing of folders and determining the shared drive contents) and Prodagio and how they documented their work and work processes.

56. A vicious cycle developed, with Prodagio not being populated with all relevant information on a timely basis, making it even less useful. Also, because Prodagio did not collect workload data or hours worked, management could not rely on it to inform management action and reallocation of staff or other resources. Prodagio did not lend itself to collaboration on documents or matters which, combined with the siloing of General Legal Division staff into substantive "clusters", contributed to a lack of knowledge among staff about the entirety of the Office's contemporaneous work, ultimately impacting the ability of the Office to speak with one voice and staff understanding of the totality of issues for which a client had turned to the Office.

57. Furthermore, because the Office did not have an information technology system that tracked staff time spent on each client's concerns, the charges to funds and programmes for Office time could not be substantiated with an acceptable degree of accuracy. During an audit of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), auditors unsuccessfully requested from the Office a breakdown of its cost allocation to UNDP.

58. Office management was aware of its information technology/information management weaknesses and commissioned a review, which resulted in recommendations that address many of the Office's issues in this regard. Management was in the process of devising a plan to implement its recommendations at the time of the preparation of the present evaluation.

Cross-cutting issues

D. The Office of Legal Affairs partnerships have strengthened its work, particularly in the technical assistance realm. However, partnerships at times have not been fully leveraged and good practices not replicated

The Office of Legal Affairs effectively engaged with several organizations in delivering its technical assistance programmes

59. The Office effectively engaged with foundations, the private sector, multilaterals and United Nations bodies to deliver its mandates. It successfully partnered with the United Nations-Nippon Foundation of Japan Fellowship Programme, an ocean affairs and law of the sea fellowship, with The Hague Academy/Carnegie Foundation on the International Law Fellowship Programme and with the Korean Commercial Arbitration Board on the Alternative Dispute Resolution Conference. The International Trade Law Division also collaborated with The Hague Conference on Private International Law, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on strengthening trade law instruments.

60. Partnering with the Nippon Foundation enabled the Office to address capacity-building on ocean affairs and the law of the sea. The Nippon Foundation provided approximately \$5 million, which supported 55 fellowships in a nine-month in-depth programme managed by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea and helped to strengthen alumni networks during the period from 2014 to 2018. Beneficiaries suggested that the fellowship programme had helped them to become part of a tangible network and develop lasting relationships. In 2018, the Foundation extended its partnership with the Division by launching the United Nations-Nippon Foundation Sustainable Ocean Programme, which was aimed at providing approximately 200 developing country nationals with advanced training and research opportunities.

61. The Codification Division also partnered with The Hague Academy/Carnegie Foundation to more efficiently deliver the six-week United Nations International Law Fellowship Programme. Students attended complementary courses led by The Hague Academy and the Office at the Peace Palace (see document [A/73/415](#)). Also, the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law and regional courses benefited from organizational and logistical support from the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions.

62. The International Trade Law Division successfully partnered with the private sector (Korean Commercial Arbitration Board) in running a credible, respected arbitration event (Alternative Dispute Resolution Conference) for the past seven years. The reputation of the Division and UNCITRAL attracted leading private law firms, legal professional and academics. The Office used this platform to include Member States from the region, discuss technical assistance needs and provide networking opportunities. The International Trade Law Division was the only division that reported on all its coordination and cooperation with other organizations to

UNCITRAL, which helped it to have a more consistent partnering approach in some areas. For instance, the Division coordinated with The Hague Conference on Private International Law on recognizing and enforcing insolvency-related judgments and international settlement agreements resulting from mediation.

63. The International Trade Law Division also supported the work of other organizations. It worked with WTO on the harmonization of procurement-related provisions for accession to the WTO Government Procurement Agreement of five countries. It provided feedback on Economic Commission for Europe draft standards against corruption in public-private partnerships procurement and World Bank draft policy guidelines for managing unsolicited proposals in infrastructure projects. The Division partnered with UNCTAD on the eTrade for All Initiative, which was aimed at improving the ability of developing countries and economies in transition to use and benefit from e-commerce.

64. Survey results indicated that the Office partnered with other stakeholders effectively; 86 per cent of respondents agreed that the Office successfully collaborated with external partners and 79 per cent agreed on successful collaboration with United Nations entities. Figure XIX illustrates the views of respondents on partnerships.

Figure XIX
Views of stakeholders on Office of Legal Affairs partnerships



Source: Stakeholder survey.

However, partnerships were not fully leveraged, including on the application of proven approaches that could be replicated across the Office

65. Despite the progress made, the Office lacked a comprehensive strategy to engage with different partners and replicate successful approaches in different regions and across organizational units. The adoption of model laws in international trade and the Regular Process of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea were two pivotal areas in which the Office did not fully realize its partnership opportunities.

66. While many regions need technical assistance on adopting model laws and legislative guidelines, the efforts of the International Trade Law Division were concentrated mostly in Asia. The International Trade Law Division/UNCITRAL Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific collaborated with the Economic and Social

Commission for Asia and the Pacific. There was a plan to establish an African regional centre in Cameroon, but there was yet to be an agreement between the national Government and the International Trade Law Division on its financial feasibility. The Division also had limited engagement with development banks on the adoption of model laws and legislative guidelines. Stakeholder interviews highlighted that development banks, which have an extensive regional presence and the resources to support technical assistance for trade law reform, recognized UNCITRAL model laws as standards. However, no formalized mechanisms of collaboration between development banks and the International Trade Law Division were established. Within Asia, while there were some successful collaborations on the domestic implementation of model laws (for example, with the Asian Development Bank in Fiji and Papua New Guinea) that leveraged the strengths of both partners, there were cases in which development banks were spearheading the revision of national trade laws, with no participation by the International Trade Law Division.

67. In addition, the workshops for the second cycle of the Regular Process had inadequate collaboration with relevant bodies (for example, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, International Maritime Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and United Nations Environment Programme) that had provided technical and scientific support during the first round of World Ocean Assessment workshops. In interviews, stakeholders suggested that during the first cycle, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea benefited from the support, links and leverage of technical partners. Their connections to national agencies, universities and institutions proved beneficial in selecting experts and helped to finalize and disseminate the World Ocean Assessment report. However, during the second cycle, their participation was not constant. Similarly, while the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea partnered with some regional technical organizations, a strategy for enhanced engagement with the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions would have been beneficial to support the process.

68. While noting that the Office should be cautious in selecting academic partners, owing to its role, mandate and resources, it should further explore opportunities for cooperation. Also, stakeholders supported the view that more information and discussion forums could be organized in support of Member States and that partnering with and/or promoting the Audiovisual Library among academic institutions would increase the reach and uptake of the lectures.

E. The Office of Legal Affairs supported the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, in the context of the United Nations reform agenda, the Office did not systematically integrate all relevant Sustainable Development Goals into its work programme

69. The United Nations reform agenda ([A/72/684-E/2018/7](#)) presented an opportunity for the Office to better align its work to the Sustainable Development Goal agenda, which was not fully integrated into the Office's programme of work. While the Office explicitly worked towards achieving Goal 14 and its work was linked to Goal 16, linkages to other Goals such as Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and Goal 17 (Partnerships and capacity-building) were not systematically integrated into relevant areas of the work of the Office. While a D-level staff member was assigned to be the Sustainable Development Goal focal point in providing legal services, full discussion across the Office in respect of the Goals has yet to ensue.

70. The Office has taken concrete steps to implement its gender mainstreaming strategy (Goal 5). Gender balance was achieved in Director positions and gender issues were continuously discussed to inform management decisions. However, telecommuting was not widely used, which would allow for better work-life balance. About three quarters of the stakeholders considered that the Office integrated gender and human rights consideration in a systematic manner.

V. Conclusions

71. The work of the Office of Legal Affairs was relevant and vital to the successful functioning of the Organization, both substantively and functionally. Its mandate, derived from the Charter of the United Nations, was multifaceted and complex, and the Office delivered on that mandate. In the context of an increased demand for its services, the Office was highly responsive to requests, and its value added included its neutrality, technical skill set, institutional memory and credibility.

72. The Office was effective in achieving significant results across its functional areas. However, the lack of effective dissemination and a coherent strategy to deliver some aspects of its technical assistance, coupled with its still nascent monitoring and evaluation work, hindered further effectiveness and impact. Improvements in sharing good practices across functional areas and a more strategic approach on partnerships to more effectively leverage good practices across institutions would make its work more relevant and effective.

73. While the full impact of the United Nations reform agenda is still unknown, it is likely to increase the demands on the Office, particularly on issues surrounding the delegation of authority and the system-wide coordination role of the Development Operations Coordination Office and its resident coordinator system. To respond to these challenges effectively, the Office will need to become more strategic about the provision of its technical assistance services across its thematic areas. It will need to increase its visibility and dissemination strategies and strengthen its partnerships. Internally, it will also need to enhance the sharing of good practices and lessons across its functional areas, including by using state-of-the-art technology and management approaches to efficiently address the new demands for legal service and advice.

VI. Recommendations

74. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS made seven important recommendations, which the Office of Legal Affairs accepted:

Recommendation 1 (results A, B and D)

75. The Office of Legal Affairs should develop and implement a technical cooperation strategy covering relevant areas of international law, but most importantly, international trade activities. The strategy should at a minimum:

- (a) Review the thematic and regional priorities of the beneficiaries based on their needs and the mandates of the Office;
- (b) Review comparative advantages and value added to the different areas of work;
- (c) Assess the Office's current partnership arrangements and determine which ones are deemed necessary and critical to implement its mandate thematically, regionally and functionally;

(d) Assess and determine dissemination strategies and fundraising needs to supplement and strengthen the delivery of its technical assistance.

Indicator of achievement: Technology cooperation strategy developed and implemented.

Recommendation 2 (result C)

76. The Office should review all processes and available standard operating procedures across organizational units and functional areas to identify those processes that might require new or updated standard operating procedures. The Office should ensure that knowledge and institutional memory are captured to consistently support its work.

Indicator of achievement: Standard operating procedures reviewed and issued across functional areas.

Recommendation 3 (results C and D)

77. The Office should establish formal mechanisms for information-sharing across functional areas to discuss best practices and lessons learned across the Office, including on the best modalities of delivery and monitoring and evaluation practices.

Indicator of achievement: Formal information-sharing mechanisms established.

Recommendation 4 (results B and C)

78. The Office should strengthen its monitoring and self-evaluation practices through the establishment of a dedicated mechanism at the senior level that periodically reviews performance, supported by a dedicated function that implements the Office's evaluation policy, workplans and efforts, by:

- (a) Developing and reviewing monitoring and self-evaluation methodologies, toolkits, templates and tools to support divisions in their assessment efforts;
- (b) Facilitating the periodic (quarterly) and systematic performance and results review to support management;
- (c) Supporting the self-evaluation efforts within the divisions, including the systematic and periodic assessment of stakeholder feedback and assessment surveys.

Indicator of achievement: Functions and methodologies for monitoring and self-evaluation developed and established.

Recommendation 5 (results B and C)

79. The Office should strengthen its information technology and information management by:

- (a) Obtaining a new, state-of-the-art legal information technology system (General Legal Division and Office of the Legal Counsel);
- (b) Migrating all Office matters since 1949 to the new information technology system (General Legal Division and Office of the Legal Counsel);
- (c) Having mandatory professional development in information management and information technology for all staff;
- (d) Updating its websites and systematically tracking user data;
- (e) Implementing all the recommendations from its information technology/information management review.

Indicator of achievement: New, updated legal information technology system and websites.

Recommendation 6 (results A and E)

80. The Office should more systematically review and assess whether it is fit for purpose in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the different changes and mandates that will ensue as a result of the United Nations reforms.

Indicator of achievement: Sustainable Development Goals and United Nations reforms reviewed and fully integrated into the workplan of the Office.

Recommendation 7 (result C)

81. The Office should quickly fill vacancies by selecting candidates from rosters. It should build rosters of attorneys and staff on all thematic areas by identifying qualified candidates.

Indicator of achievement: Updated and available rosters and reduction of vacancy rates across divisions.

(Signed) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2019

Annex I*

Management response from the Office of Legal Affairs

This refers to your memo of 14 March 2019 (IED-19-00596) by which you transmitted the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Office of Legal Affairs for our review and formal comments.

We have reviewed the draft report, and after some discussions and exchanges with the Inspection and Evaluation Division and the evaluation team, including on the recommendations, we are pleased to inform you that we agree with the draft report and will be accepting all the recommendations of OIOS set forth in the draft report.

The Office of Legal Affairs will continue to strive to respond to the needs of its stakeholders and beneficiaries with the valued specialized legal skill set, institutional memory, credibility and neutrality in delivering our mandate, as noted in the evaluation report.

In particular, I would like to highlight the importance I have attached to strengthening the Office of Legal Affairs' monitoring and self-evaluation practices, including through the future establishment of a dedicated mechanism that periodically reviews performance, supported by a dedicated function that implements Office of Legal Affairs evaluation policy. My Office will be in contact with OIOS and other relevant offices and departments in order to develop and consolidate the evaluation culture at the Office of Legal Affairs.

Similarly, the Office of Legal Affairs will work with the relevant offices and departments to strengthen its information technology and information management, as is recommended in the draft report, including by assessing the budgetary and financial options in order to achieve the elements contained in the draft report.

The Office of Legal Affairs will continue to review and assess ways to improve the support of the Sustainable Development Goals and the different changes and mandates that will ensue as a result of the United Nations reforms.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Juan Carlos Peña and the rest of the evaluation team for their professionalism, commitment and teamwork, all of which have been highly commendable. We are very appreciative of the time invested and expertise shown while they acquainted themselves with the different and complex mandates of the Office of Legal Affairs. We valued their several interactions with us to share their conclusions and openness to receive our input.

We look forward to seeing the final report.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Office of Legal Affairs. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee. The comments have been reproduced as received.

Annex II

Functional areas of work of the Office of Legal Affairs



- Servicing of meetings: intergovernmental body
- Servicing of meetings: technical/expert body
- Technical assistance: capacity-building
- Technical assistance: advisory services
- Provision of legal service and advice
- Registration and depositary services