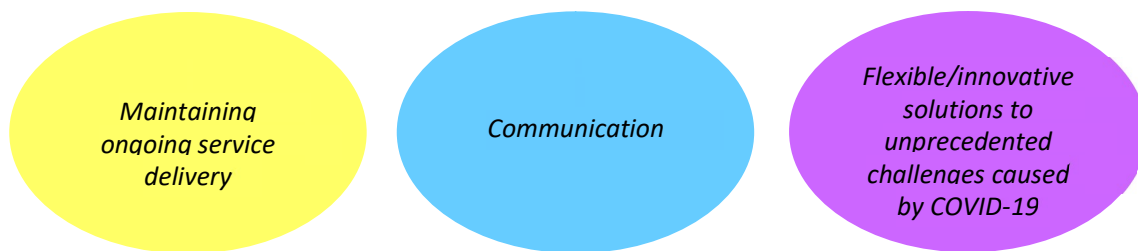


## The response by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the UN Common System

The ICSC's response centered around helping the UN Common System organizations and staff, in headquarters and in the field, to cope with and continue to deliver their mandates within the complex and health-threatening operating environment caused by COVID-19. We primarily focused on the support to organizations and staff as they managed the crisis response. This became top priority for ICSC that fell into three urgent areas:



While the spring session of the Commission scheduled for March 2020 had to be cancelled, a Commission session was held in October 2020 in Geneva, in hybrid mode.

A robust ICSC Business Continuity Plan (BCP), leveraging the cloud technology platform, and a quick and proactive organization enabled ICSC to adapt to the new reality with minimal disruption. Below are some highlights of the ICSC secretariat's responsiveness which serves as an example of service orientation and duty of care in these challenging times.

From the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak, the ICSC secretariat collaborated with WHO and the CEB HR Network regarding Danger Pay for health reasons. Following the declaration of the pandemic by WHO and the related WHO recommendation, Danger Pay was approved effective from 8 April for a limited group of UN staff directly involved in COVID-19 operations specified by WHO. This included calculation of danger pay amounts for locally recruited staff in all possible locations as a way of forward planning should the situation arise. To further facilitate the organizations' implementation of Danger Pay under these circumstances, the ICSC secretariat also issued "COVID-19, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)" developed in collaboration with WHO, and available in all official languages of the UN.

*"We are working hard and we are not leaving behind staff in the field and in headquarters. We keep going. We are with them. We feel what they feel. We do whatever is within our authority and we are not reluctant to react promptly to their requests."*

*Larbi Djacta, ICSC Chair*

The issuance of regular periodic updates continued smoothly, including issuance of monthly Post Adjustment multipliers, Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) Rates, quarterly Danger Pay, temporary hardship classifications and the approval of exceptional Rest and Recuperation lists as well as temporary hardship classifications for new duty stations. Various queries from the staff federations have also been addressed.

ICSC suspended cost-of-living surveys in response to COVID-induced disruptions of data collection efforts and introduced special measures regarding adjustments of net remuneration for staff in the Professional and higher categories. These measures ensure that net take-home pay (NTP) is not reduced regardless of macro-economic conditions, while increases in NTP are granted if warranted.

Also being considered is the possible use of statistical projections using official statistics rather than survey data for some of our calculations, in a manner consistent with best practice.

Requests for rescheduling of DSA surveys have been treated with understanding. At many locations, DSA surveys had to be postponed at the request of country teams. In this regard, the organizations have been requested to closely monitor the adequacy of current DSA rates after COVID-related restrictions are lifted so that these rates could be expeditiously reviewed if necessary.

With respect to the General Service and other locally recruited categories, the ICSC secretariat as a member of the Headquarters Steering Committee, contributed to the development of measures to be implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on local labour markets and the travel capacity of salary survey specialists. These measures include conducting surveys remotely or postponing them with the approval of the ICSC Chair and, on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with local salary survey committees, changing the interim adjustment modality from a mini survey to indexation where reliable data are available.

The ICSC secretariat provided inputs toward system-wide activities related to the impact of COVID-19 as it relates to women, namely: UN Entity briefs on Gender and COVID-19; The Secretary-General's Policy brief: The impact of COVID-19; and The Meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) Working Group on Gender and COVID-19.

As duty of care and wellbeing of staff have become increasingly important in the current situation, the ICSC secretariat provided expert assistance with the design and administration of the UN System COVID19 Staff Health and Wellbeing Survey 2020 which was successfully launched by several organizations in May/June resulting in over 5,000 responses. Support with reporting and analysis will continue to be provided to the organizations.

Where scheduled meetings and working groups cannot take place due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, consideration is being given to virtual meetings to the extent possible. The tripartite mid-year and annual reviews of duty stations under the mobility and hardship scheme and designation of non-family duty stations took place virtually in June and December 2020, respectively.

Communication and coordination with the organizations, through the CEB HR Network or bilaterally, as well as with external counterparts and partners, were enhanced in order to provide timely policy advice and solutions, exercising agility and flexibility wherever possible. The ICSC website has been updated to include a section on COVID-19 Impact Updates for ease of reference.

As part of its research and planning functions, the ICSC secretariat will continue to focus on areas that are directly impacted by this unprecedented global crisis. As the situation continues to evolve, the outbreak may be an opportunity to accelerate longer-term solutions and improved methodologies, policies and procedures for the Commission's consideration. In such times of uncertainty and concern, the ICSC's support to the UN Common System organizations in delivering their mandates and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is paramount.

