Conference Room Paper

FICSA COUNCIL

77th SESSION
Bern, 26 February to 1 March 2024

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FICSA/C/77/HRM/R.1   Geneva, 29 March 2024
Agenda item 11 (B)

REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Introduction

1. The Standing Committee on Human Resources Management (see Appendix 1 for participants) met virtually on 7 February 2024 and in-person on 27 and 28 February 2024 to address its agenda. Dina Franchi (FAO/WFP-UGSS) was elected rapporteur.

2. The Chair provided a summary of the topics discussed at the virtual session and the decisions made by the 76th session of the FICSA Council. The Standing Committee continued work on the proposed FICSA Permanent Technical Committee on Non-regular Staff Contractual Issues and concluded that a targeted approach was required. The SC agreed to separate discussions on staff human resources (HR) issues from those related to non-regular staff issues by creating two separate sessions. There would be an SC session solely on the topic of HR for staff contracts and and one dedicated to the work of the proposed Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) that addressed only non-staff issues that did not fall under the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) contractual arrangements.

3. A report had been published on the issue of overtime for international professional staff and national officers, based on a survey conducted in 2023. FICSA sent out a communication on [Overtime Compensation and Duty Travel's DSA. Activities in 2024.](#)

Latest updates

4. Members raised concerns regarding the unfair treatment and dismissal of fixed-term contract types. It was highlighted that the matter of fixed-term contracts was nearly equivalent to consultancy contracts. One burning issue emphasized was the lack of recourse and compensation when a post was abolished, leading to contract termination without any compensation. It was noted that only 30% of staff have access to contracts that afforded them "proper" rights. This sparked a debate on whether fixed-term contracts were here to stay, with concerns about the potential weaponization of contracts. The contracts of some staff members who voiced their opinions were reportedly not renewed, while others were renewed for extended periods. SC concluded that the Compensation Review Group currently investigating hiring practices should address those issues.

5. Members raised concerns about the potential weaponization of staff performance evaluations, particularly for those under continuing contracts where a PIP (Performance Improvement Plan) could be applied. It was questioned whether there were any protection for such contracts. Participants emphasized that, if performance indicators were met, management could not take adverse actions. SC suggested that seeking legal advice might be necessary, as disputes could escalate to tribunals if appealed.

6. The Standing Committee stressed the importance of completing performance documents thoroughly, suggesting that once a PIP was completed, there should be no trace of it remaining.

7. A member described a proposal in their organization of plans to externalize the shared services centre, which they viewed as a mistake.

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8. The Standing Committee also highlighted the issue of abolishment of posts. Members would like to see rules to specify a process for abolition, as well as clear criteria for reclassifying national professional officer (NPO) positions. Members identified the lack of opportunity for internal candidates as a general problem across most organizations, in addition to flaws in the ranking system and the practice of abolishing vacancies if the first-ranked candidates did not accept the offer of appointment.

9. In conclusion, the discussion shed light on various concerns surrounding fixed-term contracts, performance evaluations and hiring practices within organizations. There was a consensus on the need for fair and transparent procedures to safeguard employee rights and ensure equitable opportunities for career advancement. These issues would likely continue to be scrutinized as organizations strove to improve their HR policies and practices.

Concept of contracts "with no duty-station"

10. The Standing Committee decided to focus on the concept of contracts "with no duty-station" defined for internationally recruited staff and the potential repercussions of the use of such contracts. The discussion focused on the applicability and the potential removal of the requirement to pay any "location based" or "expat based" entitlements, such as home leave, or education, relocation and repatriation grants.

11. The discussions also focused on the impact contracts "with no duty station" would have on post adjustment and the compensation review package. A participant queried if staff with no duty station would be granted a post adjustment at all, or if the lower post adjustment between the location of the position compared to the staff's home country would be taken into consideration.

12. The continued misuse of consultants and interns was also discussed. The inclusion of interns in staff unions to defend their rights was highlighted and one member reported that their staff union had included interns in their membership. SC supported the issuance of proper contracts and sustainable staffing structures.

13. The Standing Committee discussed the concept of "elsewhere" as a duty station and the potential consequences/changes in post adjustment after a few months based on teleworking outside of duty station (TWODS) location. Staff representatives should inform their constituents about the implications of such flexibility, and suggest erring on the side of caution for staff opting for "elsewhere" as a duty station, as privileges and immunity vary across different countries and that could change depending on location. Furthermore, the Standing Committee raised concerns about potential consequences such as local recruitment if staff members return to their home countries for work on a TWODS for an extended period.

14. The proposal for the FICSA position paper considered the ongoing degradation to the conditions of work and what defines a staff member versus a contractor. The paper would consider location, independence of workforce, such as contractors, and a way forward to look at employment more deeply, build capacity and hold training. During the HR Network meeting, it was decided that a position paper on the discussed topics would not be produced at that time. Instead, the group agreed to closely monitor the ongoing developments and gather more information before making any definite decisions.

15. The elected Standing Committee Chairs, in collaboration with the SC core group would build up the SC's Teams Channel within the general FICSA Teams Channel. During those efforts the SC Chairs would oversee the building up of a library of information that contained material and information that will assist SC in its work with a potential for long-term initiatives. The SC decided to put the effort to draft a FICSA position paper on non-location-based contracts on hold for the time being. The timeline would be decided at a future session.

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Recommendation

- **The Standing Committee recommended that, when planning the 78th FICSA Council, the FICSA Executive Committee should ensure that the new Human Resources Management Permanent Technical Committee on Non-regular Contracts meets and opens a constructive dialogue on the dual-track employment framework(s). The FICSA Executive Committee should build an agenda for the Committee that covers different frameworks used by UN organizations and scenarios of cultural overlap, and investigate the availability of case studies, with enough lead time to inform the membership before the 78th Council meets.**

Impact of artificial intelligence in the workplace

16. The Standing Committee considered the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace and confirmed that its transformative potential had been recognized by the UN. The Standing Committee agreed that AI technology may offer opportunities to:

    a. enhance sustainable development efforts;

    b. provide tools to deliver humanitarian assistance and improve coordination;

    c. augment crisis management efforts; and

    d. enhance the overall effectiveness of operations by automating repetitive tasks and optimizing workflows.

17. The Standing Committee reflected on the growing need to embrace AI technology but to approach its implementation with caution. Moving forward, continued evaluation and exploration of AI was necessary to fully understand capabilities and limitations on the UN system. While the UN can leverage AI to support its mission it must mitigate potential risks, ensure accountability and uphold ethical standards.

18. Concerns were raised about the limited number of service providers, with Microsoft and Google dominating the market and holding approximately 98% of the market space. The Standing Committee addressed concerns about the ethical implications of AI technologies and their potential impact on intellectual property rights, loss of administrative staff positions and the impact on HR management. A member raised the importance of augmenting work rather than replacing it with AI technologies. Another member pointed out the unusually fast pace of AI implementation within the UN system. A speaker pointed out that AI flattened language and amplified gender biases, resulting in receding advancement in gender parity.

19. The Standing Committee agreed that an emphasis on ethical considerations and the importance of monitoring the transition to AI to safeguard colleagues' mental health and well-being was imperative. Finally, SC recognized the high costs associated with procuring AI products and the creation of new job opportunities.

20. The Standing Committee discussed the HLCM Task Force on Artificial Intelligence two subgroups that are designed to address distinct aspects of AI implementation within the UN system. Subgroup 1: Organizational Use of AI focused on the use of AI within the UN system and had taken a human first approach (draft framework not currently available). Subgroup 2: UN Generative AI Platform explored the feasibility of establishing a UN generative AI platform. The Standing Committee reported that the concept of a generative AI application serving all UN organizations was met with scepticism due to the practical challenges.

21. A member expressed concerns on the role of a software developer in an organization. The reply was that the AI working group had dedicated significant time to examining the applicability of contractors,

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particularly in relation to software development roles. There was a noted lack of understanding regarding the close relationship that SAP engineers have with staff and the organization. The Standing Committee emphasized the importance of applying standards of conduct to external IT technicians, ensuring consistency and accountability in their roles within the organization. Moving forward, it is imperative for the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) Task Force to address concerns regarding ethical considerations, diversity of service providers, and the potential impact on staff members. The UN had taken a conservative approach to effectively navigate the complexities of AI adoption while upholding its core values and principles.

Recommendations

- **The Standing Committee recommended that the FICSA Executive Committee should issue guidance that encourages staff representatives to take part in discussions on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace through FICSA communications on the impact of AI on mental health and wellbeing, based on the recommendations of the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) Task Force on Artificial Intelligence.**

- **The Standing Committee recommended that FICSA should explore options to add capacity building and training related to the use of AI in the workplace to its catalogue.**

SC officers and core group members

22. The following participants were elected as SC officers:

- Anthony Alozie (IAEA/HQ) as Chair

- Alessandra Marcorio (UNGSC) as Co-Chair

- Helena Debussy (ICAO) as Vice-Chair.

23. The core group members would be: Kay Miller (WHO/EURO), Jalil Housni (WMO), Dina Franchi, (FAO, Florence Tartanac (FAO), Shiamalarani Varathan (WHO/GSC), Shereen Barry (IMO), Fola Odulana (IMO) and Monica Hepp (IAEA).

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Appendix 1. Participants

Officers

Chair/Coordinator	Anthony, Alozie (IAEA/HQ)
Vice-Chair/Vice-Coordinator	Alessandra Marcorio (UNGSC)
Rapporteur	Dina Franchi (FAO/WFP-UGSS)

Staff association/union

AP-in-FAO	Farid El Haffar, Florence Tartanac
IAEA	Anthony Alozie, Monica Wanjiku Hepp
ICAO	Helena Debussy
FAO/WFP-UGSS	Emmanuela De Teodoro, Silvia Mariangeloni
IFAD	Monica Bugghi
ILOTC	Cristina Pierini
IMO	Shereen Barry, Fola Odulana
OSCE	Nizar Zaher
UNAIDS	Tlotliso Monaheng
UNIDO	Osadolor Akpata, Steven Eales
UNESCO	Viviana Zaccaria, Federica Delconte, Amani El-Sheikh, Denis Pitzalis
UNGSC	Alessandra Marcorio, Cosimo Lunedi
UPU	Franck Landauer, Stéphane Vuillemin
WHO/HQ	Neddy Mafunga
WHO/AFRO	Harris Benito Koubemba Mona, Bienvenu Carinne Amona, Prisca Blanche Ndongo-Mombo
WHO/EURO	Anita Stefin
WHO/WPRO	Modesto VI Beligan

Members with Associate Status

CERN	Joel Lahaye
CTBTO	Moshir Kyrollos, Khalil Madhoun, Michelle Delinde
OPCW	Begimai Sataeva, Oksana Tyshchenko

Members with Consultative Status

EMBL	Maria Cerezo

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