

REPORT OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE SESSIONS ON THE FUTURE OF WORK

1. FICSA officers represented the membership at meetings of the High-Level Committee for Management (HLCM), which had identified the future of work as critical to its workplan in 2019. HLCM had therefore established the Task Force on the Future of Work and identified and work streams focused on three topics:

- remote work
- agile contracts
- enabling technology.

2. To raise awareness among the FICSA membership of those closely related topics and to ensure that FICSA adequately represented the membership's views to HLCM, the Secretariat convened three joint sessions of [standing committees](#) to address them jointly for the first time. The topics must be viewed together as they depend on each other in their development and implementation across the UN common system.

3. The joint sessions were in no way comprehensive, and FICSA members clearly agreed that they needed further opportunities to discuss the topics in greater depth and as new information emerged, including from HLCM. The objectives of the joint sessions included considerations of efficiency, transparency, connectedness, roundedness of understanding, preparedness and avoiding overlaps and duplications. This report addresses each topic in turn and then summarizes common issues and proposes joint recommendations. In addition, a dedicated section on the future of work was established on the FICSA [website](#).

Three topics

Remote work

4. The term remote work currently covered an array of options for working away from offices, which included teleworking from the duty station or another place, flexible working arrangements, and the use of hub and spoke offices. These differed from the business-continuity arrangements that organizations had put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Participants noted the lack of clear and consistent definitions for terms related to options for remote and other flexible ways to work. Training for managers was essential to enable them to understand the organizational arguments in favour of flexible working

arrangements and to combat outdated opposition to, for example, not having staff at hand in person; the latter was also a matter of trust. Management needed to apply clear and consistent criteria to decide which staff could access remote or flexible working arrangements. That would ensure increased transparency across the board.

6. Remote or flexible work also raised important issues related to the lack of adequate equipment (ergonomics), connectivity and cost implications, particularly for staff in the field. Those were also closely related to provisions for staff's occupational safety, health (particularly mental health) and welfare. The specific concerns of field staff included appropriate space to work, security, access to power and adequate access to the internet at an affordable price. Other concerns were related to the possible impact on entitlements, including staff health insurance, pension and post adjustment. The real implications of remote work for all staff categories in all duty stations across the UN common system were unclear.

Agile contract modalities

7. As no additional contract modalities had yet been proposed, discussion during the joint sessions focused on raising awareness of the current debate in various high-level fora and trends outside the UN system.

8. The participants discussed the underlying reasons for HLCM's possible plans to implement agile contracts outside the ICSC current contractual framework. Discussions with and documents from HLCM could indicate that those reasons included the need to ensure operational agility, save money and respond to the needs of the modern workforce. Nevertheless, the participants noted that the proper implementation of the existing contract modalities could address those concerns.

9. Current trends in the private sector showed the casualization of employment contracts, with increased use of precarious contracts. Any move towards agile contracts could adversely affect the independence of the international civil service, so the participants stressed the need to uphold the Noblemaire and Flemming principles in discussions in high-level fora.

Enabling technology

10. The session on enabling technology had two parts, underpinned by technical and practical presentations by staff of the UN International Computing Centre (UNICC) and the University of Nottingham Business School, United Kingdom, and the presence of a staff member of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

11. The technical part of the session informed participants about machine learning (artificial intelligence – AI); the risks of security breaches and inherent bias and discrimination in the use of data behind enabling technology, if not calibrated carefully; and the potential impact on staff skill sets, including those of managers.

12. Participants discussed the legal and ethical implications and noted the absence of a legal framework in the UN system. There was an urgent need to establish guiding principles across the UN common system that would preserve the right to privacy.

13. Progress in digitalization and AI was swift, so the participants agreed that UN staff needed to be actively involved in organizations' efforts to chart the course ahead, through FICSA's active participation in the work of HLCM. They also agreed that a

formalized relationship with the UNICC would help the FICSA membership both to follow and provide input on developments. Finally, the participants thought that the well developed European Social Partners [Framework Agreement on Digitalization](#) would be suitable to adapt to workplaces in the UN system.

Common issues

14. The participants expressed concerns about the lack of clear and consistent definitions and processes; possible effects on staff entitlements; transparency and fairness; and implications for different staff categories across the UN common system. They discussed more general concerns about occupational health and safety and general welfare, with a particular focus on mental health challenges due to the fast-changing working environment.

Joint recommendations for the FICSA Excom /Secretariat

15. The standing committees participating in the joint sessions recommended that:

- (a) the FICSA ExCom should formalize the relationship with UNICC;**
- (b) the FICSA Secretariat should to organize and hold online Ask the FICSA Expert sessions on the three work streams to inform the membership in greater depth, and should organize further joint sessions;**
- (c) the FICSA ExCom should propose to HLCCM that it develop guidance for the UN common system that is adapted from the European Social Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalization;**
- (d) the FICSA ExCom should continue to raise the importance of the consistent implementation of the [UN strategy on mental health](#) across the common system in all fora in which the future of work is discussed.**

Joint recommendation for the FICSA Members

FICSA members should inform the FICSA Secretariat of developments related to the future of work in their organizations;

Appendix 1. Participants in three joint sessions on the future of work

Remote working, 11 January 2021

Facilitator	Simon Ferrar
FICSA President	Tanya Quinn-Maguire (UNAIDS)
FICSA General Secretary	Evelyn Kortum (WHO/HQ)
FICSA ExCom members	Veronique Allain (SCBD), Kay Miller (WHO/EURO), Pilar Vidal (WHO/PAHO)
FICSA regional representatives	Anthony Ndinguri (ICAO), Rajesh Mehta (WHO/SEARO), Jesus Garcia Jimenez (ILO/ITC)

Staff associations/unions

AP-in-FAO	Line Kaspersen, Jakob Skoet
FAO/WFP-UGSS	Paola Franceschelli, Dina Franchi, Silvia Mariangeloni, Susan Murray
IAEA	Eugenia Agostini, Balazs Zsigo
IARC	Cécile Le Duc
ICAO	Andrew Brown, Sanya Dehinde, Viera Seben
IFADIMO	Charles Forrest, Victoria ValenziJuan Lyu
OSCE	Nizar Zaher
SCBD	Lisa Pedicelli
UNAIDS	Andrea Palazzi
UNESCO	David Storti, Elia Matias
UNFCCC	Mary Jean Abrazado, Melita Kolundzic Stabile, Ambretta Perrino, Tracy Tollmann, Santhosh Thanjavur Prakasam
UNIDO	Steve Eales, Cosimo Melpignano
UNGSC	Vito Musa
UPU	Stéphane Vuillemin
WHO/AFRO	Hamidou Bague
WHO/EURO	Antonella Biasiotto, Nathalie Germain-Julskov, Julia Nowacki
WHO/HQ	Gemma Vestal, Lianne Gonsalves, Catherine Kirorei Corsini
WHO/SEARO	Ritesh Singh
WHO/GSC	Khalid Aizat
WHO/WPRO	Priya Mannava, Beligan VI Modesto

Members with associate status

CTBTO	Michelle Delinde
IOM	Berta Fernandez
ITER	Sophie Miras
OPCW	Alberto Fernandez

Associations with consultative status

UNFCU	Elizabeth Philippe
Guests	
UNICTF	Maria Del Rocio, Martin Vargas
ITLOS	Sebastian Gomez, Dejan Berberovic
SKAO	Jeff Waff
WMU	Anne Pazaver
UNISERV	Steve Towler

Agile contracts, 13 January 2021

Facilitators	Simon Ferrar, Cosimo Melpignano (UNIDO)
FICSA President	Tanya Quinn-Maguire (UNAIDS)
FICSA General Secretary	Evelyn Kortum (WHO/HQ)
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WHO/HQ	Lianne Gonsalves,
WHO/WPRO	Priya Mannava, Beligan VI Modesto
WHO/GSC	Khalid Aizat
WMO	Jalil Housni

Members with associate status

CTBTO	Michelle Delinde
IOM	Berta Fernandez
WTO/OMC	Muriel Salette Carroz

Guests

UNICTF	Maria Del Rocio Martin Vargas
SKAO	Jeff Waff
WMU	Anne Pazaver

Enabling technology, 15 January 2021

Facilitator	Simon Ferrar
Speakers	Aubra Anthony (US Agency for International Development), Marco Liuzzi (UN International Computing Centre), Aditya Jain (Nottingham University Business School, United Kingdom)
FICSA President	Tanya Quinn-Maguire (UNAIDS)
FICSA General Secretary	Evelyn Kortum (WHO/HQ)
FICSA ExCom members,	Veronique Allain (SCBD), Kay Miller (WHO/EURO), Pilar Vidal (WHO/PAHO)
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IAEA	Eugenia Agostini
ICAO	Anastasia Alba, Andrew Brown, Marisa Collis, Sanya Dehinde, Sonia El Sakka, Dominique Kearney, Kevin Murad, Viera Seben
IMO	Shereen Barry, Juan Lyu
SCBD	Lisa Pedicelli
UNAIDS	Andrea Palazzi
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