



UNISERV REPORT

ICSC 90th Session

Introduction

Executive members of the United Nations International Civil Servants Federation, UNISERV, recently took part in the ICSC 90th Session held in Geneva.

The following is a brief on the more important subjects that were on the agenda of the Commission at this session.

Please note that some of the decisions and recommendations by the ICSC have to be endorsed by the General Assembly.

UNISERV Executive members that took part in the session:

President Mr. Stephen Towler

Vice President Mr. Mark Polane

Vice President Ms. Vesna Markovic Dasovic

Executive Secretary Mr. Ryad Bouhadeb

UNISERV Opening statement to the ICSC

Mr. Chair, Members of the Commission, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNISERV fully supports the statements made previously by the other staff federations, FICSA and CCISUA, and wishes to add the following:

We would like to take this opportunity to especially thank the Chair, Vice Chair and the ICSC for the special measures to stabilize NTP during the COVID pandemic.

UNISERV thanks the Secretariat for making this session possible during all the current constraints. We understand the problematic situation, but as we have already missed one Session it was key that this one went ahead with all concerned parties being in the same time zone. It would have delayed far too many important matters even further to delay.

UNISERV wishes to acknowledge the tremendous hardships the current pandemic has placed on the world population as well as our staff, in particular staff serving in the field. Many of whom have had to not only deal with the “normal” hardships in their work environment but also the fear and uncertainty for the health of their families and loved ones whom they have been separated from for extended periods due to the global travel restrictions. These too are issues that have a huge impact on mental health and wellbeing.

UNISERV still has grave concerns over the vast number personnel on precarious contracts often referred to as “non-staff”, a descriptor we find demeaning, in the system. UNISERV has noted that the HLCM wishes to add another contract type for reasons of “agility”.

This is a proposal UNISERV is vehemently against as it considers bureaucratic working practices and organizational design the major impediments to an agile workforce. We believe it is time to address these principles and practices, as in the long run, they will have a negative impact on the notion of an equal and one UN, and the desire to be an employer of choice. The JIU Report A/70/685 - Seventieth session - stated that,

The current situation is that United Nations system organizations have a dual workforce: one with full rights and entitlements and another with no or limited entitlements, working in the same organization. This is in line with neither international labor principles nor the values promoted by the United Nations. While United Nations system officials have acknowledged that the present significant use of non-staff is not a good practice, they put forward two important reasons for the use of non-staff contracts instead of staff contracts: lower cost and greater flexibility. The Inspectors would like to clarify that United Nations system organizations should not assume that the need for practical solutions overrides the obligations of the organizations to practice what they preach and what good labor practices require”.

With the latest rejection of an end-of-service grant, for fixed-term staff whose contracts are not renewed, now is not the time to inject another contract with likely fewer protections than the ones we currently have, all of which have previously been agreed upon by the Commission. As we are all aware many staff could lose their jobs as their current contracts, “*could be progressively replaced*” as stated in CEB/2020/HLCM/13. This same document states in

Para 20a, “Putting people first by investing in and enabling our workforce”. This is something that we can support in making the UN the first-choice employer it should be.

UNISERV strongly believes that a staff member’s pension contributions should be portable, all staff grades and levels should be used, allowing recruitment of a workforce with less experience requirements to join the organizations, restrictive regulations and bureaucracy reduced, all of which we believe can be done within the current contractual frameworks.

We politely ask the ICSC and the organizations to consider the effect of the contractual changes being discussed on the mental health of the staff that serve. (We are now in the month of mental health awareness).

While the ICSC notes that all the current contract types, Temporary, Fixed Term and Continuous are the agreed ones, not all contract types need to be implemented by the organizations and the organization could implement any combination thereof nevertheless, the use of staff contract types outside the framework should be restricted and adhered to. Of note is that continuing contracts are being used less and less by the various organizations and becoming very rare.

As we increase the use of the term “employer of choice” let us not forget parental leave and the positive step this would be towards allowing coparenting. In the last session we discussed this at length, however, the working group never materialized. UNISERV politely requests the Commission to move forward with this as fast as possible, allowing the Organizations to demonstrate themselves as a modern, forward thinking employers. These changes may in time lead to further improvements in gender balance.

UNISERV looks forward to a solution to the Post Adjustment rules and methodologies leaving a fair, transparent and simplified system that the staff members can clearly understand. At the moment this is extremely difficult to explain to our colleagues. The working group, although much effort was put into finding a solution to suit all, failed to come to a unanimous position on all points but agreed on a package that could suit all parties, including changes to the 10-point rule. The common view was that we need to have a system that stabilizes NTP, (New Take Home Pay), for all, but at this time all parties have not agreed on what methodology would give this solution.

It is of concern to us that the ongoing situation of disparity of purchasing power of professional staff in Geneva still exists and currently remains within the legal framework. Our concerns go further though, no matter what the outcomes, there was and will remain a period of time when colleagues were in receipt of differing PA. Even after an agreed methodology is implemented, a survey completed and new PAI set, this will not necessarily be the end, as some rules could still see a remaining disparity depending on what the survey results are. We look forward to hearing the Commissions solutions to this problem as we move forward through the session.

With regard to the GS salary survey methodology UNISERV believes that the Fleming principle in its current formulation is still valid and it complies with article 101 of the UN charter with reference to the necessity of securing the “highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity”. We request the ICSC Secretariat to Identify and establish the appropriate parameters for any future pilots, and that they are in line with the principle. We believe, the current categorization of duty stations has satisfactorily functioned over the years and maintaining that would be the best course of action.

Since 2011 the children's allowance level has not been addressed and agreed at the GA, we look forward to the Commission's deliberations on this subject and a recommendation for the upward movement of this allowance. We feel that after this lengthy period of time there is no acceptable manner to change any methodology that would in effect freeze or lower this allowance. After 9 years this should be raised as soon as possible. With the reforms of the United Nations and its intent to attract and retain staff members, whilst aiming at gender parity, this area is of extreme importance.

Danger pay is an integral part of the compensation for those staff working in environments that it is certified meet the criteria for this payment. UNISERV strongly believes that this payment should go up in line with the recommendations in the respective document R.10 to which we will speak more during the session.

UNISERV wishes to remind everyone that the UN Common System bears a moral responsibility not only towards the world we serve, but also towards their most valuable asset, it's staff.

We look forward to a highly productive Session and welcome a collaborative and effective effort by all parties.

Danger pay

UNISERV was unequivocal in its support for an increase in the level of Danger Pay for both internationally and locally recruited staff members as the reference year for this allowance was based between 2016 – 2019. It was also impressed on the Commission that these reviews took place as scheduled with the next review due to take place in 2023.

Key Gain:

The Commission proposed to:

Update the level of danger pay for internationally recruited staff to \$1,645 per month until the next review.

Update the level of danger pay for locally recruited staff by updating the reference year of the salary scales on which the calculations were based, from 2016 – 2019, and applying 30% to the net midpoint of those scales.

Children's and secondary dependent's allowance

UNISERV pointed out to the Commission that an attractive children's dependency allowance was one of the draws to the organizations as an employer of choice and strongly believed that an update of the allowance was long overdue. It was pointed out that the allowance had not been adjusted for nearly ten years. UNISERV strongly supported keeping the current methodology and cautioned against changing it in an attempt to lower the figures.

Key Gain:

The Commission proposed to:

Maintain the current methodology for calculating the allowances for the time being.

Recommend to the General Assembly that as of Jan 1st 2021:

The children's allowance be set at \$3,222 Per Annum.

The disabled child allowance be set at \$6,444 Per Annum,

The secondary dependent's allowance be set at \$1,128 Per Annum.

Security evacuation allowance

The Commission considered that the allowance was set to assist in offsetting the direct added expenses of staff members and eligible family members who were evacuated from their official duty stations.

The ICSC secretariat noted that the allowance was calculated using the current methodology to \$190.

UNISERV requested that the current level of \$200 be maintained and that no changes should be implemented and that in the current global volatile world economy, this allowance should be regularly reviewed.

Key Gain:

The Commission proposed to:

Maintain the security evacuation allowance at its current level of \$200 per day in respect of the staff member, and \$100 per day in respect of each eligible family member, for up to 30 days and thereafter, \$150 and \$75, respectively for a maximum period of six months.

A single lump sum shipping element of \$500, applicable when a staff member or their family is evacuated.

Update of the working group on the review of Salary survey methodologies

UNISERV, FICSA and CCISUA reaffirmed the importance of the Fleming Principle in determining the compensation of locally recruited staff in the common system. The staff federations highlighted their proactive participation in the on-going review and expressed their expectation that practical solutions will be identified to resolve the outstanding issues. In their view, the role of the LSSC is indispensable in the survey process, and their participatory nature must be preserved.

We noted that, in the light of the fact that the external data vendors contacted by the ICSC secretariat could not conduct surveys in accordance with the requirements of the ICSC methodologies, the working group explored “off the shelf salary data”. The use of this data required flexibility to some requirements currently in place in the methodologies, including thresholds of sector representation.

We were of the opinion that confidentiality requirements established by vendors of external data limited the possibilities for quality and source verification of salary data by the ICSC. We strongly reiterated that the issue of employer participation would be eased by relaxing some criteria of the methodologies, including the required number of retained employers, quantification of benefits and commuting distance thresholds.

We also highlighted the importance of implementing special measures to address special compelling circumstances, (including inflation and exchange rate fluctuations), and the need to establish mechanisms to adjust salaries between salary surveys in certain duty stations.

Future work:

The Commission proposed to:

Include the following items in the next working group meeting:

Review a comparative analysis by running a pilot application of external data conducted in parallel with the conventional salary surveys at selected duty stations.

Estimate the common system labour market positioning and evaluate the impact of the selection parameters in the external data modality.

Contractual arrangements: review of the implementation of the three types of contract

The following is the intervention made by UNISERV to the Commission:

UNISERV fully supports the interventions from FICSA and CCISUA and our comments, as have all others on this subject, been fully discussed between all three Federations.

During a recent HLCM meeting the Task Force on “Future of Work” made several recommendations to the HLCM related to the introduction of a so-called “agile” contractual framework which as stated in CEB/2020/HLCM/13, quote, “could progressively replace the current contractual framework with one, flexible contractual modality for the future.” This is a very worrying statement for all the staff we represent and is causing more stress and uncertainty during these difficult times of COVID-19.

UNISERV maintains the position that the current contractual framework, consisting of Temporary, Fixed Term and Continuing appointments is fit for purpose.

The notion that a new contractual arrangement will be required in order to achieve the desired output of an “agile” organization and attract “young” talented personnel is in our opinion misguided at best

and disingenuous at least. We do agree with the aim of simplification of rules and policies to enable faster decision making but do not see a connection to contractual arrangements to achieve this admirable goal.

Most of the stated elements that are to make up the “Agile contract modality” are in fact elements that can be implemented within the current contractual frameworks and provide for the creation of an “agile and nimble” workforce.

The strategy for transformation of the United Nations to a more nimble and agile organization should focus on “Structure, People, Technology and Processes”, building on the UN Leadership framework, have a talent management strategy focussed on attracting and retaining the best talent, flattening the organizational hierarchy and reducing bureaucracy by simplifying and delayering reporting structures.

Attracting a young and talented workforce is not dependent on a “agile” contract but rather on a system where advertised job openings offer opportunities for young people to enter the system. We note that many job vacancies require an amount of “years of relevant experience” that would be impossible for young people who are entering the workforce to have attained.

Furthermore, we would like to suggest that portability of the UN Pension may be looked at as an enabler for people to rotate in and out of organizations while maintaining some semblance of social security which many staff have to give up on in their home countries when they choose to become international civil servants.

We would advocate therefore, that rather than looking at a different contract modality, recruitment at lower level functions should be reintroduced, as it has been evident now for some years that for instance recruitment in the field occurs at levels where years of experience exceeding 7 or 10 years is required, I.e. FS5/FS6, or P3.

Since one of the stated elements of the “agile” contract modality is that it should be “financially sustainable”, we wish to point out that staff at lower levels are obviously less costly than higher levels, noting that the pay scales already exist.

UNISERV therefore, wishes to reiterate that rather than introducing a new contract modality which is primarily driven by cost reduction motives, the organizations should be able to work within the current, approved, contractual framework if a more holistic approach is adopted to workforce planning.

We already have the well-established contractual modalities of Temporary, Fixed Term and Continuing, which roughly translates to short term finite, medium term and ongoing need. An interesting description from the temporary contract being, “To work on a special project with a finite mandate”. UNISERV believes there is no reason for non-staff contracts for projects.

We strongly believe that the contractual framework is fit for purpose as is.

We request therefore, that the Commission ensures the continuance of the 3 existing contracts, as updated in 2010, and further ensures that all member organizations are following the existing framework and report to the GA when not.

Key Gain:

The Commission proposed to:

Establish a working group to review the implementation of the “Current Contractual Framework” by the organizations and any possible improvements, and make recommendations as needed at its ninety-second session.

UNISERV will be a member of the working group with the other two staff federations within the Commission, therefore, will be able to ensure the staff voice is heard and to ensure the transparency of any issues that arise. Be assured that we strongly believe that there is no need for other contract types.

Monitoring of implementation of decisions and recommendations of the ICSC and GA

UNISERV requested information regarding the timeline for the review of the reduced non-family service allowance that had been instituted at hardship level E duty stations that were not designated as non-family duty stations. We requested that the Commission should move forward in this regard with a recommendation to include D duty stations as soon as possible.

Future work:

The Commission noted that:

A review of this item was now on its work programme for the year 2021.

Base floor salary scale – International Staff

UNISERV noted the increase in the comparator civil service base scales and supported an increase in the base floor salary scale.

Key Gain:

The Commission proposed to:

Recommended an increase of 1.9% in the base floor salary scale, effective 1st January 2021.

Performance appraisal

Some members of the Commission were of the view that career progression was a stronger motivator for higher performance than monetary rewards. This was also an issue that had been shown in the preliminary results of the global staff survey, along with the desire for recognition for exceptional performance.

UNISERV and the other staff federations agreed with the Commission that they fully supported the comments made and agreed the need to align high performance with career progression as this would motivate staff.

Post adjustment issues: Report of the working group on operational rules

UNISERV stated to the Commission that it actively participated in the meeting of the ICSC working group that was held from 24 to 28 February in UNESCO, Paris.

The working group devoted most of its attention to specified modifications to the current system of operational rules, with a view to assessing their efficacy with respect to the compensation policy objectives established by the Commission, while addressing the UNGA resolution 72/255 that instructed the Commission to:

“continue its efforts to improve the post adjustment system in order to minimize any gap between the pay indices and the post adjustment indices and, in this context, to consider the feasibility of more frequent reviews of post adjustment classifications of duty stations” as well as to “review the gap closure measure in the post adjustment system during its next round of cost-of-living surveys”.

In order to move forward, the working group agreed with a package of recommendations that included:

Setting the Gap Closure Measure (GCM) to 3% so that when the Post Adjustment Index (PAI) be lower than the prevailing Pay Index (PI) by more than 3%, the new PI is set equal to the survey-PAI increased by 3% and transitional measures be provided for existing staff; otherwise the prevailing PI was maintained.

Changing the 12-Month Rule so that if two consecutive 12-month reviews conducted during a given round resulted in the updated PAI being significantly lower than the prevailing PI, a price survey would be conducted within six months and its results incorporated in the PAI and implemented according to existing operational rules.

If a survey triggered under the above conditions could not be conducted for reasons of force majeure, no adjustment would be made to the prevailing Pay Index until such time as the survey could be completed. Otherwise, the Pay Index is set to the level of the gap which triggered the survey, unless the PI was already below that level, in which case it is retained.

The implementation of a consistent personal transitional allowance to ensure a higher level of stability of pay for existing staff at the duty station before the implementation of the results of the survey.

The modification of the Four-Month Review (FMR) rule for group II duty stations and the creation of a system of cap and delay for negative adjustments.

UNISERV stated that it still has grave concerns over the 10-point rule as it seems G2 duty stations, in some circumstances can still suffer a 9.99 point drop in a 4 month period within a year, with for instance a rapid currency devaluation. For example, the first 4 months of a drop would be limited to -3 due to the 4-month rule, 2nd period up to a -9.9 reduction would be implemented in full, 3rd period total exceeding 10 would trigger a survey. We strongly request the ICSC to find a solution to this anomaly to ensure stability at all times.

We would like to see at any point within the year no matter how many 4-month periods, a physical review if a total of 2 or 3 reviews in a 12-month period totals a 10 or more point reduction.

UNISERV called for a special meeting of the working group at the earliest convenience, which we believe can be successfully done virtually as it is a small group, to thoroughly analyze the additional changes prior to upcoming ACPAQ meeting and next round of surveys. The Commission could then review the final recommendations of the WG by virtual means and make its recommendation for consideration.

Key Gain:

The Commission proposed to:

Approve the recommendations of the working group.

Maintain the current formulation of the of the Gap Closure Measure.

Change the calculations of the Personal Transitional Allowance.

Pending the completion of further tests and simulations, the modifications of the operational rules were approved in principle, concerning the 12-month review (Group I duty stations), four-month-review (Group II duty stations) and the 10-point rule (Group II duty stations).

It is important to note, that the Commission also decided that the review of the results of test and simulations have to be shared with the working group and that the WG needs to report back to all stakeholders if the calculations result in any unintended outcomes.

Summary

UNISERV notes the key gains recommended by the Commission during this session and will continue to work to ensure that the staff voice is heard. We will pressure the Commission to ensure that the working groups go ahead, even by online means, during these difficult times. There remains much work to be done, however, this is a good start.

As soon as the formal sessional report is available, we will of course share it with you.



United Nations International Civil Servants Federation

<https://uniserv-federation.com>