Global Survey on Staff Diversity in International Public Administration (SDIPA)

Survey report 2020

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Executive summary

This report summarizes key findings from the **Global Survey on Staff Diversity in International Public Administration**, conducted in July 2019 among the staff of UN system bodies. In total, 306 respondents from more than 100 countries and twenty bodies of the UN system answered the survey. The survey evaluated perceived strengths and weaknesses of the national and international staff working in regional and local offices of UN system bodies. The survey finds that a distinct strength of international staff lies in its impartiality towards local groups. In comparison, national staff has strengths in the alignment of UN body activities with local environment, in seamless interaction with locals, and in gaining trust of the host country. However, the patterns of disagreement in responses point to important divisions between the two staff groups, where each group generally tends to perceive itself as better than it is perceived by the other group. That may affect the performance of UN bodies in policy implementation. We also find that, across the board, respondents see the UN bodies as performing particularly well in being perceived as experts, while relatively lower (perceived) performance scores were attained concerning the fulfillment of local societies' expectations. The data also indicate that while the status of staff as national/international is relatively prominent in their everyday work, it does not represent a salient feature of diversity management efforts (contrasting, for example, with gender).

Note on the participant lottery

As part of the survey, participants were offered two options of a participation reward. They were able to choose between participation in a lottery for 1 of 5 Amazon vouchers (100€ each) or a copy of the survey results. Some participants chose neither option as illustrated in Table 1. E-mails with results and Amazon vouchers were distributed upon project completion in December 2020. **The authors would like to express gratitude to all the survey participants.**

Table 1: Participant choices for reward

Number of valid survey answers	306
Number of "lottery" choices	106
Number of "results" choices	113
Number of "no response" choices	87

Project publication

Eckhard, S., & Parizek, M. (2020). Policy implementation by international organizations: A comparative analysis of strengths and weaknesses of national and international staff. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*. doi:10.1080/13876988.2020.1813032

A. Survey design and responses

The survey was distributed in July 2019, to the e-mail addresses of UN bodies' offices and staff members publicly available on the official UN bodies' websites. Using the annexes of the UN System Chief Executive Board for Coordination reports, we identified each individual UN system body duty station across the world, that is each location in which any UN body has an office, other than its headquarters. In 2015, we counted 2,939 such individual IGO duty stations. Many bodies have their individual duty stations in the same locations (e.g. in country capitals). There were, thus, in total 1,674 IGO country operations located in 885 cities or towns. With the help of a group of research assistants, we searched online for the website of each individual station, and collected all e-mail contacts available. After initial clean up and deduplication, the contacts database contained 5,664 e-mail addresses. These came from 611 different locations, across 186 countries and 34 UN system bodies. Out of the 5,664, 1,509 were generic e-mail addresses (for example of the form city@unbody.org), while 4,155 were personal. In total, 2,159 e-mail addresses were reported by our survey system as invalid, so that the call was not delivered. The vast majority of these (around 90%) were personal e-mails. The survey was sent both to the generic and the individual e-mail addresses. After initial contact, in case of no response, in total three reminders were sent. From the generic ones, we received only 8 responses. From the individual e-mail addresses, we received in total **306 valid questionnaires**. For the individual addresses, and given that out of the 4,155 addresses around 2,000 were undeliverable, this amounts to a **response rate of close to 15 percent**. The respondents come from 113 countries, work in 100 countries for 22 UN system bodies and consist of an almost equal number of national and international staffers.

B. Participants characteristics

Our sample consists of 306 respondents, out of which 153 are female and 145 male (4 did not report). 143 respondents are classified as international staff, 159 respondents are nationals. In terms of the type of duty station, 84 respondents work in local stations, 142 in country offices, and 74 in regional offices.

The tables below show the distribution of respondents along several further dimensions of possible interest. With regard to staff category, which in itself is not necessarily of direct relevance for our theoretical framework, Table B.1 shows the distribution of staff across the categories of IPS, GS, NPO, and the numerically small category of Field service. Table B.2 provides information on the distribution of respondents across age brackets. Finally, Table B.3 provides the distribution of respondents across paygrades, though a number of respondents refused to answer this question (category Other).

Table B.1: Respondents by staff category

International professional staff	119	39.27%
General services	65	21.45%
National professional officers	73	24.09%
Field service	7	2.31%
Other	39	12.87%
Total	303	100%

Table B.2: Respondents by age category

<25	2
25-34	45
35-44	104
45-54	75
55-64	66
65>	2
Total	294

Table B.3: Respondents by paygrade

D1 and above	18	6.04
P4-P5	82	27.52
P1-P3	50	16.78
G5-G7	50	16.78
G1-G4	19	6.38
Other	79	26.51
Total	298	100

While it is very positive that the body of respondents is highly diverse, the figures show some divergence from aggregate statistics across the UN system at large. The most recent UN system HR statistical report CEB/2018/HLCM/HR/10 (Table 1A) says that international professional staff accounts

for around 34% of staff, while our sample counts 39%. Female employees across the UN system account for around 43% of staff (Tables 1A, 1B, 1C), while in our sample they account for 51%. Having said that, among our respondents, we do not find any significant differences in overall evaluation scores between female (6.4) and male (6.6) respondents, between international and national respondents (6.5 both groups), or across different paygrades (ranging between 6.1 and 6.9, with an insignificant ANOVA test). This means that our results are unlikely to be directly affected by differences between distributions in our sample and those in the overall UN system at the aggregate level. With regard to age (Tables 8A-8H) and length of service (Table 6A), our calculated averages (based on brackets' median values) of 44.5 years of age and 9.2 years of service are very close to the aggregate figures.

Figure B.1 shows the distribution of respondents' nationalities across the world, while Figure B.2 shows the location of the offices in which our respondents work. Both signify a very high degree of geographic spread of the respondents.

Figure B.1: Respondents' nationality
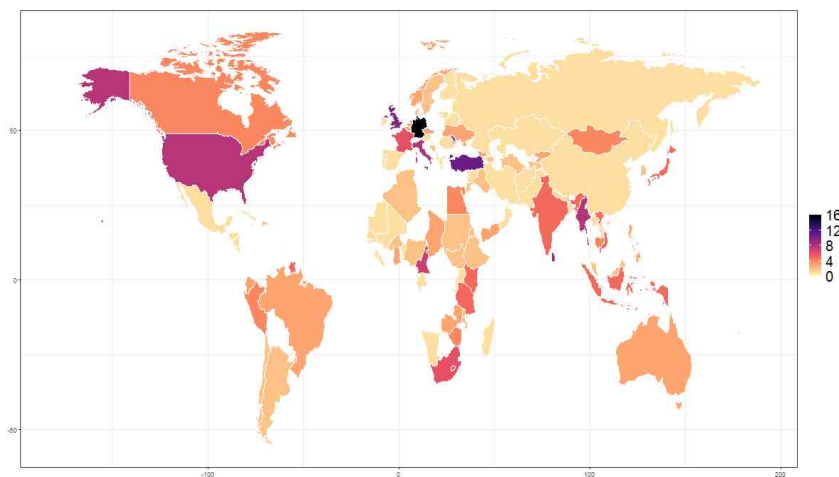
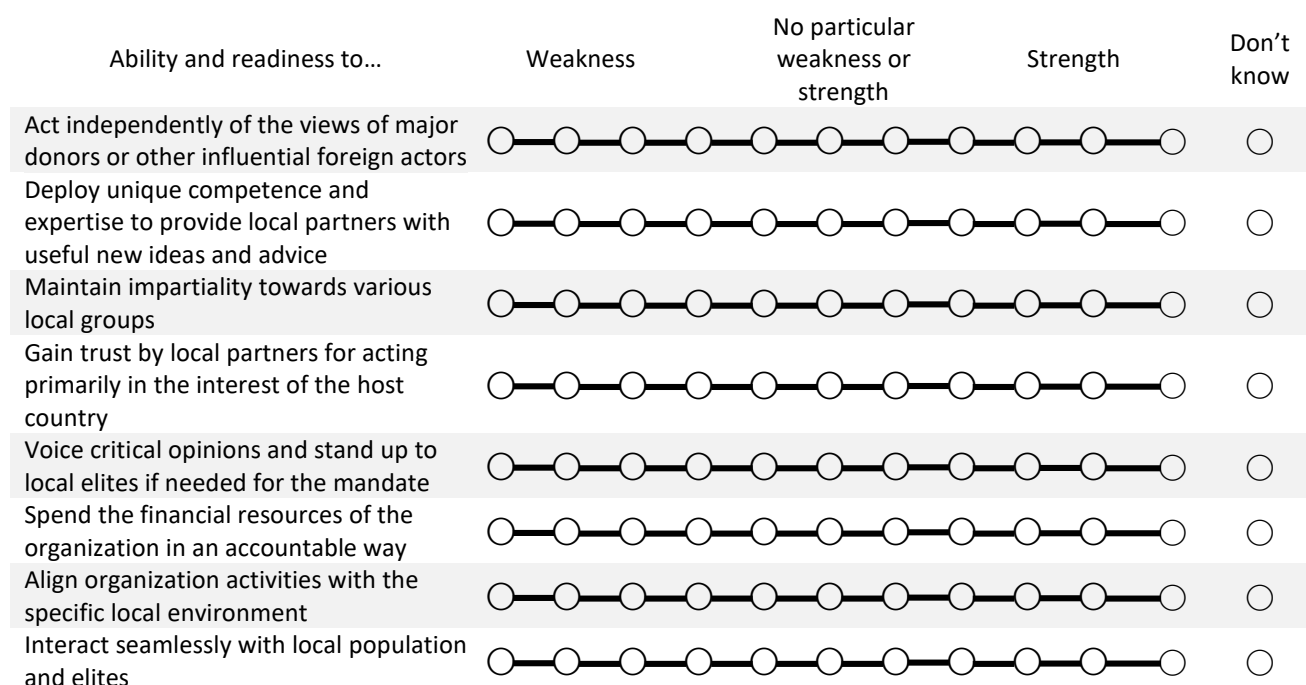**Figure B.2:** Respondents' office location
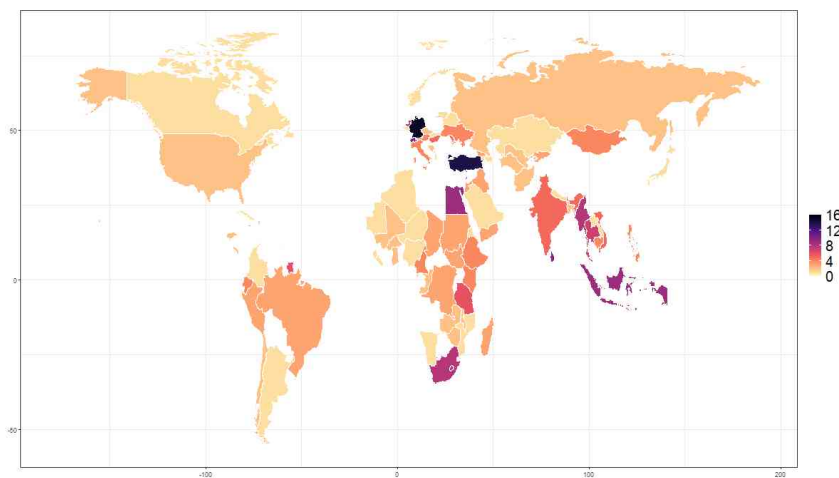
C. Evaluation of staff strengths

In this section, we report on the respondents' views on the strengths of IO staff along several dimensions. In the survey, we asked respondents, specifically, to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of international and national staff working for IOs along eight categories, always on scale from 0 (Weakness) to 10 (Strength). Figure C.1 shows the wording of the question with all the eight qualities, asked here for the international staff. An identical question was asked for the qualities of national staff, separately.
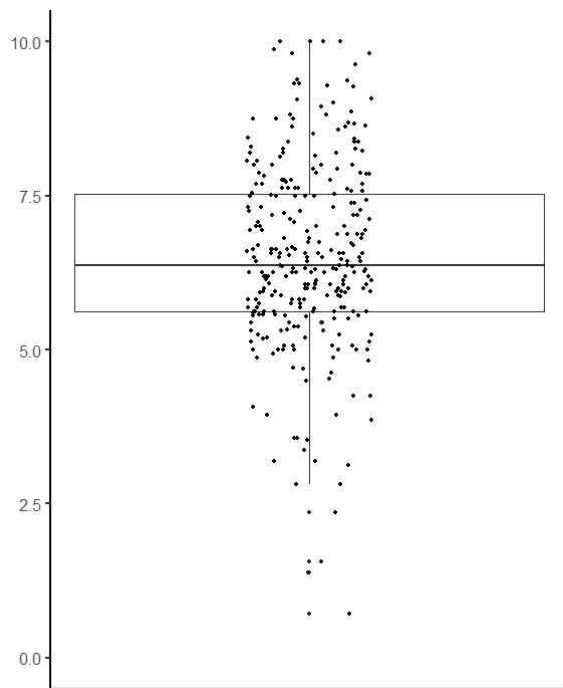
Figure C.1: Wording of the staff strength questions

"According to your experience and opinion, where do you see the strengths and weaknesses you would generally associate with <u>international</u> staff? By international staff, we mean individuals with a nationality that is not that of the host country."

| Ability and readiness to…	Weakness	No particular weakness or strength	Strength	Don't know
Act independently of the views of major donors or other influential foreign actors				○
Deploy unique competence and expertise to provide local partners with useful new ideas and advice				○
Maintain impartiality towards various local groups				○
Gain trust by local partners for acting primarily in the interest of the host country				○
Voice critical opinions and stand up to local elites if needed for the mandate				○
Spend the financial resources of the organization in an accountable way				○
Align organization activities with the specific local environment				○
Interact seamlessly with local population and elites				○

When we combine the evaluation scores across all respondents and all the eight qualities, the average performance evaluation reaches 6.5 (standard deviation 1.5), on the 0-10 scale. Figure C.2 shows the distribution across all respondents. The overall evaluation did not differ systematically across the status of the respondent, be it international or national (both groups average 6.5). Figure C.3 shows this, the results displayed separately for respondents who are nationals to the country they serve in (left box) and those that are internationals (right box).

Figure C.2: Overall staff strengths evaluations   **Figure C.3:** Staff strengths evaluations by status
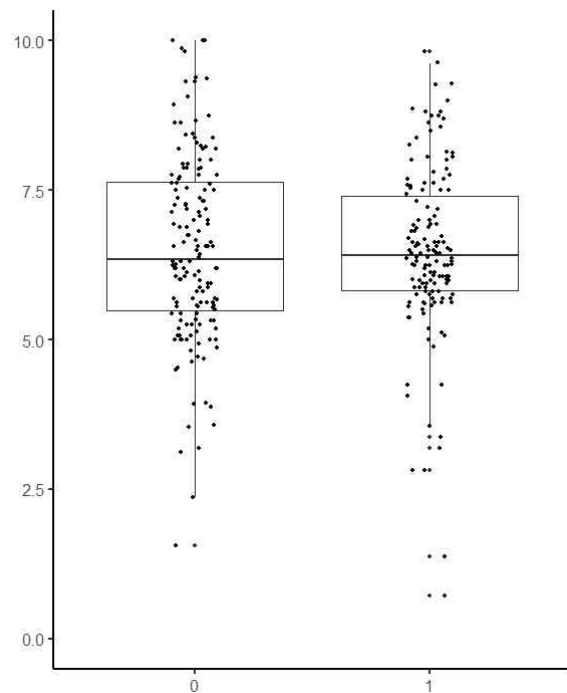
The **difference in overall evaluation scores between male (6.6) and female (6.4) respondents is small and not statistically significant**. There is also no systematic variation in overall evaluation across respondents' age (6.5 in all brackets). Descriptively, respondents higher in the paygrade hierarchy tend to be slightly more positive than those lower, as indicated in Table C.1, but none of these differences are large enough to be statistically significant.

Table C.1: Evaluation decomposition by paygrade

Professional		GS	
D1 and above	6.9	G5-G7	6.8
P4-P5	6.4	G1-G4	6.6
P1-P3	6.1	Other (non-GS)	6.5

In Table C.2 we decompose these aggregate scores by the eight individual staff strengths and weaknesses, corresponding to the eight dimensions in Figure C.1. In developing the survey, our theoretical priors lead us to expect that the following qualities could represent particular strengths of national staff: Independence on foreign actors, Alignment with local environment, Interaction with locals, and Trust by host country. In contrast, for the following categories we expected a particular strength of international staffers: Critical to local elites, Accountable spending, Impartiality to local groups, Unique competences. For elaboration of the theoretical framework of the study, please consult the project output Eckhard & Parizek, 2020, referred to at the beginning of this report.

In column 1 in Table C.2, we see that **across all eight qualities, the average evaluation scores for international staff are higher than five, indicating an overall positive evaluation**. The scores range from 5.5 (Interaction with locals) to 7.3 (Unique competence). **When it comes to national staff, column 4 shows that the aggregate score is higher than five on all eight categories as well**, ranging from 5.2 (Impartiality to local groups) to 7.9 (Alignment with local environment). For the qualities of Impartiality towards local groups and ability to be Critical to local elites, the difference from five is not significant in statistical terms.

Table C.2 Evaluation of staff groups' relative strengths, disaggregated by respondent international/national status

Question asked for:	International staff			National staff		
As evaluated by:	(1) All staff	(2) National staff	(3) International staff	(4) All staff	(5) National staff	(6) International staff
Independence on foreign actors	6.2	5.7	6.7	5.5	6	4.9
Alignment with local environment	**6.3**	**6.1**	**6.5**	**7.9**	**8**	**7.8**
Interaction with locals	**5.5**	**5.3**	**5.7**	**7.7**	**8**	**7.4**
Trust by host country	**6.1**	**5.9**	**6.3**	**7.3**	**7.7**	**6.8**
Critical to local elites	6.4	5.8	7	5.3	6.2	4.3
Accountable spending	6.7	6.2	7.2	6.5	6.9	6
Impartiality to local groups	**7.1**	**6.5**	**7.9**	**5.2**	**6.2**	**4.1**
Unique competences	7.3	6.6	8.1	6.9	7.2	6.5

Note: Bold values show agreement between national and international respondents about a quality.

In addition, however, **we find that staffers often strongly disagree in their evaluations of international and national staff strengths and weaknesses, depending on their own international/national status**. Columns 2-3, and columns 5-6 in Table C.2 show the evaluation scores as disaggregated not only by who is being evaluated, but also by who evaluates. Thus, column 2 shows evaluations of the qualities of international staff, by respondents who are themselves national staff, while column 3 shows the evaluation of international staff qualities by international staff themselves. Columns 5 and 6 show, analogously, evaluations of national staff, by national and international staff, respectively.

First, on the one hand, **there are four categories where both groups agree on which staff group excels with respect to a certain quality**, that is where a comparison of scores in columns 2 and 5 as well as in columns 3 and 6 reveals a difference in the same direction. These are (1) Alignment with local environment, (2) Interaction with locals, and (3) Trust by host country as unequivocal strengths of national staffers, and (4) Impartiality to local groups as a strength of international staffers. For two of the qualities – (1) Alignment with local environment, and (2) Interaction with locals – all the individual

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pairwise differences are statistically significant. For the other two – (4) Impartiality to local groups and (3) Trust by host country – the differences are all present descriptively but for one of the pairwise comparisons the difference is not sizable enough to be statistically significant, given the dispersion in the data.

Second, however, **the table highlights how the two groups of respondents disagree on who possesses the relative strengths**. For all the remaining four qualities not mentioned in the previous paragraph, the groups always perceive themselves as being equally strong or stronger than the other group. So, for example, national staff perceives itself (7.2) more positively with regard to the ability to bring unique competences than they perceive international staff (6.6), the exact opposite of how internationals see it. Furthermore, for every one of the eight qualities, each group is always seen better by itself than by the other group. So, **internationals are always seen more positively by themselves (column 3) than by nationals (column 2) and nationals are always seen more positively by nationals (column 5) than by internationals (column 6)**. It may not be surprising that one's self-evaluation is more positive than the evaluation of the same qualities by the other group, but it highlights the divergence of the perspectives between the two core groups of staff of IGOs.

D. Overall performance evaluation

In several separate questions, **respondents were asked to evaluate the performance of their 'organization's country operations' along several dimensions**, on a scale from 0 to 10. The evaluations focused on 1) Fulfilling the expectations of all member states, 2) Fulfilling the expectations of the local society, 3) Being perceived as a competent expert, 4) Being perceived as impartial, and 5) General success in achieving mandated objectives. The highest performance score was achieved on the dimension of the organization 'Being perceived as impartial' (average 8.2, median 9, standard deviation 1.8). The lowest score was attained on 'Fulfilling the expectations of the local society' (average 6.9, median 7, standard deviation 2.3). In Figure D.1, we show the distributions of responses for all the five dimensions in a series of boxplots.[1]

Figure D.1: Overall IOs performance evaluation
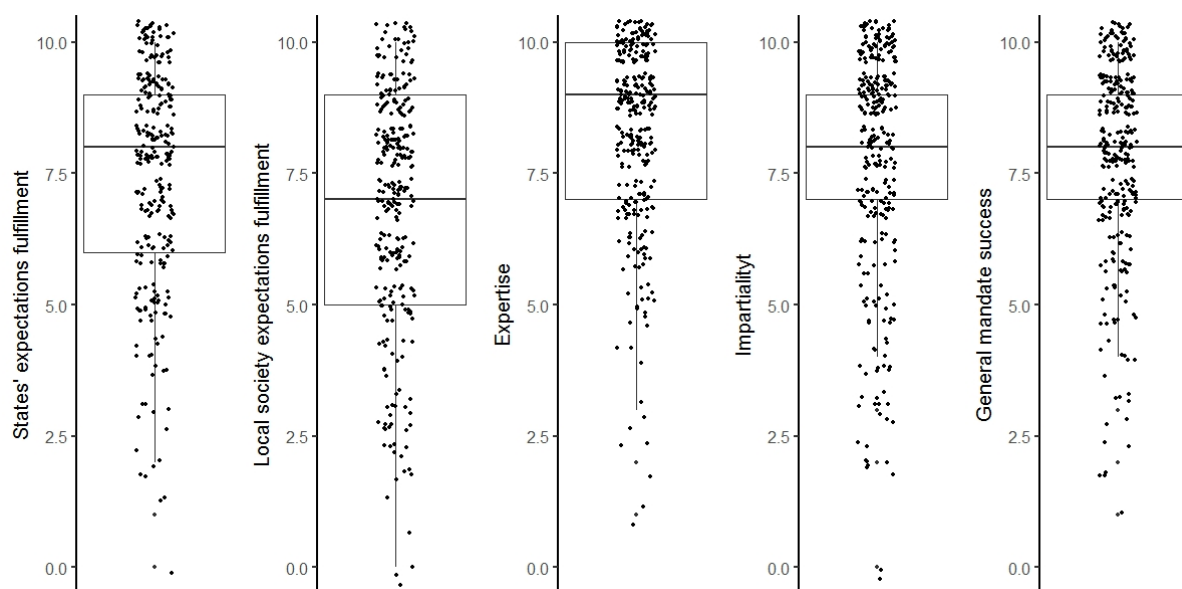
The overall perceived performance of organizations may be expected to be strongly linked to perceived strengths of the staff. Figure D.2 shows this connection, with overall staff strength evaluations – across all eight categories discussed in section C combined – plotted on the horizontal axis. The graph on the left shows the relationship to the organization performance indicator of the General mandate delivery success on the vertical axis, while the graph on the right relates the evaluations specifically to performance with regard to the fulfilment of local society's expectations. It should be highlighted, however, that the correlation between organization performance perceptions and staff strength evaluations may also be influenced by individual respondents' general tendency to evaluate both staff and organizations more negatively or more positively, i.e. by their personality traits.

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[1] The central horizontal line indicates the evaluation median. The box contains observations between the first and third quartile, i.e. 50% of all cases.

Figure D.2: Connection between staff performance and perceived mandate delivery
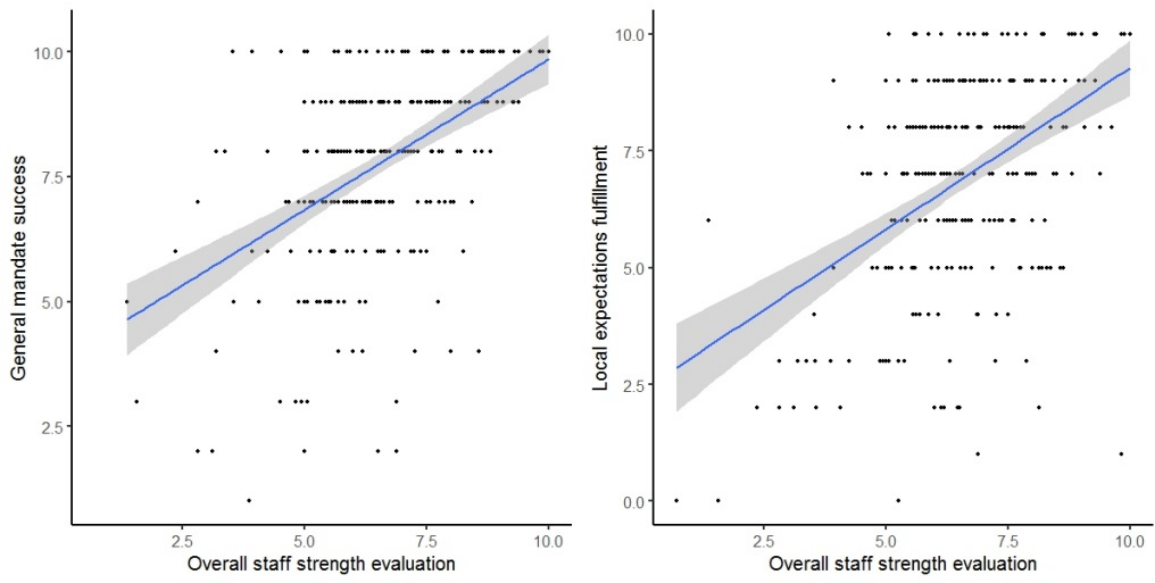
E. Diversity management

In a set of questions, we also asked the respondents to evaluate various aspects of staff diversity issues and diversity management in the bodies and offices they work in. The first set of questions asked whether people working in their organization regularly split into subgroups along demographic alignments. And if yes, which alignments are the most frequent ones.

In total **95 respondents** (36% of those who replied) say that their teams indeed do split along demographic alignments, **while 169 indicated they do not**. Out of those who responded their teams do split, 34 respondents (39%) named the national/international staff as the most prominent dimension. This makes it the most frequent dimension of split. The second and third most frequent dimensions of split are race, religion, and ethnicity, as well as language. Gender and age are much less prominent. Table E.1 summarizes these results.

Table E.1: Dimensions of split

	First split dimension	Second split dimension	Relative dimension salience
Gender	9	14	13%
Age	6	10	9%
Language	19	22	23%
International/national	34	21	31%
Race, religion, and ethnicity	20	21	23%

Finally, we asked respondents to evaluate to what degree their organizations' management seeks, in the respondents' perspectives, staff diversity along the dimensions of age, language, gender, international/national groups, and race, religion, and ethnicity (Table E.2).

By far the most **prominent diversity management effort is in the dimension of gender**, where the mean score on a scale from zero to ten is 8.4 (median 10, i.e. more than 50% of respondents indicated 10 as their response). Dimensions of age, international/national status and race, religion, and ethnicity all mark around 6.3-6.6. The least prominent dimension is that of language (5.6).

Table E.2: Diversity management efforts

	Median	Mean
Gender	10	8.4
Age	7	6.3
Language	6	5.6
International/national	7	6.6
Race, religion, and ethnicity	7	6.4

The results indicate that while the status of employees as national or international staff is an important feature in everyday team work, it is not necessarily a prominent feature or concern of the

organizations' management. This is in contrast to gender, with very strong management focus but relatively small relevance in everyday work experiences.

F. Limitations

The survey provides a first systematic conceptualization in scholarly literature of the relative perceived strengths and weaknesses for staff groups in country operations of international organizations. However, the selection of respondents carries a potential risk of bias. Firstly, when searching for contacts, we were only able to identify email addresses of offices with websites and only a small fraction provided any individual email address in addition to generic contact addresses. It is possible that these offices are characterized by a specific working culture that could influence staff responses. Secondly, it is probable that those with an interest in diversity were more likely to respond. This is especially conceivable in view of the relatively low response rate. Having said this, the very high degree of diversity of the respondent body should be highlighted, as already presented in section B. Even though the number of responses is fairly low and there are some limitations to the sampling strategy, the virtual absence of similar survey evidence in the study of IGOs, in scholarly literature, makes the results of the survey nonetheless highly relevant.