

REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONDITIONS OF SERVICE IN THE FIELD

Chair	Amani El-Sheik (UNESCO/STU Cairo)
Rapporteur/Member, FICSA Executive Committee	Véronique Allain (SCBD Montreal)
FICSA President	Brett Fitzgerald (WIPO Geneva)
FICSA General Secretary	Gemma Vestal (WHO/HQ Geneva)
Members, FICSA Executive Committee	Pilar Vidal Estevez (PAHO/WHO Washington DC)

Participants

AP-in-FAO	Jean Risopoulos Jakob Skoet
FAO/WFP-UGSS	Paola Franceschelli Silvia Mariangeloni
UNAIDS	Evelyn Jonazi Tanya Quinn-Maguire
UNESCO	Elia Matias
UNGSC	Paola De Mauro Cosimo Lunedi Vito Musa
WHO/AFRO Brazzaville	Lydie Gassackys
WHO/EURO Copenhagen	Oleksandr Martynenko
WHO/GSC Kuala Lumpur	Kiranjeet Kaur
WHO/SEARO New Delhi	Ritesh Singh
WHO/WPRO Manila	Rachelle Anyayahan

Association with consultative status

EMBL Thomas Heinzmann

Federation with observer status

FAFICS Gerhard Schramek

Guest

UNIDO Chantel Pothier

Adoption of the agenda (Agenda item 1)

1. The Standing Committee (SC) approved the following agenda:
 1. Adoption of the agenda
 2. Election of the rapporteur
 3. Ongoing review of salary survey methodologies for locally recruited staff and their impact on the membership of FICSA (to be discussed in GSQ)
 4. Update on IASMN sessions
 5. Implementation of the revised methodology for the annual classification of hardship duty stations in the LAC Region, Middle East and CEE Countries
 6. Devaluation of local currencies with especial focus on Egypt and Argentina (FICSA/C/72/FIELD/2)
 7. Proposal to establish an additional geographical region for purposes of FICSA representation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (FICSA/C/72/FIELD/1)
 8. Requests for training
 9. Other business
 10. Nomination of Standing Committee officers and core group members

Election of the rapporteur (Agenda item 2)

2. Véronique Allain (SCBD) was appointed rapporteur.

Ongoing review of salary survey methodologies for locally recruited staff and their impact on the membership of FICSA (to be discussed in GSQ) (Agenda item 3)

3. The Member of the Executive Committee for Compensation Issues gave a short presentation and explained that the membership of the Federation had been surveyed in the first half of 2018 to get a sense of the major difficulties encountered when conducting local salary surveys in various duty stations. That, in turn, helped the FICSA Executive Committee to be well prepared for the first meeting of the working group set up by the ICSC to review the salary survey methodologies. For the FICSA representatives, it was obvious that the Flemming

principle, as a guiding principle, was still valid. However, the methodologies applied needed to reflect the reality of today's workforce and ensure a full and unbiased assessment.

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee continue being highly active in the different bodies involved with salary surveys to ensure that the Flemming principle remained valid and truly applicable.

Update on IASMN sessions (Agenda item 4)

4. The Inter-Agency Security Management Network (IASMN) Steering Group meeting, composed of 15 members (DPKO-DFS, FAO, IOM, OCHA, UNDP, UNDSS, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO, WFP, UN Women, DPA, UNESCO and World Bank) met twice: November 2018 and January 2019.

5. The Standing Committee took note of the following:

- The importance of the issue of security for UN staff, particularly in the field;
- The evolving challenges that the security services were facing (i.e. a particular challenge being the new generation of children growing up in conflict areas who consider violence to be the norm);
- Social media was proving to be a most helpful tool for terrorists. During the recent attack on the hotel in Nairobi, social media posts provided information on the location of targets, armed forces etc., assisting the terrorists and hindering the work of the security personnel;
- Appreciation the work of the FICSA Executive Committee (ExCom) and other representatives on the IASMN on behalf of members during the year.

The Standing Committee requested the Executive Committee in communicating with members to: (a) stress the importance of consistently completing the TRIP requirements in advance of all duty travel; and (b) strongly encourage all staff to complete the TRIP requirements when leaving the office on personal leave as it had proven to be equally important in terms of ensuring the safety of all UN staff in times of crisis that could occur at any time, including personal leave periods.

Implementation of the revised methodology for the annual classification of hardship duty stations in the LAC Region, Middle East and CIS Countries (Agenda item 5)

6. The ExCom Member for Field and Regional Issues informed the participants in the SC that the Latin America & the Caribbean region, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Middle East countries were under review in November 2018, after a cycle of three years. The countries that posed some challenges were: Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti, Libya, Lebanon as well as some Caribbean countries recently affected by natural disasters. A total of 169 active duty stations were listed for review and 152 questionnaires had been duly submitted to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), representing 90 per cent of all duty stations that had completed the process and returned all the information to the ICSC. A new model, approved by the Commission, for the evaluation of the level of hardship duty stations under

review, allowed for all hardship factors, except climate, to be attributed the same level of importance as security. FICSA members were invited to refer to the ICSC official circular dated 12 December 2018 which provided a complete list of entitlements (ICSC/CIRC/HC/23) together with the official list of non-family duty stations. This document was available on the FICSA website or could be requested from the ExCom Member for Field and Regional Issues.

7. In the framework of the revision of the methodology to classify hardship duty stations (July 2017), the ICSC was asked to address the difficult topic of designating non-family duty stations at the request of the CEB HR Network, some UN organizations (UN Sec, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, etc.) and the staff federations. Since staff members faced hardship in many areas, not only with respect to security, it should be linked to the designation of non-family duty stations which is currently and normally based only on family restrictions for reasons of safety and security. However, other issues such as limited medical services, non-availability of housing, isolation of family members or availability of goods and services are not being considered. The topic was first introduced with the Duty-of-Care obligations of UN organizations whereby, before deployment, a UN staff member should be provided with all the information necessary about a given duty station, in particular whether it is fit for the installation of family members.

8. It was interesting to note that since June 2017, the language had evolved slightly with the HR Network and the ICSC introducing the notion of “very difficult duty stations” (not family-friendly) as opposed to “non-family duty stations” which are solely designated as such based on the local security and safety situation. The UN General Assembly authorized, on a pilot-phase basis, the allocation of an amount of USD 15,000 for UN staff members with eligible dependants, only for those duty stations classified at the E hardship level, ignoring the pleas of the staff working in D duty stations. Other organizations of the UN common system should follow that recommendation to allocate the amount of USD 15,000 as an “in lieu of family installation” payment.

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee continue participating actively in the ICSC regular meetings devoted to the classification of hardship duty stations. The Standing Committee also recommended that the Executive Committee continue advocating for the interest of staff deployed in D duty stations as their conditions of living and work do not justify simply ignoring their plight.

Devaluation of local currencies with especial focus on Egypt and Argentina (Agenda item 6)

9. The difficult subject of the devaluation of currencies in specific duty stations was already brought up at the 70th and 71st FICSA Councils held in 2017 and 2018 where the SC was asked to look seriously into the matter in particular for Egypt and Argentina. A document outlining the actual data and figures pertaining to these volatile currency situations was presented to the SC participants (ref document FICSA/C/72/FIELD/2). The cases illustrated that the recommendations of the 70th and 71st Councils to support rapid responses to address the negative impacts on staff at affected duty stations were still valid.

10. To understand better the conditions and the extreme circumstances such as economic distress or long-term economic and social instability which triggered special measures, the attention of the SC was drawn to section X. *Special Measures* in the Report adopted by the ICSC on the review of Methodology II for non-HQ duty stations (ICSC/72/R.11).

11. The SC was reminded that if the UN wished to remain a competitive employer and, more importantly, wished to recruit and retain staff with a high level of skills and of the integrity essential to its work, it would be important to continue linking the UN salaries for locally recruited staff to dynamic, progressive employers in each locality. In countries where there was a high level of currency devaluation and inflation, local employers were also going through similar difficulties.

12. An ideal scenario was presented to the SC whereby the conversion of the salaries of locally-recruited staff from the local currency to the US dollar could be a solution to the dramatic impact of currency devaluations.

The Standing Committee recommended that, in countries with volatile currency situations, the Executive Committee continue advocating the conversion of the locally recruited staff salaries from the local currency to the US dollars. That would allow the Federation to give due consideration to the critical circumstances currently affecting several countries.

Proposal to establish an additional geographical region for purposes of FICSA representation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Agenda item 7)

13. At the 71st FICSA Council held in Bonn, Germany, the SC was presented with a proposal that took into consideration the diverse political context and instability of some regions in the Middle East, North Africa and many Arabic-speaking countries. Indeed, if FICSA were to be more effective in representing its membership, it was suggested that the Council session introduce the possibility of adding a region to the geographical scope of the Federation's work: The Middle East and North Africa Region and Arabic-speaking countries (MENASC). Hence, the Executive Committee was approached soon after the Council session in Bonn to nominate, with the assistance of the Member for Field and Regional Issues, an ad interim focal person in the region. Dr. Samar Elfeky, Vice-President of the WHO/EMRO Staff Association (based in Cairo, Egypt), was identified and designated to undertake, for part of the year 2018, the tasks of the MENASC region until the 72nd Council of FICSA. The SC took into consideration the proposal of the WHO/EURO Staff Association regarding the geographical distribution so as to determine the countries to be included in the latter region.

14. Thereafter, the ExCom looked carefully into the definition of the additional region. It was suggested a comparison be drawn with the geographical distribution of the World Bank and other UN agencies as well as international organizations in terms of regional activities (ref. document FICSA/C/72/FIELD/1). For the suggested geographical distribution for the MENASC region for the purposes of the Federation see below:

SUGGESTED LIST OF COUNTRIES FOR THE MENASC	
1.	ALGERIA
2.	BAHRAIN
3.	EGYPT
4.	IRAN
5.	IRAQ
6.	JORDAN
7.	KUWAIT
8.	LEBANON
9.	LIBYA
10.	MOROCCO
11.	PALESTINE
12.	OMAN
13.	QATAR
14.	SAUDIA ARABIA
15.	SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
16.	TUNISIA
17.	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
18.	WEST BANK & GAZA
19.	YEMEN

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee confirm the above-proposed list of countries for the MENASC region and liaise with the Standing Committee on Legal Questions (see Annex) regarding the modalities for the revision of the Federation's Statutes, with a view to finalizing the process in due course for the confirmed establishment of the new region in line with FICSA procedures.

Requests for training (agenda item 8)

15. It was suggested that video presentations on pension issues be given by the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) for FICSA members based in Africa, the LAC region, Arab-speaking countries and Europe, facilitated by the Regional Representatives and the ExCom Member for Field and Regional Issues (similar to those held in Santiago de Chile in April 2018 and at WHO/EMRO in Egypt in November 2018).

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee facilitate, through its Regional Representatives and ExCom Member for Field and Regional Issues, video presentations by the UNJPSF.

Other business (Agenda item 9)

Reduced per diem

16. The representative from WHO/EURO Copenhagen informed the participants that since 1 January 2019, WHO had started implementing a so-called Preferred Hotel Programme (PHP) that envisages the payment of a reduced DSA to both staff and non-staff who undertake official travel. The travellers currently receive a reduced per diem that does not include the accommodation component of the full DSA. After receiving the approval for travel, traveller make their hotel booking using an online booking platform. While the platform allowed instant booking, the availability of rooms was subject to real time and was controlled by the hotels that might adjust the number of rooms depending on the demand. Hotels that participated in the PHP were not obliged to keep a certain number of rooms for WHO.

17. Unlike the flight booking policy of WHO, which was recently updated to align itself with the UN SEC global travel policy, the new hotel policy placed limitations on staff in their options to choose the type of accommodation as well as its location when travelling to the cities that participate in PHP (Geneva, London, Copenhagen, Rome, Paris). Staff who undertook last minute and emergency travel at the request of the organization might find that the choice of available hotels was limited and might offer less choice and flexibility, including any special health and mobility requirements.

18. WHO intended to expand the practice to the following cities: Accra, Addis Ababa, Amman, Atlanta, Bangkok, Beirut, Brazzaville, Cairo, Dakar, Jakarta, Johannesburg, Libreville, Manila and Nairobi.

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee compare the compliance and consistency of the newly introduced WHO and FAO PHP policy with the UN Secretariat official travel policy, with a view to assessing the impact it had on staff travelling on official business.

FAO's calculations of the rental subsidy for P-staff in the field

19. The representatives of the Association of Professionals in FAO (AP-in-FAO) informed the participants that since May 2017, the FAO Management had been applying a revised (unofficial) procedure for the approval of rental subsidy in the field. While staff members still needed to provide a signed lease and proof of payment, which needed to be signed by the Responsible Official in the field, the revised approval and final decision remained with the Deputy Director-General for Operations who worked at the FAO HQ. For the purpose of approving rental subsidies, average rent levels reported in the ICSC cost-of-living survey reports were used to establish the maximum reasonable rental (MRR) levels for the particular field duty station.

20. However, those survey reports provided the average rental costs for UN staff at any given duty station, which were used to establish the Post Adjustment Index and Multiplier, as well as to set the rental subsidy threshold (with or without dependant allowance). Those reports are not designed to be used to set MRR figures.

21. Through this approach, FAO is artificially lowering the amounts of rental subsidy granted to staff and in some cases phasing out the rental subsidy entirely (where, for any given family composition, a staff member's rental subsidy threshold is above the average rent paid by UN staff at that duty station). Estimates of the losses often range from USD 500 to USD 1,500 per month, i.e. USD 6,000 to USD 18,000 per year. Conversely, FAO Management proudly reported to members the impact of the new methodology currently applied, stating that the "savings resulting from the new rental subsidies controls are estimated to be USD 950,000 per biennium" (Finance Committee document FC 173/8, paragraph 79, November 2018).

22. Beyond the significant financial impact that this measure is having on FAO Professional staff in the field, AP-in-FAO is highly concerned that FAO can unilaterally decide to disregard MRR circulars drafted and distributed by UN Resident Coordinators, which should apply to all UN staff at a specific duty station. In effect, FAO Professional staff in the field are being treated differently than any other UN staff in the same duty station, and this practice undermines the principle of the so-called UN common system.

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee facilitates the intervention of the ICSC in this matter by alerting the FAO Management to the fact that the ICSC place-to-place survey report should not be used to establish maximum reasonable rents.

Impact of the UN Reform on staff in the field

23. The General Assembly requested a new proposal on how a Global Service Delivery Model can support the delivery of fit-for-purpose administrative support services to clients across the United Nations Secretariat, including through the establishment of global shared services. With administrative services delivered where, when, and how they are needed, to the United Nations Secretariat.

24. The Global Service Delivery Model is part of the more comprehensive UN Secretariat reform. Within the United Nations, many funds, programmes and agencies have already moved toward similar models of service delivery and may be implemented by other agencies in the future.

The Standing Committee recommended that the Executive Committee request the membership to promptly keep the FICSA Secretariat informed on any changes that would affect staff as a result of the implementation of the UN Reform.

The Standing Committee also recommended that the Executive Committee remain attentive and reactive when the Global Service Delivery Model is implemented in the field with a view to protect staff.

Nomination of Standing Committee officers and core group members (Agenda item 10)

25. Amani El-Sheikh (UNESCO/STU Cairo) was nominated as Chair and Vito Musa (UNGSC Brindisi) as Vice-Chair.

26. The following participants were nominated as core group members:

Véronique Allain (SCBD Montreal)
Amani El-Sheik (UNESCO/STU Cairo)
Oleksandr Martynenko (WHO/EURO Copenhagen)
Ritesh Singh (WHO/SEARO New Delhi)
Evelyn Jonazi (UNAIDS Geneva)
Lydie Gassackys (WHO/AFRO Brazzaville)
Cosimo Lunedi (UNGSC Brindisi)

Annex

PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE STATUTES OF FICSA

Change in « Statutes, Rules of procedure of the council and financial rules »

Special Status

Chapter IV ORGANS AND OFFICERS OF THE FEDERATION

Article 18 The Federation shall act through its organs: the Council and the Executive Committee.

The Officers of the Federation are:

- the members of the Executive Committee; and
- the **five** Regional Representatives.

The Terms of Reference of the Officers of the Federation are annexed to these Statutes and approved by Council in accordance with Article 20(c)(2) of the Statutes.

The Regional Representatives

Article 36 Candidates for the Offices of Regional Representatives must be serving in the region concerned at the time of their election and be supported by the staff association or union to which the candidate belongs. However, if after the closure of candidatures no nomination has been received for one of the empty Regional Representative seats, candidates from a different region may be nominated provided they have previously served in the region and have the competency and the knowledge of the region in which there is an empty seat. The Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall define from time to time the regions (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and **the Middle East and North Africa Region and Arabic-speaking countries, or MENASC**) for the purpose of the elections of the Regional Representatives as well as their functions.

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