LOVE, LIVE AND WORK DIFFERENTLY
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
International Training Center of the ILO (ILO TC)
International Maritime Organization (IMO)
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
Pan American Health Organization - WHO Regional Office for the Americas (PAHO-WHO),
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD)
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
United Nations Global Service Centre (UNGSC)
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)
United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Universal Postal Union (UPU)
World Health Organization (WHO)
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
BIOVERSITY International
Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM)
European Organization for Nuclear Physics (CERN)
Centre international d’enregistrement des publications en série (CIEPS)
Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)
European Central Bank (ECB)
European Southern Observatory (ESO)
The Global Fund
International Cocoa Organization (ICCO)
International Coffee Organization (ICO)
International Development Law Organization (IDLO)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
International Olive Council (IOC)
International Organization International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, (OPCW)
World Customs Organization (WCO)
World Trade Organization (WTO)
Love differently

A poem with impressions from our Regional Representative for Africa Anthony Ndunguri on the current extraordinary situation of confinement due to COVID-19

2020 progresses, COVID – 19 bites harder and deeper…
The pangs can be felt all over the world’s skin.
Everyone is affected. The ground shaking beneath our feet, we are trapped with no place to go.
The roar, only getting wilder and louder.
No where to run, No where to hide, we can only wait.
Its not what, where, when nor how….
Our world has suddenly become a village…..
Our voices echoing throughout the land….
Like the Muazzin call for prayer!
From the highest minarets of the globe.
STAY AT HOME!! WASH YOUR HANDS!! LOVE DIFFERENTLY

News are depressing, we can only wait for the worst.
The worst comes….lockdown comes…
Schools close, markets close, airports close, entertainment places close, worship centres close….the world closes.
Where will we go and repent.
STAY AT HOME!! WASH YOUR HANDS!! LOVE DIFFERENTLY

We listen, we watch, we peep from our windows and balconies.
Like prisoners we wait for the day of our freedom.
Are the numbers right? Wrong? Sure?
Media houses projects…..
Breaking news everyday.
One more infection, the numbers end with a +
STAY AT HOME!! WASH YOUR HANDS!! LOVE DIFFERENTLY

One more day we sink a day deeper.
The rich, the poor, Kings, Queens, Presidents, Prime Ministers.
Scholars, Leaders…..me and you…..
With hearts filled with fear we sail on…
I feel sick after sanitizing my hands.
I can’t figure out if it’s the 70% alcohol in the sanitizer or if am coming down with a flu…..a flu???
STAY AT HOME!! WASH YOUR HANDS!! LOVE DIFFERENTLY.

But,
We shall survive, the human race always does.
We will survive with scars.
A mother, a father, a brother, a sister, a son, a daughter, a spouse, a partner, a friend. One less a family member.
A job, a penny, a semester, a term, a deadline, a goal…. We will all lose something at the end.
The scars will tell a story.
Of fear, agony, loss.
A story of victory and a battle won.
The poem will be read with tears.
Tears of victory, tears of friends we lost along the way.
We will surely survive……if we…..
STAY AT HOME!! WASH OUR HANDS!! LOVE DIFFERENTLY

Poem only available in English
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It was a very different world just two months ago when I gave my address to Council during the elections for FICSA President at the IMO in London. We even shared some jokes about this new virus that people were starting to talk about – and we laughed, because we could not understand why they were making so much fuss about a ‘flu’. Sadly, the effects of this global pandemic have slowly but surely affected all of us in some way. Many of us are getting used to isolation and working from home along with the added burden of caring for family members, home-schooling, bad network connections, an overwhelming amount of media reports, not to mention concern about loved ones in distant countries who we cannot visit because of travel restrictions as well as the possible effects of all of this on our job security. Some have been affected by the virus directly, either personally or loved ones, and we have sadly received the news that one of our colleagues in FAO Rome sadly passed away due to the virus. It now seems a million years away from that week in London where we earnestly discussed the concerns of our members: multiple salary scales, multiple standards for recruitment, selection, classification and career development, the implementation of mental health strategies, as well as our organisations’ different approaches to safety and security, to name but a few. Those issues have not gone away. However, it now seems that all our time is spent reacting to the latest COVID-19 update while struggling to keep an eye on the key issues we have been working on for so many years and wondering when it will all return to “normal”.

One issue I focused on during my speech in February was my strong belief in the importance of unity and teamwork. Nothing could be more relevant to us all at this time. We heard so much during Council about the importance of teamwork and of building steady, consistent partnerships based on sound technical knowledge and real-life data from our membership. Those partnerships, in-depth knowledge and sense of team-spirit have come to the fore in recent weeks where previously well-planned week-long meetings of the ICSC and other bodies have been cancelled and replaced by rapid virtual consultations between the staff federations and the HR Network. FICSA has been able to respond to these rapid changes with the support of all of the members of the Executive Committee while continuing to focus our attention on salary methodologies and other key concerns to ensure that we are prepared to continue working on these important topics when meetings resume either virtually or otherwise. Please rest assured that you elected a great Executive Committee this year and everyone has worked hard to live up to the high standards you expect from us while working from home in Washington, Montreal, Vienna, Copenhagen, Geneva and France and ensuring that FICSA holds our administrations accountable through fact-based dialogue and upholding the principles of transparency and accountability. Together with the regional representatives we will continue to ensure that the concerns you have about the current situation will be raised to the level of the ICSC, the CEB and the HR Network, and, we will continue to reiterate your concerns in every possible forum.

Some of you will remember how we spent quite a few hours in discussion during sessions of the SOCSEC Standing Committee about how frustrating it was that our administrations did not seem to grasp the importance of staff mental health and wellbeing. We lamented how
difficult it was to get traction as staff representatives for this topic which we knew was so important on a daily basis for our members. Well, there is nothing like a global pandemic to focus attention on health and wellbeing… Not a day goes by without reading some directive from the HR Network, the Secretary General, heads of agencies, or directors of Human Resources stressing the need to prioritise staff mental health and wellbeing. This is a lesson to all of us that our work is never in vain and we should continue to advocate even when our voices seem to be falling on deaf ears. Your voices over the years have ensured that FICSA has been able to contribute to the amazing body of work that has enabled administrations to respond to the Secretary General’s call to protect staff mental health and wellbeing at this difficult time. We now need to work together to ensure that efforts in this regard are genuine and are consistently applied across our “un-common” UN system. FICSA continues to work as an active member of the Mental Health Implementation Board, and now more than ever we are here to support you and your members in any way we can. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with your concerns. If you have not already done so, you should look at the compilation of information available to support staff and managers at this time: https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/wellness

Going forward, I think that the general spirit of the call to work together I raised during my speech in February resonates just as much today. I am sure that you will all agree that working together is essential now more than ever during these difficult times to maintain, build on, and re-build if necessary, the work of FICSA colleagues over the years. I plan to keep those words in mind as I continue to work with all of you over the coming months:

• Together, we need to continue to benefit from close partnership with our expert colleagues who can share their knowledge and help build the capacity of our members. They can help us to keep an eye on where we have come from, to not forget the efforts that were required to build and maintain the compensation package that we enjoy today, and can ensure we can pass on this essential institutional knowledge to the next generations of staff representatives.

• Together, we need to ensure capacity building within our membership – share the technical knowledge – inspire others to become technical experts so that we can continue to assist our members.

• Together, we need to work with the next generation. We need to forge links with Young UN and bring those young activists into our staff associations – encourage their active participation in staff representation – learn from them and help them to build their knowledge.

• Together we need to channel the energy and enthusiasm of our members to ensure solidarity across the generations – across our associations – across regions and duty stations to ensure that we are building a solid future for our Federation and helping the UN to continue to be relevant to the people we serve.

• Together, we can stay strong and continue to be “One Strong Federation speaking with one Strong Voice”.

Thank you for the faith you put in me when you elected me as President in February. It hasn’t exactly been the start that any of us would have hoped for. Nevertheless, I look forward to continuing so support you all over the next two years despite the current challenges, and along with the rest of the Executive Committee I will continue to ensure your voice is heard on issues from COVID-19, its impact on our lives and our job security as well as our mental health and wellbeing, to salary survey methodology and the future of the United Nations and its specialised organisations. As I said in London – if you want to go quickly, go alone, if you want to go far, go together (African proverb). I look forward to our journey together and I look forward to seeing you all safe and well at our next FICSA Council in Copenhagen.

My warmest wishes for the health and safety of you and your loved ones.
53rd FICSA COUNCIL
London 10–14 February 2020
Hosted by IMO

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 11 Feb
Presentation of the Executive Committee of @FICSAHQ at our 73rd Council.

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 6 Feb
EVENTS AT 73rd FICSA Council: Almost 40% of the @UN system workforce is made up of non-staff personnel. Should FICSA represent non-staff personnel? What are some advantages/disadvantages of representing nonstaff? ficsa.org/fileadmin/user... 2

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 11 Feb
NOW AT THE 73RD COUNCIL: We invited the ICSC Chair, Mr. Djicca and the ICSC Executive Secretary for a Q&A with FICSA members.

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 8 Feb
An acquired right is “a fundamental term of an employment contract that cannot be unilaterally amended.” All international organizations have a duty to ensure stable acquired rights of staff when changes are made. acquiredright staffright laboraction

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 8 Feb
EVENTS AT 73rd FICSA Council: Rishi Gulati will present his article on acquired rights of International civil service under the @UN and ILO Tribunals, as part of commissioned legalstudies through FICSA. What steps can we take to protect acquired rights? ficsa.org/fileadmin/user...

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 10 Feb
Mr. Kitack Lim, Secretary General of the @IMOHQ in London, opens the 73rd FICSA Council today assuring his full support to his staff and FICSA.

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 12 Feb
NOW AT THE 73rd FICSA COUNCIL: Today, staff representatives met with legal advisors Rishi Gulati, Ludovic Moro and Necho Dubey (on video) to discuss the concept of acquired rights. acquiredrights

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 9 Feb
PRE-MEETING FOR 73rd COUNCIL, held on Saturday, 8 February, the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) conducted a briefing on the ongoing review of the GS Salary Survey Methodologies. #salary 2

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 8 Feb
EVENTS AT 73rd FICSA Council: Negotiation skills are important in improving staff conditions and benefits. What are some of the best approaches you have used in the past? Are your staff encouraged to take the training? #negotiation ficsa.org/fileadmin/user...

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 7 Feb
EVENTS AT 73rd FICSA Council: How does technology change our future of work and workforce? Has your organization implemented a new #ERP system? Did it impact the health and well-being of your staff? ficsa.org/fileadmin/user...

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 7 Feb
EVENTS AT 73rd FICSA Council: Feedback on the 50th session of Inter-Agency Security Management Network, annual ICSC meeting on classification of hardship duty stations, @UN rules concerning carrying of firearms by security guards and more. #IndService ficsa.org/fileadmin/user...

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 11 Feb
EVENTS AT 73rd FICSA Council: Are there any discriminatory policies toward General Service staff applying for professional positions in your organization? Do you want FICSA to address this matter? @UN_Careers #GeneralService ficsa.org/fileadmin/user...

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 18 Feb
Sending our heartfelt thank you to all the participants at the 73rd Council, especially Mr. Kitack Lim and @IMOHQ for being an amazing host. We will be sharing more photos from the Council later this week as well. #thanks

FICSA @FICSAHQ - 18 Feb
Introducing our new logo! We encouraged our members to send ideas for a new logo before the 73rd Council in order to modernize our image. The top three winners were honored last Friday at the Council. What do you think of our new #logo?
The Council of the Federation of International Civil Servants’ Associations (FICSA) returned to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for its 73rd Session, from 10 to 14 February 2020, while pre-Council meetings took place on the preceding weekend. The last FICSA Council was held at IMO 24 years ago in 1996. The meeting was chaired by Alfredo Parroquín-Ohlson, from IMO.

Despite the violent storms Kiara and Dennis, the Council gathered around 140 participants from 30 full member associations and unions, and 55 other participants with associate, consultative or observer status, as well as other guests to discuss important issues concerning international civil servants’ rights in 7 different Standing Committees, 2 Ad Hoc Committees and 2 Joint Sessions, as well as in Plenary.

IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim inaugurated the opening session of the Council and hosted a welcome reception on the first day of the week which was busy with many events. Mr. Larbi Djacta, Chair of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), addressed the Council as guest speaker and responded to a Q&A session, together with the Executive Secretary of the ICSC, Ms Regina Pawlik.

Throughout the FICSA Council, FICSA members addressed a number of important matters for staff both within and outside the UN common system; some of these topics are discussed in this issue.

Participans most enjoyed opportunities to network and exchange knowledge, to feel solidarity and comradery, and to meet staff association representatives from the diverse membership. Participants unanimously agreed that the venue for the Council, IMO, was conducive to a good working environment and they appreciated the efforts that were put into the organization of the Council at this very appropriate venue. Most importantly, the Council elected a new Executive Committee including the new President. The outgoing President Brett Fitzgerald from WIPO was followed by Tanya Quinn-Maguire from UNAIDS. The new composition of the Executive Committee is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Tanya Quinn-Maguire</td>
<td>UNAIDS Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Secretary</td>
<td>Evelyn Kortum</td>
<td>WHO/HQ Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Kay Miller</td>
<td>WHO/EURO Copenhagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st of two members for Compensation Issues</td>
<td>Imed Zabaar</td>
<td>IAEA Vienna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd of two members for Compensation Issues</td>
<td>Pilar Vidal</td>
<td>PAHO/WHO Washington DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member for Regional and Field Issues</td>
<td>Véronique Allain</td>
<td>SCBD Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member without Portfolio</td>
<td>Brett Fitzgerald</td>
<td>WIPO Geneva</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Council also elected the following Regional Representatives for a 1-year term:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Anthony Ndinguri</td>
<td>ICAO Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>Jesus García Jiménez</td>
<td>ILO/ITC Turin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Rajesh Mehta</td>
<td>WHO/SEARO New Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Juan José Coy Giron</td>
<td>FAO Rome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At this year’s FICSA Council, the membership amended the statutes for the Regional Representatives to undertake a 2-year term as of next year instead of the longstanding 1-year term. This extension of term partly arose from the need to follow-up more thoroughly on issues in the field and to form more Federations of UN Staff Associations (FUNSAs). The Regional Representatives work very closely with the Executive Committee and particularly the Officer in charge for field issues, Veronique Allain. They are elected to represent the different geographical regions (Africa, the Americas, Europe and Asia) on behalf of the Federation.

As they work closely with the Executive Committee, they support it in the implementation of the Council decisions and the work programme, they also provide reports on activities in the region for inclusion in the annual report to the FICSA Council.

The Regional Representatives attend meetings of the Executive Committee by invitation to update, inform and coordinate any actions required. They are asked to refer any regional issues to the FICSA Secretariat for advice and guidance on approaches to be followed. However, the overall responsibility over any actions taken and steps implemented will remain with the Committee.

They are not on full release time and, therefore, cover to the extent possible, and while taking into account regional differences, a multitude of tasks. These particularly include staying in regular contact with FUNSAs to discuss topics of importance, as well as to strengthen and promote the role of the FUNSAs as interlocutor with each Resident Coordinator regarding changes within the organizations based in the respective regions and inform and coordinate on common concerns for the FUNSAs, where and when possible. There is also some general outreach expected in order to promote FICSA in the region by establishing and maintaining a good working relationship with associations and unions which are not yet FUNSAs. Regional Representatives can be instrumental in providing regional/country staff with information about FICSA. They also promote and support the formation of FUNSAs in Country Offices. This includes a lot of outreach activities and can be very rewarding.
Feedback on the 73rd FICSA Council

Through FICSA Communication 20/20 we provided you with feedback on the FICSA Council after we received input to a short survey distributed to participants. We were happy to report that more than 140 participants met and discussed an extensive agenda in plenary, in the seven Standing Committees and two Ad Hoc Committees. The membership felt throughout that it was a very successful and useful gathering. I am sure you have fond memories of that meeting now that we are all confined in our homes. I do, as I am now writing this in the beginning of April.

What was important and enjoyable for participants were the generous opportunities to network and exchange knowledge, to feel the solidarity and comradery, and to meet new like-minded people. Everyone agreed that the venue, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the way Council was organized, was conducive to a good working environment.

One good outcome of the COVID-19 crisis might be that we are all getting more savvy in the use of technology, which is clearly one issue that we are still working on all together. Nevertheless, the electronic voting system that we introduced for the first time at this Council was very much welcomed by all the participants. We saved a lot of time and feelings of frustration.

We are still working on suggestions of developing an Application (App) for the Council. Our new website will have a section on good practices where varying conditions in our member staff associations/ unions can be compared and used in discussions with management.

We assure our membership that we will continue to work on improved and expanded technological tools for increased use in future Councils.

We will also consider shortening the agenda wherever possible in concurrence with the Standing/Ad Hoc Committee Chairs. Like this we can better ensure sessions ending on time and issues being covered.

It is important that you all provide feedback when we publish the agenda for your input before each Council.

Also before the next Council, we will identify rapporteurs in advance since they will be receiving training this time from our Chief Rapporteur, Mary Stewart Burgher. We count on your solidarity and encourage you to volunteer. You will learn a lot.

Any further feedback you might want to convey can be sent to ficsa@un.org.

Evelyn Kortum
FICSA General Secretary

Article only available in English
We are modernizing FICSA, one step at a time

Irwan Mohd Razali
FICSA Information Officer

Article only available in English

FICSA began its journey towards paperless meetings since its introduction of the Google Drive and Google Calendar concept during the 70th Council in Kuala Lumpur. During the 71st Council in Bonn, FICSA tested an in-house electronic voting system to increase the efficiency and save time during election, however members felt that there is a need to look for a professional, tested solution in the market. After much exploration and interviewing several companies recommended by FICSA Members, FICSA found a suitable solution that went into rigorous testing before the 73rd Council.

Meeting Documents and Google Calendar

During the 73rd Council last February, FICSA went from Google Drive to OneDrive/SharePoint, since this tool is being widely adopted in the UN system. Plus, it integrates with Office 365 and Microsoft Teams, which FICSA plan to extensively use as a part of its Digital Transformation, as recommended in the FICSA Functional Review.

Invitation emails were sent to all FICSA Council participants, that would enable participants to use their organization’s existing Office 365 account to access the FICSA SharePoint site. However, a handful of participants did not receive the invitation email or were not able to sign up using the link, and this was resolved on a case to case basis. In some instances, alternate email addresses or personal Microsoft accounts had to be used. The same Google Calendar concept was retained since Office 365 did not provide any new tool to replace this already useful feature.

Electronic Voting System

FICSA approached a company, which was recommended by other organizations in Geneva for their internal elections. The solution provided appears to fit FICSA’s requirements, and the cost is within the budget frame.

Despite at least three rounds of testing before the dry run during the council, there were teething issues that were caught during the dry run; the email poll was blocked by many organization’s firewall and had to be whitelisted. For others, there had been spelling mistakes in their email addresses and the polling officers fixed these in the system.

After taking some time to resolve this issue, the elections went forward like a breeze. Participants generally observed at least 30% savings in the time taken for elections, if not more. A comparison between the past and the current voting system will give you an idea on the efficiency gain:
Keeping the dialogue and collaboration ongoing

Microsoft Teams, a tool provided by our host UNOG, and is widely used by UN organizations worldwide, is being adopted as FICSA’s virtual collaboration centre. At the moment, the FICSA Team Channels comprises of the FICSA Secretariat, FICSA Executive Committee, and Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each Standing Committee.

Soon, this will be expanded to include all FICSA member staff associations/unions, and other relevant networks and partnerships that FICSA will maintain. Teams allow free telephone calls over the Internet with colleagues, as well as free video-conferencing meetings, as well as team chat, document sharing, taskboard and other collaboration tools, that are particularly useful during this time when major parts of the world is working from home. You can read more about Microsoft Teams through this link.

Meetings with each standing committee chair and vice-chair took place in Microsoft Teams in the first quarter of 2020, fresh after FICSA Council, to discuss the Index of Decisions, which is FICSA’s work plan for the year 2020. This enables FICSA to maintain the momentum and complete the work plan in a timely manner, as well as keeping an open channel of communication all year long. The next meeting will take place in the second quarter, to follow up on action items and tasks, as well as identify if new issues or topics are arising.

Future Plans

There is still room for improvements. A one-stop meeting app for future FICSA Councils is being planned, that would integrate a library of meeting background documents, record meeting attendance, provide a calendar of meetings and locations similar to the Google Calendar, as well as facilitate the electronic voting by having better information flow.

FICSA has also begun its preparedness in facing a post-COVID world. At the moment, FICSA is putting together a dedicated webpage with interagency resources on Covid, that would be helpful to its members. This page will launch this week, please visit www.ficsa.org to get the latest information, as well as refer to FICSA Communications 22, 24 and 25.

As we all know, many high-level interagency meetings were postponed or cancelled due to the situation, however, FICSA continues to follow the work that has now taken place through electronic means and virtual meetings. As usual, if you need support from FICSA, please reach out to us through your Staff Associations and Unions, who will contact through ficsa@un.org or through our website.
The need to work from home has changed life for many of us. As it has become a necessity following the COVID-19 outbreak, we have no choice but to adapt quickly if we want to keep up with our daily work which continues. We need to be disciplined and organized in a new way. We are separated from our usual daily encounters at work and privately. It can be burdensome, but I am convinced that we will also come out the other end knowing more in terms of technology, having learnt more about ourselves and others, that we have had time to review our priorities in life, as well as seeing ourselves again as being part of an ecosystem encompassing humans, animals and the environment and that all this needs to be respected and protected.

From FICSA we have aimed at supporting you through adequate information. I would like to pick up on the guidance we distributed in our FICSA Communication 24/20. This guidance has been used widely and I would like to promote it further. If you have not seen it, now is the moment to review the tips and to review your new daily routine.

Bring routine into your day

- Get up at a similar time that you would if you were going to the office
- Get dressed in smart-casual clothing to give you the feeling of being ready for work (pyjamas and casual clothes will have a negative impact on your work)
- If you’re with your family, sit down with them and work out a timetable for everyone. Be realistic. You are not going to be able to sit at a desk for eight hours if you have small children around you wanting your attention. If necessary, split your day up into shorter chunks (30 or 45-minutes for each task)
- Use a time tracker – online or offline – to plan your tasks for the day and include coffee and lunch breaks. Setting an alarm can be a useful reminder for you to take a break
- Towards the end of the day, review what you’ve achieved and plan your next work day. This will help you to create a clean break in your day between work and private time
- Decide what time your work day will finish and set an alarm on your ‘phone or clock to make sure you shut down your laptop/computer when the alarm goes off

Create some clear space to work

- Not everyone has a home office but it’s important to have a dedicated space from where you can work
- Is there somewhere you can block off with some plants or other items to create a screen? Having piles of washing, children’s toys or other non-work items in view will irritate your concentration. Keep your space as neutral as possible
- Make sure that you have sufficient light to work with. If it’s not possible for you to be close to natural light, make sure you have a desk lamp so that you’re not straining your eyes
- Keep an extension lead close by to charge any equipment you’re using so that you don’t have to keep getting up unnecessarily from your work space
- If you enjoy having a snack whilst you’re working, keep something close to hand (again so that you’re not getting up unnecessarily)
- Limit visits to the fridge
Limit Feelings of Isolation

Human beings are not designed to live in isolation, and even if there are other people in the household, not being at the office with your colleagues can leave you feeling alone and isolated.

- Find an online community and join groups on Facebook, LinkedIn or other social media, or create your own online social group with your work colleagues
- Limit the amount of time that you watch/read the news because it will bring your energy down (especially these days). Decide to watch a news summary once a day and stick to it.
- Use the time that you would have spent commuting doing something for yourself – or maybe start doing that one activity that you’ve been telling yourself you never have time for – it could be a few minutes of meditation or focused breathing, maybe some exercise, yoga, virtual coffee with someone close….
- Set up a regular video call with your colleagues. Messaging and emails are good for passing information, but face to face conversations will help everyone to feel connected
- Plan some FUN activities for the evenings or weekends. Get creative using video on your ‘phone or laptop. Join an online yoga class, arrange an online party with friends and take it in turns to play your favourite music, hold a baking class and show others how to make your favourite cake, form an online choir, set up online play dates for your children – the possibilities are endless (see a list of websites at the end of this information)

Stay Focused

- If you have a home office, shut the door; put up a do not disturb sign
- Have regular meetings with your family to make sure that everyone knows what everyone else is doing
- Turn your ‘phone to silent or vibrate when you’re working because there will likely be people wanting to just have a chat (let others know when they can call you)
- Keep your work space tidy and make sure everything is shut down when you finish for the day (don’t be tempted to re-open your laptop just in case)
- Managing upwards: you’re already working in a different environment with a huge amount of uncertainty about how long this situation will continue. Long online meetings are not helpful to anyone. Encourage those you work with to send information over email, and then meet online to take decisions
- To function properly, your brain needs water, oxygen and protein (and time to sort things out whilst you’re asleep). Keep a large jug or bottle of water close to where you’re sitting, and if possible, spend a few minutes outside during your breaks
- If you have small children and you’re finding it impossible to work, speak to your staff rep/supervisor and find out what your options are in this exceptional time.

Hang in there!
How are FICSA officers coping during times of COVID-19 and confinement

Week 3/4/5

The FICSA headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. We have no curfew and people are allowed to go anywhere outside while at the same time taking good care of the social distancing and sanitary rules. Most of us go shopping with masks and gloves. People are disciplined thus far and the Government puts the responsibility on its citizens. We are all well aware that if we do not follow the rules, they will take this last bit of freedom from us. Meanwhile we are experiencing the most beautiful spring weather. Nevertheless, now we are in the fourth week and we start feeling a bit like living in a bunker with lots of light.

France next door has different restrictions. They are allowed to go out but only one kilometer away from their houses. Fines are awaiting those who do not comply. They need to complete a form if they want to go shopping and show it when asked by the police.

Meanwhile nature starts breathing again, the air around the lake of Geneva is clearer, but at the same time, the world economy is experiencing a bang on the head and we don’t know what will follow. This outbreak and the way our lives suddenly changed, seems to make it possible for anything to happen now, without any limits maybe. We might feel less safe and secure in this ever-changing world.

As we all know, the world of work has been changing drastically for all of us as well. Teleworking has become the norm during this period of social distancing. Something that we are now forced to do even if it was seen as being unwelcomed in many organizations. Will it provide us with more serenity, or will it stress us out more than before? Only time will show.

To make you feel that we are all truly in the same boat with different captains who provide different instructions, I have gathered some information from our FICSA officers, their circumstances, their thoughts, worries and their hopes. Please enjoy the following excerpts.

Anthony Karanja Ndinguri is FICSA’s Regional Representative for Africa. He has been working for ICAO for the last eight years and is stationed in Nairobi. He is currently teleworking. Nairobi is on partial lockdown with a curfew imposed by the Government from 7pm to 5am. Anthony describes the surroundings as scary and nothing like he and others are used to. Nairobi is usually a bubbly city and now everyone is afraid of meeting a friend or even family because you have to avoid shaking hands, afraid of talking to them and afraid of the dark due to the curfew.

It is unusual for Anthony to turn down a friend who wants to meet up, but that is what he has done out of his duty to protect his friend and his family, his own family and himself. He also loves playing with the kids from the neighbourhood, but in order to protect them, he has to be selfish and considerate. It is difficult for the kids to understand the situation, but he keeps explaining the reasons to each of them and every time...
for why they have to stay inside their houses. That makes him feel so sad when he sees them peeping through the window grills like prisoners.

If there is one thing Anthony has learned due to this current situation it is that ignorance is dangerous and will definitely result in irreversible consequences.

He very much misses his friends, colleagues, coffees, meals and time together. He believes that if there are things that we all could gain from the situation it is the opportunity to explore how we can work smart and still achieve our objectives, as well as the opportunity to spend more time and bond with our families. He believes that if one thing will never be the same after the pandemic it is our priorities.

Anthony feels this is a time of confusion for all of us. None of us has ever been in this kind of a situation. As staff leadership, it’s time to gather notes and the lessons that we will learn from this and use it as a tool to interact with management on a range of issues that the UN will face in the coming days. He further believes that after this period, economies will be struggling, and that this will affect the ability of the UN membership to make their contributions. It is time to look forward and see how the UN will need to adjust because as this in turn will directly affect the staff members.

Some questions he is asking include:

- Should the UN now adopt telecommuting?
- Should UN jobs be part-time or should the UN allow staff to seek part time employment outside?
- Will the UN collapse or scale down in a big way, and if so, what happens next?
- Will we see an increase in short term contracts/consultancies/individual contracts and how do we now absolve that as staff federations?

For Anthony these are some of the questions that run through his mind and he would like to seek experts’ opinions into these which he can find within the FICSA ExCom and its membership.

One good thing for what it’s worth is that Anthony thought a lot and wrote a wonderful poem about the current situation. This poem is featured on the first page of this FICSA Magazine and I think we can all relate to it.

Robyn Thomas is from Australia and she has been working with FICSA as the FICSA accountant for 10 and a half years. She is now teleworking in self-isolation with her husband. Once a week she goes to the office to get the mail and water the plants, for which Evelyn is very grateful. She works at her home workstation, which is set up at one end of the dining room table. Robyn’s husband has his workstation set up at the other end of the table. She says she is usually supervised by her cat!

The most unusual and enjoyable thing she had done on the day of the interview was an online Zumba class recorded by her gym. It was a pleasure to move to music. One of the most selfless or selfish deeds throughout this period so far has been that she and her husband both ‘fight’ to make coffees for each other or to check the mail – anything to get moving she says.

One thing that Robyn has learned due to this current situation is that keeping in touch with family and friends via video chat is very important for her mental well-being. One thing she misses is the normal social activities that bring joy to life. She also misses her day to day contact with her work colleagues. Thank you, Robyn! I miss you too.

Robyn believes one opportunity that we all could gain from the situation is the knowledge that many of the smaller meetings that are normally held face to face, can also be conducted via video conference. And one thing that she believes will never be the same after the pandemic is that it has broken down many of the barriers about working from home/teleworking but that the face to face and social interaction is a very important part of people’s lives.

Robyn added that the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of current business continuity plans, incorporating a well-managed IT infrastructure and that it has highlighted the power of cloud-based computing.
Jesus García Jimenez is FICSA’s Regional Representative for the Americas. He has been working in Turin at the ITC ILO since 2007. He is currently teleworking from his house in Turin in a nice space, which is in his living room. The most unusual thing he has done on the day of the interview was conducting a virtual appointment with his psychologist. When asked to name something that made him think positively or gave him pleasure on the day of the interview, Jesus answered that music is always something good for him, as well as the fact that his husband, who is always in a positive mood, lives with him and constantly cheers him up. The one thing he misses is going out into the street, and he would like to visit his mother in Madrid as well.

Due to the current situation, he believes that we should rethink many things and that after the pandemic our sense of vulnerability will have changed to be more heightened.

Véronique Allain is FICSA’s expert for field issues. She has been working in the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), a UN Environment out-posted office in Montréal for the last 21 years. And guess what, she has been teleworking at the request of the local Québec provincial government and the Canadian federal government since 17 March. She is comfortably sitting in her home, at her dining-room table, listening to classical music or opera, with direct light and sunshine coming through the windows. During the day she tries also to work in a standing position for a few hours at her kitchen counter. She arranged a set-up with a cardboard box used to package a large book ordered recently on-line and on which she can comfortably stand. Not a fancy arrangement but it works well. Véro is very inventive!

The most unusual thing she did on the day of the interview was that she had enjoyed a nice lunch made of left-over rabbit from the previous evening’s menu! In her office this would have not been possible. A positive opportunity lent itself when she taught her husband how to use the app TEAMS effectively on his iPhone so that he does not miss any TEAMS chat from his colleagues. This App is new to them both and she was happy to share a few tips.

From the current situation she has learnt how to introduce the e-signature of her boss on a form for payment of a consultant on-time, which she had never done before (because previously it was always signed in person!) and she says that it was very exciting to learn this. She also learnt to even better manage her time during the day while working remotely.

One thing she most definitely misses are her colleagues and the daily interactions with them. She also misses the nice lady in the small take-out place where she has been buying her lunch every day for the past 20 plus years. The lady is so nice and cooks special dishes just for her!

To the question what we could all gain from the situation, Véro responded that if internal office politics could disappear that would be a huge gain for her, as well as better targeted e-mail exchanges and more efficient virtual staff meetings. She added that we could also simply re-discover the joy of simple phone conversations.

She is hopeful that after this pandemic, many things will have changed including:

- maybe we will value our job and our colleagues more;
FICSA news

• we will value also the tremendous impacts of a well-functioning education system where millions of kids (young and older) are suddenly not going to school realizing how much they are losing;

• maybe the world population will become less hooked to consumerism;

• maybe we will pay more attention to our planet because unhealthy ecosystems will continue bringing about unhealthy people;

• maybe the tourism industry will reflect on the too many negative impacts this industry has on the planet at large.

Mino Melpignano is the Chair of the FICSA Standing Committee on Field Issues. He has been working in UNGSC, Brindisi, Italy, for the last 25 years. He, too, is teleworking from home at his desk surrounded by his books, TV and the radio. He has organized a fundraising activity for the local hospital since Italy has been one of the hardest hit countries. Like many others, also Mino finds new pleasures in the small things of life, such a cup of coffee which he thoroughly enjoys.

If there is one thing Mino has learned due to this current situation, it is how much people take care of those who are in need, including economic support. Many have lost their jobs and he is discovering that there is still space in our hearts for compassion and empathy. He misses mostly drinking his coffee in the bar and realizes that his period is an opportunity to rethink many issues, including staying with ourselves and our family, taking care of all things we tend to forget during our normal life, which is generally filled with obligations, commitments, meetings, deadlines. Mino feels that this is an opportunity to finally find a way to live and breathe.

After the pandemic he hopes that everyone would recognize this period as the time we rediscovered our inner spirit, the time we reconnected with the real world, the world of people, the world of feelings, of fears and smiles, where the time was not just marked by our calendars and our meetings and deadlines. Mino is working even more than ever but he is still finding the time to talk with his family members, the time to look at school and university papers for his son and daughters, to shop at the greengrocer’s (which, he says, he would not have imagined at all one month ago), and he now even talks to the baker who he had never met before.

Mino believes that maybe this period came for a reason, to get ourselves all together again. I fully agree with him.

Irwan Shahrezza Mohd Razali has been working with FICSA for the last 5 months as the long-awaited Information Officers. Prior to this assignment Irwan had been working for the last 12 years for WHO in Kuala Lumpur. He is currently teleworking, due to local government regulation that requires all office buildings be shut down from 18th of March until 14th of April (for the moment). In fact, even before the lockdown, he was already teleworking from home from the 3rd of March onwards because a neighbor in his apartment was positive with COVID-19. Therefore, he put himself into self-quarantine. 14 days later, on 17th of March, thank goodness Irwan did not develop any symptoms and I can continue the joy of working with him.
Irwan works from the 19th floor of an apartment building in Kuala Lumpur. He says, normally it is pleasant as one can go down to the common facilities, to swim, jog or visit the gym. With the lockdown, the surroundings feel like being confined in a box. Like all of us, Irwan hopes that the lockdown does not continue too long!

The week of the interview he told me that he had ordered extra monitor screens and the most unusual thing, for him, is to work on four monitors at once. In his opinion, having multiple monitors does boost productivity, particularly when editing/reviewing documents as he can have reference documents on some monitors and Teams and Outlook on others. We are so happy at FICSA that Irwan is so IT savvy.

He felt the hardest thing he had to do was to explain to his child that although he is at home, there are periods of time when he needs to sit in front of his computer and work; therefore, should not be disturbed. His daughter really looks forward to playing with him all day long, and at first was sad that he seemed to give more attention and time to work. He makes it up to her by spending as much time with his family outside of working hours, or during breaks and lunch times.

Irwan felt it was positive for him to meet with his colleagues on Teams, as well as meeting a new colleague from Turin. He loves understanding people’s needs and identifying ways to fulfill them, which is one main reason he works in service management.

He feels he learned the importance of hope and unity due to this current situation and he said it warms his heart to see communities work together in this difficult time and support each other. One of his neighbours even set up a concert in the common area to lift everyone’s spirits up. People cannot go down and gather as a crowd, but instead watched the concert from their own balconies and windows. It really cheered everyone up!

Irwan definitely misses relaxing at the beach in the sunshine, and not worrying about any disease or infections. After this period he hopes that the way organizations and employers view work will change. Work is what we do, not where we go. He hopes the trend of allowing flexibility in teleworking, with clear deliverables and deadlines, continues. He says ‘imagine the positive environmental impact if we can avoid the daily traffic jams as people commute to the office, and productivity increases as time spent in commuting can be better utilized for work instead’. I absolutely agree with Irwan. Many jobs can be done through teleworking.

One thing that he believes will never be the same after the pandemic are discussions about flexible working arrangements. This topic had been discussed for many years, with a lot of resistance from many different parties, as well as trust issues, equipment and technology issues, etc. The pandemic has given the world a chance to test and resolve many of these issues. In a way, the pandemic has pushed many companies towards digital transformation. It is either that, or cease to exist or be forced to close down.
We are all experiencing the dramatic consequences of the coronavirus these days. We are impacted by the need to telework, stay home, by school closure, travel restrictions, supply shortages to name a few. However, the anxiety about getting the virus ourselves, worry that our loved ones will get it, worries about financial implications and all the other dark scenarios flooding the news and social media — is to a large extent of our own making. In short, the actual pandemic causes unavoidable pain, while our resistance to adapting to the changes creates fertile ground for all the other anxiety problems.

It’s important to remember that our emotional and psychological response to crises are natural and very human. But the truth is these responses often bring us more suffering by narrowing and cluttering our mind and keeping us from seeing clearly the best course of action.

The way to overcome this natural tendency is to build our mental resilience. Being resilient means to be able to quickly adapt, making us better able to leverage change, solve problems, and settle a conflict. In many ways, adaptability is the master skill when it comes to resilience. In the work environment, resilience reduces our own risk of burnout. This means we’re able to respond to stress in a healthy way and can bounce back after challenges and grow stronger in the process.

Mental resilience, especially in challenging times like the present, means managing our mind in a way that increases our ability to face the actual problem and to deal with anxiety about the unknown. Resilience is the skill of noticing our own thoughts, unhooking from the non-constructive ones, and rebalancing quickly. This skill can be nurtured and trained, see more at www.resilience.org; and https://education.resilience.org/

Some effective strategies that I wish to share follow herewith.

based on Daniel Goleman’s “Emotional Intelligence”
Paola Franceschelli UGSS FAO

Article only available in English

Calm the mind

When you focus on calming and clearing your mind, you can pay attention to what is really going on around you and what is coming up within you. You can observe and manage your thoughts and catch them when they start to run away towards doomsday scenarios. You can hold your focus on what you choose versus what pulls at you with each ping of a breaking news notification. Also, putting a name to your feelings helps you regain a more rational state of mind. Knowing the triggers that ignite an emotional hijack in your brain, and having a plan to take back control, is a huge first step towards emotional balance.

This calm and present state is crucial. Right away, it helps keep the mind from wandering and getting hooked, and it reduces the pits of stress and worry that we can easily get stuck in. Even more importantly, the continued practice of unhooking and focusing our minds builds a muscle of resilience that will serve us time and time again. When we practice bringing ourselves back to the present moment, we deepen our capacity to cope and weather all sorts of crises, whether global or personal. One of the best tools to practice being present, to be in the “here and now” is Mindfulness, which emphasizes “letting go” of things one has no control over. See more on https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness; and on https://heartfulness.org/en/about-heartfulness/
Connect with others through compassion

Unfortunately, many of the circles of community that provide support in times of stress are now closed off to us as cities and governments work to contain the spread of the virus. Schools are shut down, events are cancelled, and businesses have enacted work-from-home policies and travel bans. The natural by-product of this is a growing sense of isolation and separation from the people and groups who can best quell our fears and anxieties.

The present climate of fear can also create stigmas and judgments about who is to blame and who is to be avoided, along with a dark, survivalist “every person for him/herself” mindset and behaviours. We can easily forget our shared vulnerability and interdependence.

But meaningful connection can occur even from the recommended six feet of social distance between you and your neighbour — and it begins with compassion. Compassion is the intention to be of benefit to others and it starts in the mind. Practically speaking, compassion starts by asking yourself one question as you go about your day and connect — virtually and in person — with others: How can I help this person to have a better day?

With that simple question, amazing things begin to happen. The mind expands, the eyes open to who and what is really in front of us, and we see possibilities for ourselves and others that are rich with hope and ripe with opportunity.


Breathe!

When you sense a hostile, negative or adversarial reaction arising, simply think to yourself “I’m remaining calm,” and deliberately take a series of slow, deep breaths. This will help short circuit your amygdala’s natural attempt to restrict higher reasoning (“fight or fly” reaction), while oxygen can be a powerful ally of the prefrontal cortex (designed for detailed reasoning).

You can use this simple technique to better manage your response to conflict, stressful situations and other challenges. You can also build on it. For example, once you have learned to detect, and manage, the early signs of your own hijacks, you will have a greater capacity to notice them in others. You can use the same technique to maintain a calm, clear mind when those around you struggle to do so. People who focus their energy on constructive problem solving – basically things they can actually control, tend to recover more quickly from setbacks. See more on https://www.yogajournal.com/yoga-101/science-breathing

Practice Yoga

You may wish to consider practicing Yoga, which is the best way to practice conscious breathing and to allow the best connection between body and mind.

Yoga has incredible benefits as it builds strength, awareness and harmony in both the mind and body. While there are more than 100 different types, or schools, of yoga, most sessions typically include breathing exercises, meditation, and assuming postures (sometimes called asana or poses) that stretch and flex various muscle groups. This practice focus on preventive medicine and believes in the body’s ability to heal itself. Yoga is a great tool for staying healthy, please see links herewith for more information

https://uplift.tv/2018/really-practice-yoga/
https://yogavastu.com/
https://www.worldyogainstitute.org/
https://www.yogaanytime.com/mx/about-us
https://itsyogabrighton.co.uk/

Change perspective

Perspective is paramount. Events and situations do not have an inherent meaning - only the meaning that we give to them. Normally, we create meaning without any conscious thought. We simply react. However, it’s possible to change our perspective in ways that improve our emotional lives. Our body provides important cues in three specific ways. These are called the three markers of emotional balance, or the 3Rs:
1. **Recognition** – early on, your body gives you warning signs of an impending emotional hijack. The reactions would probably include a pounding heart, sweaty palms, dry mouth, butterflies, and shallow breathing. Simply recognizing your body’s automatic physiological stress response is the first part of emotional balance.

2. **Resilience** – once you get better at recognizing the signs of stress and rationalizing what’s going on for you in your body, this will allow you to pull yourself back to the “here and now”, and recover from the fear quicker.

3. **Regulation** – management of these mental and physical responses will allow you to identify when to check in with your thoughts and feelings, what’s worth expending energy on and what can be let go. This in turn will help you to curb your impulse to act without thinking.

Emotional balance doesn’t mean you avoid anything bad; it’s quite the opposite. Recognition of your body’s physical reactions to stressors is the first step towards building resilience and regulating your emotional and physical responses. Your body is designed to give you tell-tale signs of stress, and the more you are able to tune in to your body and listen to the clues it provides, the better you will be able to face life, whatever it throws your way. You may wish to check more information at the following link: [https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-regulation-worksheets-strategies-dbt-skills/](https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-regulation-worksheets-strategies-dbt-skills/)

**Learn new skills**

Learning new skills increases your motivation, makes you more adaptable, relatable, interesting and helps you get better jobs. You can yourself set up a list of skills you may wish to learn, both in the work environment and for your personal benefit. Since it is proven by countless studies that creativity is key to transformation and wellbeing, we suggest that you have a try at several creative patterns, such as:

- **Journal Writing** helps you define your voice. It helps you get clarity on who you are and who you want to become. Your story is your story alone. It has the power to change both your life and that of others. [https://journaltherapy.com/journal-cafe-3/journal-course/](https://journaltherapy.com/journal-cafe-3/journal-course/)

- **An art journal** is a visual diary; it combines elements of writing, drawing, painting, collage, and even printmaking to express yourself. This includes your everyday life, as well as your bigger hopes, dreams, and fears. This practice offers a way to de-stress and to sort through complicated emotions. As a result, you gain self-awareness and feel empowered. Discover more at this link: [https://artjournalist.com/how-to-start-an-art-journal/](https://artjournalist.com/how-to-start-an-art-journal/)

- **Mandalas** represent order and structure. We have known the geometric shapes ever since our childhood days. Colouring them in provides orientation both in terms of space and time. That is why mandalas are ideal for use in occupational therapy. With their clearly defined areas they give assistance to patients for whom free drawing or painting might be difficult to cope with. In addition to that, colouring in mandalas is an activity that facilitates concentration.
When used with meditation, it is important to focus on one thing in order to feel calm and relaxed. Colouring in mandalas is highly suitable to achieve relaxation and it is not without reason that it is a favourite meditation exercise for Tibetan monks. It facilitates concentration and is suitable for all ages. More at https://www.justcolor.net/relaxation/coloring-mandalas/

Dance has always been a part of human culture, rituals and celebrations. Dancing can be about recreation and self-expression, not only as a competitive activity and above all it is an enjoyable way to be more physically active and stay fit. The secret of the great health benefits it ensures, may be that dancing requires a variety of different skills, both mental and physical. Dancing requires not only balance, strength, and endurance ability, but also cognitive ability: adaptability and concentration to move according to the music, artistry for graceful and fluid motion, and memory for choreography.

Dancing can be a way to stay fit for people of all ages, shapes and sizes. It has a wide range of physical and mental benefits including: improved condition of your heart and lungs, increased muscular strength, endurance and motor fitness, increased aerobic fitness, improved muscle tone and strength, weight management, stronger bones and reduced risk of osteoporosis, better coordination, agility and flexibility; improved balance and spatial awareness, increased physical confidence, improved mental functioning, improved general and psychological wellbeing, greater self-confidence and self-esteem, better social skills. More info at the following links: https://time.com/5484237/dancing-health-benefits/ and https://www.5rhythms.com/

Dancing is so powerful that it can be used as a therapy to overcome and transform strong emotions, stress-related problems, depression and even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) syndrome. It is a holistic approach to healing, based on the empirically supported assertion that mind, body, and spirit are inseparable and interconnected; changes in the body reflect changes in the mind and vice versa. Please see more at https://adta.org/2014/11/08/what-is-dancemovement-therapy/

**Meditation** What's good about guided meditation is that it teaches you that it's okay to have thoughts and guides you through a greater clarity of mind, which is what meditation really is about. You learn to be aware of how your body and mind feel. You learn to relax, even when you feel like you’re too nervous to relax. Try some simple exercises at https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations and on https://www.gaia.com/article/begin-hacking-your-way-to-a-solid-daily-meditation-practice

**Physical Exercise** Having an increase in blood flow and circulation to areas of your body helps promote cell growth and organ function. Your skin also benefits from an increase in blood circulation. Healthy skin is better able to fight off bacteria and infection that it may come in contact with. When your heart pumps at full force, your heart rate lowers, heart muscles relax, and your blood pressure flows evenly and smoothly. Try some simple exercises at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=6olrMNTw5g

We trust that you will manage to go through this period without too much stress. Stay safe and healthy and in case you wish to have more tips about how to manage your time while staying at home, have a look at this comprehensive guide https://www.forestco.co/pandemic-guide

**References/Further Reading:**

8 Timeless Skills to Learn Now in Under 8 Hours to Change your Life Forever. https://medium.com/skilluped/8-timeless-skills-to-learn-now-in-under-8-hours-to-change-your-life-forever-75e7b339373a


“We don’t talk anymore”

The UN common system (UNCS) applies common standards across a number of UN agencies. A key benefit to the system is that it ensures consistency in terms and conditions of employment. The UN Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) is an independent inter-agency entity which operates under its own regulations and provides benefits for staff in its 24 member organisations.

Recent legal developments have prompted FICSA to consider the content and scope of staff rights in the scenario where an international organisation (IO) seeks to leave the UNCS or UNJSPF. These developments include that some IOs have withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the International Labour Organisation’s Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT) to sign on to the UN internal justice system’s jurisdiction (the UNDT and UNAT), and the potential for contradictory judgments being issued by different tribunals.

The decision for an IO to leave the UNCS or UNJSPF will be entirely driven by its policy agenda and administrative needs. This article sets out the essential legal considerations for staff members to ensure that their rights are protected throughout the process. This has been done once before (by the World Trade Organisation) so the question is not whether an IO can UN-xit, but how it plans to do so in a legal manner.

“It’s over, take your st(a)ff with you!”

The primary legal consequence of any potential departure is a breach or violation of a staff member’s acquired rights, which could give rise to an individual or group claim by affected staff against an organisation.

An acquired right is a fundamental term of an employment contract that cannot be unilaterally amended. International organisations have a duty to ensure that any changes made to acquired rights must be stable, foreseeable and reasonably understood by staff members.

When assessing whether a proposed change will impact an acquired right, the three factors to assess are the nature of the term, the reason for the change and consequences of the change. There will only be a breach of an acquired right when a change alters fundamental terms of employment in consideration of which a staff member accepted an appointment, or which subsequently induced them to stay on. Changes cannot have retroactive effect.

Distinguishing between fundamental and non-fundamental rights will generally be a balancing act based on specific facts. In practice, there needs to be consideration of the particular terms of a staff member’s contract and which terms played a fundamental role in their acceptance of the job offer.

If your organisation leaves the UNCS or UNJSPF, your rights should be protected as follows:
**Fundamental rights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Benefit</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base salary</td>
<td>The amount of your base salary cannot be changed without your consent. This does not include performance bonuses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>You have a fundamental right to accrue pension, but how your pension money is calculated is not an essential employment term. However, pension contributions accrued for services already rendered are “untouchable”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax equalization</td>
<td>Exemption from national taxes is an essential condition of employment in the international civil service. The right to reimbursement of national income tax is also a fundamental right, although the calculation of the amount is not. Although it is not specifically stated in the case law, this is most likely a fundamental right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expatriate premium or post-adjustment multiplier (PAM)</td>
<td>Although it is not specifically stated in the case law, this is most likely a fundamental right. However, how this amount is calculated is not fundamental.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Non-fundamental rights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Benefit</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children allowance and Education grant</td>
<td>These allowances are not fundamental of themselves, but could have that quality if they were relied upon by staff members or induced them to accept employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual leave and repatriation allowances</td>
<td>These are not fundamental.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"But we can stay friends"

Staff associations and FICSA will be key actors and points of reference in any departure process. The staff rules of most IOs contain a consultation procedure with the staff representative body, and that the IO must follow that procedure in order to adopt lawful decisions. A proper consultation means one that gives the staff association a reasonable amount of time to discuss the issues, have questions answered and provide recommendations to the IO.

Staff members need to be sufficiently informed in order to assess two scenarios: termination and litigation. Staff members nearing retirement or in a specific job description may prefer to take a voluntary separation package instead of moving to the new organisation. Others may have strong grounds to engage in internal appeal procedures if they will suffer significant financial or other detriment as a result of the departure. However, this would have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Therefore, to ensure a legally compliant departure from the UNCS or UNJSPF that preserves acquired rights, IOs should adopt the following practices:

- Transitional measures that minimise the impact of any changes in the new organisation
- Grandfathering of existing rights so that staff are not worse off in the new organisation
- A transparent and informative communications campaign which identifies the specific advantages and disadvantages of leaving
- Holding town halls and staff referendums
- Preparing detailed comparative actuarial studies by an external independent consultant, and the IO should provide reasons for their acceptance or rejection of this study

In the absence of a prenuptial agreement which allows for a smooth separation, one can only hope that the divorce will be civilised…

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1 Non-fundamental terms can be amended unilaterally, but this should not be done in an arbitrary or improper manner.
2 ILOAT Judgment No. 832, Consideration [14]. See also ILOAT Judgment No. 3540, Consideration [12] and ILOAT Judgment No. 4195, Consideration [7].
3 ILOAT Judgment No. 3876, Consideration [7].
4 UNDT/2017/099/Corr.1, Mirella et al v Secretary-General of the UN, [121].
5 UNAT/DEC/1253 (30 September 2005), [XIX].
6 WBAT Decision No. 1 (1961), de Merode, [45]-[47]: “[…] First, no retroactive effect may be given to any amendments adopted by the Bank. The Bank cannot deprive staff members of accrued rights for services already rendered. This well-established principle has been applied in many judgments of other international administrative tribunals.”
7 ILOAT Judgment No. 2032, Consideration [17], cited in ILOAT Judgment No. 2256, Consideration [13] and ILOAT Judgment No. 2255, Consideration [19].
8 UNAT Judgment No. 1253, [XVI]; ILOAT Judgment No. 2256, Consideration [8].
9 ILOAT Judgment No. 3074, Consideration [16].
10 ILOAT Judgment Nos. 4009, 3883, 3671, 1488, and 3921.
11 ILOAT Judgment No. 4230.
Legal matters

Can FICSA members extend Union membership to non-staff personnel? Should they?

During the 73rd FICSA Council (agenda item no. 12 in the Ad-Hoc Committee on Strategic Development), FICSA members discussed the pros and cons of extending union membership to non-international civil servants and consultants. The United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) refers to this workforce collectively as “non-staff personnel” and it composing more than 35% of the United Nations system workforce.

The prevalence of non-staff personnel varies greatly depending on the organization. In UNOPS, UNDP, UNIDO and WFP, non-staff personnel are over 60% of the workforce; in ITU, WMO and WIPO, they are less than 10%.

At the United Nations system level, there is no universal definition of a “consultant”, “non-international civil servant” or “non-staff personnel”. Non-staff personnel, including consultants, can refer to any person in a contractual relationship with an organization who is not subject to the staff regulations and staff rules.

Legally speaking, FICSA members can include non-staff personnel, such as consultants, as members because the freedom of association is a fundamental right that binds international organizations. International organizations are obliged to respect the freedom of association irrespective of whether this principle is written in their staff regulations. They therefore are precluded from interfering in a staff association’s internal affairs. In accordance with the freedom of association, the ILO Administrative Tribunal and other authoritative sources indicate that staff associations and unions are free to regulate their internal affairs, including prescribing rules for membership. The freedom of association also empowers consultants, like all workers, to join associations/unions of their choice.

Three FICSA member staff associations/union already include consultants and non-staff personnel as members. In two associations, consultants are full members who pay dues and have voting rights. No other FICSA member has yet to extend membership to non-staff personnel, but there are many relevant examples at the national level.

Should FICSA members represent non-staff personnel?

Organizations have asserted that non-staff personnel are needed for operations or due to budget constraints. However, precarious forms of employment such as consultancy contracts may threaten staff members’ rights. Advantages and disadvantages of representing non-staff personnel are outlined below.

In organizations with a significant number of non-staff personnel, staff associations could increase their membership, financial resources and negotiating influence by extending representation to them.

Staff associations could help improve the conditions and morale of the overall United Nations system workforce by ensuring that organizations comply with international labor principles when hiring non-staff personnel. This could protect staff members’ rights and their jobs, by preventing outsourcing of posts or weakening of employment conditions.

Staff associations also could help ensure that consultants do not have de facto employment relationships with international organizations. The JIU has found that “[i]n many organizations, some non-staff personnel work for long periods with short-term contracts under a de facto employment relationship [in violation of …] internationally accepted labour principles.” Non-staff personnel may have a de facto employment relationship with an international organization if they:

Neil Fishman
Attorney at Law
• Work under control and direct supervision of staff;
• Work full time from the organization's premises, subject to regular staff hours;
• Are provided with an office, desk, phone and email account;
• Are subject to performance assessments and the same code of conduct as staff;
• Perform duties similar to staff members;
• Receive social benefits such as annual leave, maternity leave and medical insurance;
• Have managerial authority, sometimes over staff members.

There is also a void in leadership and coordination of non-staff personnel at the system-wide level. The International Civil Service Commission governs only the employment conditions of staff and has no mandate to address non-staff matters. In addition, the United Nations Secretary-General has so far resisted a JIU recommendation to initiate harmonization efforts under the authority of the UN System Chief Executive Board for Coordination.

Staff associations and unions could help fill this void by organizing non-staff personnel and facilitating negotiations with management to harmonize conditions of service for non-staff personnel throughout the various organizations.

These could be win-win opportunities for staff associations, staff members, non-staff personnel and the organizations. Staff associations could see increased membership, resources and clout when dealing with management. Regular staff might perceive less risk that their work could be outsourced to non-staff personnel. Non-staff personnel could receive fairer treatment. Organizations could better comply with international labour principles, their duty of care and ensure staff-wide acceptance of their approaches towards non-staff personnel.

Disadvantages of representing non-staff personnel

Staff members may not understand the immediate benefits of extending union membership to non-staff personnel. The interests of staff members and non-staff personnel may not always be aligned. While it should be beneficial to all workers if non-staff personnel are treated in accordance with international labor principles, opinions on how to achieve this may differ. Staff members might prefer that consultants be hired less frequently and with stringent rules to avoid de facto employment relationships. Consultants may favor more flexibility in contract arrangements or may desire benefits traditionally provided to staff.

Staff members are bound by their respective staff regulations and staff rules and the ICSC Code of Conduct, but these norms may not necessarily be replicated in the general conditions of contract for non-staff personnel. Organizations may also differ greatly in how they hire non-staff personnel. Some organizations hire them through the human resources department, while others utilize a procurement process. This leads to different contract modalities that may make it difficult for staff associations to adopt a unified approach towards non-staff personnel, even at the organizational level.

From a practical perspective, if staff associations accepted non-staff personnel/consultants as members, amendments to staff associations’ constitutions and by-laws must be made. Staff associations should also consider amending recognition agreements with the organization’s management to ensure that they will continue to be recognized.

In some cases, it may not be politically feasible at this time for staff associations to include non-staff personnel as members. At least one organization’s legal office is of the view that consultants and non-staff personnel do not have the right to associate and or join the organization’s staff association because the staff regulations and rules do not permit it. While this may be incorrect from a legal point a view, there is nevertheless a possibility that staff associations would risk not being recognized if they proceeded to represent non-staff personnel despite management’s disapproval.
While non-staff personnel are not granted the privileges and immunities that benefit staff, they may be afforded some privileges, which can differ greatly depending on the organization’s relationship with its host state. In some instances, non-staff personnel may be designated as "experts on mission". In other instances, they may be purely contractors that have entirely different terms of service. In providing any assistance, staff associations will need to take note of differences in status and avoid any potential conflicts of interest.

Staff associations would also need to consider whether some services provided to staff members could even be provided to non-staff personnel. Some services may be too difficult or costly to offer. For example, non-staff personnel such as consultants are generally excluded from the jurisdiction of the ILO Administrative Tribunal and United Nations Dispute/Appeals Tribunals. Instead, employment grievances are typically resolved through arbitration, which is costly and infrequent. Staff associations may find it challenging or unfeasible to advise on these matters and current legal expenses insurance regimes might also not cover arbitration.

Conclusion

At the recent FICSA Council, FICSA members agreed to maintain the status quo approach to non-staff personnel: staff association and unions may individually determine whether to include non-staff personnel as members. This empowers FICSA members and their constituents to adopt an approach that best meets their needs and takes into account the diversity of organizational practices. As outlined above, for some associations and unions, there may be significant benefits to incorporating consultants into membership; for others, risks may outweigh benefits.

Even though there is no “one size fits all” approach, staff unions and associations who encounter numerous non-staff personnel within their workforce may find it beneficial to coordinate on issues of common concern. Such areas of coordination could include best practices for amending recognition agreements, constitutions and bylaws. They could also examine ways to provide more services to non-staff personnel in a manner that adds value for its constituents and which builds on a union’s expertise (such as helping non-staff personnel avail themselves of health insurance and legal expenses insurance options).

Neil Fishman, Attorney at Law

Mr. Fishman has provided legal advice within the United Nations system, with an expertise in employment law, for nearly a decade. He served as a staff member in numerous international organizations, including the World Trade Organization, Special Tribunal for Lebanon and as part of the legal secretariat of the WHO Global Board of Appeal. He has training and experience in conducting United Nations harassment investigations and is a certified and experienced workplace mediator. Mr. Fishman stands ready to assist employees in disputes and appeals with their employer and to advise staff associations of international organizations on a range of topics, as well as by serving as an investigator or mediator.

This article provides general information and is not legal advice.

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2 See Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 20), and the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Rights to Organise (No. 87) (the “ILO Convention”), article 2.


4 For example, Services Employees International Union (SEIU), a United States-based 2-million-member union, includes cleaners, irrespective of whether they are employed directly by a property owner or through a subcontracting arrangement. Professionals Australia, a 25,000 member employee association from various professions, has a distinct division for consultants and contractors. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) has members who are both employees and independent contractors. Some contractors have started units which are organized as part of a larger CWA local.

5 JIU/REP/2014/8, at 6.
Thanks to the Federation of International Civil Servants (‘FICSA’) who have asked me to prepare this short article, I have had an opportunity to consider some key reforms that ought to be pursued to the international administrative law regime. For obvious reasons of space, the discussion here is high level and based on my work as a practicing lawyer in the field as well as academic contributions. Of course, many more reforms may be pursued. My aim is to focus on the most pressing ones. I outline a four-point agenda.

A greater reliance on contracts of employment

As most readers of this publication would already know, international administrative law or IAL is the body of law governing the legal relationship between an international organisation (‘IO’) and their staff members. It is also well understood that IAL enshrines the conditions and terms of employment of staff members. These conditions and terms of employment are generally contained in the applicable Staff Regulations and Rules, administrative instructions or bulletins (howsoever named), the general principles of international administrative law, increasingly, human rights law, and also the contract of employment. More often than not, the contract of employment between IOs and its staff members is very brief and does not precisely encapsulate the mutual obligations assumed. This has meant that largely, the rules applicable to the employment relationship are governed by the IO’s internal legislation and rules, which are truly vast and can be difficult to ascertain.

The question of an IO’s power to unilaterally amend the conditions and terms of employment is salient. This power of unilateral amendment is conventionally subject to several limits, with a key one being the doctrine of acquired rights. ‘An acquired right is one the staff member may expect to survive any amendment of the rules’. Which particular term of employment may form an acquired right is highly debatable. At their crux, acquired rights are those conditions and terms of employment that cannot be unilaterally amended by an employer IO for they constitute ‘essential’ conditions or terms of employment. Importantly, the doctrine of acquired rights constitutes a general principle of IAL. The result being that regardless of whether or not acquired rights are expressly enshrined in an IO’s internal law, it continues to have application. There is little controversy that in so far as the staff members of the UN Common System are concerned, the doctrine can in theory protect them from excesses in the exercise of IO power.

However, following the decision in Quijano-Evans et al v Secretary-General of the United Nations, Judgment No. 2018/UNAT/841, 29 June 2018 (‘UNAT Decision’), the acquired rights of staff members of the UN have been seriously undermined. This is because the UNAT reduced the acquired rights doctrine, which conventionally protects both past and future rights based on the classification of a condition of employment as ‘essential’, to the rule against retroactivity. The rule against retroactivity is narrower and only prohibits altering what already belongs to the past. The power of the UN to thus unilaterally amend its rules that impact on staff pay and benefits has now expanded significantly. To what extent the UN makes use of this apparent enhanced legislative power over its staff members remains to be seen. It is further to be noted that the UNAT Decision reversed the well-considered decision of the UNDT in Quijano-Evans Dedeyne-Amann v Secretary-General of the United Nations, UNDT/2017/098, 29 December 2017 (‘UNDT Decision’). The UNDT Decision sought
to apply the decisions of the ILOAT developed over several decades, as well as significant jurisprudence from other international administrative tribunals.\footnote{2}

As a result of the UNAT Decision, now a fundamental inconsistency on the meaning and scope of acquired rights exists across the Common System. Staff members of the Common System who have access to the ILOAT appear to have their acquired rights better protected at this point in time because the ILOAT takes a broader and conventional view to the doctrine of acquired rights (which according to this author is to be preferred).

The broader picture emerging signals towards an ever-increasing power of IOs to unilaterally amend conditions and terms of employment. Therefore, issues of contract law (which are often understudied) are of much importance as a means to enhance certainty. It is important to more precisely enshrine the mutual obligations of the IO and the staff member assume towards each other. It could be thus worthwhile to create detailed model employment contracts developed in the context of IAL specifically.

**Better substantive legal protection for consultants and contractors**

The number of consultants and contractors IOs now retain to perform materially the same work conventionally done by staff members as defined in the applicable staff regulations and rules is on the rise. Given that there are more than 400 IOs operational today, it is difficult to precisely state the number of consultants and contractors retained by all IOs at any given moment. The number would be in its thousands. To understand broader labour trends at IOs, it would be useful to collect precise data on how many consultants and contractors IOs retained in a given period; what roles were assigned to such individuals; and under what arrangements are such individuals retained.

Individuals retained as consultants and contractors are especially vulnerable and find themselves in precarious situations. To enhance certainty and legal protections for such individuals, it is of much importance to clarify the substantial and procedural protections (see further 4 below for procedural issues) that are put in place.

In so far as substantive protections are concerned, if the UN’s Model General Conditions of Contract: Contracts for the Provision of Services are considered, it is not clear as to what is the applicable law vis-à-vis the relationship between IOs and consultants and contractors. For example, clause 16.2 states:

**ARBITRATION:** Any dispute, controversy, or claim between the Parties arising out of the Contract or the breach, termination, or invalidity thereof, unless settled amicably under Article 16.1, above, within sixty (60) days after receipt by one Party of the other Party’s written request for such amicable settlement, shall be referred to either Party to arbitration in accordance with the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules then obtaining. The decisions of the arbitral tribunal shall be based on *general principles of international commercial law* (emphasis added)

The term ‘general principles of international commercial law’ does not capture the employment type relationship that exists between IOs and their consultants and contractors in terms of enhancing clarity on the applicable law. While much work needs to be done in this respect, it is important to clarify what precisely are the rules applicable to the relationship between IOs and the ever-increasing number of consultants and contractors? Once such clarification is forthcoming, for reasons already stated at 1 above, as much as possible, these conditions and terms ought to be provided in a relevant contract to enhance certainty, predictability and enhance substantive legal protections.

**Reforms to anti-harassment regimes**

Especially following the ‘MeToo’ and ‘Time’s Up’ movements, harassment at the workplace generally, and sexual harassment specifically, have rightly come into sharp focus. Based on this author’s own experiences representing amongst others, victims of harassment at IOs, much reform must be undertaken. Of course, to address the wicked problem of bullying and harassment at the work place, cultural change is necessary. However, with robust legal protections in place, much can be achieved to ensure that victims of harassment can realise justice, and at the same time the due process rights of the accused can be
protected. It is presently impractical to list all the issues existing with the way in which IOs legally and factually respond to harassment. No doubt, IOs would tend to possess and adopt rules and policies encapsulating zero-tolerance to harassment at their organisation. However, this may not often be the case in reality.

It is crucial that in any harassment complaint: investigations are carried promptly and concretely; independently and impartially (this may require an external person carrying out an investigation); de jure and de facto guarantees as to the prohibition of retaliation against the victim or witnesses must exist; and once a complaint is lodged, the investigation must be carried out within set time limits. If these time limits applying to the investigation process are not followed, international administrative tribunals (or arbitral tribunals as the case may be) should conduct a full review on the merits, including engaging in a fact finding exercise. This is of as much importance to the victim who has the right to realise justice without undue delay, as it is to the accused whose right to due process is also an important factor.

In fact, the International Labour Organisation’s latest convention specifically deals with such matters and must be implemented by IOs as well. Article 4 of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) states:

1. Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall respect, promote and realize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment.

2. Each Member shall adopt, in accordance with national law and circumstances and in consultation with representative employers’ and workers’ organizations, an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. Such an approach should take into account violence and harassment involving third parties, where applicable, and includes:

   (a) prohibiting in law violence and harassment;
   
   (b) ensuring that relevant policies address violence and harassment;

   (c) adopting a comprehensive strategy in order to implement measures to prevent and combat violence and harassment;

   (d) establishing or strengthening enforcement and monitoring mechanisms;

   (e) ensuring access to remedies and support for victims;

   (f) providing for sanctions;

   (g) developing tools, guidance, education and training, and raising awareness, in accessible formats as appropriate; and

   (h) ensuring effective means of inspection and investigation of cases of violence and harassment, including through labour inspectorates or other competent bodies.

Although addressed to states, the above core principles have direct relevance and application to IOs who are subjects of international law and are required to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Consideration should also be given to expressly including provisions about anti-harassment rules and policies in applicable contractual arrangements. Bullying and harassment in all its forms is not only injurious to the victim, but is corrosive to an organisation generally. It is in every party’s interest that the rules against bullying and harassment in all its forms are not only provided in the law, but practically realised for everyone at the workplace.

**Access to justice**

There is little point in adopting substantive legal protections if these substantive rights cannot be practically realised. In a recent study comparing the ILOAT and the UN internal justice system, I had concluded the following as to the operation of those two justice regimes.

If the UN’s internal justice system is to avoid the risk of being impugned before national and human rights courts, immediate steps to counter the independence and impartiality deficit must be undertaken. The ILOAT…is not rendering justice consistently with the right to a fair trial. Leaving
alone the significant structural independence and impartiality deficits, the excessive delays in the delivery of justice on their own are egregious contraventions. The idiom ‘justice delayed is justice denied’ rings true for the ILO. Remarkable though it may be, unless significant changes to the ILO’s law and practice are made, the individuals having access to the ILO cannot receive justice in compliance with fair trial standards. Blame for this lowly state is largely attributable to the ILO and the international organizations responsible to set up the justice machinery. So far, the broader regime provided by the ILO is being spared the ignominy of rejection at the international level not because it is compliant with the right to a fair trial, but because national and regional human rights courts have failed to examine it with the proper scrutiny that is warranted.

To make matters worse, increasingly, international organizations, including the UN and the ones subscribing to the ILO’s jurisdiction, rely on temporary workers, such as consultants or contractors, to perform roles traditionally performed by fixed or permanent staff members. This category of worker does not have access to the UN or the ILO; or the case may be. As a result, an even larger number of officials are being denied access to justice. How to enhance access to justice for this latter category of individuals, and how such mechanisms may be integrated into what I have called an international administrative procedural law of fair trial is a significant issue…

IOs must ensure that access to justice is provided to all individuals performing work for them. Reform efforts must focus on ensuring that: existing international administrative tribunals are working effectively; inquiring whether there is a need to create an appellate mechanism to resolve international administrative disputes to avoid inconsistencies across the UN Common System specifically (or for that matter across all international administrative tribunals generally); and how can international arbitration be used to ensure efficient access to justice to all those who do not have standing before international administrative tribunals and work for IOs in some capacity.

Conclusion

The world of work and employer and employee expectations has changed across jurisdictions radically. IOs are not immune to these developments. It is time to rethink how international administrative law can best serve the needs of the coming decades and enact reform. Of course, reform for the sake of reform is to be avoided. What is good about the current system should be kept. However, as pointed out in this brief article, on four pressing issues at least, reforms ought to be pursued as a matter of priority.

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2 Judgment No. 832 (Re Ayoub et al), ILOAT, 5 June 1987, paras. 12-13 (‘Ayoub’).

3 See for example, Judgment No. 61 (Re Lindsey), ILOAT, 1962; and Ayoub.

4 Even where the term acquired rights is not adopted, IATs have in substance placed limits to an IO’s power of unilateral amendment to the conditions of employment: see generally, De Merode et al v World Bank (Decision No. 1), World Bank Administrative Tribunal, 5 June 1981.

5 UNAT Decision, para. 52.

6 UNDT Decision, para. 102.


Duty of management to consult with Staff Unions on conditions of Service Freedom of Association

Laurence Fauth
Legal Advisor to the IAEA Staff Council

In its 129th session the ILO Administrative Tribunal in Geneva decided an appeal filed by the FAO Union of General Service Staff reaffirming the fundamental rights of staff unions to freedom of association, and in particular, the right of consultation with management on the terms and conditions of employment. The ILOAT is the court that decides employment disputes between international civil servants and international organizations, and is one of the critical institutions for preserving Union rights to freedom of association.

The Judgment is No. 4230 issued on 10 February 2020. FAO’s management introduced a Circular, with retroactive effect, imposing a maximum length of employment for holders of short-term appointments under by FAO's staff rules. Management announced that it was issuing the Circular with immediate effect during a Staff Management Consultative Committee meeting. The Union demanded more time to consider the new rules in the Circular and to engage in real consultations. Management argued that there was an “emergency” situation and it could not wait to issue the Circular, and that the discussions during the Committee meeting were sufficient to hear and consider the Union’s views.

The Union filed an internal appeal on the grounds that management had violated the Union-Management Recognition Agreement, Staff Rule 302.8.3 which provides that “the Director-General shall, before issuing administrative instructions or directives on matters relating to terms and conditions of employment or affecting the welfare of the staff, consult the recognized staff representative body or bodies concerned and shall take due account of their comments”, and the Standards of Conduct of the International Civil Service (para. 30 pertaining to staff-management relations and freedom of association). The majority of the internal appeals committee agreed with the Union that no proper consultation had taken place, and recommended that the new rule be suspended until “proper and meaningful” consultations take place. The appeal was rejected by the FAO Director General, and the appeal was filed with the ILOAT.

The ILOAT found that there had not been any proper consultation and ruled in favour of the Union. The ILOAT clarified what consultation requires: “proper consultation must allow a reasonable amount of time for the consulted body to discuss the issue, have its principal questions answered and provide reasoned advice or recommendations, and must also allow time for the deciding authority to take that advice into consideration prior to taking the decision”. The Tribunal rejected management’s excuse that there were “emergency” circumstances justifying the lack of consultation and that indeed management had acted in “bad faith” by making this excuse for not allowing meaningful consultation with the Union.

This is a significant case and a strong reminder to management that it must consult with staff representatives when it is proposing changes to employees’ conditions of service.
Legal matters

Why legal insurance for employment matters is essential

If you are a United Nations staff member (and former staff or affected dependents) who wish to appeal an adverse administrative decision, or who are subject to disciplinary action, this article does not concern you as you luckily have access to the Office of Staff Legal Assistance (OSLA), which does not charge a fee for its services. OSLA can help if you are a UN System staff member and are a UN workplace victim of: harassment, abuse of authority, discrimination; facing disciplinary charges at the UN; have been denied United Nations contract renewal; and, are concerned about a promotion exercise at the United Nations. A UN staff member in New York said "OSLA provided me with the highest level of service at a very low point in my professional life."

But what about if you are not a UN staff member? What if you work for one of the UN-affiliated agencies and where access to the national justice system of your duty station is not an option? A standard legal protection insurance would not cover your work-related matters because there is usually a fine print provision in those policies that necessitate the use of the relevant national court, which precludes cases that would be adjudicated at the International Labor Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT) or the United Nations Appeals Tribunal (UNAT).

Legal expenses insurance is a class of insurance that facilitates staff access to law and justice, by covering the costs incurred in case of an unforeseen legal matter. Such costs normally include a lawyer’s fees and related legal expenses. Unfortunately, this issue is often only considered when a staff member approaches a lawyer for assistance about a potential legal dispute. At this point, the dispute may have already started, and the staff member may face deadlines, heightened stress and require urgent help. When staff members do not have legal expenses insurance, this may impede them from obtaining competent and timely legal advice.

As most international organizations already have a cadre of administrative law legal officers in their human resources department plus an entire legal department, there is already a daunting inequality of arms. Legal insurance covering employment law is imperative to facilitate access to justice within your international organization. Legal insurance can cover matters within your organization that are unforeseen and affect your employment status, including workplace conflicts, whistleblowing, selection process, and investigations. With the administrative inequality in the workplace, having legal insurance itself can signal to your organization that staff will legally contest unfair or unjust administrative decisions. In order to protect yourself, it is imperative to sign up for legal insurance.

At WHO HQ in Geneva, the Staff Association offers, through CAP Protection Juridique, its dues-paying members legal protection coverage up to 10,000 CHF per case, less 500 CHF deductible, limited to two cases per head per year. For a mass litigation arising from the same facts, CAP covers up to 30,000 CHF, less 1,500 CHF deductible, limited to one mass litigation per year. The fee is 220 CHF per head per year provided there are 1,000 staff members enrolled. And then it is 230 per head per year for over 1,000 staff members. If you are a WHO HQ staff member and you are not yet a dues-paying member of your Staff Association, contact staffassociation@who.int to start your membership and avail of this necessary legal insurance coverage.
However, the above coverage is not possible if the membership is below 1,000 staff members. This is the reason why many UN-affiliated agencies here in Geneva do not have CAP Protection Juridique insurance. Therefore, the Federation of International Civil Servants Association (FICSA) has worked for over two years now to broker a deal with an insurance provider so that staff associations and unions who have less than 1,000 dues-paying members could still get legal protection coverage.

Under this insurance scheme with Fortuna Insurance, if FICSA can gather more than 1000 adherents, the premium will be CHF 80/head/year. Below 1000 adherents, the premium will be CHF 100/ head/year.

Without a deductible, Fortuna Insurance will cover up to 15,000 CHF per member and per dispute which includes:

1. The cost of a lawyer
2. Any compensation for legal fees awarded to the other party
3. Cost of expert opinions

For mass litigation, defined as a case where there are ten or more staff filing against their administration on the same issue, Fortuna Insurance will cover up to 200,000 CHF and there is no deductible.

Under Fortuna Insurance through FICSA, the staff member does not have to be based in Geneva. The duty station could be London, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Cairo, Brazzaville, Copenhagen, Vienna, etc. The contract is between Fortuna and FICSA, and both are based in Switzerland. However, the respective court (ILOAT or UNAT) needs to be in Geneva, or hold its session in Geneva.

If you are interested in signing up for Fortuna Insurance, contact your staff association/union and ask them to add you to the list of interested staff that should be sent to FICSA as soon as possible. The email of FICSA is ficsa@un.org.

What is the overall process of bringing a case to Fortuna?

(a) The staff member needs to contact the President of the staff association/union who is responsible for informing the FICSA Secretariat and for passing the case to Fortuna within ten days from the date of receipt.

• The staff member needs to provide proof that options within the organizations were exhausted to settle a conflict

(b) Fortuna lawyers will consider the merits of the case and revert to the President of the staff association/union and the President of FICSA in another ten days maximum.

(c) The President of the staff association/union has to relay such a decision to the respective staff member without any delay.

Don’t be like David facing Goliath alone. Have access to a competent lawyer; sign up for legal insurance protection.

As all of us continue to face organizational challenges in relation to austerity measures, restructuring and governance, including now also the challenges in terms of business continuity related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are at a critical juncture to determine a strategy to sustain healthy employment relations and remain relevant for the largest body of the workforce.

Pushing back on decisions of retrenchment to regular staffing, conditions of service and compensation has become more and more difficult in recent years. For staff representative bodies, retaining solid membership numbers has also become an increasing challenge. This is also partially attributable to most UN organizations expanding employment categories to include different forms of non-regular contracts, which generally do not automatically entitle the contract holders to enrol in that organization’s established staff association/union (please also refer to Neil Fishman’s article in this Magazine for a discussion on this topic).

As it stands, much of the UN workforce has undergone fragmentation, commercialisation and outsourcing which has affected not only project-related and extra-budgetary activities or facility management, but also core structures such as human resources management, finance and administrative support. Apart from not being free to associate under the authority of the UN regulatory framework, those colleagues performing core functions usually also work under a reduced compensation and benefits package compared to those colleagues serving under regular contracts.

The UN system as an employer usually qualifies the need for such a non-regular workforce with a challenging fiscal climate and an undescriptive need for flexibility, based on evolving HR strategies and earmarked funding. These HR strategies often erode staff rights and protection while alleviating long-term liabilities for the organization and its member states. Such efforts are being pursued despite many arguments to the contrary from many stakeholders, including the staff federations, demonstrating the value of a long-term, career-oriented workforce.

It is evident that the funding landscape of the UN has quite dramatically evolved over time, moving from mainly voluntary core contributions to issue-based financing, leveraging Official Development Assistance, and innovative spending and sourcing instruments. An African proverb says: “If the beat of the drum changes, so must the step of the dance”. Budgetary challenges and political pressure might have left organizations with a sense of urgency to make innovative workforce choices to suit the new financial architecture. However instead, they often use familiar instruments, reducing terms and conditions of employment, limiting the staff-management consultative process and access to internal justice, as well as excluding their established staff representative body (SRB) from oversight.

With burgeoning populations of non-regular staff, most organizations have inadvertently created a split workforce, contrary to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, despite the fact that both are working towards delivering the global public goods envisioned by the Sustainable Development Goals. Established SRBs cannot automatically represent the so-called “non staff” section of the workforce, the numbers of which vary hugely across the organisations. Instead, the 73rd FICSA Council saw a number of members giving examples of the non-regular staff population attempting to associate. Whilst admirable and important that these groups associate, the established SRB must ensure that the central messages of equal pay for work of equal value and...
of contesting the ideology of austerity are not diluted and the core principles of international civil service are protected.

The principles of staff-management relations emanate, legally and politically, from a number of legal texts within the various UN common system organizations (constitutions, rules, regulations, etc.) as well as numerous General Assembly resolutions. The way staff-management relations are anchored in an organization’s regulatory framework usually reads analogue to UN Staff Regulation 8.1.2 Herein, lies the first legal challenge, as administrations generally agree that non-regular staff are contractually not governed under the rules and regulations of their contracting organization. This includes any access to statutory rights to association and employment relations, not to mention a duty of care to provide social welfare benefits, such as health insurance and pension. At the FICSA Council, many recognised this as one of the biggest challenges to SRBs from the broader perspective of attempting to bring the entire workforce together under one umbrella of representation.

These continuing emerging trends are both of concern to Human Resource departments as well as SRBs. Although fitting into the new financial architecture of the UN’s operations, non-regular staff are still a rather new group which, over time, will develop their own systemic HR Management issues pertaining to [but not limited to] talent management, knowledge management, taxation, social security, legal liabilities, gender equality, and many other fields which will challenge the respective HRM departments for years to come. SRBs, on the other hand, are wise to closely follow the usage of non-regular staff and observe the dynamics of that population, and use these numbers to strongly advocate for a workplace that upholds and demonstrates the basic principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

The UN doctrine firmly places final decision-making authority in the hands of executive heads, which means that an SRB will always be a secondary organisation under the umbrella of their respective organisation or agency. However, that does not mean that SRBs are confined to a purely reactive role in this development. To this point, SRBs can: 1) ensure that joint workforce interest remain aligned; 2) the staff-management relation processes do not become over-politicized; and 3) that the various tracks of employment for individuals performing core functions become aligned in terms of compensation and benefits.

The 73rd FICSA Council’s HR Management Standing Committee made a series of proposals that pursue such a strategy, based on the study undertaken by FICSA on this topic (LINK TO NEIL’S ARTICLE). To this end, FICSA could provide guidance to assist their membership in developing their own strategies to advocate for harmonizing all forms of contractual employment, ensuring that austerity measures and changes to the working culture are addressed with one voice and constituent membership is retained or improved. The recommendations made by the JIU on the ‘Use of Non-Staff Personnel and Related Contractual Modalities in The United Nations System Organizations’ also have yet to see wide scale implementation and were again discussed during the FICSA Council. Finding consensus on how these could support Federation efforts might be a short-term goal worth pursuing.

In conclusion, the increase of non-regular staff is deeply rooted in the transformative agenda the UN is pursuing. The implementation and administration of such is causing a variety of an unpredictable burden on both HR Management and SRBs alike. This article should have highlighted that the development of these two employment tracks remains on different trajectories. Seeking alignment of these paths might be even more in the SRBs’ interest than in that of HR Management departments. However, an effective strategy to that effect will require careful, strategic negotiation of FICSA members with their respective managements over time. Guidance issued by the Federation, representation at the highest levels of the UN common system, as well as cooperation among the three staff federations to ensure a cohesive approach across the system in the interest of all will play an equally crucial role.

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1  Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Financing the UN Development System Getting it right for a post-2015 world (self-published, 2015) 48
2  See ST/SGB/2009/6 Art. VIII Reg. 8.1 “The Secretary-General shall establish and maintain continuous contact and communication with the staff in order to ensure the effective participation of the staff in identifying, examining and resolving issues relating to staff welfare, including conditions of work, general conditions of life and other human resources policies.”
3  JIU/REP/2014/8
The United Nations may be the leading advocate for equality and human rights, but it falls short in ensuring the rights of its own staff. When examining the parental leave policies set forth by the UN Secretariat, it is evident that there is a definitive presence of gender bias. Gender bias language and policies that accommodate only those families who follow a traditional structure means that the essential needs of non-traditional families are not met. In a world where family structures are becoming more diverse and less binary, is it not crucial that workplace policies are adapted in tandem?

The UN Secretariat is the front runner of such policies in the whole UN common system, and it is therefore not surprising that the absence of gender-neutral language is common throughout the policies of the United Nations and its agencies.

Categorizing maternity and parental leave on the basis of gender by providing sixteen weeks of leave to the natural mother but only four to the father, reinforces the notion that it is the responsibility of the mother to care for the child, and that the father is only the secondary care provider. Fathers are thus prevented from having a reasonable amount of time to bond with the child, and the traditional gender roles are perpetuated.

In situations of adoption, mothers and fathers are both limited to eight weeks of parental leave. While some organizations such as UNAIDS, UNESCO, and WHO have already modernized parental leave by offering the same amount of time for adoption as for natural births, there are still many organizations that discriminate against adoptive parents. Although mothers take leave to recover from the physical toll of pregnancy, the parental leave is also needed to establish a connection with the child. Adopted children who often come from very traumatic situations should not be treated any differently than other children by having less bonding time with their new family.

While this bias negatively impacts heterosexual couples and reinforces stereotypical bias, the major impact is on homosexual families where, by gender semantics, both parents have to fulfill the role of the primary or secondary care provider. As current language asserts, only women can be the primary, and only men the secondary. A male same-sex couple will in total be given less leave than a traditional or female same-sex couple, although one of them will actually and naturally be the primary care giver. By structuring parental leave on a traditional family structure, the notion of a patriarchal heteronormative society is reinforced.

UN Globe suggests that “the guiding principles of parental leave policy should be equality, fairness, and non-discrimination” and that the interests of the child should always be placed first. This would seem like common sense, but despite efforts made by a few organizations, overall the majority of policy neglects to ensure that equal opportunity is provided to all employees in the event of raising a child.

To be more inclusive, the United Nations and its agencies need to implement parental leave policies that are categorized on the basis of “primary care” and “secondary care” provider. By determining parental leave in a gender-neutral manner, the needs of diverse family structures are better accommodated for and respected. Organizations such as Bioversity have already incorporated this into their policy, eliminating all categorizations based on gender.

In doing so, gender equality between staff would also improve, and stereotypical relations and actions would be reduced. It could for instance mean that more men would request flexible working hours to take care of their children, breaking the stigma related to this. It would also help eliminate gender conflicts, parental leave complications, and the likelihood of discrimination lawsuits. By allowing parents to determine who will fulfill the role of primary care provider, the potential burdens of childcare are decreased. When parental leave is fair and flexible, the most important goal is reachable: ensuring the best interest of the child.

This article was edited in partnership with Eva Moller, FAO, Rome.
Restructuring and moral harassment

Evelyn Kortum
General Secretary, FICSA

Last year’s press reports stated that the former President of France Telecom, Didier Lombard, and six other former executives have gone on trial for accusations of moral harassment leading to 19 suicides, 12 suicide attempts and eight reported cases of serious depression of employees over the past three years. His restructuring plan consisted of laying off 22,000 jobs. However, since most jobs were held by civil servants, they were largely protected from layoffs. Some employees were transferred away from their families or left behind when offices were moved or assigned demeaning jobs.

Lombard attributes the suicides and depression to local difficulties with no link to work issues. However, evidence including a note left about why one employee who decided to end his life, blames it on “the permanent sense of urgency, overwork, absence of training, the total disorganization of the company, plus "management by terror." Lombard’s lawyer claims he is innocent because there was no way for him to know what was going on with over 100,000 employees. He admits, however, that the restructuring upset employees, but he rejects the idea that it led to people taking their own lives.

The public France Telecom became a private company now named Orange which is also on trial for the same offence, as 35 staff took their lives between 2008 and 2009. Notes were left blaming France Telecom and its managers.

There are many parallels with experiences in our large and diverse organizations that regularly undergo restructuring that leads to staff facing similar anxieties and stress. These articles outline the importance of proper protection for staff, as well as their empowerment through staff representation. We should all be active in properly addressing perceived moral or psychological harassment, staff anxieties and threats of job insecurity, tough restructuring plans, mismanagement, mobility and other related issues.

The FICSA website has a wealth of information available for you to use in discussions with your administrations when devising and implementing new policies.

FICSA also prepares you through professionally-led training courses on a variety of issues. You can contact ficsa@un.org for more information or consult our website: ficsa.org
Field issues

Classification of duty stations according to the level of hardship and what you need to know before your next deployment

This article will give you an overview of the importance of a properly classified duty station, from hardship levels A to E, for internationally-recruited UN staff to be in a position to make the right decision before deployment with or without the family. More than ever, the UN common system is having to operate in more risky, insecure and very remote locations with limited infrastructures and the Duty of Care of UN organizations deploying staff away from HQs calls for providing the right amount of information to UN staff before deployment.

The classification of duty stations according to the level of hardship is an annual exercise (November), conducted per region, by a tri-partite working group (the ICSC, representatives from UN organizations and representatives from the 3 Staff Federations) under the auspices of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to review a list of duty stations situated in three different regions: (a) Africa; (b) Asia and the Pacific; and (c) Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States.

Under the hardship scheme, the duty stations are grouped into six categories by level of difficulty, “H” and “A” to “E”. The so-called “H” duty stations are headquarters’ duty stations and similarly designated locations where the United Nations has no developmental or humanitarian assistance programmes, or locations in countries that are members of the European Union. “A” to “E” duty stations are considered to be field duty stations, with “A” being the least difficult and “E” the most difficult.

A hardship allowance is paid for assignments at “B”, “C”, “D” and “E” duty stations; there is no hardship allowance at locations designated as a headquarters (“H”) or “A” duty station. The hardship allowance varies according to the category of the duty station, as well as staff member’s grade.

All duty stations, where the UN is deploying staff, are reviewed on a mandatory basis, once in a three-year period, through a lengthy and detailed questionnaire sent to the Resident Coordinators and other representatives of UN agencies in the duty stations. These questionnaires need to be returned to the ICSC dully filled out and accompanied by supplementary information and data (as much information on the duty station as possible, even pictures of the localities are good sources of information) provided by the UN community on-site. The questionnaires do prove to be a useful tool which, when completed correctly, provide a good insight into the life and work of internationally-recruited P-staff in the field.

Duty stations where security conditions pose risks are reviewed annually. If conditions have changed enough to merit a review in the period between mandatory reviews, a duty station may submit a request to the Chairman of the ICSC Commission for an out-of-cycle review. In addition, the Commission may also request an out-of-cycle review for a duty station that it is monitoring closely.

The methodology to classify these duty stations was revised in 2017-2018 and this review was necessary in order to assess better the weight given to factors
others than security and health, such as isolation (ISO), local conditions (LOC), housing (HOU) and climate (CLI). Over the years and the different cycles of classification, the Tripartite Working Group (TWG) realized that duty stations with no real security challenges per se but with significant hardship due to the other factors such as ISO (physical or social), LOC, HOU, CLI were not treated in a similar fashion. The TWG came up with a suitable definition of hardship: circumstances and living conditions that pose on-going discomfort, deprivation and difficulties.

One might ask what type of questions are asked in the questionnaires to assess the different criteria listed above. Here are a few insights:

- **Under the criteria HOUSING:** for instance availability of or lack of adequate housing; availability or not of the basic amenities of life for an acceptable standard of living for staff and their families, basic facilities, level of general hygiene in the duty station, quality of the running water, reliability of the electricity, public transportation.

- **Under the criteria ISOLATION:** internet connections, are they reliable or existing? Airport facilities: airlines serving the airport, availability of frequent flights and flight connections, entry or residency status of the family members, etc. Local language is mostly spoken with English or French not easily understood by the local population. It is, therefore, difficult to communicate with the local population. Also, if the population of expatriate women does not feel safe to walk around in the streets or the parks of the duty station, it is good to mention it.

- **Under the criteria LOCAL CONDITIONS:** although the health facilities are assessed through other means, it is good to record the state of the local hospitals and the local health infrastructure/facilities for the population of expatriate UN staff, or the access or lack of it to local specialist care. You may also inform about the availability of fresh products and fresh food in the duty station and the state of local supermarkets (decent food distribution systems), the sanitation system, the state of the roads and local means of transportation (road infrastructure), the existence or not of sports facilities and movie-theatres and other entertainment;

- **Under the criteria CLIMATE:** it is relevant to mention the occurrence of significant natural disasters, the impact of climate and environmental factors on the life at the duty station, the extreme pollution events (air, water and noise pollution and food contamination), the mitigation measures put in place (if any) and the severe weather incidents with impacts on the health of UN staff so that they can be properly reflected in the health ratings.

The FICSA Federation will continue advocating for deployment briefings to communicate to UN staff the real hardship levels (actual conditions of living on-site) and whether or not it is a duty station appropriate for families to live a decent life. The Federation could also engage in discussions to put in place more resources in terms of wellness programmes, proper medical and psychological care, and assessments of the psycho-social impacts of a deployment in a duty-station with a high level of hardship.
If the UN is to continue to be able to recruit staff of the highest caliber to work in all duty stations of the world, it must respect its Duty of Care towards its personnel. This is a topic increasingly on the agenda across the board. One of the critical aspects of the Duty of Care is the classification of a duty station according to its level of hardship.

In March 2018, a new methodology for the hardship classification was approved by the ICSC Chairman after months of intensive work and analysis in the TWG. The new methodology represents a significant shift in the interpretation of hardship and thus in the UN system’s Duty of Care towards staff. Whereas the classification in the past was mainly based on a security assessment (by UNDSS and with additional input from the UNCTs), an index has now been put in place, capturing a wider range of hardship elements, as presented in the table below.

Each of the sub-factors are scored and weighed together to create the overall hardship classification. However, the final classification is based on a flexible and detailed analysis of each of the scores, with extremes carrying more weight than just A or B classifications, which is why the TWG was of the opinion that the Health and Security indicators were given too much emphasis compared to the other factors which have an overall bigger impact on the daily life of UN staff deployed in the field (overall local conditions in the duty station, overall level of isolation, housing situation, climatic elements, etc.).

What is the hardship classification?

Each UN duty station where international staff is deployed, is classified according to its level of hardship, ranging from E (the highest level of hardship) to A (acceptable level of hardship). The H duty-stations are Headquarters’ duty stations where the UN does not carry out developmental or peace-keeping operations. The classification is based on various variables collected at country level and updated regularly.

What is the hardship classification used for?

• Establishing hardship entitlements including hardship allowances (Cat B and below) and danger pay
• Designation of duty stations as non-family (Cat C and below) and establishing Rest and Recuperation Entitlements
• Ensuring that proper deployment briefings are given to staff members and his/her dependents
• Ensuring that appropriate Duty of Care towards personnel is exercised; for example, providing extra support to individuals who have been constantly deployed in difficult duty stations and risk stress/burnout; and
• Impacts mobility schemes in some agencies.

See more about this in a separate article of this magazine!
The new methodology was developed based on a careful analysis of the reported cases and based on the general principle that there needs to be flexibility in the interpretation of the data, in the analysis of the country specific context and in the careful treatment of special cases (e.g. Iran, Cuba, Venezuela). It has also been observed that, in the past, the difference between “A” and “B” category duty stations was not clear, creating some confusion and frustrations amongst staff.

### 2019 achievements of the TWG

In the TWG session of November 2019, duty stations in the Asia and Pacific region (89 duty stations) were reviewed, as well as 11 duty stations classified on a transitional basis; and 9 new duty stations classified on a temporary basis, as a number of agencies have to deploy staff there. Examples include:

- Colombo, Sri Lanka, where the situation is still being monitored following the terrorist attacks in April 2019

- Pristina, Pec and Mitrovica, Serbia, which face serious issues about health facilities, visas for staff and dependents and thus lack of freedom of movement, leading to isolation. A fact-finding mission led to a classification at the C level for these duty stations

- Islamabad, Pakistan has had family restrictions lifted in June 2019 as security conditions had improved dramatically – this was the result of 5 years of intense discussions between local authorities and the UN RCs/Heads of Agencies

The TWG continues to pursue flexibility in interpretation of the index, to cater for specific situations such as the below:

- 28 duty stations, for example Buenos Aires, Tel Aviv, Panama City, Seoul, Singapore and small European towns like Brindisi, Lesbos, Valencia are classified as “A” in all sub-factors, except CLI which could be A or B. Removing these from the hardship scheme and into the “H” classification could free up assessment resources to other duty stations where hardship is a significant factor.

- About 30 “E” duty stations, each with only few staff, are not designated as non-family, although local conditions do not seem conducive to the “normal” life of an expatriate child or spouse. For example, Cox’ Bazar, Bangladesh (home to

### Abbreviation Sub-factor Description Comment

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEC</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Assessment based on UNDSS categorization, related to armed conflict, robbery, theft, kidnap etc.</td>
<td>Original core sub-factor as main determinant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Relates both to availability of adequate medical facilities (including availability of medicines, lifesaving equipment etc.), but also access to these facilities for all nationals</td>
<td>New variables introduced, which now all weigh at par with security. Determined through questionnaires and special field missions of the ICSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Captures both physical and social, e.g. local recreation facilities not easily accessible, local population speaks only the local language, airport is far, remote island states, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Local Conditions</td>
<td>Covers a wide range of considerations, for example pollution and limited infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOU</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Captures the relative availability of adequate housing opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLI</td>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Captures the occurrence of significant natural disasters (such as tsunami, hurricanes, earthquakes), the impact of climate and environmental factors on the life at the duty station, the extreme pollution events (air, water and noise pollution and food contamination).</td>
<td>New sub-factor of secondary importance, where there might be exceptional cases to be reviewed case-by-case</td>
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many Rohinga refugees) is currently a family-duty station (although classified as “C” in overall hardship), while at the same time women need to be escorted around and staff members are to reside inside the UNDSS designated compounds.

• Many countries in the South Pacific are prone to hurricanes, typhoons or flooding but do not have robust systems to manage the situations, exposing UN staff to high risk. This means that duty stations such as Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, Cook Islands or Vanuatu could warrant an overall “B” in the level of hardship.

What can we do as FICSA – and as individual members?

The TWG relies on data collected by the UN system in-country (see a separate article in this newsletter). This is usually coordinated through the Resident Coordinator and UN Country Teams (UNCT). If the UNCT feels that the hardship classification is not correct, or there have been significant changes in the situation at country level since the last review, an out-of-cycle review can be requested for. Fact finding missions from the ICSC Secretariat can also be requested to ensure that the situation is properly understood. In some cases, questionnaires are not returned or data on important variables are missing and no informed decision can be made. Yet, a duty station must always have a hardship classification. Therefore, we want to hear from everyone about the issues they are facing. Specific actions to be taken could include:

• FICSA could push for a systematic assessment of all the factors above, so that we ensure that all duty stations are classified properly

• Staff members may all contribute to collecting data from the field and share it with the ICSC, through their UN agency locally

• Staff representatives can ensure that UNCTs are aware of the exercise and that sufficient time and manpower is allocated to answer questionnaires in detail

• Members deployed in the field should keep the FICSA EXCOM informed of the actual conditions of living for staff and this could be supported by Regional Representatives.
“Africa may lose half of its Gross Domestic Product [GDP] with growth falling due to a number of reasons which include the disruption of the global survey chains”
Vera Songwe, United Nations-Economic Commission for Africa [UN-ECA] Executive Secretary.

According to a UN Report and captured by a leading East African newspaper, Africa registers a massive US Dollars 29 billion dent to its economies and still counting. It predicts that the corona virus will shave 1.4% off Africa’s $ 2.1 trillion GDP owing to widespread disruption of business on the continent and across the world. These are some of the effects that are being experienced as the pandemic continues to spread in the Africa region. This resulted from the regions interconnectedness with the rest of the world that exposed it to the disease that was first reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

The United Nations [UN] remains one of the key actors in the region. In fulfilment of its commitment to the sustainable development goals [SDGs], UN agencies and programmes engage in outreach activities, peace building and assistance missions, feeding programmes, refugee’s assistance, and other community based projects. These activities target the most vulnerable communities who are cut off as a result of prolonged conflicts, lack of infrastructure and other natural calamities. These communities are based in the remote parts of the region lacking access to basic needs such as foods, water, medical care and education. The UN provides the link between these marginalized communities and these needs. The activities are funded by contributions from member states, individual states, non-governmental organizations, foundations and other well-wishers around the world. In order to achieve the expected results, UN personnel are deployed or sometimes required to travel to these remote locations to access the vulnerable communities and engage them in a one one-one-interaction.

Anthony Ndinguri
FICSA Regional Representative for Africa

However, Governments in the region recently came together and agreed on a range of measures to be applied in order to help curb the spread and to eventually eradicate the pandemic. These measures range from partial lockdown, curfews and even complete lockdown. They have embarked on application of these measures based on their continuous risk assessments.

UN activities in the region have been greatly affected by the measures. On Friday, 13 March 2020 the UN Office at Nairobi [UNON] through the Director General office effected Emergency Mode, of its COVID-19 Contingency Action Plan for Kenya. These measures affected various operations like working strategy, access to the facilities which saw restricted access only to critical staff, travel for official missions in and out of Nairobi being suspended, human resource management on recruitments, contract renewals and other activities. Around the continent, different UN entities are also facing challenges with organizations adjusting to measures as continuously advised by World Health Organization [WHO] and the host states. Due to this, projects are delayed, suspended, postponed or withdrawn all together. This means late delivery of projected services, delay in targeted results, prolonged period of the project and thus additional expense and not to mention the effects this will have to the communities that were the meant to profit from these initiatives.

Staff members face a myriad of challenges owing to the new working arrangements. Challenges include but are not limited to unavailability of the essential tools that will allow them to telecommute, internet connectivity in some areas in the region, access to office drives due to non-migration to the cloud thus making it difficult for colleagues who may wish to access shared folders in order to complete their tasks. Other tasks require physical presence in the work stations to complete them. Most of the staff members
Field issues

have no designated sections in their houses that they can quietly sit and perform the tasks without any disturbance. Various governments ordered closure of learning institutions and this means that some staff members and especially our mothers and single parents have to double up working and taking care of the children. Finally, to quote the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, “We know lockdowns and quarantines are essential to suppressing the COVID-19 but they can trap women with abusive partners. Over the past week as the economic and social pressures and fear has grown, we have seen a horrifying surge in domestic violence”.

As projects scale down and others suspended if not close all together, colleagues may end up having their contracts terminated, others who hold certain types of contracts end up going home without pay as long as the situation holds and some are posts abolished. Staff members may suffer irreversibly effects both emotionally and financially as they adjust to these conditions. As staff representatives, we have to ensure that we do our best to shield them from these negative effects. The Federation of International Civil Servants Associations [FICSA] has come out strongly to support the staff members by engaging the management through high-level meetings with the Chief Executive Board [CEB], HR Network Chairs, and other relevant platforms, sharing experts’ advice on what to do in coping with stressful environment and directing staff members who require assistance to websites including experts who can help them get through this tough period. For staff members who may be facing other agency based challenges, FICSA has structured mechanisms to address this through the use of individual staff associations’ leadership and Federation of United Nations Staff Associations [FUNSAs] in collaboration with the Regional Representatives. This information will reach the Executive Committee [EXCOM] that will then address it amicably with the relevant management. Staff representatives in staff associations/ unions or FUNSAs are encouraged to report any issues immediately.

As the world faces stiffer times ahead, global economies, corporations, financial institutions, NGOs as well as other well-wishers who support the UN continue experiencing losses. Some economic activities will never recover after the pandemic and those that will continue running will require time, patience and additional financial support to help them back to their feet again. All these challenges mean that almost all the member states of the UN will be economically strained and it will take some time before they can fully recover from these effects.

What does this mean for the UN? It means that members may delay in remittance of their contributions, other projects may face cash deficit and end up closing down. This will hamper the organization operations and mean that we have to adjust to other tougher measure. Cost cutting measures may include prioritizing leading suspension and abandonment of some office activities, discontinuation of contracts, abolishment of posts, more use of non-staff contracts. Managers will be tasked to come up with additional measures and this will make an already difficult situation direr.

We may on the positive side see the UN adopting more of telecommuting in order to save costs related with office space occupancy; these will however attract adjustment in some office policies in order to recognize the remote working facility as part of the workstation. Reduction of travel and adopting virtual meetings and conferences will be a new way to go for organizations. The UN may also want to adopt part time work arrangements to allow staff members work more than one job in order to mitigate these consequences.

Having said that, this is a call to the staff federations and their members to globally to pick their pens and papers and prepare with the lessons learnt along the way to enable to us secure the future of our constituents and the future of our great federations.

“Now is the time for unity, for the international community to work together in solidarity to stop this virus and its shattering consequences”
Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General.

The world is in a closed status, washing our hands, observing basic hygiene, social distancing, lockdowns, limited movements and other measures are the best ways to show love. This will definitely result in less casualties and a cleaner world. Let us embrace it when the world opens and keep it that way so that we can continue co-existing with the trees, flowers and other living creatures.

Looking forward celebrate a COVID-19 free world.
One of my favourite books is Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel García Márquez which depicts a magnificent and magic love story in the time of a terrible disease. There is little resemblance between the story told and our reality today, but I still think of it because, although magic realism at its best, it is a look into how we may tackle and survive hardship, and find beauty in the small things in the face of fear. Such reminders are direly needed these days where staff in Italy, New York and many other places, are at home in quarantine, without the possibility of leaving their homes but for grocery and pharmacy shopping, because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Personally, at the time of writing (6 April) I have been at home for four weeks, with two more to look forward to – at a minimum. These are challenging times not only because we need to adapt to a new way of working, but because many have to attend to their children as well, or – on the contrary - feel tremendous solitude and loneliness.

Effective and solid Staff-Management relations during this period have been crucial and in FAO, and I am happy to report that we were positively surprised at the level of engagement from Management.

From the onset of the crisis, Management has called for weekly meetings to update the staff representation bodies on the measures they were taken. The Chief Medical Officer, the Chief Security Officer, Communications Officers and others are also present on a needs basis, and the meetings provide an opportunity for us to share staff’s views and concerns, and provide suggestions for how to improve the situation and the communication about the crisis. Suggestions we have made which were taken on board or looked into straight away concerned teleworking, intensifying cleaning, providing masks, special measures for the security guards, setting up of a hotline and special help to international staff who are alone in Rome. In addition to this, we also discuss the HR guidelines – adapted from the CEB guidelines – in our meetings, and tackle the changing challenges faced by staff.

Management continues to provide email updates at least once a day. We, as Staff associations, have an important role in voicing staff’s concerns and in providing suggestions, but also in bridging between the organization and staff, helping us all come together.

We hope that the current crisis will enable us all to re-evaluate how we work and communicate, and that it will spur cohesive and respectful relations between us and Management also in the future.
The importance and status of duty of care in the UN system

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In 2014, the UN initially established the notion of Duty of Care to apply a framework in which UN Staff personnel were assessed, warned, and protected prior, during, and following their deployment to a high-risk, or non-family, duty station. As part of a multi-phase implementation process, in March of 2016, the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) established a *HCLM Cross Functional Interagency Task Force on Duty of Care in High Risk Environments*, also known as the Task Force, designed to examine Duty of Care deliverables in such work environments.

The implementation of Phase I goals required the production of 13 deliverables for those stationed in high-risk areas. Later, guidelines, also known as action points, were designed to produce the deliverables. To date, these guidelines, or action points of the Task Force, include the UN Strategy on Mental Health and Wellbeing; Duty Station Health Risk Assessment; Pre-deployment guide; UN Living and Working Standards; and training for managers. The Task Force was guided by the idea of safekeeping stationed personnel’s mental, social, and physical health—achieved by supplying the necessary resources based on the principles that encompass all aspects of life in both low and high-risk areas.

A well-functioning Duty of Care framework is important because particularly in high-risk environments or duty stations, it is more likely than not that a UN Staff member could suffer from increased anxiety. This might ensue an increase of likelihood of heart disease, as well as many other co-morbid chronic, or acute diseases. Not only do poor mental health outcomes directly influence the individual’s physical health, but also their work ethic, energy levels, and ability to concentrate in the workplace is affected deleteriously.

The UN has not only set out to launch an approach on how to improve mental health conditions of those in high-risk duty stations, but also in lower-risk areas. In this way, the UN Strategy on Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHS), as a part of the Task Force’s Action Points, was developed and is now being operationalized.

Employing over 105,000 staff globally, the UN system is, technically, considered the size of a small city. Currently, for this amount of staff, only 131 counselors exist to take care of individual staff mental health needs. This disparity between staff and the number of counselors amounts to 1 counselor to 800 staff members. Not only does this ratio mean long wait times, but it also is a direct reflection upon what needs to be done in the UN system in order to alleviate much of the mental health issues related to staff.

Though initially established as part of the Task Force’s objectives, the Working Group for the UN System Strategy on Mental Health and Wellbeing developed a survey of which the results underline the purpose and importance of the Task Force itself. One major finding was a correlation between poor mental health and the number of years working at the UN, which is a worrying statistic. Another such finding was that 49% of all staff reported symptoms of a mental health condition, and 22% reported two. Only 2% of these individuals are seeking counseling within the UN system. Moreover, internationally recruited UN Staff were more likely to develop hazardous drinking.

**Introduction to some Tools in Development**

For those living in high-risk duty stations, the *UN Living and Working Standards* are very important to accurately assess their safety and accommodation...
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needs. Organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and IOM have utilized new online platforms launched in 2019, such as the Humanitarian Booking Hub, for their staff living in field locations. These services, in accordance with the digital Quality Assessment Checklist for the Humanitarian Booking Hub, have not only increased access to services such as travel, accommodation, and health clinics, but also allowed for a more streamlined process to receiving these services.

Duty Station Health Risk Assessments are currently being developed along Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) risk management framework guidelines to better understand the risks involved in various duty stations. Healthcare plans for various countries and duty stations are currently being researched for suitability. Self-assessment tools have been launched to avoid unnecessary travel in order to determine Mandatory Health Support Elements in various duty stations.

A how-to-guide has been developed upon examination of various organizations’ OSH systems and compiled into a document for use of all other UN Common System Organizations. This how-to-guide is the first step in this holistic approach to changing the UN system on the terms of the five Core Principles for a healthier, safer, and more respectful workplace. Although OSH policies have been developed in some organizations, a survey conducted in August of 2019 revealed that only few organizations have OSH policies in place. This number needs to increase rapidly under the auspices of responsible heads of agencies.

Moving forward, it is imperative that the UN Common System continues to expand their OSH Framework and be cognizant of their own responsibilities and their staff needs. Recent International Labor Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT) Judgments are reflective of upholding UN Duty of Care Policies. These judgments state that when an appeal regarding dignity, probation and terminations, harassment and health and safety are filed, that the Tribunal will now make a greater effort to ensure that rules, procedures, and appropriate measures are in line with the organizations’ Duty of Care standards developed within the main framework. The Tribunal develops its processes further and relates them to the Duty of Care framework to determine if cases violating these policies will be punished more severely. The ILOAT will continue to recognize the importance of Duty of Care principles, making it imperative that the leadership of agencies and their staff offer support to the implementation of its framework.

1 https://www.unspecial.org/2019/09/prevention-is-better-than-burnout/
You will recall that in December last year we sent a FICSA Communication (37/19) to update you on the status of the UN System-wide Strategy on Mental Health and Wellbeing (MH Strategy). Since then, the emergence of COVID-19 across the world has dramatically impacted us in many ways. The virus affects not only physical health, there are also multiple risks to mental health and wellbeing: anxiety related to the unknown, to the risks, working remotely and being socially isolated, as well as fear for family, friends and self. Often UN staff also work away from their usual social supports in challenging environments.

These developments have shifted the focus of work of the MH Strategy Implementation Board from long-term (over five years) to a focus on urgent action to increase the level of support provided and to increase efforts to look after the health and wellbeing of staff. Although the overall MH Strategy remains the same, how activities are prioritised will change in order to ensure the provision of resources that can be adapted by UN organisations to address current and emerging mental health and wellbeing issues arising due to the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond. The focus is on actions that both individual staff members and organisations can take.

Some of the immediate actions that will be implemented include those that respond to mental health and wellbeing needs and consequent implications (immediate, short-term, and long-term), including the impact of working from home, dealing with uncertainty and grief, domestic abuse and suicide prevention. We felt that developments in the following areas would be of specific interest to our members:

**Changes to the MH website**

Information related to maintaining good mental health in the shadow of COVID-19 has been added to the general UN COVID-19 website which is accessible to all UN staff: [https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/wellness](https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/wellness). At the moment, this site contains basic information for staff on protecting their own mental health as well as tips for managers on how to support the mental health of staff they supervise in the current environment, particularly in the context of working from home. There are also some basic tips on what to do if you feel anxious as well as links to online guided meditation. In the coming days and weeks more information will be added, so please keep checking back.

The regular website on general information related to mental health for staff is also being maintained: [https://www.un.org/en/healthy-workforce/](https://www.un.org/en/healthy-workforce/) and contains a lot of complimentary information which is useful in addressing concerns about mental health in general in the workplace.

**Psychosocial Support**

There is currently, unsurprisingly, an increased demand for Psychosocial Support across the UN System. The MH Implementation Board is exploring options to increase capacity in this area, while continuing to work on where the current gaps are. Some of the options being considered include immediate access to tele-counselling as this is not covered by all organizations’ insurance plans at the time of writing and it needs to be urgently addressed. In addition, work is progressing rapidly on the
completion of a Minimum Services Package in order for the Implementation Board to be in a position to recommend actions that facilitate increasing capacity across all agencies. We will keep you updated on any developments in this regard.

**Domestic Abuse**

The Secretary General has recently drawn attention to the dramatic increase in domestic abuse around the world due to lockdown situations in many countries. Sadly, UN staff are not immune to this trend. A reference group has been formed to work on this issue and a tab will be added on the website to facilitate access to help and information for all UN staff members.

**What next**

Some HQ duty stations are considering a staggered return to work approach in the coming weeks. In this regard the Implementation Board is focusing on developing a strong foundation for a post-quarantine period, to ensure staff can transition smoothly when able. This work will consist of the points mentioned above as well as ongoing projects.

**Ongoing**

Among other areas, work will continue on the development of an implementation advice/guide to organisations; this will be an important tool to ensure implementation of a comprehensive Mental Health Strategy across all organisations. It is also essential that managers and leaders have the knowledge and skills to respond to current and emerging needs. Work started in this area will continue to be built on. You can refer to the Mental Health website for existing tools in this area. Another key area which cannot be neglected is the work around stigma reduction to ensure that staff with a mental health condition are not discriminated against.

In order not to overburden an already overtaxed system, the Implementation Board will make every effort to ensure that they minimize the duplication of effort across agencies. This has been a guiding principle to date, and efforts in this regard will be reinforced in order to pool and adapt resources that have already been developed and make them accessible to all UN organisations, particularly in the areas of website content, handouts, training, webinars etc.

COVID-19 is a challenge to all of us in so many ways, but it has also provided an opportunity to shine a light on the often-neglected area of staff mental health. Let us use the resources available to us to help us and our colleagues through this difficult time and to help us to build a strong foundation for a workplace which is free from stigma related to mental health and which supports all affected staff. FICSA will continue to follow this project.