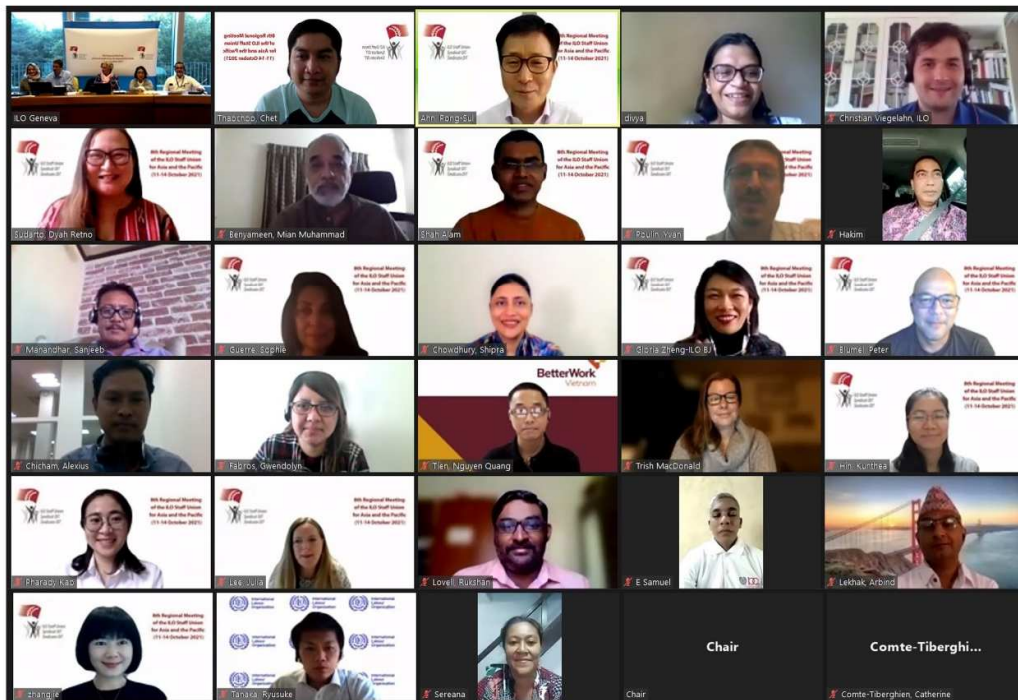


8th Regional Meeting of the ILO Staff Union for Asia-Pacific (virtual)

11-14 October 2021



8th Regional Meeting of the ILO Staff Union for Asia and the Pacific (11-14 October 2021)



First Day, 11 October 2021

Agenda:

- Welcome (Catherine and Pong-Sul)
- Self-introduction (all the participants)
- Cross-reporting (SU Representative in Asia-Pacific)
 - Roles and responsibilities of SU representatives (Catherine)
- Use of SU funds (Severine and Yvan)

Opening by Pong-Sul, Ahn

The meeting began with information from Pong-Sul Ahn, the ILO's Asia Pacific Regional Titular Member.

In his initial information, Pong Sul informed a number of things that have been discussed and will be deepened during the meeting. These are as follows:

- Affection of covid-19 pandemic and need to respect for COs' autonomous decision on RTO according to the guidelines of the government, WHO, UNCT and ILO.
- Recruitment selection issues and need for making union engagement in R&S universal.
- The adverse impact of the pandemic on local salary surveys like in the case of Vietnam.
- Discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority are observed in our workplace and a zero tolerance policy needs to be strictly applied.
- Getting the staff union in the region stronger with an increase of the memberships.
- Mutual trust and dialogue between the staff union and management will benefit all.
- Concerns with security and welling of staff in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Greetings from Catherine, Staff Union - GVA

The things that were conveyed by Catherine were as follows:

- Thanked the participants for attending. She also welcomes the new board;
- Explained the procedure, and the purpose of the meeting;
- Encouraged active participants to have an opinion and voice. This last point is important since the mandate is given to democratically elected representatives.

Introduction

Pong-Sul Ahn led the introductions. A total of 24 representatives from 14 duty stations introduced themselves. The fourteen duty stations are as follows: Bangkok, Beijing, Pnom Penh, Colombo, Dhaka, Hanoi, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kathmandu, Manila, New Delhi, Tokyo, Yangoon, and Suva.

In their introduction, they hope that the meeting:

- can be useful for understanding each other and knowing the situation and circumstances as well as activities at various duty stations;
- become a learning tool;
- can also encourage capacity building and member welfare;
- encourage members to think out of the box;
- challenge members to find ways and ensure welfare of members
- share voices

- discuss and learn among the participants

Based on the introduction, Pong-Sul explained that the composition of the board this time was very diverse in various aspects, namely:

- Combination of gender (males and females)
- Good combination of old and new committees
- Different projects and functionalities

Union Reporting Staff

Based on information obtained by the Secretariat, as many as 10 duty stations have submitted reports.

The presentation will be made only by those who submitted the report.

The presentation was agreed to last five minutes

Prior to reporting, Catherine made a quiz containing four questions, namely:

- Year the ILO SU was formed
- Current number of ILO SU members worldwide
- Number of region holders
- Number of union members

The quiz aims to share information about the history of the ILO's SU.

Staff union cross reporting

The reporting by each offices are on the following info and update:

- Introduction of field Staff Union Committee (SUC) names
- Members' data (numbers, gender, funding status, etc.)
- Summary of major issues (salary survey, performance appraisal, performance appraisal, reclassification post, SHIF, pension fund, work environment, labour relation, and relation with other Staff Association of UNs in the country)

Due to many rich information and important issues presented by SU Rep offices, the cross-reporting presentation take a bit longer time; and because there were still two (2) upcoming sessions in the planned Agenda, only the following offices shared their presentation and issues:

1. Bangkok
2. Beijing
3. Colombo
4. Dhaka

The Meeting take note of all the issues raised, and agreed that some recurring issues which happened in several offices, as well as the questions & queries raised, will be discussed further in other session more depth in the next days of the Regional Meeting. More detail info of each Offices in their Activity Reports (for those who already submitted prior to the Meeting) would be shared to all participants. (Note: Done – emailed by Ahn Pong-Sul)

Some of issues that shared by most offices, that may be discussed further, are:

- Reclassification
- salary survey (comprehensive and interim) and method of data gathering
- Teleworking and travel in (or to) duty station during Covid-19
- Working condition and staff status in DC projects (including training opportunities)
- Communication related to labour relation and administration
- Case by case work environment in field offices
- Seeking clarification on knowledge about ILO Staff Union, capacity building for new elected SU rep and SUC; handling concern and complaint from members

Guide for the ILO Field Staff representative – Roles, rights and responsibilities (Catherine)

In her presentation, Catherine discussed the following:

- “Speak with one voice, one Union”
→ One Union = same values, same principles, same ways of operating.
- Knowing well how the Union is functioning and structured is important.
→ Know, study and learn the Financial Rules, Staff Regulations, related IGDS; Know the internal structure and communication hierarchy, so will be able to reach out for support and help in regional and/or global level.
- Organising the Committee in the duty station
→ it’s important to conduct regular meetings with pre-established agenda and to have record of proceedings in the archive. This is also form of responsibilities and coordination with our SU constituents who already elected us.
- Explaining about Role of the Regional Titular Member and members of SUC in the field (Titular and Substitutes structure)
- Building a trustful relationship with the membership and increasing the number of union members
→ SU representatives must be able to convey the values of SU (including confidentiality, integrity)
→ SU reps and SUC should helping SU members by informing rules, information and enhance capacity and opportunity for dialogue. Showing them what are the options for any issues.
- Relationship with the Administration, and tips/guidance on how to perform staff union-management relations

The presentation file with more detailed info will be shared to all participants. (Note: Done – emailed by Julia, SYNDICAT)

Some Q&A – response to questions from participants:

- For a complain, we need to solve case by case; common collected problems to share with management and HR shows the magnitude of the issues more than an individual case. We need to have conversation with the concerned person in the best way to support and encourage the concerned person to share; otherwise the SUC will not be able to support effectively.
- On the DC project contract status and job security of staff: when the project duration ends the Project Manager and staff already aware of the situation before. Re-recruitment of the staff must be based on the performance of staff – and the best candidate fit in with the scope of work, and it is out of SU involvement.
- Local SU committee needs to persuade and convince the members to openly share their personal issue relating to their work, or perhaps may can organize a non-official meeting to share the issue with other SU members.

Financial Management of the ILO Staff Union (Severine and Yvan)

In her presentation, Severine discussed the following:

- Ground rules of managing and reporting SU fund is: SU rules and circular

→ Rules

- ▶ *Article 29 mandates the Committee to manage the finances of the union in accordance with the rules*
- ▶ *Chapter V devoted to financial provisions, with in particular:*
 - Art. 31: destination of resources*
 - Art. 32: description of the emergency fund, union action fund and legal action fund*
 - Art. 33: supply and amount of funds*
 - Art. 34: Advisory Group on Reserve Fund Management*
 - Art. 35: Audit committee*

→ Use of Staff Union members' dues retained by ILO field offices (Circular SU/CIRC/1/Rev.2 September 2018)

- (a) Training of staff and/or staff representatives*
- (b) General activities (day-to-day and inter-agency expenses)*
- (c) Support for regional activities involving the Union*
- (d) Social and cultural activities involving the Union1*
- (e) The dues paid to the Federation of United Nations Staff Associations (FUNSA)*

- Responsibilities of the Committee and treasurer for HQ and in the field.
- Role of treasurer and treasurer reporting

DAY 2, 12 October 2021

Agenda

- Training session on Conflict resolution – grievance handling (Chloé)
- Q&A

DAY 3, 13 October 2021

Agenda

- Overview of current issues discussed with the administration (Catherine and Geneva team)
15 minute break
- Topics for discussion: 1. Career development 2. DC projects and contractual issues, 3. Staff mobility 4. Security
- The role of SUC in Recruitment and Selection (Pong-Sul)

A. Continuation of SU reporting and overview of current issues discussed with the administration

- Review of Day 2 discussions by Catherine- on how was the learning
- Reports presented by other country as per SU reps' opinion
- Most of the country has submitted the report except
- Hanoi started presentation first (country update)
- Jakarta next
 - Based on the presentation Catherine emphasised on the social Dialogue between managers and staff. If Managers understand this, it will make changes.
- Kathmandu: shared the presentation and Catherine mentioned to discuss later some of the issues
- Delhi: Staff development fund and re-classification of job need to be clarified.
- Suva: Catherine: covid has a lot impact, certainly, there will be some change in near future....?
- Yangon: colleagues are very stressed due to national issues –threats of life and livelihood
 - Catherine: the situation is very bad in Myanmar and Afghanistan. The political condition is a burden to the staff; we will try our best to support them.
- Manila: Catherine- good practice can be shared how to organise union members... there should be some monitoring framework
- Pakistan:

Reports were acknowledged both for the information shared including good practices from which other members and offices may learn from. Catherine noted that Asia and Pacific region is quite active and thus it is good to see lots of contributions from the region.

BREAK

B. Topics for discussion:

Tele working and the extended hours

- Tele-working arrangements for members working outside their duty stations and those working away from their hometowns but required to stay in lodging nearer to duty

stations. Discussions revolved on seeking to arrive at some form of flexibility given the pandemic situation.

- Negotiations regarding tele-working arrangements in post-pandemic situation or when RTO is implemented should bear in mind one ILO principles, ensuring work-life balance, OSH
- SU can prepare for the negotiations by collecting information based on local practices as to see what works and does not work in terms of the package of support to be provided to staff in teleworking arrangement

Merit increment and Career development

- All staff including RB and TC should get it in an equal manner. The procedure should be clear, transparent and have to be published. We have to work on that. Right now, only the managers are getting this award. It should be linked with EoC performance and its must be consider the score 4and above, not less than 4.

Job Classification

- Reclassification of positions is more on the complexity of duties and the level of responsibility and not of having additional tasks outside a staff members' job description. Important for SU to know the applicable IGDS and the process that it entails.
- IRG nomination for the region will need to resume.

Local Salary Survey

- Presentation on the LSS
- Increasingly getting more complex to do the LSS given the limitation of getting data from comparators. Option explored was to purchase company data such as those from Mercer. This option, however, is still not reliable and may eventually be disadvantageous because SU will tend to have lesser control on the data to be used for salary comparisons.

DAY 4, 14 October 2021

Agenda:

- Staff development funds, career development (Carlos, Catherine, Q&A)
- DC project contractual issues (Severine, Catherine, Q&A)
- Recruitment and selection (Pong-Sul, Catherine, Q&A)
- SHIF (Catherine, Q&A)
- **Staff development funds, career development (Carlos, Catherine, Q&A)**
- There is a collective agreement on personal professional development plans. A Joint Training Council with parity membership of Administration and ILO Staff Union was established more than ten years ago, but it became became dormant afterwards due to issues related to information sharing about the staff development budget. The Council

came recently back to life and agreed on a ToR. The first meetings of the reinvigorated Council took place this year. The current topic that is discussed in the Council is the learning strategy/policy as well as the broader HR strategy.

- There is a common practice to often stigmatize colleagues who are on DC contracts, when it comes to staff development. Statements such as “you cannot use these funds because you are on DC” are common. However, there is an adopted practice: If a colleague has been on a DC project for at least 3 years, access to SDF is possible. If there are any inconsistencies with this practice, Pong-Sul and HQ may offer support.
- The SU should not give up if the use of SDF is refused to one colleague. Staff needs to know that support is available from the SU. Any refusal should be duly justified in writing. The local SU can provide support; if the issue is not getting sorted out, it can be raised with the AP Regional Titular Member or even with the global SUC and the SU provided successfully support in the past. There does not seem to be interest to invest in DC staff, despite the fact practically DC staff very often stay on within the organization – a decision needs to be taken at the political level to change this practice.
- The amount of SDF for an office is calculated on the basis of costs for RB staff, which is one of the reasons why SDF is mainly for RB staff’s individual training. The SU has a right to request a discussion with management about the use of SDF, in order to have more transparency and information. Strategic discussions in the beginning of a biennium might make more sense than discussions on an ad-hoc manner on a case-by-case basis.
- The practice at ILO-Manila is to evaluate each SDF training request in a joint committee and the committee needs to elaborate the explanations when rejecting the SDF request in the rejection box on the SDF form. The monitoring of the amount of available SDF funds in the Office is possible through IRIS.
- Concerns were expressed that National Officers’ application for P positions might not always be properly considered. This is one type of barrier within the organization – there are other barriers between departments, between HQ and fields etc. This particular issue is currently addressed during the review of generic job descriptions at HQ, but it could take a long time to achieve some tangible results. Based on recent negotiations about the JD, we have come in principle to an agreement that a different type of international experience will in the future be set as requirement, after the next JD is going to be implemented. This issue is a top priority and also relates to minimum requirements for language skills or experiences at the institutional level. However, “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”.

- **DC project – contractual issues (Severine, Catherine, Q&A)**

- We are one ILO – DC staff are now the majority in the ILO (latest data as of December 2020), especially in the field. The challenge is that there is a big diversity among DC staff, depending on the type of funding, specific project etc. In this context, we need to be careful when using “DC contract” as terminology; legally, there is nothing like a “DC contract”, but there are only FT, ST and WLT contracts.
- The revision of the global ILO contract policy is not happening, even though it should be a priority. It was expressed by colleagues that, in any kind of discussions, the SU bureau should include DC staff in order to make sure that negotiations applicable to DC colleagues take into account their realities and challenges. The SUC Geneva has a working group on technical cooperation which includes colleagues working on projects or PSI from the field and HQ, in order to exchange experience and determine priorities.
- The provision of individual support, also through legal action through the SU lawyer, can help create a precedent on the equality of rights for DC staff.
- DC colleagues are on FT funding. Problems arise when funds from the project are not coming on time and the Office extends contracts on a short-term basis (for 1, 2 or 6 months). The criteria that the Office applies, when deciding about the extensions, is not always clear and it is sometimes not sure what the justifications are. Normally an FT contract is to be renewed for one year.
- How to be more inclusive and make DC staff feel to be true part of the ILO? How to advocate that being part of the SU is an advantage? This is especially relevant in Offices like Dhaka and others, where almost all staff is on DC projects.
- DC colleagues are often very much focused on how they can secure their future within the organization. There are also differences in expectation, depending on the duration of the project on which colleagues are employed. The question was raised: Can there be a natural, automatic transition for colleagues between projects? Personal lobbying efforts should not play a role.
- Article 4.2 mentions clearly that ILO experience should be taken into account in the selection of candidates. Article 4.2 also mentions direct selection for DC projects, while HRD often organizes a competition in practice, which sometimes does not seem to be a real competition. The SU should be involved in the recruitment process also for DC projects.
- The chances that complaints in relation to recruitment of DC staff are successful are very slim, given current ILO staff regulations. Nevertheless, raising issues as SU makes sense, as the SU will have more arguments to change the rules, the more issues are raised.
- According to Catherine, the SU should seek to be involved in the short-listing, should have a say on the JDs and should also be present in the panels. This should be decided at the regional level.
- The SU is powerful, especially in Asia and the Pacific, where we have many members. Some good practices are available in the Americas and Africa; so we should be able to get what we want in this region as well.

- The issue of the capacity of the SU in terms of time commitment to participate fully in the recruitment process was also raised. SU Geneva is ready to coordinate support if needed.

- **Recruitment and selection (Pong-Sul, Catherine, Q&A)**
 - Reference was made to Article 4.2 of the staff regulation that covers the issue of Recruitment and Selection. It was observed that one of the key agenda of the Staff Union is to promote Decent Work and rights of staff members. However, there are instances and examples to suggest that the organization needs to do a lot to make the working conditions decent for the staff.

 - The working conditions for staff members in DC projects need consistent attention. DC staff constitutes a large proportion of staff in the organization. The Staff Union has to fight for defending and protecting a meaningful role in the Recruitment and Selection process, including endorsement of JDs, shortlisting, as appropriate, participation in the panel- as observer and/or as panelist.

 - The SU agrees that the recruitment and selection process should be fair and transparent. In case of direct selection, which is allowed as per the staff regulations, for filling the XBTC positions, the staff union should be involved so that the eligible colleagues get priority.

 - HR should have a system of mapping the upcoming DC positions and matching with the eligible colleagues available internally to fill the positions before filling the position with external candidates. The Regional Titular has engaged with several CO Directors, RD and HR Partner in the past and raised this issue, however the outcome has not been satisfactory. This needs to be taken up consistently with the management.

 - The level of SU engagement and the process followed in Geneva is different from that in the region/ country offices. The full application of the Collective Bargaining Agreement is still to take place. The SUC should use the CBA for negotiations and reference purposes. The idea of having a collective agreement at the regional level was also put forward.

 - It was pointed out that to have a CBA at the regional level then it will be important to have complete information about the situation in each duty station and the role played by the respective SUCs, whether they have full rights or are only selectively involved e.g. as panel observer and what principles would guide their engagement.

 - The benefit of creating a pool of SU observers in the region, for potential participation in the recruitment and selection process (in particular during the interviews) across different duty stations, was discussed. The idea was welcomed by the participants.

- Capacity building of SU members to effectively carry out their role in the recruitment and selection process was also discussed and welcomed.
- Becoming a full-fledged member generates responsibility including maintaining confidentiality of information; being aware of and the instances of conflict of interest and acting accordingly so that the confidence of the members is established.
- There are mixed experiences of SU involvement in the recruitment and selection process, across country offices. Not all the SUCs are involved in all the stages of the process- review of JDs, shortlisting, participation as panel member and/ or observer.
- It was opined that SU involvement in shortlisting can be a manifestation of observing fair recruitment; however, it was also pointed out that it may be too much of work for the SUC besides, caution should be exercised to avoid getting into the issue of conflict of interest.
- There are good examples of SUCs full involvement in the process and good working relations with the HR/ Management by proactive and timely turnaround to expedite the recruitment process.
- **SHIF (Catherine, Q&A)**
 - Participants pointed out that members have been mentioning about the difficulties with SHIF. However, it would be important to hold specific information-sharing sessions about SHIF for the country offices.
 - It was explained that SHIF contribution/ deduction is mandatory. It is an entitlement to the ILO Staff and should be availed. SHIF contribution and membership is automatic for ILO officials. It is based on solidarity so individual withdrawal cannot be authorized.
 - One of the key difficulties pointed out was that the SHIF card is not recognized by many countries in Asia and Pacific.
 - Concerns about response from SHIF during emergency hospitalization, especially due to time difference between countries, was also raised.
 - Another difficulty highlighted was that SHIF does not allow prescription in local languages. This should be addressed, instead of just rejecting the claim the member should be given an opportunity to explain, get the translation.
 - The secondary insurance bill should be accepted for submission online but SHIF often just rejects such bills.