



ANALYSIS OF THE 2021 SURVEY ON HARDSHIP CLASSIFICATION



Building back

Geneva, 14 December 2021

In response to decision FICSA/C/74/D/13, a survey was launched among the FICSA membership ([FICSA Communication 27-21](#)) to assess the knowledge of the FICSA members about the hardship classification process and how much is known about the local living conditions at hardship duty stations.

Below is a detailed analysis for each question. Overall, it is confirmed that staff representatives and their formal association or union could be playing an important role in:

- Raising awareness locally about the ICSC request to review the hardship level of the duty stations, every 3 years. This could be done through the FICSA EXCOM member for Field and Regional issues and the Regional Reps calling for the constitution of a local committee made of all UN organizations (Staff, HR and Administration) in the large duty stations in order to fill out the very lengthy questionnaires providing as much additional information as possible so that the ICSC can suggest the proper level of hardship classification to the TWG.(Tripartite Working Group)
- For organizations with staff deployed in the field such as WHO, FAO, UNIDO, IFAD, ICAO, etc., use the staff representation bodies in these organizations to alert the HR departments of this regular exercise and why it is important to comply with filling out the questionnaires received from the ICSC;
- Staff, who are in HR departments in HQs and who are involved in onboarding staff to be deployed away from the HQs, should definitely know more about the hardship classification process and should be able to provide sound advice about the actual conditions of life and work in these duty stations. This is when the FICSA Regional Representatives should also be more responsive when the FICSA Field Representative on the ExCom sends out the information about the questionnaires being dispatched to the specific region and the mandatory aspect of this exercise.
- It is good that the traditional means of communication such as regular updates via emails, information notes/bulletins, townhall meetings and a dedicated website for staff away from HQs do achieve their purpose. With the current overflow of information circulating on a daily basis via email, one would fear that an overload of information is affecting staff, but it seems not to be the case. Worth mentioning this to the FICSA membership.
- The Regional Representatives of FICSA will need to be more familiar with the process of hardship classification as the different regions of the globe are revised every three years and by experience, the Executive Committee Member for Field issues has had a hard time reaching out to the staff members in these regions, through the FICSA Regional Representatives and this is definitely an avenue to explore. We could build capacity, via on-line training sessions with the FICSA Regional Representatives when it is the turn of their region to get classified.
- Access to quality health care and health facilities of good standards seem to be a recurrent problem encountered by those surveyed. Also access to medicine and basic amenities in some duty stations is a challenge. Some lack proper schooling system locally, those schools which are recognized by the ICSC as the good standard ones. And now that the information about the education system available in the duty stations is no longer required in

the hardship questionnaires, many UN staff member are complaining that this has an impact on their local conditions of living, which is the case for sure.

Question 1: As a staff member of staff rep., are you aware of the process led by the ICSC which classifies UN duty stations according to their levels of hardship ?

Out of the 27 responses received, it is encouraging to see that about half of the members of FICSA (48 %) are familiar with the hardship classification process. And close to 30% can confirm that they have been involved, one way or another, with the hardship questionnaire. It is somewhat reassuring that over the past 5-6 years, at the FICSA Council, facts and information were shared with the FICSA membership about the hardship levels of the duty stations and this served to be a useful exchange of information with the FICSA membership (even if the feedback during the FICSA Council meetings was not so clear about the usefulness of this agenda item being discussed !).

Yes, I know the classification system and what it is for.	48.15%	13
Yes, and I have been asked to contribute to filling out the hardship questionnaire provided by the ICSC	29.63%	8
No, I do not know what the classification system is, but I have heard about it or been asked by field colleagues about	22.22%	6

Question 2 – see comments at the end of this document

Question 3: does the HR department in your organization play any of these roles in the hardship classification process, such as disseminate the information or organize training sessions ?

About half of the respondents (45 %) confirmed that the HR Department of their organization was disseminating information about the hardship classification process when it was time to fill out the questionnaires. But another half of the respondents did not know about the involvement of their HR department in this process; which is not very encouraging if it is a UN entity with staff deployed away from the HQs!. The ICSC always informs the UN organizations which are part of the Tripartite Working Group on hardship classification that staff members and their spouse can definitely provide supplementary information in these questionnaires; but the reality on the ground is different. If the HR department(s) do not necessarily share the information about this process, then the staff cannot know that it is the turn of their duty station to be evaluated for the level of hardship.

Disseminate the information	45.83%	11
Organize training sessions	8.33%	2
Don't know	54.17%	13
Total Respondents: 24		

Question 4: Do you think that your Staff Association/Staff Union can play a role about raising awareness about this ICSC process ?

Close to 100% responded positively for the role to be played by the SA or SU in this process. This means that FICSA should continue its advocacy role with the ICSC and other UN organizations about the importance of this process. But also staff, who are in HR departments in HQs and who are involved in onboarding staff to be deployed away from the HQs, should definitely know more about the hardship classification process and should be able to provide sound advice about the actual conditions of life and work in these duty stations. This is when the FICSA Regional Representatives should also be more responsive when the the Executive Committee Member for Field issues sends out the information about the questionnaires being dispatched to the specific region and the mandatory aspect of this exercise.

Question 5: would you consider your organization a good example of Field-based HR management based on the following:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Clear onboarding policies	28.57%	6
Easy sharing of information about working away from the HQs	28.57%	6
Rules and regulations especially applicable to Field staff	23.81%	5
User-friendly HR tools	4.76%	1
Easily accessible support from HR staff	33.33%	7
Any other important areas for field-based HR management?	42.86%	9
Total Respondents: 21		

21 respondents were positively impressed by their HR department regarding the management of HR who are deployed away from the HQs and this is worth noting, as this would demonstrate that the duty-of-care responsibilities of the UN organizations are well fulfilled when it comes to sharing the right information to staff who are either about to decide to accept a posting away from the HQ or who are feeling pressure or disappointment once they reach their destination of work.

Question 6: what are the measures in place to address the right communication streams between the HQ and the Field on the process for hardship classification ?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Townhall meetings	23.08%	6
Frequent and regular updates via emails	38.46%	10
Information Notes / Bulletins	65.38%	17
Dedicated Intranet for Staff away from Headquarters	26.92%	7
Other suggestions?	23.08%	6
Total Respondents: 26		

From the results, regular updates via emails, information notes/bulletins, townhall meetings and a dedicated website for staff away from HQs seem to be the best means of communication. It is good that the traditional means such as emails or information bulletins do achieve their purpose; with the current overflow of information circulating on a daily basis via email, one would fear to get overloaded with information, but it seems not to be the case. Worth mentioning this to the FICSA membership.

Question 7: in your organization, is there a need to increase general awareness about the regular ICSC hardship classification mechanism ?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	96.30%	26
No	3.70%	1
TOTAL		27

Overwhelming positive response ! meaning that FICSA should continue participating actively in these ICSC meetings, build capacity about this process and push for even more accurate data gathered to obtain a classification level which represents well the situation on-site. There is often a disconnect between the actual situation and the descriptions contained in some questionnaires for certain duty stations.

Question 8: In your Organization, is there a need to engage the Staff Association/Staff Union in this process?

92.5% of the respondents responded yes ! another proof that this exercise should not be taken lightly and that the staff members should be notified when the hardship questionnaires are requested for the specific region and its duty stations under review, every 3 years.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	92.59%	25
No	7.41%	2
TOTAL		27

The FICSA Regional Representatives will need to be more familiar with this process as the different regions of the globe are revised every three years and by experience, the the Executive Committee Member for Field issues has had a hard time reaching out to the staff members in these regions, through the FICSA Regional Representatives, and this is definitely an avenue to explore. We could build capacity with the FICSA Regional Representatives when it is the turn of their region to get classified.

Question 2 was more an open question:

During past surveys, did you encounter any specific issues related to local living conditions at hardship duty stations that you would like to flag to FICSA or not covered in the ICSC Questionnaire? (For example, related to confidence in & access to local health facilities and/or levels of local isolation)

- Lack of involvement of staff or staff representatives in this process;
- Access to health services and security (beyond the DSS and UN System).
- I have heard staff in hardship duty stations from other UN agencies raise issues such as security and quality of living.
- Many issues related to local health facilities, schooling and disaster response and recovery were glossed over or misrepresented (it was represented as having a cyclone response plan, which it did, but when a cyclone happened, the plan was unimplementable).
- Access to quality health care for my kids is a major challenge. Also access to basic necessities for kids are very limited. Where they are available, the cost is very high. Intermittent power outage makes it harder to keep anything in the fridge in good condition. Also access to international school is very limited. The only one which is not even up to the standard is about to lose its accreditation, making it harder for young families to keep their families here and yet it's a family duty station.
- Local health facilities are limited and standards very poor; access to medicines is a continuous problem due to the limited foreign currency exchange; supplies of some basic food items are erratic and often not available. standard versus availability: available health facilities doesn't mean necessarily good and reliable ones.
- Special conditions for women, not mentioned or underlined.
- Discretionary measures applied by the different UN agencies. For instance, FAO does not follow UNDP rental subsidy guidelines in countries making the staff opt for sub-optimal housing.

- Issues relative to access to Covid 19 vaccines.
 - Even in non-hardship duty stations, the COVID pandemic has widened the gap in access to proper health-care worldwide and access to vaccines globally.
 - Nairobi, the level of hardship is not adequately recognized.
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