



39th UNOG Staff Coordinating Council **39^{ème} Conseil de coordination du personnel de l'ONUG**

Minutes of the 4th meeting

held on 16 September 2021 at 1.15 p.m. via MS Teams

Council members present: ABDELLAOUI Naima; ALLEK Meriem; ALMARIO Francis; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALI Mohamed; BATAK Cecilia; CHANTREL Dominique; CHAOUI Prisca; COLANGELO Roberto; DAN Lin;; HERMELINK Ursula; JACQUIOT Cédric; JOHNSON Laura; KHAN Anjum; MEYER Olivier; NGUYEN Ngoc; POPA Gabriela; RICHARDS Ian; SMITH Brad.

Council members absent: ALEKSANDROVA Anna; DUPARC Philippe; GAZIYEV Jamshid; LEWIS-LETTINGTON Nicole; MONNET Aminata; PECK ARIF Catherine.

The meeting began at 1:20 p.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes as reflected below.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 3rd meeting

The minutes of the 3rd meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council secretariat.

3. Report of the Finance Commission

The FC informed the Council members that it was looking to open an additional bank account to split funds and avoid negative interest rates. Concerning possible investments, the search for options was ongoing noting the limitations imposed by the Regulations and the legal personality of the Council.

4. Report of the Executive Bureau

The Executive Secretary highlighted the points raised in the written report that had been circulated to Council members prior to the meeting, notably concerning: Joint Negotiation Committee (JNC) discussions, updates on working conditions in SSS, return to office, the newly created racism working group, the use of UNOPS contracts in UNOG, etc. *[The full report can be found as annex of the present minutes.]*

A request was raised that before future JNC meetings the relevant agenda be shared in advance with Council members to allow them to share feedback and ideas.

5. ICSC's cost-of-living survey

The Council recalled that Ian Richards, Mohamed Bali and Catherine Peck Arif were part of the Local Salary Survey Committee (LSSC). The LSSC was going ahead with the new round of cost-of-living (COL) survey and the concern remained whether it would realistically reflect staff spending habits for the following 5 years given the Covid context. The ICSC's criteria established that LSSCs were to determine if there was a "general return to office" for the survey to go ahead. Following meetings, it was the Committee's common agreement that such criteria was still not met, and therefore its position was not to go for the COL survey at the present time.

6. Staff-Management Committee (SMC)

The Council recalled two ad-hoc SMC meetings that had recently taken place and that the next SMC meeting would be held in Bonn in a few weeks' time. Whilst an official agenda remained to be release, items for discussion at SMC would likely include: the revision of staff rules and regulations, informal groups representing staff, overly restrictive job openings, issues of Afghanistan-based personnel and the safety of

Afghan national staff, delegation of authority and centralized placement by the SG in respect to downsizing and the release of a new downsizing policy, and adjustment to flexible working arrangements. Various papers were submitted by staff representation, including from Geneva on the reform of UN tribunals and the granting of compensation in lieu of rescission of administrative decisions.

Concerning performance management, the Council recalled the new system was introduced without a policy to back it up and despite the reluctance of staff unions. The new policy was released while the WG was continuing its deliberations. The SMC would have to decide to review the policy already issued or release a new administrative instruction at a later stage.

Concerning the working group on selection and mobility, staff had put forward policy proposals however management seemed unwilling to pick up on some of the good proposals. The working group remained stuck given reluctance from management.

The question was raised to the Council plenary on which criteria staff representatives were selected to be part of SMC working groups. It was noted that whenever an SMC working group was established, staff unions put forward names of candidates and, if accepted by other staff unions, they would become members of the working groups' staff side. In the case of the Council, the Executive Bureau puts forth nominations when required.

7. Strategic Heritage Plan (SHP)

The survey on the move to the H building and related concerns yielded results that were shared with the administration. A meeting was held with the SHP Transition Team (TT) to follow up on the concerns which were also forwarded to the Joint Committee on Health and Safety at the Workplace. Said Committee issued a memorandum urging management to take action on the concerns and used a language that the administration did not appreciate. The Council broadcasted the memorandum nonetheless with the view of maintaining transparency with the staff. Later, however, management went back to the Committee and pushed for a new memorandum to be issued which was also broadcasted to staff by the Council. Whilst the language in the second memorandum was lighter, recommendations to management remained unchanged. The worrying issue though was that they interfered with the work of the Committee.

A discussion ensued. Members regretted interference by management on the work of joint bodies and suggested to address a communication to management reminding them that work of joint bodies was independent and they should not interfere. At the same time, it was noted that management was actively taking action in resolving the H building issues and that several exchanges had already taken place noting the concern of staff representation regarding said interference. In the interest of allowing the improvement of H building services to continue the Council decided not to issue such communication.

Also, a meeting took place with clubs where the TT briefed them on their temporary and future locations. Unfortunately, due to Palais renovations, clubs could not count on any space available until February 2022 when a number of offices would be made available until October, when new alternatives would have to be found. A communication was sent to the Director of Administration raising that clubs were part of staff welfare and a solution to their locations should be found with the priority it deserved.

8. Working Group on Racism

Following the Director-General's encouragement, the Council put together a working group on racism in the workplace along with management, which would serve the SG's strategy to counter racism in the Organization as overarching policy and address Geneva issues more directly, as well as a forum for continued staff-management discussion on the matter, including the issue of microaggressions and the legal framework on how to challenge discrimination in the workplace. Terms of reference were drafted and adopted and a call for volunteers was sent out.

9. Roster management in selection processes

Concerns were raised that the "rostered" status for job vacancies was generally being disregarded by hiring managers and depended mostly on their very discretionary and personal appreciation of candidates. The Council noted that rosters were central (applicable for all the Secretariat) and should be taken into account to

the extent possible when it came to filling vacancies. Staff representatives would follow-up with any particular case.

10. Communications sent by members of the Council to staff

Council members discussed the extent to which each one of them was entitled to communicate with staff members (following a recent case which, in the view of some Council members, only amounted to generate confusion and disinterest among staff). The Council generally agreed that all Council members had the right to communicate, but that official communications should be sent through the Council leadership to ensure the decisions and positions of the Council were correctly represented. It was noted that the Council had the mandate to take decisions and act as the official entity representing staff and underscored the importance of speaking with one voice. It was also generally agreed that communications sent by individual Council members should never touch upon personal issues. Some Council members expressed disappointment at what they considered to be unprofessional and disrespectful communications and attitudes from other fellow Council members. The need to uphold the utmost respect and maintain decency and kindness was highlighted.

It was raised that a sense of exclusion of certain Council members by the leadership was being felt by some members, and that often proposals were being easily disregarded. The Council generally agreed that all Council members were entitled to raise proposals and those to be voted on, and any accusations of undue disregard were unfounded seeing decisions were taken by vote as per the Regulations on staff representation, and positions on substantive matters taken accordingly.

11. Any other business

- A question was raised on the status of management's survey on post-Covid flexible work. Council leadership would inquire about it and inform Council members when possible.
- Concerning the Organization's liquidity crisis, Council members noted management has been silent about it, notably the Controller who was yet to brief staff after several months. From interactions with senior management it was informally understood that the crisis was considered over, but this was yet to be confirmed. Council leadership would inquire and inform the Council when possible.
- On Covid vaccinations, it was noted that management had not released official guidelines regarding the right of managers to request their staff's Covid vaccination status.
- Regarding the harmonization working group within DGACM, the role of UNOG's Languages Service's Sectoral Assembly was highlighted. A Council member expressed interest in joining the working group. The Council mentioned the need to revert to the Sectoral Assembly to discuss this issue.
- Engaging member states on substantive issues was raised to be an effort that should pertain all staff unions.
- Concerning the election of the UNOG Focal Point for Women, it was raised that it should be elected as was the case in OHCHR. Said position, in line with relevant regulations in place, could either be elected or appointed by the DG. In the case of UNOG it had never been elected, but when the time came for the next call for expressions of interest the Council could propose that it be elected and put forth nominees.
- CCISUA was expected to hold its mid-term meeting in New York during the month of November. Council members would be informed of details over the coming weeks.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

Annex I

Executive Bureau Report (16 September 2021)

Here is a summary of meetings, broadcasts and other activities since the last Council meeting held on 8 June:

JNC: The UNOG Staff Coordinating Committee (UNOG SCC) met with senior managers at UNOG on 7 September to discuss issues relating to the Safety and Security Section, the return to work and COVID vaccinations, as well as the Working Group on Racism. We also reviewed action points from the last JNC meeting held on 31 May 2021.

- Regarding Safety and Security Section staff, paid overtime has been frozen except for Christmas and New Year's Day due to the financial constraints facing the Organization. As the financial situation has improved somewhat, UNOG SCC requested that paid overtime be extended to all official holidays in Geneva. The UNOG SCC also raised the issue of the lack of career advancement for many G-3 security staff members. Management agreed to look into the percentages of the different grades to see how they compare to other duty stations with a view to their possible adjustment, which would open up opportunities for possible career advancement. Management stated that they offer specific programmes to assist G-3s in passing the G-4 examination. Management also mentioned that staff who have been at the same level for 20 years and step 11 for five years could be granted a long-service step. We also agreed to provide a list of other issues brought to our attention by the staff of the Safety and Security Section, which will be discussed further.
- The UNOG SCC then asked for plans about our return to work and vaccination protocols as many staff have expressed concern about working with colleagues who are not vaccinated. Management first highlighted the need to register their vaccinations in EarthMed portal, which is confidential and provides needed information to the Organization on the percentage of staff vaccinated. They also highlighted that managers have the right to ask staff about their vaccination status as this is not confidential. Medical conditions, however, which prevent a staff member from being vaccinated are confidential and such information does not need to be shared. Guidelines have been provided to managers in this regard. Management is looking into the issue of a vaccination certificates issued from outside of Switzerland, which are not recognized by the Swiss authorities. They are also looking into the possibility of COVID passes for certain categories of staff and for using the cafeterias and cafes at UN premises in Geneva. With respect to tests being used as a substitute for a COVID pass, UNOG management made it clear that the Organization would not be in a position to reimburse such costs. For the time-being, however, staff are able to telecommute and no date has been set for our return to work as the COVID situation is rather fluid.
- With the new Geneva rules regarding the COVID pass, guidelines have been sent out to the UN and we will need to follow-up in this regard.
- Regarding the Working Group on Racism, it was noted that the Terms of Reference have been drafted and a joint call for staff interested in participating in the Working Group will be issued shortly.
- On other matters discussed previously, management will organize a briefing for staff on *cartes de* legitimisation issues and staff on UNOPS contracts in ICTS will be regularized starting in January 2022.

SMC: Meetings were held on 1 July and 5 August. We discussed the following issues:

- Resident Coordinators Policy-Staff need to look into the policy and come back with comments. Staff are entitled to representation by staff unions. Staff requested confirmation of legal framework. Discussion suspended awaiting legal advice. Staff agreed to provide editorial comments on draft AI but would not endorse it pending legal advice.
- WGs: Need to organize and agree on a meeting schedule.
- Update on revision to ST/SGB/2018/1 (Staff Regulations and Rules). Amendments based on decisions coming from GA. Prerogative of Member States. Need to review changes. But we can look to see how management interpreted GA res in making changes to SGBs.
- Informal Groups "representing" staff: No headway at SMC. There was agreement to the first part in NY's proposal. The second part is still open to discussion and staff unions reserved the option to go to SG and federations for further action.
- Status of interim reports. Procedures need to be clear in TOR of working groups on whether they will issue interim report.

- We raised the issue of overly restrictive job openings at the SMC and submitted a background paper. The staff representatives explained that there are requirements for field experience (or sub-regions) in job advertisements which are reminiscent of tailoring. While they acknowledge that there is a need for specific experience at times, there is no consistent criteria and many times the requisite field experience has no link to field positions. They questioned if this trend is this part of the mobility initiative, and if so, they noted that it should be applied at a policy level, not on an ad hoc basis. The ASG OHR concurred and noted that it falls under diversity (both gender and geographic aspects). She added that a memo was circulated in 2020 to Head of Entities. She committed to send reminders (written communication and in the next global VTC/meetings). She also suggested that DOS might be able to conduct spot checks. When the staff representatives asked how instances should be escalated, the ASG OHR indicated that first staff should escalate within the duty station/JO issuing unit, then to HQ (OHR and/or DOS). She also noted that the various Directors of Administration and HR Chiefs are members of SMC and are now apprised of these concerns. The staff representatives asked whether these cases could be relayed to Central Review Bodies, to which the ASG OHR responded by reiterating that they had issued communications in the past, and that they will review the situation. Following this meeting, we sent out an update to staff and requested that they continue to inform us of issues and this regard. (Broadcast dated 27 August).
- The SMC also discussed the situation in Afghanistan in particular relating to the safety of national staff.
- The staff representatives raised their concern over the conflict between head of entities' delegation of authority (DOA) and centralized placement by the SG(DMSPC) in respect of downsizing. While acknowledging efforts made by ASG OHR and USG Khare, they expressed their concern that Head of Entities have the delegated authority to place/accept staff. Staff are being downsized/terminated and at the same time other staff are being recruited. They recalled that employment contracts are Secretariat-wide. They stressed that centralized placement supersedes the Head of entity's wishes and that there is a need to change the relevant policies. The ASG OHR stated that the policy on downsizing should address the staff representative concerns. She added that due to OHR and DOS' joint efforts they are seeing increasing openness to consider downsized candidates. A good number of staff have been placed. She also indicated that the downsizing policy was about to be released when a new tribunal judgement (staff must express interest, but they should be given priority) required that they revisit the draft and incorporate the new judgement.
- Follow up on adjustments to the Flexible Working Arrangements policy (as per SMC ad hoc of 29 April). The staff representatives inquired about updating the FWA policy. The policy was critical over the last year and a half, and they wish to discuss its enhancement sooner rather than later. The ASG OHR stated that they appreciate all the inputs and are considering these comments. She stated that management will bring a revised SGB to the SMC for consultation.
- Revision to ST/SGB/2018/1 (pending staff rep and management papers – per Ad hoc meeting of 1 July). The management representative explained that there are certain portions of the staff regulations and rules that must be updated. The staff representative indicated that when they were able to review the revision, they found that the changes were of a technical nature. They mentioned that the mandatory age of separation text is different from GA resolution and that the acquired rights language seemed to have been dropped. They noted that they were surprised to see a 2018 document being revised and not just annexes being updated. They requested that in future Management alert the staff representatives. The Management representative asked for bilateral discussion on the acquired rights language text. The staff representatives raised their concern relating to the return to premises. Some directors (OHCHR staff in the field); are demanding that staff return to the office despite dire conditions. They asked that this topic be tabled at the next SMC meeting.

CCISUA:

- Broadcast 6 August : Survey to inform staff federation position at upcoming ICSC session (16 to 27 August) that will look into a comprehensive assessment of the compensation package.
- Afghanistan : Broadcast on 23 August on petition regarding national staff in Afghanistan. CCISUA wrote several letters to SG. We wrote letters sent to HC and OCHA USG re staff in Afghanistan on 1 September. Responses were received from OHCHR and OCHA. This was also communicated to staff.
- We are also involved in the revision of the Statutes and the first meeting of a working group met to highlight areas that may require revision.

H Building : We also conducted a survey of staff regarding the H building and followed-up with the Administration in this regard (Broadcast of 1 July). In order to deal with staff concerns, we have held an urgent meeting with the SHP and the transition team and requested them to provide us with concrete solutions. Staff concerns were also forwarded to the Joint Committee on Health and Safety which met on the matter and issued recommendations to Management (Broadcast 16 July). This memo from the Joint Committee on Health and Safety was sent out as a broadcast to all staff (Broadcast 18 August). Management responded in a broadcast providing information on corrective actions to reduce noise, address issues related to temperature and humidity, deal with hygiene issues as well as emergency issues.

Racism : We organized an informal discussion on racism in the workplace on 16 June where staff had the opportunity to share their experiences as well as ideas on how to address this issue within the Organization. Another discussion was organized on 14 September. Broadcasts were issued in this regard. Both were very well-received. These discussions provided an opportunity for staff to share their experiences and raise awareness. Regarding the **UNOG Task Force on Racism in the Workplace** : Terms of Reference were drafted and a call for volunteers will be going out shortly.

Geneva Long Service Awards: By broadcast of 25 August, SC announced that these awards will be presented in 2021. Co-organized by the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council and the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Long Service Awards is an opportunity to collectively recognize and show our appreciation to those who have served the Organization. Staff members will be recognized for their outstanding achievement of having served the Organization for 10 years or more with a certificate of recognition and 25 years or more with a medal and certificate of recognition. No in-person ceremony is envisaged at this time due to the COVID-19 situation. However, holding a virtual gathering to mark this important milestone may be an option (more information will follow in due course). Staff are eligible for the Long Service Award if they have completed 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 or 35 years or more by 1 August 2021 excluding any periods of special leave without pay exceeding 30 days.

DCM-Languages Service :

- Updates were provided to the Languages Service on 17 June and 2 and 30 July. These updates informed staff of the status of the legal proceedings at the United Nations Dispute Tribunal. Following the decision that the complaints to UNDT were not receivable, we contacted the lawyers to appeal the decision of UNDT.
- We wrote to Michelle Keating (copying Kira Krugiklova) regarding the various task forces that have been established to implement the new workload standards and expressed our concern that no staff representatives were involved in these task forces. We reminded management that the outcomes of such task forces are subject to staff-management consultations in line with ST/SGB/274.
- By email dated 1 July, Ms. Michelle Keating confirmed that the outcome documents would indeed be shared. Ms. Kira Krugiklova further clarified that since the implementation of the workload standard is a global process, the formal consultation process is also a global one. She noted the Director General's letter dated 4 June, which stated that a Harmonization Group would be established to continue further consultations between both management and staff representatives, and that the ASG of DGACM confirmed that the Group is in the process of being set up shortly.
- We wrote to other staff unions on 5 July to update and coordinate and wrote to USG Abelian from the staff unions on the work of the task forces reminding him that all outcome documents are subject to SM consultations. We also discussed the issue of lobbying MSs, the responsibility of which falls largely on the NY Staff Union. The NY Staff Union was not keen on this as it is the MS themselves that have voted for increasing the workload and felt that it could be counterproductive.
- With respect to interpreters, the relevant staff unions met on 8 September to discuss continuing health concerns and options, as well as to prepare for the meeting with the ASG on 13 September.

Safety and Security Section: Issues relating to overtime pay (OT) and the situation of G-3s being stuck at the same level with no upward mobility will be discussed at the next JNC in September. Other matters relating to Appendix B will be discussed in a working group which is being established. Chiraz Baly agreed to be part of the working group with Brad Smith as alternate along with Philippe Duparc and Cedric Jacquot. At the follow-up JNC meeting, we discussed OT and G-3 situation. See JNC.

UNECE : We met with UNECE Staff Representatives with respect to staff concerns. We also requested feedback from staff on issues of concerns, met with several colleagues and met with the Executive Secretary of UNECE on 6 September to discuss these concerns. We raised both specific cases and general concerns, including on staff morale, lack of career advancement, gender parity, recruitment issues, flexible working arrangements, the internal mobility initiative and performance management.

We provided UNECE with all staff concerns in writing requesting feedback and clarifications. We will be following-up on the issue of establishing a sectoral assembly as regular communication with staff representatives would be useful. As there does seem to be a problem with morale and relations with some managers, we also suggested continue working with the Ombuds or engage a consultant to look at some of the staff-management problems with a view to improving the overall work environment. We also suggested that communications be sent to all staff on gender parity and geographic representation statistics on a regular basis. We additionally suggested appointing an alternate Departmental Focal Point for Women to look at the gender parity targets/policy and recruitment. While there may be a need to bring in expertise from the outside, we also highlighted that a balance should be struck to ensure that internal candidates also have the possibility for lateral moves and promotions in the first instance. Lastly, we suggested that managers show flexibility to allow staff to broaden professional experience through training, sabbaticals and temporary assignments, as well as with respect to flexible working arrangements in line with the policy.

OHCHR: We followed-up on the issue of the Departmental Focal Point for Women, including holding a meeting with the OHCHR Staff Committee. A survey was prepared to seek staff views on the selection of the Departmental Focal Point.

The survey indicated that 80% of the staff who responded preferred elections. This information was provided to OHCHR SC, OHCHR staff and to Management (20 August) and elections are being organized.

OCHA : We requested feedback from staff on issues of concerns for a meeting with management and met with several colleagues (28 June) on the relocation of staff to Istanbul. Following our request for more information, OCHA Human Resources organized a briefing on the relocation (8 July), which provided an opportunity for staff to ask questions and clarify concerns. UNOG SCC met with the USG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths. The Staff Council raised issues brought to our attention by staff following a call for inputs. A summary of the main points raised during the meeting and communicated to staff on 23 August is as follows:

- Concerning OCHA's decentralization process already set in motion, the USG confirmed that he cannot stop the process that has started but he made it clear that he did not foresee further decentralization exercises after the current one is completed.
- About the importance of the role of the Geneva office, the USG committed to strengthen the Geneva office by appointing a head of office and also by suspending the decision to transfer the D2 position from Geneva to New York.
- On contractual stability, we mentioned the inappropriate use of the temporary contract scheme that has led to situations where some staff have been on TJOs for many years and the precarity of their situation. We insisted on the importance of revisiting this practice in order to discontinue it and to ensure that TJOs are only used as originally intended. We also mentioned our concern on the restrictiveness of some job openings depriving staff from opportunities of career advancement. The USG promised to look into these issues.
- Regarding the "culture of fear" reported to us in numerous occasions, the USG reaffirmed the importance of changing the negative work environment in OCHA as he is convinced of the necessity of ensuring that staff feel comfortable and are able to express their views freely at the workplace.
- Finally, the USG welcomed a continuous dialogue with us in order to address issues of concern and we will also follow-up with OCHA senior management to go into details of staff issues raised.

Lists of broadcasts¹, communication and other activities:

- Broadcast 7 June (survey) on staff concerns regarding H building. Subsequent broadcasts were sent

¹ Dates of broadcasts may not reflect the actual date of the broadcast as there is often a delay between when we send the broadcasts to UNOG and the date that UNOG actually issues the broadcasts.

summarizing concerns, providing memo from Joint Committee on Health and Safety and responses from management (16 and 21 July, 8 and 26 August, and 10 September.

- Broadcast 9 June- Petition regarding staff of the Special Tribunal For Lebanon.
- Updates to Languages Service staff on 17 June, 2 July and 30 July;
- Broadcast on 16 June regarding JNC meeting held on 31 May;
- Broadcasts on 16 and 28 June on Let's Talk About Race Discussion (16 June) and feedback on the first discussion. Other broadcasts about the second discussion (6 and 14 September);
- Broadcast on 21 June regarding pension information session;
- Broadcast on 24 June regarding pension fund elections;
- Update to OHCHR staff on meeting with DHC on 24 June regarding Departmental Focal Point for Women (DFP). Communication with survey sent on 1 July. Subsequent update to OHCHR staff on results of survey (20 August);
- Communication to OCHA on 13 July requesting feedback on staff issues. Subsequent communication of 23 August on meeting with ASG;
- Broadcast on 8 August on pay and benefits survey for upcoming ICSC meeting;
- Broadcast on 23 August with petition regarding safety on UN staff in Afghanistan with a follow-up broadcast on 31 August;
- Broadcast on 25 August on Long-Term Service Awards;
- Broadcast on 31 August regarding overly restrictive JOs;
- CCISUA letter to SG dated 24 August on Afghanistan. Letters to HC and USG at OCHA dated 1 September on staff in Afghanistan;
- Communication of 7 September to ES of UNECE providing details of issues raised at meeting and suggestions on how to move forward, and communication of 8 September to UNECE staff on meeting held with management;
- Worked on a number of individual cases, including a complaint that OIOS has accepted to look into. Another OIOS case was referred back to UNECE to address.
