



COMMUNICATIONS

UPDATES ON THE BASELINE COST-OF-LIVING SURVEYS AT THE HEADQUARTERS DUTY STATIONS

43/21**Geneva****14 September 2021**

To: All FICSA Full Members part of the UN Common System

From: Tanya Quinn-Maguire, President

Dear colleagues,

As you are aware, in the UN Common System, there are two major and important surveys related to staff compensation. These are:

1. The Local Salary Surveys which affect the salaries of General Service, NPO and other locally recruited categories of staffⁱ.
2. The Cost of Living (COL) surveys, which includes both price collection and staff expenditure surveys as the basis for the calculation of the Post Adjustment for Internationally Recruited Professional Staff (IP staff)ⁱⁱ.

Both comprehensive surveys are normally carried out every five years, with adjustments in between as stipulated in the respective methodologies.

This communication is about the latest developments in the Cost of Living (COL) surveys for Internationally Recruited Professional Staff (IP staff). We will keep you updated when there are new developments regarding local salary surveys for locally recruited staff in the future.

Background

- If you are new to the topic, this where you should start:
 - First, review the 2016 approved Cost of Living survey methodology as published in the [booklet](#) from the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC)
 - Second, review the [recent changes to the methodology which were approved in March 2021](#) during the 91st ICSC session. The ICSC will eventually update the booklet with the approved changes.
 - Review the [changes to the set of operational rules, for application in the 2021 round of surveys](#) and see how this may potentially impact you.
- Some members of Local Salary Committees (LSC) in Rome, Geneva and other duty stations had compiled a list of questions that the ICSC [answered](#). Please review if these are useful to you.

The current situation

We informed you [in July](#) that the ICSC had officially initiated the 2021 round of COL surveys, starting with the baseline survey of Headquarters duty stations. The round began with New York in July, and the ICSC has now started the process to conduct surveys at other HQ locations in October and November (Geneva, London, Madrid, Montreal, Paris, Rome, Vienna and Washington, D.C.), subject to [criteria to ascertain the feasibility](#) of conducting the 2021 baseline cost-of-living surveys in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Some of you had expressed the need to conduct the survey to capture the changes in your expenditure pattern during the pandemic, while colleagues in other duty stations would prefer not to conduct a survey at a time when spending patterns remain highly disrupted. This was discussed extensively during the 91st ICSC Session, which led to the approval of the criteria mentioned above.

- I. Re-opening of restaurants and non-essential shops
- II. Access to cultural and recreational facilities
- III. Availability of international flights
- IV. Public transportation allowed
- V. General return to the office
- VI. General availability of goods and services

FICSA also [raised the concern](#) on the short timeline between ICSC's announcement of the survey and the expectation to convene the LSC during the period of summer holidays in the northern hemisphere – and for most duty stations, this is the first period of holidays for staff in the last 18 months. This concern was reiterated again by FICSA and the other staff federations during [the 92nd ICSC Session in August 2021](#).

However, the ICSC has decided to proceed with its planned [schedule of activities for the surveys](#), subject to changes if requested by the LSCs.

What you should do

- **If you are located at a Headquarters duty station**, make sure your staff representatives and administration are represented in the LSC. Your staff representatives and administration on the LSC, should jointly ascertain the local conditions and identify if it meets the criteria to conduct the survey. If not, the LSC should raise the issue to the ICSC Chair through the ICSC Secretariat. As [mentioned at the end of July](#), the LSC meeting(s) will usually still proceed even if your staff representatives are not on board, therefore it is important to make sure they are!
 - **If you are not located at a Headquarters duty station**, your turn will come next. After the baseline survey for Headquarters duty stations is completed, the ICSC will conduct the Cost of Living survey at the remaining duty stations. That is why FICSA strongly suggests all staff associations keep up to date with the developing situation, even if this issue does not immediately affect your duty station.
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- The ICSC has reiterated its commitment to provide briefing or training to LSCs, subject to request by the LSC. Therefore, do not hesitate to evaluate the capacity and capability of the LSC, and request training sessions accordingly from the ICSC. For example, if most of the LSC members are new and inexperienced, you may want to request for a comprehensive end-to-end training. If your LSC members are experienced, perhaps a shorter briefing on what has changed in the new methodology would be sufficient. The keyword here is that the request for training **should be initiated by the LSC to the ICSC.**

Do not hesitate to get in touch with FICSA if you have further need for support, advice or if you have any questions!

ⁱ These surveys are conducted by the ICSC at Headquarters and similar duty stations, or the United Nations Office of Human Resources (UN OHRM) at field duty stations, together with the Local Salary Survey Committee. The methodology is currently being reviewed, and you can read the [latest progress report here](#)

ⁱⁱ As stated in the Noblemaire principle, the post adjustment system ensures that all IP staff should have the same purchasing power as per New York as the global baseline for calculation of the post adjustment indices.