

REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY/OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Introduction

1. The Standing Committee on Social Security/Occupational Health and Safety (SOCSEC – see Appendix 1 for participants) met virtually on 25 January 2023 and face to face during the 76th Council session, to address its agenda. It elected Marjorie Manduli (UNFCCC) as rapporteur.

Activities undertaken in 2022

2. SOCSEC considered the [decisions of the 75th session of the FICSA Council](#), noting that all the previous year's decisions had been fully implemented.

Paper on medical insurance plans for minimum standards

3. SOCSEC had decided that it needed to develop a set of recommendations on basic, standard procedures and best practices as a tool to be used by staff representatives in different organizations when negotiating medical insurance contracts with providers. There were currently no uniformity of providers and procedures, and a high degree of non-standardized rules and uncommon practices due to the geographical location of UN agencies and their host-country arrangements. A UN working group had been created to address the issue, but only a sheet of common practices was available. In addition, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was understood to be analysing the medical insurance schemes in the UN common system. SOCSEC discussed the need for a consultant to analyse the data presented in the JIU report.
4. In the discussion participants reported both problems – such as scarce medical assistance during the pandemic, failure to address long-COVID symptoms, delays in claim reimbursement and ineffective medical evacuation – and good practices – such as mental-health provisions by insurance providers, a telehealth app and effective information sessions. In the discussions it was noted that the United Nations Staff Mutual Insurance Society against Sickness and Accident ([UNSMIS](#)) appeared to provide the best standards for coverage.
5. SOCSEC reaffirmed the importance of capacity building and training for staff-representatives, to enable them to understand which provisions should be included in the health insurance contract, as a minimum standard, to learn how to negotiate for those provisions, and to educate staff about their health insurance coverage. SOCSEC encouraged staff representatives to become involved in their respective organizations' Advisory Committee on Medical Insurance coverage.

Conclusion

6. SOCSEC decided that, upon release of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on different medical insurance schemes in the UN system, its officers would liaise with the core group to create a task force, which would review the report in depth and identify any needs, such as:

- a consultant to prepare a paper to share guidelines and best practices.
- capacity building as training for staff representatives on negotiating insurance contracts with management and providers.
- The Task force would then send those recommendations to the ExCom, including with cost implications.

UN Disability Inclusion Strategy

7. The [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#), adopted by the CEB in 2019, provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of the work done in the UN, and all organizations should implement it. A case study from Mexico was shared with participants to provide an example of the challenges faced by those with disabilities. The Strategy will be posted on the FICSA website.
8. Some participants mentioned the apparent discrepancy/inequity of access to benefits offered to staff in the different categories who had children living with disabilities. Despite what stated in UN SEC Administrative Instructions [ST/AI/2018/2](#) it appears that there is a gap in the allowance granted to P-staff vs locally recruited staff. It was suggested that additional family leave and the possibility for teleworking be granted to parents of children with disabilities, for all categories of staff.

Recommendations

SOCSEC recommended that the FICSA ExCom should:

- a. encourage staff representatives to ensure that their administrations are implementing the CEB disability guidelines [[UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#)] within their agencies/organizations; and
- b. advocate in all fora the need to ensure reasonable accommodation of and the necessary support for staff with disabilities incurred before or during their service.
- c. should continue to raise, in all relevant fora, the concerns raised by members about discrepancies in, or inequitable access to, benefits offered to staff in different categories with children living with disabilities.

Occupational Health and Safety Forum: update on discussions

9. The HLCM Occupational Health and Safety Forum [Occupational Health & Safety – Overview of deliverables | United Nations – CEB \(unsceb.org\)](#) produced deliverables including an online repository for standards for and documents on occupational health and safety (OHS), which would be hosted on the UN Policy Portal and the Knowledge Gateway, and managed by the UN Secretariat. The repository would start to be populated in 2023. The Forum had also developed an OHS taxonomy, and had established a process to collect, vet and develop OHS standards.

UN-specific guidelines on OHS incident management [Policy Portal \(un.org\)](#), once finalized, will consolidate best practice approaches to incident management to guide UN agencies in designing their incident management programmes. SOCSEC asked staff representatives:

- to strongly advocate that their organizations to follow these guidelines, which were equally relevant for field and for HQ duty stations.
 - to continue sharing knowledge and resources with their constituency, while steadily building their capacity on OHS matters; and
 - to advocate to be included in the updating of the OHS frameworks in their organizations.
10. Concerns were raised that the [United Nations Mental Health and Well-being Strategy](#) had been placed under OHS for reporting purposes at the level of the HRN and HLCM, since mental problems

affected not only health but also the working environment. It was noted that HR departments had, or should develop, powerful tools to prevent ill health, by enabling a healthier working environment.

11. The implementation guide and scorecard [for the MH and Well-being Strategy](#) would help staff representatives to discuss with management and cross check the implementation of the Strategy in each organization. It was important for staff representatives to be aware of the guide and scorecard as they were often the first people staff members would approach to try and find solutions. The guide provided an outline of initial steps to create an action plan and suggestions on how organizations can report results for each of the priority actions.
12. HLCM had endorsed the recommendations of the Mental Health and Well-Being Implementation Board in October 2022 (CEB/2022/5 – [CEB.2022.5 - HLCM 44th Session - Final Report.pdf \(unsceb.org\)](#)). Given the call for funding and the importance of the Strategy, SOCSEC suggested that FICSA contribute a symbolic amount to the resources of the Implementation Board.
13. The participants shared a wide range of experiences and standards related to mental health. The FICSA ExCom would continue to share all relevant resources on the FICSA website, including links to [WHO / ILO Guidelines on Mental Health at work](#), and remind members that those resources were available to them.

Scope for joint standing-committee work on harassment and abuse

14. The FICSA Standing Committee on Staff–Management Relations (SMR) proposed forming a new joint working group with SOCSEC that would address both misconduct, harassment and abuse of authority and ways to improve staff mental health and well-being.
15. It was suggested that, for example, the working group could produce a matrix for staff representatives or “well-being ambassadors” to use when approached by staff seeking advice, as well as an advocacy toolkit on how to address those issues in their organizations. Further, the working group could meet with the FICSA ExCom after developing the matrix/tool and discuss further steps to be taken before the 77th Council session.

Recommendation

The SMR and SOCSEC SCs recommended that the FICSA Secretariat should contact core group members of both Standing Committees to request participation in the Joint Working Group.

Updates on social-security-related topics

16. An email had been sent to heads of delegations by the FICSA Secretariat on behalf of the SOCSEC to encourage them to reflect, before the 76th Council session, on matters related to social security and OHS, focusing on staff returning to their offices after the pandemic, which presented new challenges.
17. The events of recent years had shown the importance of adapting to unpredictable changes in both the working and home lives of UN staff. With a view to creating some guidelines based on best practices and lessons learned, SOCSEC discussed such issues as modalities and policies on the return to the office, safety standards, risk assessment, psychosocial support, administrative support, governance of the crisis, participation of staff representatives in related decisions, contractual arrangements and conditions of employment, medical testing, and obligations from medical insurance. It was noted that HLCM had endorsed the final draft of the paper on the *Review of Work-Life Harmony Actions in the UN System* (CEB/2022/HLCM/5/Add.1/Rev.1) and submitted it to the Human Resources Network for further elaboration and implementation (ref. <https://unsceb.org/session-report-388> para 79).

Recommendation:

SOCSEC recommended that the FICSA ExCom should send a reminder to staff-representative bodies to send their list of best practices (including implementation and monitoring), lessons learned and challenges in the context of the return-to-work following COVID-19, with a view to evaluating benchmarks for policies on flexible working arrangements (FWA).

Any other business

18. SOCSEC decided to retain After Service Health Insurance (ASHI) as a standing agenda item, and coordinate with FAFICS and sister federations. A FAFICS representative had informed SOCSEC that Vienna hosted an organization for retirees, providing information on ASHI.
19. Although the UNJSPF was not on SOCSEC's agenda for the 76th Council, it nevertheless noted with concern the exclusion of the three UN staff federations from the participants' representatives' group of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board. In view of this, it is proposed that UNJSPF remains a standing agenda item for next sessions.

Recommendations

- a. **Recalling previous recommendations, SOCSEC recommended that the FICSA Secretariat should recall Staff Representatives that they should seek election to the boards of their organizations' staff pension fund, to participate in and report on their work.**
- b. **SOCSEC recommended that the FICSA ExCom should make every effort to regain access to the participants representatives' group of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board.**

Nomination of officers and core group members

20. The following delegates were nominated as Standing Committee officers:
 - Paola Franceschelli (FAO/UGSS) as Chair
 - Michelle Delinde (CTBTO) as Vice-Chair
 - Andrew Brown (ICAO) as Vice-Chair
21. The following participants in SOCSEC were invited to become members of the core group.

Appendix 1. Participants

Officers

Chair/Coordinator	Paola Franceschelli (FAO/UGSS)
Vice-Chair/Vice-Coordinator	Andrew Brown (ICAO)
Vice-Chair/Vice-Coordinator	Michelle Delinde (CTBTO)
Rapporteur	Marjorie Manduli (UNFCCC)
FICSA President,	Tanya Quinn-Maguire (UNAIDS)

Staff association/union

AP-in -FAO	Florence Tartanac, Wadzanai Garwe
FAO/WFP UGSS	Dina Franchi, Susan Murray
IAEA	Erik Glass, Maria Mikheieva, Anthony Alozie
ICAO	Sonia El Sakka, Helena Debussy
IMO	Shereen Barry, Lionel Shen, Ivana Goode, Fola Odulana
ITCILO	Christina Pierini
OSCE	Nizar Zaher
PAHO/WHO	Pilar Ramon-Pardo
UNAIDS	Carlos Garcia de Leon
UNESCO	Denis Pitzalis, Federica Delconte
UNFCCC	Tracy Tollmann, Marsha Cheddi, Sarah Klinghammer, Mary Jean Abrazado
UNGSC	Salvatore Brunori, Alessandra Macorio
UNICTF	Rocio Martin
UNIDO	Osadolor Akpata
UPU	Silvia Baratech, Leolinda Dieme, Franck Landauer, Stephanie Vuillemin
WHO/AFRO	Gildas Wilfrid Makaya,
WHO/EURO	Anita Stefin
WHO/GSC	Liana Michael Abdullah, Haznim Ahmad
WHO/HQ	Daniella Salmon, Jerome Zanga Foe
WHO/SEARO	Kumar Ravinder

Members with associate status

CERN	Joel Lahaye, Catherine Regelbrugge
CTBTO	Maria Zelda Rojas,

Associations with consultative status

AMFIE	Svend Booth
OAS	Maria Isabel Rivero