

FICSA CIRCULAR



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From: Gemma Vestal, General Secretary

**REPORT BY THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA)
ON THE 35TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES NETWORK (HR NETWORK)
(UNIDO Vienna, 5 to 7 July 2017)**

A FICSA delegation consisting of the President, Diab El-Tabari, the General Secretary, Gemma Vestal, and the President of the IAEA Staff Association, Imed Zaabar, attended the 35th session of the Human Resources Network (HRN) held at UNIDO in Vienna from 5 to 7 July 2017.

The following topics were discussed:

1. Budget for local salary surveys 2018/2019

The budget for local salary surveys for 2018/2019 was discussed and was not a contentious issue. Approval of the final budget was carried out in the closed session on Friday, 7 July.

2. Joint UN Centre for HR Services (job classification and reference checking)

To sum up from the document which served as the basis for discussion, a draft Business Plan for the Joint UN Centre for HR Services was developed to help continue to advance the deliberations and decision-making of the HLCM to establish a joint UN centre for job classification and reference checking. Following on the HLCM meeting of 30 and 31 March 2017, consensus was reached that the most beneficial institutional arrangement for the Joint Centre would be to establish the Joint Centre as a common UN -shared service center, co-located with UNDP and United Nations Volunteers (UNV) which has its headquarters in Bonn, Germany. Although this institutional trajectory was clear, there were still extensive operational matters, identified by HLCM, which needed to be considered and to be collectively addressed. In this respect, HLCM suggested that items such as the following be discussed during the CEB-HR Network:

- ✓ Detailed proposals on the Joint Centre's costing and pricing model
- ✓ Service level commitments
- ✓ Partnership agreement instruments

Services offered: The status of planning around the Joint Centre for HR Services was that the Centre would initially offer two specific HR services, namely job classification and reference checking. Beyond direct cost savings and qualitative improvements, the services could bring significant efficiencies through better risk management in talent acquisition and staffing. The intensified inter-agency collaboration was also expected to enhance the system-wide expertise on these areas over time.

Job classification: One of the main benefits of managing job classification as a common service was consistency of grading between agencies. Given the current substantial differences, the facility would issue classification recommendations only, with the final decision authority for practical legal purposes still being retained within each recruiting agency. The business case assumed that volumes of work were for a standard job classification or re-classification. Any special requests, including for desk audits, had not been factored in and would need to be assessed and priced on a case-by-case basis. When assessing the potential volume of job classification, it should be borne in mind that over time, the volume may decrease. It was assumed that the Centre would be at the forefront of reform of the process of job classification, but the business case had not assessed the level of work required to do this, and had not built in the impact of any significant reform.

Verification and reference checking: This is the act of verifying the accuracy of the information provided by candidates during a recruitment and selection process. It is an objective evaluation of an applicant's past job history and performance and proves to be a useful predictor of future job performance. In addition to reference check the Joint Centre would also offer services in the scope of background checks. Background checks solicit different kinds of information on a potential candidate, such as verification of education, employment history, professional qualifications and certifications, criminal records etc. In addition, there was substantial interest in the development of a database containing names of staff and former staff as well as details of previous disciplinary charges. Currently there is limited sharing of such information between agencies leading to cases where former staff who had been dismissed on disciplinary grounds had been hired by another agency.

The proposed list of checks/services to be delivered by the center are as follows:

- ✓ Request for verification of employment history
- ✓ Request for verification of academic credentials and accreditation of academic institutions (using the UNESCO list)
- ✓ Request for verification of membership in professional boards, associations and networks and veracity of publications
- ✓ Request for integrated knowledge, set of behavioral skills, technical competencies, judgment and attributes
- ✓ Request for character/integrity/ethics/core values checks
- ✓ Request for performance evaluation history
- ✓ Request for liability release from candidate
- ✓ Request for additional and/or more discreet references
- ✓ Request for disciplinary measures/sanctions check (internal UN)
- ✓ Request for security checks including identification, criminal, commercial and financial records
- ✓ Request for social media internet profile red flags
- ✓ Request for clearance on conflict of interest
- ✓ Executive search for top professional vacancies

Governance: The Joint Centre is a UN common service, which is co-located with the UNV, also a UN common service. UNV is acting as the administering agent and is supporting the creation of the Joint Centre by leveraging its host country agreement with the Government of Germany.

Organizational structure: The organizational structure of the Joint Centre is envisioned to be lean, scalable and both geographically and contractually flexible. There was broad consensus that the Joint Centre should have a single geographic location to serve as an anchor, while significant components of the Joint Centre's workforce could work from home or alternate locations. As such, the Joint Centre could emerge as a primarily virtual office for common services.

Investment priorities: The creation of a Joint Centre for HR services would require a startup investment, in addition to decisions about institutional arrangements and location. The initial investment costs foreseen during a set-up phase included:

- ✓ Project management
- ✓ IT infrastructure
- ✓ Staff development and team culture
- ✓ Performance and excellence

Go live: The Joint Centre is expected to be operational by early 2018. There were organizations which said that they were willing to be a client of the Centre as they saw more advantages than disadvantages. However, there was also a handful which, for the time being, could not commit to a MoU by late 2017, as delineated in the timeline.

The FICSA delegation listened with interest to the discussion but did not make a specific intervention at that point in time.

3. End-to-end review on pension processing

It was planned that the HRN would be well represented in the Pension Board meeting in July in Vienna. HRN noted the improvement in processing the pension payments for newly-retired staff and that although the investment had met its objective for 2016, it was still far from the cumulative three-year target.

4. Topics for discussion at upcoming ICSC session

The representatives of the ICSC Secretariat gave an overview of the following topics:

4.1 Post adjustment matters

The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) explained extensively the way the cost-of-living survey was conducted and the results which concluded with -7.7% for Geneva, -6.56% for Rome and -6.1% for Madrid. The HR Network and staff representatives explained that the methodology, though problematic and requiring revision, was not currently the issue, but how to find a way out of applying these results which were damaging to staff morale and would instigate appeals. As the ICSC was not in a position to propose any solutions, the issue would be debated at the upcoming ICSC session in Vienna.

4.2 Use of staff categories including National Professional Officers (NPOs)

The ICSC representatives gave an overview of the work of the working group on the use of categories including NPOs. It was noted that the organizations, ICSC and staff representatives agreed on all the categories except NPOs, where issues on use in regional offices, nationality requirement and serving in more than one duty station remained an issue of dispute between staff representatives and organizations. The issue would be raised at the next ICSC session.

4.3 Hardship classification methodology review

A briefing on the work of the working group was provided to the participants. The HR and staff representatives appreciated the work carried out.

4.4 Pensionable remuneration

The ICSC representatives informed the participants that a working group would most likely be created for the purpose. The issue would be discussed at the upcoming session of the ICSC. It was most likely that acquired rights would be taken into account.

4.5 Review of children's and secondary dependents' allowance

The ICSC representatives explained that a new calculation method would be proposed at the upcoming ICSC session that it might include additional duty stations (either larger duty stations and/or the two new HQ duty stations).

5. Duty of care in high risk duty stations

A presentation on a proposed strategy on duty of care in high risk duty stations was made. The issue was discussed in the closed session the following day.

6. Draft gender parity strategy

The item was deferred to the closed session the following day.

7. Final transitional arrangements for closure of UN CARES programme

Due to lack of time, this item was also deferred to the closed session the following day.
