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ARE THE MEETINGS
of the future
hybrid?

THE CHALLENGES
of being a
non-traditional
parent at
the UN

A PEEK
into the
workplace
of the
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Is teleworking a golden opportunity or a curse? This question is giving rise to an ongoing debate.

On the one hand, some welcome the possibility of spending more time with the family and less time commuting; on the other hand, some have doubts about the effectiveness of this type of arrangement and its impact on the teamwork. Not to mention that, for many employees, the workplace remains the only means to interact socially with others.

This debate took on a new dimension following the COVID-19 pandemic. Overnight, thousands of civil servants and other employees around the world found themselves under “house arrest”.

The excitement of the early days has given way to questions. And, what if teleworking isn't the panacea? Many predict that hybrid work would become the “new normal”, i.e. the combination of on-site work and telework. However, to date, no consensus has emerged on the sustainability of this new model. Only time will tell us what is possible and what is not.

In this issue of UN Today, we give an overview of the UN policy on flexible working arrangements (or teleworking) and its implementation at UN Geneva, taking into account the views of management and staff. We also look at experiences in the private sector, to give a wider picture of what is undoubtedly a critical question of the moment.



Opportunité en or ou malédiction, le télétravail n'en finit pas de faire débat.

D'un côté, on salue la possibilité de passer plus de temps en famille et moins de temps dans les transports ; de l'autre, on s'interroge sur l'efficacité de ce type d'arrangement, sur ses conséquences en ce qui concerne l'esprit d'équipe.

Sans compter que pour un certain nombre d'employés, le travail en présentiel reste le seul mode d'interaction sociale.

Cette polémique a pris une nouvelle dimension suite à la pandémie de la Covid 19. Du jour au lendemain, partout dans le monde, des milliers de fonctionnaires et autres employés se sont pratiquement retrouvés « assignés à résidence ».

L'engouement des premiers temps a cédé la place à diverses interrogations. Et si le télétravail n'était pas la panacée ? Nombreux sont ceux qui préconisent de recourir à une forme hybride, une « nouvelle normalité » qui combinerait travail in situ et télétravail. Aucun consensus n'a encore émergé quant à la viabilité de ce nouveau modèle. Affaire à suivre donc.

Dans ce numéro, nous avons passé en revue la politique adoptée par l'ONU en matière de télétravail et son application à l'ONU Genève, et pris en compte l'optique des membres de l'administration et du personnel. Nous nous sommes aussi intéressés aux expériences menées dans le secteur privé afin de se faire une idée plus claire sur ce qui est certes la question de l'heure.

Prisca Chaoui

Editor-in-chief / Rédactrice en chef



Flexibility doesn't necessarily mean low productivity

Model policy on flexible work

We explore the impact of the Task Force on the future of the UN Workforce

Jaime Kearney*

The HLCM Task Force on the Future of the UN Workforce was established in 2019 with the goal of anticipating and making proposals for the organization to adapt to challenges stemming from array of external factors, including social and economic issues, emerging technologies, and changing political situations in order to equip the organization to remain a competitive employer of the future.

The Task Force divided its goals into three main areas, one of which was to explore new ways of working. The objective was to propose elements to

foster an enabling culture and positive employee experience from multiple perspectives, including leadership, people management, flexible work arrangements, transparency and dialogue, with due consideration for inclusion and diversity.

The Task Force set out with the aim to propose common principles and guidelines for UN entities, while refraining from applying one cultural approach to *all* entities, in recognition of the diversity in the UN system. The Task Force also ensured to pay special attention to the critical role of leadership, particularly encouraging

senior leaders to welcome new ways of viewing leadership by empowering teams and allowing for flexibility and innovation. It also sought to assist in preparing UN leaders to steer the transition of their organizations and workforce towards the future of work.

Flexible work is underpinned by the ethos and guiding principles of the Senior Leadership Commitments, which were developed to guide organizations and their global workforces towards the future of work. The Commitments invite senior leaders to welcome new ways of viewing leadership by empowering teams and allowing for flexibility and innovation. These Commitments are grounded within the Leadership Framework and the people-centred approach that is also central to flexible work.

“ Flexible work brings various benefits to personnel ”

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Task Force refocused its work on the immediate impacts - both positive and negative - and on the UN ways of working, their implications for the future, and how to derive important lessons learned to be applied towards that future. The Task Force decided to place the emphasis on assessing our current way of working – during the crisis – in order to develop a policy framework to support the new paradigm – a new model policy on flexible work.

The pandemic ignited a large-scale social experiment: the majority of the global UN workforce switched to working remotely in the course of a few weeks. The UN Secretariat, as well as other organizations of the UN system, experienced, albeit under exceptional crisis circumstances, the realities of Alternate Working Arrangements on the largest scale ever, i.e., full-time remote work for the vast majority of their personnel, with only minimal personnel at many duty stations continuing to enter the UN premises to perform essential on-site functions.

This experience brought a wealth of knowledge and lessons learned to multiple areas impacted by remote working, including not only the organization’s ability to deliver on its mandated

activities, but also on UN personnel’s well-being and mental health. Various surveys were conducted by management and staff representatives within and among UN system organizations, such as the UN-wide COVID-19 Pulse Check survey. Results showed that working remotely largely worked well, helped to build trust and destigmatize flexible working arrangements. Some colleagues even reported better coordination and teamwork, as the physical separation of remote working demands more explicit communication than before.

“ The Task Force also undertook to pay special attention to the critical role of leadership ”

Traditionally, organizations have addressed issues such as employee engagement, culture, performance management, rewards and learning, and career development as separate independent topics, with solutions designed and delivered by different HR divisions and accompanied by a set of tools and programmes to drive and measure the impact. Recent research, however, suggests that employees today see the picture differently. Employees look at everything that happens at work as an integrated experience that impacts daily life in and outside the workplace, including overall physical, emotional, professional and financial well-being.

Flexible work brings various benefits to personnel, from reduced commute time to an increased empowerment and overall freedom to organize their lives more flexibly, while often delivering more effectively. Strongly related to this is the technology experience as an enabler of the broader employee experience. Making the use of technology an attractive experience for employees during working hours, as it already is in their personal lives, is essential in today’s competitive talent market. At the same time, we must be mindful of the need to protect the right of staff to disconnect, in order to prevent excessive encroachment into their private lives and safeguard the health and well-being, by not being overly reliant on technology as the only solution to a balanced work culture.

UN system model policy on flexible work

Flexible work has been incorporated into several common system initiatives, including in the context of the UN Secretary-General’s System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, the Enabling Environment Guidelines, and the Field-Specific Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System. It is a powerful tool to promote work-life harmony for all and to complement both the mandates of the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy, and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, among others.

“ **UN System organizations have been strongly encouraged to incorporate the policy into their own realities** ”

The UN System Model Policy on Flexible Work, which was one of the key elements identified by the Task Force to foster an enabling organizational culture and positive employee experience, was endorsed with submission of the final version to the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) at its 42nd Session, which

was held virtually in October 2021. It deals with various options for flexible working, including part-time work which may also be adopted to facilitate work-life harmony.

The Model Policy sets out a number of high-level principles and provides a harmonized framework for UN system organizations to build on and operationalize. For this reason, a balance was kept between high-level principles and the level of detail required in a UN model policy document. Specific effort was made to make the policy as equitable and inclusive as possible from a gender perspective, while at the same time compatible with the high-level principles approach. The principles are:

Trust and accountability

Flexible work is based on mutual trust, which is key to a successful professional relationship between managers and their team members. Managers should clearly communicate to personnel on their responsibilities and agreed deliverables, including performance expectations and timelines.

Management by results

The work of all personnel, including those who engage in flexible work, must be planned and evaluated in accordance with the organization’s internal policies on performance management, including results-based evaluation and provision



Flexibility at the workplace is key for the life-work balance of the employees

of clear and timely feedback. The use of flexible work should not result in an increased workload for other personnel.

People-centered approach

Flexible work options should put the well-being and health (both mental and physical) and the safety and security of personnel at the centre. Organizations should ensure the availability of necessary tools, guidance and training to all UN personnel, and in particular to managers, to allow an effective, inclusive and consistent application of the policy across the organization.

Resourcing and support

Flexible work should normally not result in additional costs. However, active reallocation of resources may be required, for example for the provision of laptops or other equipment. Organizations may decide to cover certain costs and provide other relevant support to personnel.

“ Organizations must strive towards a lighter and greener environmental footprint ”

Flexibility for field contexts

Field locations may face more challenges in taking advantage of flexible work options due to the expectations of physical presence by host governments, beneficiaries and external partners. Flexible work should be adapted to respond to duty station-specific realities and needs, in accordance with the organization’s applicable policies. Flexible work can help to support the physical and mental health of personnel serving in challenging work environments and mitigate the risk of burnout and absences.

Organizations with a field presence, particularly those in hardship duty stations, may consider operationalising flexible work to meet their needs, for example by establishing hybrid teams consisting of personnel based within and outside the duty station on a rotational basis in accordance with the organization’s applicable policy, mindful of particular local contexts.

Gender parity, diversity and inclusion

Flexible work helps organizations, retain and

motivate highly talented personnel who reflect the diversity of a global workforce. Flexible work is part of the institutional support for gender equality and helps break down barriers to employment, including among persons with disabilities. Organizations should both promote and implement flexible work with a view to diversifying their talent pools, thereby contributing to gender parity, diversity and inclusion.

Ecological responsibility

Organizations must strive towards a lighter and greener environmental footprint and ensure that sustainability and earth-friendly measures are incorporated into all facets of their operations. This is also an important factor to take into account when considering the feasibility of flexible work.

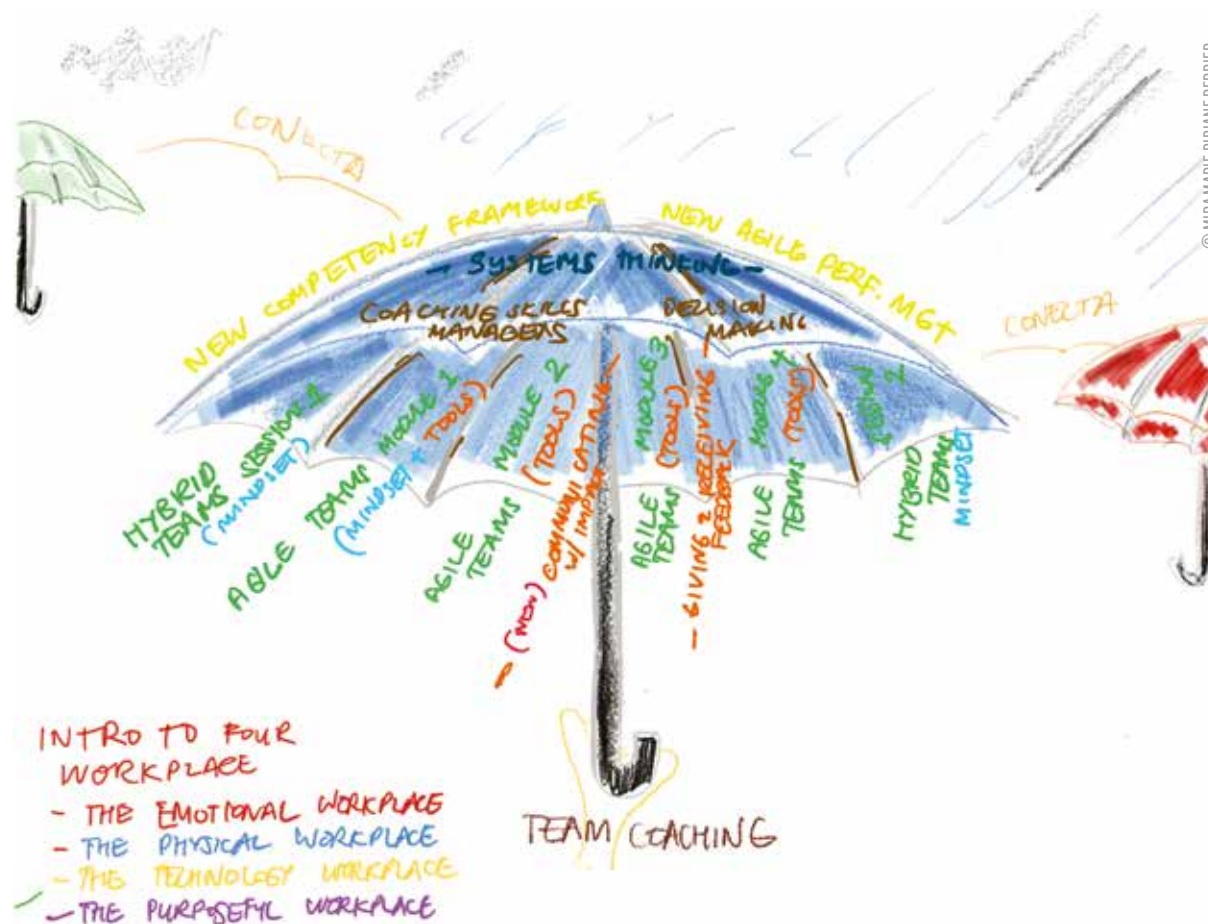
Flexibility is a mindset that goes beyond the particular ways organizations structure their work; it is ultimately about providing personnel with a supportive environment that enables them to deliver their best while putting people/personnel and their well-being at the centre.

UN System organizations have been strongly encouraged to incorporate the policy into their own realities, based on their specific contexts and operational needs and necessities. Field-based organizations may need to identify innovative solutions to ensure all their personnel, regardless of location, hardship, grade, or level, enjoy flexibility and work-life harmony.

Organizations have also been requested to put in place accountability mechanisms to collect gender-disaggregated data to analyse how the UN workforce avail themselves of flexibility and allow for corrective actions, if required. Explanatory notes were included in the policy to direct organizations to additional resources to promote an enabling environment for all personnel.

As we enter the “Next Normal”, whichever shape this may take, it is the Task Force’s hope that the policy will guide UN organizations to become more agile, effective and inclusive in the fulfillment of our mandates, and in how we treat our most valued asset: our personnel. ▶

* Jaime Kearney is Administrative Officer at the United Nations.



Blue umbrella representing various initiatives of UNOG and the #NewWork team

FWA at UN Geneva before, during and after COVID-19

Well before the pandemic, UNOG encouraged flexibility as a way to foster work-life balance. Today, we are looking at ways to embrace the Next Normal

Nataliya Myronenko *

A policy for flexible working arrangements (FWA) has existed at the UN Secretariat since 2003. However, while many staff were working remotely, there was no consistent approach to authorising and using different FWA options. There was bias and resistance among some managers and staff due to a lack of understanding of available choices, trust vis-à-vis teleworking colleagues, or understanding of how to manage staff working from home. Some managers may also

not have known how to provide equitable access to FWA among team members, while ensuring that team's effectiveness and dynamics were not negatively impacted.

To effectively deliver on our mandate in the changing work environment, we needed to adapt the way we conceived our work and the workplace. To address negative perceptions of teleworking and other FWA options, UNOG and the #NewWork team

implemented several initiatives to support and promote flexible working arrangements as a way for managers and staff to improve work-life balance. Access to different types of FWA was also seen as an important means of promoting gender equality.

In 2019, two new workshops were introduced: Working Remotely (FWA) for Staff and Managing Flexible Teams (FWA) for Managers. The workshops aimed to facilitate the shift of mindset and ensure that individuals, teams and the organization are able to make the most out of flexible working arrangements. They encouraged staff and managers to embrace flexibility as a tool to achieve better results and move away from management by presence. The launch of the workshops coincided with the issuance of the updated FWA policy.

“ The pandemic served as catalyst for a widespread adoption of remote work ”

Both workshops received positive feedback and contributed to the preparedness of staff and managers to full-time remote work when the pandemic struck in March 2020. UN Geneva personnel were able to adapt quickly to full-time remote work, in part thanks to these earlier efforts. Well-functioning IT systems and the deployment and adoption of IT tools among staff also enabled business continuity, along with the support provided by colleagues in the Information and Communication Technology Service (ICTS).

During COVID-19, UN Geneva focused on providing support to staff and managers in various formats: through regular COVID updates, the IT support mentioned above, and publishing tips for remote work, among other initiatives.

UNOG personnel were invited in May 2020 to give feedback on their experience of teleworking during the first COVID-19 lockdown. The survey results shed light on staff well-being and provided some interesting insights:

- Staff were positive overall when describing their own and team experience, perceived the situation as an opportunity, and felt supported by their managers.
- Staff and teams maintained a high level of motivation during the entire period.



- IT support ensured business continuity, enabled effective teleworking, and was key in allowing staff to maintain quality interactions with their teams.

- There was a general feeling of “too much”: extended duration of confinement, too many things to juggle, too many/long meetings, too much time spent working in front of a screen, too much uncertainty.

Staff at large generally experienced an increased level of flexibility and autonomy, which contributed to maintaining a high level of motivation and, hence, productivity. In addition, the shared vulnerability we experienced has given us a great opportunity to see the ‘whole’ person with kids, pets, and in a home office context.

As with many other organizations, the pandemic served as catalyst for a widespread adoption of remote work. Of course, this does not mean that all of us should be working remotely full-time. Nothing can replace face-to-face interactions, especially when it comes to building relations, holding multilateral negotiations, or simpler things, like having a chat with colleagues over coffee, or coming up with a new idea after an impromptu encounter with a colleague from another team. Nevertheless, this unprecedented work experience of large-scale telework showed staff and managers that we were collectively able to remain productive and adapt to the unknown.

In examining the impact of the pandemic on workplace trends and realising ‘the way things were’ is not what most of us want anymore, UN Geneva and the #NewWork team have been working to support the new workplace models that are emerging. In summer 2021, #NewWork team conducted another survey to find out how perceptions have changed about flexible working arrangements and how staff envision the post-pandemic future. The survey showed there has been an important culture shift within our organization, and a significantly increased interest in the use of FWA. We have proven teleworking can work for many teams and can provide many benefits to colleagues and the organization. The COVID



Many staff would like to have greater flexibility to define the way they work

experience has rapidly increased our adoption of digital collaboration tools and pushed teams to adapt their processes to a new reality.

There are many benefits to flexible working, but also challenges — such as maintaining connectedness and collaboration, protecting healthy work-life boundaries when these can become easily blurred, and a need for teams to

UNOG FWA APP:

One of the challenges with implementing the FWA policy was recording and processing FWA requests efficiently and effectively. It is no surprise that in 2019, at Dragon's Den, two HR officers pitched a project to digitise the process for requesting, reviewing and reporting on FWA. Although the project did not win, it received support from the Senior Management sponsors. Over the course of 2020, in collaboration with the Human Resources Management Service (HRMS), the UNOG Information and Communication Technology Service (ICTS) developed and launched the UNOG Flexible Working Arrangements App, which allows users to record and manage all types of FWA in a user-friendly and transparent way. The app also enables HRMS to have a precise view of the usage of FWA through a dashboard.

rethink how they can thrive in a hybrid workplace. Colleagues made suggestions about how we can address some of these challenges.

When asked about the culture change colleagues would like to see in the 'Next Normal,' many said they would like to have greater flexibility to define the way they work, feel less constrained by organizational hierarchy, and experience more collaboration across the organization at all levels.

Surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 showed that teleworking contributed to a better work-life balance for many colleagues, among other benefits. The discretion given to managers to find and decide on what worked best for their teams, contrary to a one-size-fits-all approach, also generated positive feedback.

UNOG and #NewWork team developed a new training "Managing Teams in the Next Normal – From Disruption to Choice" to capitalize on this experience. The training aims to support team leaders in dealing with uncertainty, provides them with ideas and practical tips to operate in the workplace of the future, and enhances their understanding of their changing role in the 'Next Normal'.

“ Building on this experience will allow UNOG to define how we will work in the future ”

Readiness to embrace FWA, together with flexibility exercised by management, gave excellent results, which were captured through the survey.

Building on this experience will allow UNOG to define how we will work in the future and continue its transition towards a more agile mindset and way of working. We can envision a future where the benefits of both worlds — work from home and work from the office — are combined in an optimal way for individuals, teams and the organization as a whole. ▶

* Nataliya Myronenko is the Chief of Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) at UNOG.



Séléman Nabiyyar
Clinical Nurse at the Hirslanden
Clinique Cecil

MOVING FORWARD HAND IN HAND WITH THE PATIENT

Séléman Nabiyyar, a clinical nurse at the Hirslanden Clinique Cecil, introduces us to his role in a constantly changing and evolving environment. An environment where the voices of many different stakeholders need to be integrated to ensure the best care possible. Particularly, the patient's voice is gaining importance. Technology, medicine and care no longer work «for» but «with» the patient. Hirslanden Clinique Cecil takes this evolution into account, using innovative methods: for example, the Healthy Mind virtual reality headset, which supports patients in managing their pain and emotions.



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Is the hybrid workplace the new normal?

Creating the hybrid workplace

Due to COVID-19, most of the world suddenly embarked on an experiment in remote working. As COVID recedes, what should the workplace of the future be?

Veronica Melian *

How to get the best from the workforce has been a favourite question of management gurus for decades.

Open plan? Cubicles? Hot-desking?
How about management by walk about?

The COVID-19 pandemic brutally interrupted this discussion.

Suddenly, across the world, office working was prohibited, except for certain jobs in which the office was essential. Remote working, long at the heart of the discussions about the 'Future of Work,' became the new reality, and management by walk about was now entirely out of the question.

Almost two years on from this forced change, the results of the experiment in large-scale remote

working are beginning to emerge. They challenge past orthodoxies and raise new questions.

Home produce

Decreased productivity, a big worry for those resisting any remote working transition, has not materialized. On the contrary, early surveys suggest that workers feel more productive working from home. It's apparent that parts of our daily work can be done just as well remotely as in the office, and many workers are delighted not to spend hours commuting, often expensively, from home to office. They find it easier to combine their home and work lives. They see more of their family. Childcare and family activities can be carried out with less difficulty.

Strain in isolation

However, productivity gains could also be erased by negative impacts of remote work. There are reports

of increased anxiety and a sense of isolation, and some workers find that breaking the boundaries between work and home means they work longer hours. Also, attending online meetings from the home environment can, for some, have an adverse impact on well-being and motivation. So, too, can the absence of the personal, human connections of the workplace. Employees can lose their sense of belonging to the organization.

“ **One size does not fit all: the work environment must be flexible** ”

A non-binary world

As a result, most workers do not want to return to the office full-time, nor do they want to work entirely remotely. As leaders look to the future and decide where work will be done, the decision should not be seen as binary, either full-time office or totally remote. The better idea is to become more fluid. What’s needed is a hybrid workplace for a workforce equipped to operate from anywhere, in whatever way feels most productive and engaged. At Deloitte, most professionals and project teams decide on the hybrid working environment that works best for them and their clients. There is no obligation to spend some time in the office.

The human experience must be central to the hybrid workplace. After all, workplaces



How will work be in the future?

exist to help employees work their best way. A human-centric perspective includes considerations about performance and productivity, the ability to access dispersed talent, as well as questions of culture, a sense of belonging and well-being. It is about how we collaborate and enable continuous knowledge-sharing.

The remote leader

Some of our old work approaches must be abandoned or re-imagined. Technology designed for office use, performance management considering primarily face-to-face interactions, or employee well-being isolated initiatives may not be as effective anymore.

At Deloitte, we have worked with our clients to create an adaptable environment that empowers employees in the new hybrid working model. Initiatives have included ‘guilt-free flex working campaigns’ in which success stories from the new working model were showcased. Courses were designed to help managers build accountability and embed a culture of trust in a new working environment. Organizations have also redesigned workspaces, shifting from the traditional office to environments that foster collaboration, with more communal spaces to network and discuss ideas. Away from these areas, quiet zones provide space for individual work. Investments in virtual infrastructure simplify connection with colleagues along the hallway – or across the world.

Adaptability in the workplace demands a nuanced understanding of individual employee preferences: the technology they use, physical and digital workplaces, collaborate, and work patterns. One size does not fit all: the environment must be flexible to foster productivity and enhance well-being.

A hybrid future

COVID lockdowns will eventually end. Organizations need to prepare for a flexible post-lockdown era with a mix of remote working and office presence. The hybrid workplace should enhance the experience of the workforce, connect people, and emphasise well-being and the values, purpose, and culture of the organization. Companies can become more productive and innovative, while empowering and engaging the workforce. The terrible ordeal of COVID may yet leave one good legacy. ▶

* Veronica Melian is the Human Capital Lead at Deloitte Switzerland.



It is important to learn from our experiences

Five things the pandemic has taught us about working at the UN

Two years on, what have we learned about flexible working arrangements and other workplace issues

Ian Richards *

It is now a full two years since the start of the pandemic. Like other employers the UN had to change its way of working and fast. Twenty-four months later it's time to draw some conclusions and discuss how we want our new workplace to be.

Telecommuting works... under the right conditions

While the UN had a telecommuting policy in place well before the pandemic, its use was limited. Many managers did not feel comfortable with having staff work from outside the office and many staff were scared to request such arrangements. There was therefore little meaningful take-up.

But the pandemic changed this view, almost turning things on their head. Indeed, for a long time after return to office was allowed, it was the older, and

formerly more conservative, managers staying at home, fearful of catching the virus from their younger charges.

Telecommuting worked best in teams with good relations and trust and where, perhaps for travel or other reasons, staff were anyway not always at their desks. These teams had developed the wherewithal and tools to make telecommuting work.

At the same time, colleagues who did not have to deal with screaming kids while schools were closed, report being able to focus on their work, free from the distractions of coffee breaks and office gossip. And, in some cases, free from the harassment of certain colleagues. However, for those without a comfortable working space and called up as substitute teachers, it wasn't quite the same.

Regardless though, the last few months have also shown the importance of getting together regularly to rebuild relations, brainstorm, and reach those impromptu eureka moments that Teams calls just don't provide.

Contract stability is important

For a number of years, organizations have been trying to undermine the current system of contracts (temporary, fixed-term and continuing) with a new model, called the agile contract. Staff would be recruited for a particular task and would have to apply to a new contract for the next task. At the same time, organizations would be freed from having to provide pension and health insurance.

“ Staff, regardless of age, saw stability as fundamental in their relation with their employer ”

The organizations echoed the far-fetched claims of Uber saying that staff, particularly millennials, would welcome the opportunity to jump from one contract to another, flitting around the world and taking life one day at a time. Covid, however, showed the limits of this model. Closed borders and a difficult jobs situation underlined the unattractiveness of this approach. Survey after survey showed that staff, regardless of age, saw stability as fundamental in their relation with their employer. Meanwhile, managers felt that the last thing they needed to be doing in a pandemic was deal with recruitment issues.

Hybrid and virtual conferences don't work

We all gave it a try. Global conferences online. You got to peer into delegates' sitting rooms and listen to their dubious music choices. But we soon saw that once-vibrant conferences were reduced to a series of statements. There were no informal discussions to try and break the deadlock or reach an important agreement.

Meanwhile, interpreters struggled to understand what their delegates were saying, leading in certain cases to health problems, speakers didn't know if their audiences were listening to them, delegates struggled with clunky conference platforms (interprefy anyone?) and ambassadors worried that their capitals would question the

expense of operating embassies if meetings could anyway be done from home. And then we realised that accommodating delegates in different time zones who couldn't travel meant meetings could only run for three hours a day. Face-to-face meetings are rightfully making their comeback.

Hot-desking has created a stark inequality in the workplace

Hot-desking was never going to live up to its promise of increasing teamwork and collaboration. Even before the pandemic, anyone walking through UN hot-desking spaces, such as in the New York Secretariat Building, would hear only silence instead of animated team chatter, punctuated by the aggressive glare of colleagues, enveloped in their noise-cancelling headphones, trying hard to concentrate on their work.

Now throw in the need to keep a distance and wear masks, even while seated, and it is clear that hot-desking was never meant to be. So today we must contend with colleagues in normal offices, able to carry on pretty much as before, while those in hot-desking spaces must keep their mask on all day, have their glasses steam up, and work perennially in fear of having to isolate themselves for ten days should someone in the same space test positive. Let's hope the differences in productivity and performance are not taken into account when it comes to the ePas.

Innovation is driven by necessity, not working groups

Do you remember all those innovation working groups that were set up before the pandemic? Lacking the genuine support of senior managers, who in many cases created the groups in a fit of style over substance, their reports gathered dust on office bookshelves, or somewhere in the cloud.

And then Covid came along...

At a stroke, documents no longer needed physical signatures, memos were done away with or became meaningless, digital platforms were created, files were shared. All this could have been done before, but it took Covid to make it happen. Think about that the next time you are invited to participate in an innovation task force. ▀

* Ian Richards is an economist at UNCTAD and a UNOG staff representative.



A hybrid meeting organized by UNECE

Are hybrid meetings here to stay?

As the pandemic continues and travel is restricted, the UN explores new ways to work and hold its meetings, and there are pros and cons

Paola Deda *

While stuck and squeezed in an astonishingly long queue outside of the COP26 conference centre in Glasgow, I was wondering what motivated so many delegates from all corners of the world to travel such a long way to attend the event. After all, negotiations and key decisions are in the hands of representatives of member States, which altogether could have reached the hundreds but not the thousands. The presence of well over 50,000 people ready to go through uncomfortable travel conditions, daily COVID testing, long waits, crowded facilities, and two weeks spent with a mask

glued on their face was inexplicable only as the call of duty or commitment to the cause.

Something else, which I call the “human factor”, pulled the COP crowd together: the need to interact again in person, network and socialise, entertain informal discussions, bump casually into colleagues and start a conversation that will then lead to other talks, new projects, new ideas and renewed diplomatic ingenuity.

The in-person gathering immediately brought back memories of when business was done formally

around a table and informally over a cup of coffee: the frenetic and energetic atmosphere at COP26 with busy delegations and Heads of States trotting around UN ground again gave all of us a sense of ‘old normal’. But are we really back to the old ways or have things changed forever?

Field visits cannot be virtual

As I had highlighted in my previous article on this subject (“Can diplomacy work on line?” - UN Today, December 2020) technology is offering opportunities, online solutions, and tools that have so far allowed us to compensate for the inability to meet in person. COVID-19 has accelerated the teleworking trend, which was, in any case, ongoing.

Over the past months we have learned how to make better use of fully online meetings, as we have realized how ‘virtual’ round tables or workshops can really reach out to a much larger audience than the old in-person seminars, going well beyond time zones and geographical boundaries.

“ People have returned to conference rooms anytime the virus gave travellers a small break ”

If I have to compare a capacity building workshop my team organized in the past and that of now, I can confidently say that the virtual format reduces major participation and travel costs, increases the number of participants (thus allowing better knowledge sharing), reaches out to and includes more expert speakers, and the recordings remain as online tools available to all. This is, however, at the expenses of human interaction, which remains a key element of learning and is only partially outweighed by the advantages listed above.

Virtual meetings also seem to represent more of an obstacle to bilateral dialogues, and have not been very successful in replacing ad hoc missions to countries, where field visits and interactions with many government representatives and experts are necessary. Virtual reality makes it difficult to assess the situation, grasp real needs and facilitate frank conversations: a sign that the “human factor” is still essential for deeper conversations and to fully embrace and understand the needs of a country, its culture, and the actors in play.

Better virtual than nothing, but hybrid may be the future

Yet, as the value of in-person meetings has been fully recognized, and as people have returned to conference rooms anytime the virus gave travellers a small break, the so-called “hybrid format” has been taking over.

Overall, despite the fact this solution often still has to deal with the hiccups of technology, the hybrid format is likely to continue in the future. Not only does it allow those incapacitated to travel to connect, but it opens the door to new participants who would not have joined the discussions before due to financial or other restraints to travel.

While the challenges to handle a meeting in two rooms - the real and the virtual – remain, over the months I noticed that improvements in the technology, combined with a learned ability of chairs, and the secretariat is making hybrid meetings smoother. We now find it normal to hear from someone from the podium as well as from the large screen above it. Indeed, we have all already adjusted to, or are in the process of adapting to the change, and this holds true for larger as well as smaller meetings, when people can extend their table with a virtual one.

Besides not allowing for informal exchange for those who participate online, the risk of this format is however to ‘isolate’ those in the virtual world who cannot travel, creating a meeting with first class in-person participants leaving the ‘coach’ virtual travelers behind.

Only those in the room will have the ‘luxury’ to meet during breaks and after the meetings, and to socialize again in-person. As the COP example clearly showed, the human factor remains strong in diplomacy and cannot, as yet, be replaced with virtual-only connections.

Certainly, the learning curve on how to operate in the virtual world is still steep, since the virus is still not ready for an armistice. If we consider the sudden and serious limitations to travel the world has experienced, however, it is fair to say the UN has adapted well to the new ways of doing business or, better said, of making “hybrid diplomacy” work. ▶

* Paola Deda is the Director of Forest, Land and Housing Division at the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).



Davos: the home of stakeholder capitalism?

Are the days of Davos man and woman really over?

The World Economic Forum's Davos: plutocrats' playground or a new global governance?

Michael Stopford *

The World Economic Forum (WEF), whose annual meeting was supposed to have taken place in person last month, purports to be devoted to “improving the state of the world”.

It has become an increasingly prominent feature of the global elite's landscape since 1971, when Klaus Schwab, then a business professor at the University of Geneva, launched it as the European Management Forum – renaming it as WEF in 1987.

The ubiquitous WEF image gave us “Davos Man”, to which “Davos Woman” was later added, as a symbol of globalism: a self-selecting, self-perpetuating caste of international ultra-rich, bankers, captains of industry, politicians and celebrities — leavened in part by leading members of civil society and dutifully reported on by the global media. A group

which U2's Bono dubbed “fat cats in the snow,” and Greta Thunberg fairly mocked in 2019, noting “here in Davos – just like everywhere else — everyone is talking about money. It seems money and growth are our only main concerns.” Meanwhile, it was estimated that at an event dedicated to ‘sustainability’ in 2020, participants flew to the WEF via 1,300 private jets.

The WEF is undoubtedly, as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* noted, a “money printing machine”. Its finances seem opaque, reporting a 2020 revenue of \$367 million, with astounding corporate membership fees — in 2014 to be a “Strategic Partner” cost \$628,000 — and handsome salaries for the top staff, with the foundation's founder drawing a salary of around one million Swiss francs

per year. Small wonder that the more activist NGOs take sharp aim at Davos, even creating a Public Eye on Davos “anti-award” for the corporations deemed egregious offenders of social responsibility. I confess that, as the head of Public Affairs for the agribusiness Syngenta some years back, they presented me with this award for corporate environmental offences.

The glamour of Davos unfortunately obscures a more serious question: what should the future of global governance be? Here Davos takes a clearcut position: Klaus Schwab and his team advocate a “Global Redesign” and a “Global Reset” where a globalised world is best managed by a coalition of multinational corporations, governments and civil society organizations, urging (as do many others) a “stakeholder” capitalism. As for the UN, the avowed incarnation of the international community, the WEF has suggested the creation of a “public-private” UN in which selected agencies steer global agendas under shared governance systems.

Here the lines are sharply drawn. For a social critic such as Naomi Klein, these ideas are merely an attempt by the rich to make themselves look good, whereas for others they are totally undemocratic. If you start from the premise that the global system is now dysfunctional, that populist politics wash across the globe with stultifying effect, that fake news is omnipresent, and that democratic governments seem paralyzed by challenges beyond their control, then a different governance approach by governments alone seems imperative. Klaus Schwab was ahead of his time in pointing to public-private partnerships as an essential component of solutions to global problems — a recognition that the UN System even today is slow to acknowledge in practice, despite the formal commitments of initiatives like the UN Global Compact. Indeed, the impetus for multi-stakeholder partnerships urged by Davos — effective or not — might be less crucial if the UN System were less stymied by its governmental structure and more genuinely open to collaboration with private and civil society sectors.

The overwhelming challenges before us demand non-traditional resolution. Climate change and the COVID nightmare are obvious trials for governments worldwide: how then can we forge innovative models to meet them? Davos is often seen as self-congratulatory, but it was there that the multi-stakeholder GAVI vaccine alliance was launched. Now ably chaired by former EU

Commission President Jose Barroso, GAVI supports immunisation programmes and vaccination campaigns in developing countries. A partnership of vaccine manufacturers, governments, donor agencies, philanthropists and researchers, it presents a replicable model for multi-stakeholder global action.

The WEF’s Davos is fortunately not alone in promoting such dialogue, for several years the Clinton Global Initiative brought together the corporate and civil society worlds under its mission of turning ideas into action. Attending as a former Coca-Cola staffer, I was impressed that the “ticket to entry” was launching a substantial partnership with a civil society actor. Also across the Atlantic, the Aspen Institute has long espoused “driving change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the greatest challenges of our time.”

WEF “graduates” have also created alternatives which may offer similar stimuli for innovative intersectoral action, without the commercial veneer of Davos dealmaking. One example has been the Horasis conferences; another the Summit of Minds, rather inspiringly termed Great People, Great Content and Great Outdoors with participants “sourced from public life, politics, business, academia, and civil society.” A Summit of Minds-Armenia gathering was held last fall with Armenian President Sarkissian personally hosting many of the sessions on “new dynamics for a quantum world,” cross-pollinating ideas amongst disciplines from arts and humanities to social and natural sciences: and indeed universities should have a critical role in this enterprise.

Perhaps we should not begrudge Davos-like engagements, if they produce initiatives which can break some of the current political impasse and transform global society. It is hard to conceive of breakthroughs towards greater global equity being pursued by the privileged 1% or .001%, and greenwashing will be pervasive amongst corporate participants. To quote E. M. Forster “only connect — the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted.” Connections, unexpected and unusual, may give us answers to our global society’s ever more urgent challenges. ▀

* Michael Stopford is a former Chef de Cabinet at UNOG. He is currently Managing Partner of data-based communications company ANCORED: ancored.se

The art of moving goods from one country to another

Digitalizing border crossings will help countries in normal and in extraordinary times. How should we understand this new challenge?

Kostas Alexopoulos *

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a cascade of border closures in Europe in a matter of days. Combined with customers rushing to supermarkets to stockpile on essential items, this led to shortages of various food and hygiene products.

For many people, this was a new experience. For others, it recalled unpleasant episodes from a not-so-distant past. For most of us, it was the first time we had ever thought about how goods from all around the world arrive on supermarket shelves.

The disruptions in closely interconnected global value chains caused by the pandemic suddenly put logistics in the spotlight. Few people know that two UN transport conventions administered by UNECE

are key to keeping goods moving internationally, including right to our supermarket shelves.

You may have seen the blue “TIR” sign on the back of trucks on the road. For the past 70 years, the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnet - TIR Convention for short - has made trade faster, easier and more secure by allowing trucks to transit through multiple countries without being examined by customs until they reach their country of destination. The TIR system, which brings together 77 countries across five continents, has more than 30,000 authorized operators and is accepted at more than 3,500 customs offices worldwide. It reduces cross-border transport time by up to 80%, and costs by up to 38%. This makes it an especially crucial tool for many landlocked countries, for which high transport costs constitute a real barrier to development.

In addition, the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road – the CMR Convention – applies to every contract for the carriage of goods by road in vehicles between two different countries.

Both Conventions date back to the 1950s and, in recent years, the replacement of paper-based procedures has been discussed with member States and transport operators. In February 2020, just weeks before the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, countries adopted the legal framework for the full digitalization of the TIR system.

During the pandemic, border closures significantly disrupted both TIR and CMR procedures and made it clear that digitalization would not only speed up border crossing but would also offer a major advantage in such circumstances by removing the

An example of a TIR truck



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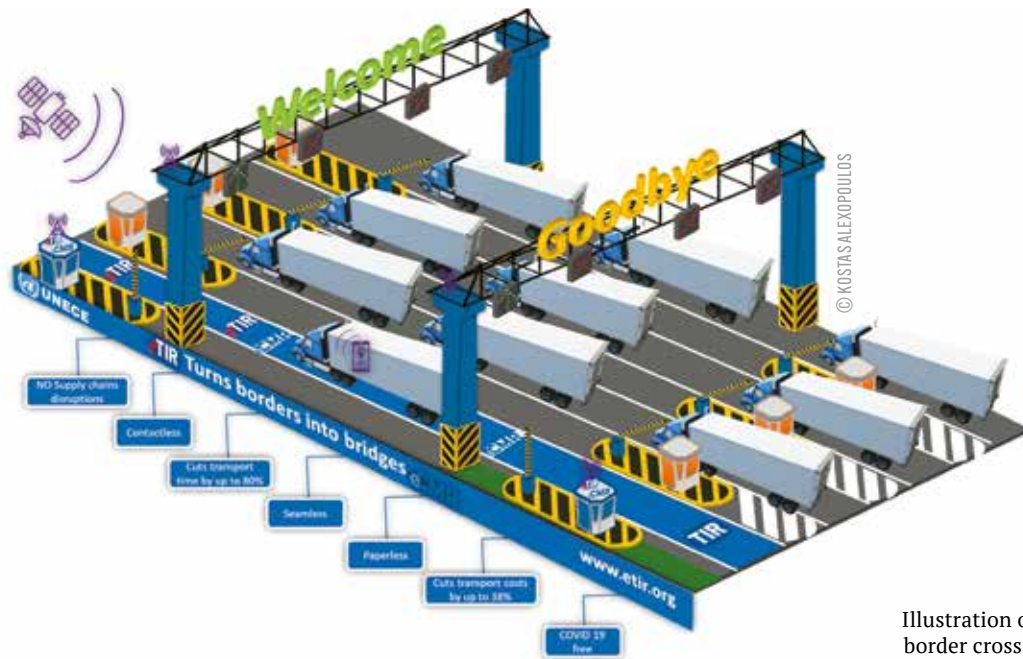


Illustration of a border crossing

need for physical contact between customs officers and truck drivers.

The entry into force in May 2021 of the legal framework allowing this full digitalization – and creating the so-called eTIR – was thus very timely!

In addition to automating procedures, the eTIR international system, developed and hosted by UNECE, is now being interconnected with the national customs systems of all 77 contracting parties to the TIR Convention. This means that very soon, when a truck starts its journey in China, just seconds after the Chinese customs seal the truck and approve the declaration in the eTIR system, all customs offices in the countries en route and at the final destination will automatically receive the data about the cargo. It will also be possible to include information on the CMR and other data such as the COVID-19 vaccination certificate of drivers.

Various countries, including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey and Uzbekistan are already in the process of interconnecting their customs information systems with the eTIR system. On behalf of its 27 member States, the European Union has finalized a proof of concept to interconnect its New Computerized Transit System with the eTIR system.

The benefits of using these tools for trade and transport facilitation will be enormous:

- There will be no need for exchanging papers or

for physical contact at borders since all information for each truck will be available online in national customs systems the moment the truck departs from the country of origin.

- Trucks will no longer have to wait at borders, which will further reduce transit times. Various countries are already thinking about the possibly of creating dedicated eTIR/eCMR blue lanes at their borders, to further ease transit.
- Security will also be increased, and risk of fraud reduced, since customs offices will be able to perform multi-factor risk analysis for each cargo well before the truck reaches the border.

In his report on the response to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, published in March 2020, the Secretary-General stressed: “Innovative tools such as UN eTIR/eCMR systems and other tools that allow the exchange of electronic information without physical contact and facilitate the flow of goods across borders should be used”.

We are now very close to this becoming a reality. In the future, there should be no reason to impose the closure of borders for the delivery of goods by truck, in the case of pandemics or other global crises. ▀

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Children in classroom (Senegal)

Reaching SDG 4: The necessary contribution of NGOs

Six years after the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where do we stand and what role do NGOs play?

Mathieu Cros *

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through which Heads of State and Government committed to reaching 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, of which SDG 4 states: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” As 64 million children of primary school age are still out of school, and 56% of

that age group do not reach the minimum proficiency level in reading, achieving SDG 4 will require the concerted efforts of all education stakeholders. (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2019).

Indeed, the Education 2030 Framework for Action acknowledged that “the ambitious education goal cannot be achieved by governments alone. They will need the support of all stakeholders, including

non-state actors.” (Education 2030 Framework for Action). This article explores the particular contribution that NGOs can make to SDG 4, based on the experience of Aide et Action, an NGO for development through education founded in 1981 to ensure access to quality education for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations: in particular children, girls, and women in 19 countries.

A missing link between institutions and communities?

At the local level, NGOs often play a key role in bridging the gap between schools and marginalized families who do not always have the necessary social skills to face administrative procedures for school admission or to claim their rights. Accompanying families towards effective access to education is a steady element in Aide et Action’s interventions, from our project with disabled girls in poor communities in India, to our work with children from allophone families living in slums in the suburbs of Paris.

On another level, non-formal education initiatives can be a lever for reaching out to those most alienated from the school system. In Niger, in the context of security crisis, Aide et Action has set up 40 non-formal bridging classes. In one or two years, they have allowed out-of-school children from 9 to 14 years old to acquire basic skills, and have prepared them to eventually integrate in regular schools and pursue their education within the formal system.

A source of innovation in education

In certain fields, NGOs have been pioneers in developing solutions to educational issues. This was notably the case in mother tongue education through the Écoles Communautaires de Base (basic community schools) in West Africa in the 1990s. These non-formal, community-led schools targeted out-of-school children and used local languages as the primary medium of instruction, progressively transitioning to French at a later stage. This model proved successful and was later taken over by a number of ministries of education.

Today, the expertise of civil society organizations might be key to reach SDG 4, especially in terms of fostering community participation in schools, ensuring inclusion of girls, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities, or developing education to sustainable development, peace and global citizenship. The main challenge is then to develop synergies with public institutions and schools.

Between 2015 and 2020, in the Casamance region of Senegal, Aide et Action and the local education authorities (Inspection d’Académie) have partnered to implement PAEBCA, a project aimed at improving basic education in the region. It articulated government-led activities – including building 30 new schools and training 1000 teachers – and NGO-led activities such as fostering community participation in the management committees of the newly built schools, developing citizenship, and health education activities in schools. Furthermore, NGOs and public authorities need to learn to build such partnerships to make sure we develop coherent actions towards SDG 4.

Carrying the voice of civil society in the global education agenda

Last but not least, NGOs have a crucial role to play in informing the public on the right to education, alerting about educational issues, and monitoring political and financial commitments to SDG 4. Such responsibility is crucial, since an additional US\$39 billion is needed each year to achieve universal education in low and lower-middle income countries by 2030.

This role is notably carried out by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a movement comprised of civil society organizations that aims to coordinate voices in relation to the global education agenda. The GCE is represented in almost 100 countries, where its national coalitions prompt governments to fulfil their commitments towards SDG 4. More broadly, NGOs should act as catalysts to mobilise citizens and carry their voices at the local, national, and international levels.

The task of achieving education for all is such that a ‘Lone Ranger’ approach is doomed to failure. Governments, NGOs and other stakeholders should develop mechanisms to further coordinate their actions, and to enhance civil society participation in policy planning and monitoring. Particular attention should be paid to the funding and capacity building of local NGOs so they can fully participate in the process. Joining forces and working together is, therefore, an emergency action, given that there are less than ten years left to achieve SDG 4. ▀

* Mathieu Cros is the Head of Research, Evaluation and Capitalization for Aide et Action.

Chronicles of Everyday Diplomacy

Antoine Tardy*

What is the proper distance when it comes to diplomacy and cooperation? How close or how far – physically, psychologically, philosophically or emotionally – should one stand, with regards to their counterparts, their opponents, or the issues at stake? And, how much of it should be shown or seen?

Switzerland has long specialised in providing a neutral venue for discreet encounters and discussions. In the present case, religious and community leaders from Morocco, Tunisia, Belgium, and France gathered somewhere above 'Lac Léman' to explore ways to counter extremist propaganda in their respective countries.

The contrast between this peaceful setting and the subject matter made for an intriguing scene to the onlooker. ▶

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Pascal Crittin, Directeur de la RTS

Radio Télévision Suisse : Notre mission est d'atteindre tous les publics

Pour le Directeur de la RTS, Pascal Crittin, la radio est un bien public plus que jamais nécessaire pour la démocratie suisse et le débat public

Muriel Scibilia *

A l'ère du numérique et des services de streaming en ligne, comme Spotify, les jeunes écoutent-ils encore la radio ? La multiplication des « Fake News » a-t-elle des incidences sur votre travail ?

Il faut être clair, les jeunes écoutent moins la radio que leurs parents ou grands-parents. Les habitudes d'écoute ont beaucoup évolué avec le numérique. Longtemps, la radio a joué un rôle de prescription en matière de musique. C'est le cas notamment de

Couleur 3, notre chaîne « jeune » qui fêtera ses 40 ans en 2022. Mais cette chaîne n'est pas seulement musicale. Elle s'est imposée aussi comme une chaîne d'humour tout à fait originale dans le paysage suisse romand. Couleur 3 est une chaîne de radio qui se développe aussi sur les réseaux sociaux avec la radio visuelle. À ce titre, elle est populaire auprès du jeune public. Par ailleurs, pour occuper le terrain face aux plateformes de streaming mondialisées et défendre la production suisse, nous développons toute une ligne de podcasts et nous

nous apprêtons à lancer une nouvelle offre musicale pour les jeunes à l'enseigne de Tataki, la marque de la RTS qui connaît un très grand succès auprès de ce public. Exclusivement numérique, elle produit tous les jours des vidéos dans les domaines du divertissement, de la culture urbaine et des enjeux sociétaux. Il est intéressant de voir que la radio, qui a été créée à Lausanne il y a exactement 100 ans, a un avenir devant elle, en se déployant sur de multiples antennes et plateformes.

En ce qui concerne les incidences des « Fake News » sur notre travail, nous veillons à ce que la RTS reste une référence, une source sûre d'informations crédibles, vérifiées et pertinentes, ce que le public perçoit assurément. C'est ce que nous observons lorsque l'actualité est forte, par exemple lors de la première vague Covid en 2020 ou depuis la fin de l'année 2021 avec la « 5e vague ». Les études menées par la Société suisse de radiodiffusion et télévision (SSR) ou par des instituts externes comme le Reuters Institute d'Oxford concordent : le public nous accorde un taux élevé de confiance et de légitimité (entre 75 et 80% selon les études). Et cela est valable dans toutes les classes d'âge. Cette relation de confiance est un bien précieux que nous cherchons à renforcer tous les jours par notre professionnalisme, par un dialogue ouvert avec le public ou encore en reconnaissant nos erreurs et en les corrigeant. C'est plus que jamais nécessaire pour le bien de la démocratie suisse et du débat public.

Avec la proximité de la France, les radios privées ou/et locales, votre radio opère dans un univers très compétitif, quelle stratégie pour préserver et élargir votre bassin d'auditeurs ?

Le marché de la radio en Suisse romande se répartit grosso modo en quatre parts : la moitié pour la RTS, 30% pour les radios régionales romandes, 10% pour les autres chaînes SSR et 10% pour les chaînes étrangères. Les quatre chaînes de la RTS ont chacune leur identité, ce qui permet de répondre aux attentes de tous les publics. La Première est la chaîne généraliste, qui rassemble le plus large public, et elle est la chaîne de tous les domaines, en particulier de l'information politique, économique, culturelle, scientifique et sportive. Espace2 se consacre à la musique classique, au jazz, aux musiques du monde et à la culture. Couleur3 est la chaîne de la jeunesse et de l'humour. Option musique est axée sur le répertoire francophone. S'agissant des chaînes françaises, elles sont davantage écoutées à Genève et sur l'arc lémanique que dans le reste de la Suisse romande. Elles ne



Dans les studios de la RTS

représentent pas à proprement une concurrence et elles ne bénéficient pas, comme nous, de l'atout de la proximité et de la « suissitude », mais elles sont complémentaires et certaines émissions des chaînes publiques françaises sont de bons modèles pour nous et parfois un aiguillon pour stimuler notre créativité. Par ailleurs, Option musique, qui diffuse les artistes suisses, résiste parfaitement bien aux chaînes commerciales françaises avec ses plus ou moins 10% de parts de marché.

Comment travaillez-vous avec les organisations internationales installées à Genève, dont l'ONU, et qui constituent un vivier de sujets et d'interlocuteurs ?

Notre plateforme Genève Vision (genevevision.ch) traite de l'actualité internationale avec le regard et les compétences de Genève et de la Suisse, concrètement en faisant appel aux compétences présentes au sein de la Genève internationale, de l'Université et des hautes écoles de Genève. Nous sommes en outre en train de développer, à partir de nos archives ou de celles des institutions internationales et avec le public lui-même, une dimension historique et patrimoniale qui valorisera pleinement Genève en tant que « ville monde ». Un magnifique projet porté par la Fondation pour la sauvegarde et la valorisation des archives de la RTS (fonsart.ch) et soutenu par des mécènes genevois. ▶

* Muriel Scibilia est auteure et ancienne fonctionnaire de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur le commerce et le développement (CNUCED).



Recognising internal talent piece by piece

The UN's staff selection system should focus on internal talent

Staff Selection: a paradigm shift is needed to truly recognise internal talent and to strengthen the profile as “employer of choice”

Stefan Brezina *

Joining the United Nations as a staff member is certainly not the easiest task. It requires (endless) patience and resolve, often leads to frustration, confrontation with very personal and disruptive obstacles, or simply inner resignation. Those who do manage to get a contract in hand may rejoice at first, but may run into other frustrating experiences down the road.

Staff selection is not a one-off for actively serving staff members. It is a constant companion, our only way to have something resembling job security and upwards career progression. We have spent countless hours updating PHPs, writing cover letters, answering Job Fit Questionnaires and, if one is lucky, sitting through repetitive technical assessments and competency-based interviews.

All this effort is supposed to determine our future within the UN System, but these are all just snapshots, one snapshot assessment after the next. What does any of this tell the organization about our ability to learn, grow and stay motivated? A cynical indicator for assessing the agility and resilience of applicants could be to check how many unsuccessful applications they have submitted, how far they have gotten and how often they have been turned down.

Are those not the people the UN would want to employ, the internal talent they would wish to nurture? The ones who show true persistence in the face of the seemingly impossible task of a promotion or new position?

There needs to be a fundamental change in the way the Organization approaches staff selection, not only for the sake of those already serving within, but also to not scare away the talent that would love to work for the UN, because they too are highly motivated and want to contribute towards its noble cause.

What are some of the pillars a new selection system would be built upon?

1. The UN has a responsibility to invest in its people to grow into their current and future functions. Under the headings of resilience and flexibility, the Organization needs to embrace motivational concepts, particularly autonomy, mastery, and purpose. The UN needs to narrow the gap in preferring 'generalists' on paper, yet selecting mostly external experts, in recognizing the motivation and ability to learn and grow. The focus should be on grooming and deploying the experts of the future in-house, rather than entertaining modern, agile and flexible 'instant-use' contracts.

2. The UN needs to rethink the picture it portrays to unsuccessful applicants. All applicants have expressed their interest to serve, yet in most unsuccessful cases, what they see are impersonal 'we regret...' emails and no opportunity to stay engaged or be considered for future selection. Every application process is a reset back to zero and this needs to change. Applicants should not have to sit the same technical assessments over and over, even after passing.

3. Internal learning efforts and job enrichment, as well as over performance, also need to have an impact. It makes no sense to subject someone who

has undergone an internal career transformation to a rigorous assessment process. Internal candidates who meet the eligibility criteria and who have already demonstrated their mastery of job-related skills, as documented in annual performance reviews, should be automatically shortlisted.

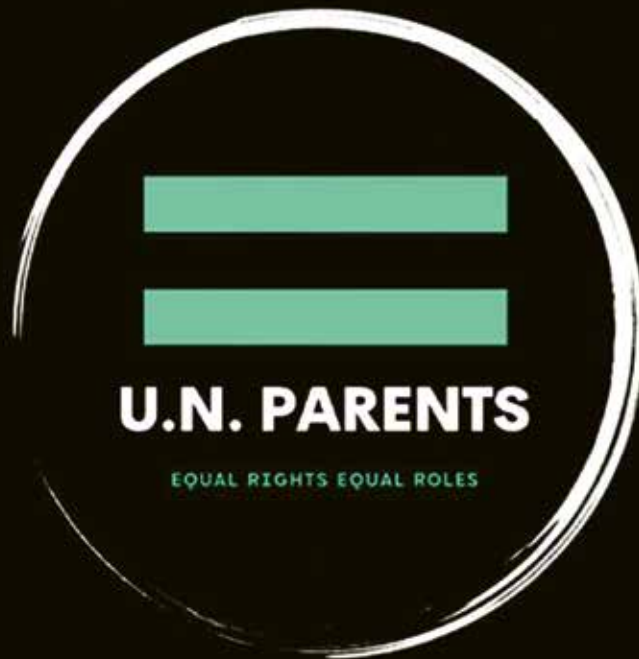
4. Hiring someone is a long-term and costly commitment, where the financial investment by the organization is only one part. Team members and peers need to have a say in a transparent selection process, as they will be the ones investing their time and energy into unlocking the full potential of the new recruits.

5. The organization has a responsibility to accommodate the life needs of successful candidates. Life realities, such as the need for flexibility, predictable periods of absence, pursuing educational goals, etc., need to be considered and form part of the contract. This approach would remove the discretionary power of supervisors in granting or denying flexible working arrangements. What is needed is a true work-life balance, recognising that life can be very unpredictable at times, but at least for the predictable parts, the employer should enable and empower.

There are multiple problems with the current staff selection system and we can only hope that the inclusive hire project, currently under construction by the Office of Human Resources, will introduce much needed changes. However, what seems to be forgotten is the clear absence of an internal promotion track, which should be brought back with urgency. Is the UN not under utilising its internal talent by subjecting staff to selection process after selection process, implying that our gained experience as internal staff does count?

A paradigm shift in the selection process is needed. We need genuine recognition of the organization's biggest asset (its staff and colleagues holding precarious contracts), their motivations and aspirations, as well as a push to embrace the five pillars as outlined. The organization could once again become a true employer of choice by acting in a welcoming and socially responsible fashion, in the way it selects its people and empowers its staff, by presenting itself as a supportive (professional) life partner of choice. ▶

* Stefan Brezina is the President of the United Nations Staff Council, Vienna.



U.N. Parent's logo

The UN's parental leave policies need to change

Parents at the UN share their struggles in the hope that senior leaders hear them and take action

U.N. Parents *

In our first article published on 9 November 2021, we relied on our own experiences to raise awareness about the insufficient maternity and paternity leave offered by the UN. We also highlighted the fact that the education grant only applies from the start of primary school, while no support is provided for early childhood care. We outlined how the current policies at the UN reinforce gender inequalities and negatively impact families and their children.

Our article was met with a great number of responses from colleagues from across duty stations and entities wanting to share their varied

testimonies. We are glad U.N. Parents can be considered a safe space for parents to reach out to share their stories. We decided to make these voices heard and to shine a light on the struggles parents at the UN face, but most often keep silent about for fear of being judged, being labeled as privileged yet ungrateful, of losing one's job or promotion opportunities, or simply because they have not found a listening ear at the Organization. For this reason, some of these stories will be published anonymously.

This is the second episode of the series called "Parents' voices." We hope that our stories resonate

with policymakers and those who have the power to make the UN System more just, for all of us as (to be) parents, but also for our children.

Hendrik Koch, Senior Operations Assistant, International Labour Organization

My husband and I are a same-sex couple. I remember one day, I was standing in our empty apartment looking at a brochure for surrogacy, thinking, “We will never be able to afford a family of our own...” Five years later, I’m sitting in a restaurant ripping up the napkin and knocking over my water in nervous twitches as we wait to meet a potential surrogate. We flew halfway across the world, poured every single cent of our savings into this plan, and there we were, trying to match with an angel to help us become a family. We hit it off, and three hours later I knew we were going to be parents. What greater feeling is there in the world? Well, until we realized that, as men, we only had four weeks of parental leave! “Where do I go with a 4-week old child if we both have to go back to work?” I wondered!

My husband’s employer at an NGO had family leave based on primary and secondary care provider roles, so he was able to get 16 weeks of paid family leave. At that point, I realized that the UN had fallen behind in the equality race. I was not biologically related to our newborn, so I had to negotiate with my organization to give me eight weeks of adoption leave.

Two years later, we were back at surrogacy contracts and getting ready for a sibling. This time, I approached my organization asking for maternity leave, instead of paternity leave, since I was the primary caregiver. My request was met with astonishment and closed-door meetings where HR explained that what I was asking for was crazy. I challenged their decision at the UN Tribunal, but lost. All I had wanted was for the tribunal to request

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

At UN Parents, we are preparing suggestions to present to the UN on how to evolve towards a fairer and more equal system of parental leave, based on the best interest of the child. If you wish to join in this effort or share your testimony to be published, please reach out to unparents@gmail.com or bardia.jebeli@un.org

some change to the UN policies, and to recognize that, no matter what the family looks like, the children need the same level of care and love. I think it’s about time that the UN starts thinking about more human and child-centred family policies!

Anonymous, single dad of one

Deciding to build a family is life-changing. Even more so when you are a single parent. Getting ready to face the paperwork, the administration, the surrogate, and your feelings, all requires solid determination. It is crucial to be accompanied by your family and friends, but you definitely need to have your organization on your side as well.

Being a single parent means you are both mom and dad at the same time. It means you are the one who needs to shoulder all the big decisions at a time when so many changes are going on in your life. This was my case when I had my daughter and was limited to only four weeks of paternity leave, with no particular benefits related to parenting since I assumed other roles in my organization that required travel and mobility while parenting alone. I feel that the UN failed me and my child when it failed to recognize that I was the sole caretaker.

I think the problem is the very binary definition of parenting (mother/father) at the UN, which excludes other forms of families. There are families made of single parents, families where the lead parent is a mother and in others, a father, and families resulting from adoption and fostering, amongst many others. These families are all part of our societal reality. Defining lead or sole caretaker responsibilities would not only help single parents, but all families who wish to choose their family design and decide who will be the one needing the time off for caretaking. This is even more critical for colleagues with consultancy or Individual Contractor positions who often satisfy the long-term needs of the Organization without benefiting from the staff category benefits and entitlements. We cannot help but wonder if it is considered that the IC’s children do not deserve the same time and care as the P staff’s children... ▶

* “U.N. Parents: Equal Rights Equal Roles” is an informal group of parents across duty stations, intending to suggest reforms to the UN parental leave policy and advocate for more child-centred family policies across the UN system.



© FAIR INTERNSHIP INITIATIVE

Fair Internship Initiative held in-person diplomatic advocacy training in Geneva, 2021

Are unpaid remote internships a new dystopian reality at the UN?

A legion of unpaid remote interns works in the shadows, sitting in front of their screens, isolated from the rest of the UN

Jakob Franke *

The blue light shines, notifications buzz and emails come in at night because of the time difference. Most of them, like me, need to live with parents to save on rent. They can only engage with UN staff digitally, and they often get long tasks: excel sheets that need to be cross-checked, texts — drafted, slides — formatted and meetings — summarized. These valuable and arduous jobs save UN staff hours and days of work, the little tasks that paid UN staff shy away from, but still need to be done. Without unpaid intern labour, the current UN system would be unsustainable, since these small, annoying tasks would pile up.

It is a hollow claim that interns are hired for their own learning benefit. They are hired mostly because they provide free, highly qualified labour.

Young people have suffered the most during the pandemic, their educational experience and social life has been ruined. They had to watch lectures and take exams under social isolation and stress. They have applied for internships and jobs during one of the biggest global socioeconomic upheavals in decades. Unpaid remote internships are an extension of their suffering and could be the new dystopian reality within the UN System.

Luckily, my internship at the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) has, so far, been good. I had already forgotten about my application and then, on extremely short notice, I was recruited for a remote internship in the policy branch. I have been lucky because my team has been exceptional: funny, innovative and hard-working. They do not accept the status quo but, instead, strive to do better. They have shown solidarity with the campaign for fair UN internships, recognizing the value of interns and the importance of socioeconomic justice in the workplace.

The HR department has, unfortunately, been less progressive. All interns in the UN Secretariat are unpaid, and the UNDCO is bound by the administrative instruction that denies compensation for interns. One could perhaps argue that UN staff do not have any agency in achieving improvements for interns. However, intern wellbeing should be a core consideration for HR, and they should act accordingly. They fail to substantially engage with the injustice that is done to UN interns. They have a safeguarding responsibility and should prioritise interns' health and safety over anything else. The financial pressure of unpaid labour and the social isolation, working remotely, can have devastating effects on mental health.

In their most recent survey, the Fair Internship Initiative has found that most UN remote interns in 2021 suffered from acute mental health problems. Remote interns are more likely to be socially isolated and suffer under a detrimental work-life balance, and since interns are on the lowest rung on the ladder of UN authority, it requires a lot of mental strength to set clear boundaries. Often, many will work into the night due to the time



Labour Day protesters demand interns' rights, Geneva, 2021

difference, and depression and anxiety threaten to cause long-term damage to the new generation of UN interns who are, supposedly, to become ambassadors of UN values.

I wonder why the UN has been so slow in protecting interns? The Youth2030 Strategy was launched by the Secretary-General to empower young people and make them partners in their work for a better world, yet the UN Secretariat has failed to deliver on Youth2030 within their own organization.

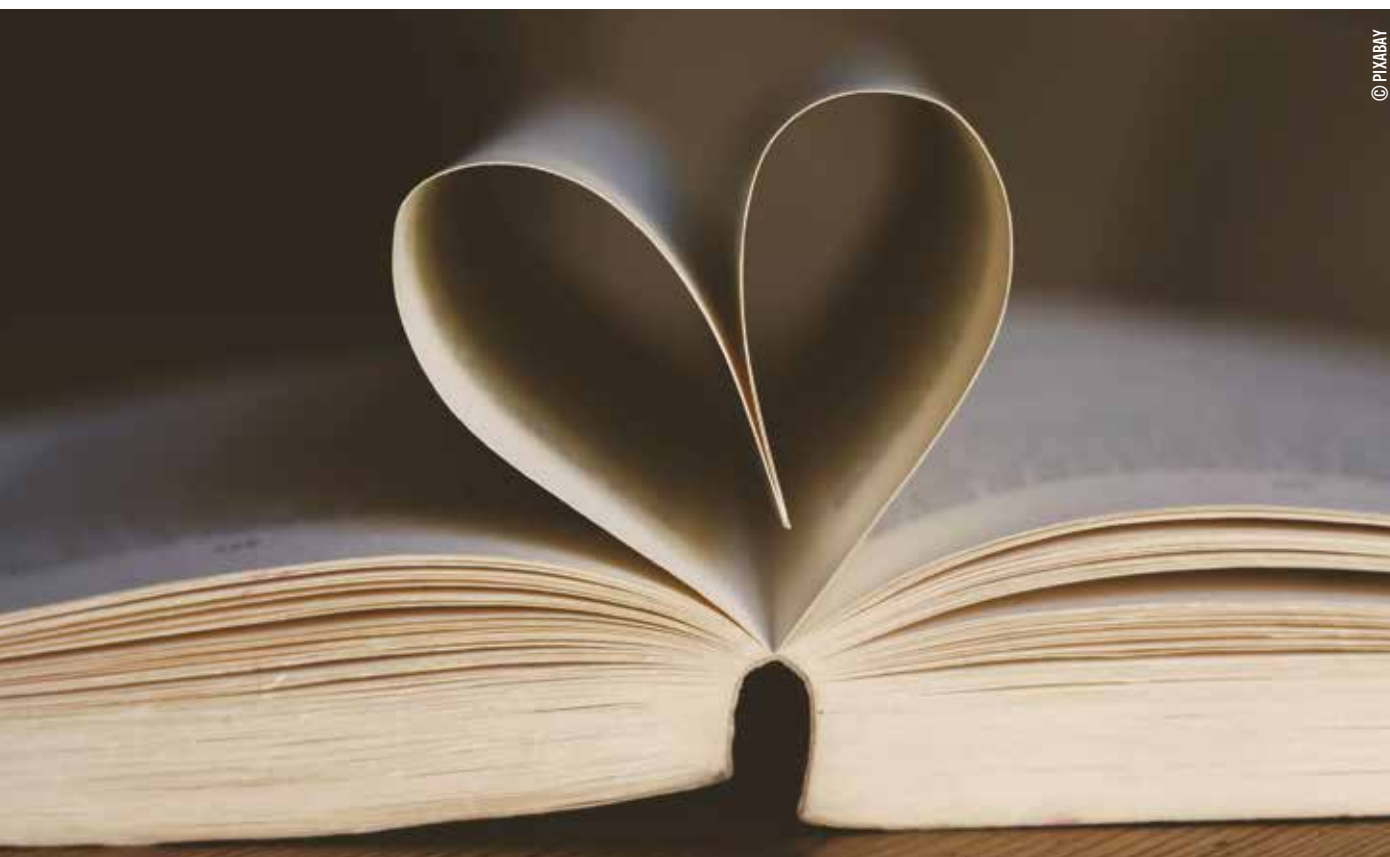
Remote internships are not the solution to current unfair practices. Many within the UN system hope that remote internships will reduce the recruitment inequities by increasing socioeconomic diversity through “virtual recruitments” from the Global South. Remote interns no longer need to travel to their posts and live there, but can work from home. In theory, interns from all over the world could apply with much lower costs.

However, this is wishful thinking. Remote internships are bad news for interns and leave the discriminatory nature of unpaid internships unaddressed. Remote interns still need to be paid. They need a place to stay. They need computer equipment. I am lucky because I have the support of my family, but for others, six months without pay would be unthinkable.

Remote interns also have fewer opportunities to organize politically and make themselves heard. Since they are almost invisible, it is perhaps a comfortable proposition for the UN to have a legion of unpaid remote interns that works in the shadows. They face difficulties protesting and demanding change because they cannot physically connect, while social movements such as the Fair Internship Initiative, that might have a chance in changing the structural conditions for UN interns, are hindered.

I hope that the UN system does not make unpaid remote internships the new norm. It would be a frightening and dystopian future for interns. They would perform invisible unpaid labour, while suffering under the negative mental consequences due to financial pressures, social isolation, and the concurrent inability to organize politically. ▶

* Jakob Franke is a member of the Fair Internship Initiative (FII) and currently intern as a UN Development Coordination Officer.



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Le pouvoir transformateur de l'éducation

Pouvoir transformateur de l'éducation

Le parcours de Yao Ydo, directeur du Bureau International d'Education de l'UNESCO est un exemple encourageant

Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga *

Passionné, M. Yao Ydo sait captiver son auditoire lorsqu'il parle de l'importance d'une éducation adaptée au contexte local.

Fort de plus de deux décennies d'expérience au sein de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture (UNESCO), et riche d'une histoire personnelle inspirante, ce Burkinabé né en Côte d'Ivoire connaît la difficulté d'accéder à l'école.

Vous aimez souligner que votre droit à l'éducation a été défendu par votre maman. Pourriez-vous nous en dire plus ?

Mon père a quitté le Burkina à l'âge de 13 ans pour aller travailler en Côte d'Ivoire. Il était ouvrier agricole et voulait m'envoyer à l'école coranique.

Ma mère, vendeuse de légumes, souhaitait que je suive une éducation classique. Opposé à cette idée, mon père a refusé de payer ma scolarité. Ma mère a dû économiser pour payer mes frais d'inscription et mon uniforme. Cela représentait un sacrifice important pour elle. Lorsque je suis arrivé en secondaire, mon père a commencé à contribuer.

Comment êtes-vous passé de l'Université de Ouagadougou à celle de Grenoble ?

A l'époque, il existait une convention entre le Burkina-Faso et la France. Elle permettait à tout étudiant qui terminait sa maîtrise sans avoir passé d'examens à la session de septembre d'obtenir une bourse pour un 3ème cycle dans un établissement français. C'est ainsi que je suis arrivé

à Grenoble. Pendant que j'effectuais mon Doctorat en linguistique et didactique des langues, je me suis inscrit au Centre d'études diplomatiques et stratégiques de Paris pour obtenir un diplôme de 3ème cycle en diplomatie et études stratégiques.

Cela fait maintenant 24 ans que vous servez la même institution. Quel a été votre parcours ?

Ma carrière a débuté en 1997 au siège de l'UNESCO, à la Division de l'éducation de base et de l'alphabétisation où j'étais expert-associé. Par la suite, j'ai travaillé en tant que spécialiste en programmes d'éducation dans différents bureaux d'Afrique (Mali, Cameroun, République Démocratique du Congo et Sénégal). Plus tard, je suis devenu Représentant en Côte-d'Ivoire et Directeur régional pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest, à Abuja au Nigéria. Je représentais aussi l'Organisation auprès de la Communauté Économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEDEAO).

Le Bureau international d'éducation (BIE), établi à Genève, est le Centre d'excellence de l'UNESCO en matière de curriculum. De quoi s'agit-il ?

Le curriculum peut être défini comme l'ensemble des éléments constitutifs des contenus et programmes de formation. Il doit toujours prendre en compte les méthodes pédagogiques et d'évaluation des acquis, ainsi que le matériel didactique pour les apprenants et les formateurs. Le curriculum est la cristallisation et la concrétisation de la vision politique éducative d'un pays. Au regard de son importance, le curriculum a la même valeur, pour l'éducation, que la Constitution dans une démocratie.

“ Le curriculum est à l'éducation ce que la Constitution est à la démocratie ”

Comment faire en sorte que le curriculum choisi soit adapté ?

La meilleure façon est qu'il soit adapté au contexte. Il doit être formulé selon une approche participative et, autant que possible, être soutenu par les cultures locales pour répondre aux besoins

des apprenants. Le curriculum doit permettre de former des citoyens, d'abord ancrés dans leur culture, mais aptes à s'ouvrir sur le reste du monde. De ce point de vue, la contextualisation constitue un gros défi. À ce jour, on ne tient pas compte des avis et des aspirations des populations locales dans les processus d'élaboration des curricula. Nous devrions donc profiter des réformes curriculaires post-COVID, envisagées par certains pays, pour proposer que cette insuffisance soit corrigée.

Concrètement, que faites-vous pour que les curricula évoluent ?

Les séminaires, les ateliers ou les conférences organisés ne suffisent pas. Ces réunions permettent davantage de partager de l'information et de sensibiliser plutôt que de former. Nous avons donc décidé de renforcer les capacités des structures nationales et régionales chargées des formations sur le curriculum. Dans chaque sous-région, nous envisageons des formations diplômantes du type Master en curriculum. Nous sommes en négociations très avancées avec des universités partenaires.

Allez-vous vous appuyer sur les structures existantes ?

Dans tous les pays il existe, au sein du Ministère de l'éducation, une division ou une section, responsable du curriculum national. L'idée est de travailler avec ces structures, de cerner leurs besoins en renforcement de capacités et de convenir d'un programme de formation qui pourrait durer plusieurs mois voire une ou deux années, en fonction des besoins.

Quel est l'objectif du BIE ?

L'objectif général du BIE est de devenir un Institut de référence mondiale en matière de production et de partage de savoir, de renforcement des capacités, de dialogue et de coopération sur le curriculum. Notre vision holistique, intersectorielle est tournée vers l'avenir. Le 21ème siècle réclame une révision des programmes et des offres éducatives qui, à terme, permettra de faire correspondre les compétences des diplômés aux demandes de leur époque. ▶

* Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga est journaliste, vice-présidente du Club Suisse de la Presse.



Ambassador Federico Villegas at the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room, Palais des Nations

What is the human rights agenda for this year?

Federico Villegas, elected President of the Human Rights Council, tells us about himself and his priorities

Julián Ginzo *

Please tell us briefly about your career, why you joined the diplomatic service, and how you were appointed to your current position as Permanent Representative of your country to the UN in Geneva.

I am a lawyer from the University of Rosario, Argentina. I entered the Foreign Service of my country in 1993. I have a Masters in Liberal Studies from Georgetown University and I specialised in International Human Rights Law in New College, Oxford University, and the International Institute

of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. I was a U.N. Disarmament Fellow in 1994, and that is when I came to Geneva for the first time.

When I was posted at the Foreign Ministry in my country I was first in charge of disarmament, and at a later stage I was appointed twice as Director General of Human Rights. Overseas, I was posted at the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the Organization of American States in Washington D.C. (1995-2003), and to the Representation to Mercosur and ALADI (Latin American Integration

Association) in Montevideo (2008-2012). And, from 2016 to 2020 I was Ambassador to Mozambique, where I opened the Embassy. Since June 2020 I am the Permanent Representative of Argentina to all the international organizations based in Geneva.

I think I became a diplomat because I am from a small city in the north of Argentina, and since I was a teenager I wanted to travel the world. But when I was 17 years old I had the possibility of living in the United States for a year as an exchange student, and then I realized that not only did I want to travel the world but, in particular, I wanted to represent my country. That is how I discovered I wanted to be a diplomat.

“ We are a country that was able to overcome the darkest period in our recent history ”

Can you share with us an event (positive or negative) that has marked your career, and explain why?

In 2001, I was posted to Washington D.C. and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 not only marked and changed our daily life forever, but also they presented a tremendous challenge to me as a diplomat: in trying to understand what had happened and why, and also which type of world would appear in the aftermath.

A whole new foreign policy with new ideas was needed for every country of all regions - negotiations and debates around human rights, nation building, cultural relativism, understanding terrorism and its root causes, security, etc. A game changer for diplomats worldwide, especially for Argentina, since we suffered two tragic terrorist attacks before 9/11.

You have recently been elected President of the Human Right Council (HRC). What are your top priorities for 2022?

My top priorities are to establish a platform at the Council that would allow a constructive dialogue and understanding among members. To know better our positions, discuss our common interests and respect our diversity, but with the aim of building together consensus for the improvement

of human rights worldwide. The increasing politicization of the Council, and the consequent polarization in the debates, prevent us from listening to each other. The HRC should be a place of uniting, not of division.

“ I wanted to travel the world but, in particular, I wanted to represent my country ”

A second priority will be to improve the role of the HRC in establishing a systematic and worldwide matrix of technical cooperation on different areas of human rights, fostering South-South cooperation and Triangular Cooperation, based on the challenges for the full enjoyment of human rights in each country, following on the results of the Universal Periodic Review. Within this framework, special attention should be given to the countries that are undergoing technical assistance under item 19. We have to ensure that this assistance shows real improvements in the human rights situation of the citizens, so that other countries start realizing the benefits of engaging with the HRC mechanisms in a constructive manner in order to improve their human rights situation.

“ My top priorities are to establish a platform at the Council that would allow a constructive dialogue and understanding among members ”

A third priority will be to have a significant improvement in the role of the HRC in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction, to help establish human rights norms and institutions as a way to prevent conflicts, as well as after conflicts occur, to avoid their recurrence. Human Rights is the best guarantee of non-repetition of conflicts. ▀

* Julián Ginzo is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.



United workers

Can the international civil service thrive without staff unions?

Let's explore the challenges, their legitimacy, and the concrete actions that await them

David Dror *

Can the international civil service thrive without staff unions post-COVID?

A wave of voluntary resignations of many employees has been reported post-COVID, called the "Great Resignation" in the USA. There is also an increase in strikes and unionisation. These phenomena are probably linked to many months of 'work-from-home', or unemployment benefits due to COVID-19. Many people are rethinking their work-life balance, and workers have taken a fresh look at commuting, schedule flexibility, pay, working conditions, long-term career goals, and the long-term emotional and mental cost of work-family imbalances. Studies suggest that Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to be dissatisfied with the old routines of 'work first'.

International civil servants (ICS) have been required by the employing organizations, not the government, to work from home or even stay redundant. What if these Organizations were to cease to pay for work-from-home or redundant jobs? The usual protections that non-ICS employees can claim from governments in many countries would not apply to ICS, and ICS would not be able

to turn to social media to apply indirect pressure on their employers due to their 'duty of reserve' inscribed in the staff regulations, and the immunity of their employers from national laws. Yet, today, there is widespread recognition that fundamental human rights include voting, economic interests, the right to organize, the right to bargain collectively, the right to protest, and the right to express opinions through many media. ICS stand out in their inability to exercise such fundamental human rights. While the administrative tribunals, to which ICS may file disputes, pay lip service to the applicability of international human rights conventions to ICS, few instances can be found, if any, where resort to such conventions resulted in a favorable judgment for an ICS.

Without staff unions, where can ICS find a legitimate forum to state their needs, negotiate their claims, and present issues often described as 'class actions'? What reason would there be for staff to accept that their labour relations should be governed by distant, corporatist, authoritative rules written unilaterally by management? And how much trust can the administrative tribunals

gain when judges are appointed and paid by those administrations?

Practice what you preach!

Experience with collective bargaining at the ILO two decades ago may offer some valuable pointers for today. My reflections draw on my experience as the President of the ILO Staff Union for two years (from December 1999 to December 2001) and as Chairperson of the ILO's Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) (which conducted collective bargaining) until 2003.

My first observation is that staff unions should be selective on the topics for their collective bargaining demands. Considering that wages and pension rights are dealt with at the common system level, the management of the specialized agencies would be unable to do more than agree to present staff claims at the common system level. Staff should not content themselves with such indirect representation of their demands. They have both the right and the obligation to represent organization-specific demands, which can happen when the union is recognized as the bargaining agent.

My second observation is that, in addition to representing collective issues, one of the essential roles of the ICS staff union is to ensure a constructive organizational climate that influences each person every day. We should not confuse 'culture' with organizational climate. Where all ICS find common ground, despite their different origins and culture, is the organizational climate. This describes recurring patterns of behaviour, attitudes, and feelings that characterise life in the organization. In my days as an ICS, offensive behaviours (e.g., harassment at work) were not suitably dealt with and hurt staff at all levels (G, P, and D levels). The staff union needed to devote considerable attention to defending the interests of individual ICS who were the victims of offensive behaviours that the existing rules did not adequately and effectively remedy.

My third observation is that while the staff union cannot usually negotiate wages or conditions of work, as these are decided for the entire UN system by central bodies (ICSC and the UNJSPF), it can nevertheless improve the well-being of many staff members through the conclusion of agreements on career planning, personal development, and promotions through fair evaluation of people's job content and performance. The ILO staff union

concluded several agreements to obtain results on these topics, and as a result of these agreements almost one-third of the ILO staff received a grade promotion.

As ILO staff representatives, we were concerned with improving labour practices within our own organization, the ILO. At the same time, we shared the information on our activities and achievements with the sister unions/associations in other organizations. And, when the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, visited ILO, I gave him a copy of the signed agreements and invited him to apply collective agreements and the provisions we signed at the ILO in the UN more generally. My pitch was that the organizations could only gain efficiency and renown by becoming 'best-in-class' employers. And, while Kofi Annan did not act on this suggestion, in fairness, the onus is with the staff. Therefore, I still think it is in everybody's interest to have a staff union of international civil servants.

Just Do it!

Post-COVID, it seems self-explanatory why the UN agencies practicing 'business as usual' risk losing their attraction for staff, mainly those from developed countries. The management of UN agencies must wake up to the changed reality, where promoting justice to people and peace to countries can occur credibly only if those organizations provide the reasonable practice of internal democracy and justice for ICS. Relevance, like charity, begins at home. This is more relevant when UN salaries are less attractive than in the past and when short-term (precarious) contracts are no longer a rare exception.

When signing their employment contract, ICS must receive a fair return for the sacrifice they make when they liberate their employer from abiding by national labour laws and protection from both the scrutiny of public opinion and the national judiciary. Staff associations and other clubs cannot deliver the results that staff unions can when bargaining binding collective agreements. It is in everybody's interest that staff unions of international civil servants should be recognised as bargaining agents, and that all aspects of labor relations are legitimate subjects for collective agreements within the United Nations Organizations. ▸

* David Dror is a Former ILO Senior Official and Member of the Executive Committee of Greycells.

Les “coups de cœur hivernaux” du Kiosque Culturel du CAGI

Que faire en cette fin de saison hivernale si vous êtes dans la région?

Michael Cochet *

Que vous soyez nouvel arrivant ou juste à la recherche d'idées fraîches pour cette fin de saison, voici quelques idées de sites de

loisirs d'hiver accessibles depuis Genève et, pour celles et ceux qui ne sont pas amateurs des sports de glisse, de manifestations et d'activités ludiques. ▶

DANS LA RÉGION DE GENÈVE : BAINS, PATINS, DÉTENTE ET CROISIÈRES À GENÈVE

LES BAINS DES PÂQUIS

C'est un lieu très populaire où les habitants de Genève et la Genève internationale se retrouvent les pieds dans l'eau. Situé sur la rive droite du Léman, devant le quartier des Pâquis, les bains existent depuis les années 1872. Lieu de passage obligé, ce lieu balnéaire est avant tout une institution qui, en brassant les générations, les cultures et les plaisirs, apporte une ambiance particulière à la cité de Calvin. La vue qu'il offre sur le Jet d'Eau jouit d'une grande popularité auprès de la population résidente à Genève. En hiver, on aime y déguster la fameuse fondue de la buvette des Bains, en famille ou entre amis, dans une salle chauffée et aménagée pour cette saison. L'odeur du feu de bois et le clapotis de l'eau douce du lac accompagnent cette atmosphère unique à Genève.

Le sauna, le hammam et le bain turc des Bains sont un autre de ses points forts. Ils attirent en hiver les amoureux du bien-être.

Les Bains des Pâquis proposent également des séances de massage dispensées par des professionnels indépendants et diplômés. De quoi vous délasser après une dure journée de travail.

Avez-vous entendu parler des baigneurs d'hiver ? De plus en plus nombreux, ces nageurs amateurs d'eau froide fréquentent les Bains des Pâquis par tous les temps. Durant cette période de l'année, les Bains mettent à leur disposition des vestiaires communs avec douches, toilettes et sèche-cheveux. Rien de mieux que de combiner les activités de détente avec une plongée dans le lac à température froide. Brrr! bit.ly/3jF9Rea



LA PATINOIRE DES BASTIONS ET L'AMBIANCE CHALEUREUSE DE CAROUGE

Chaussez vos patins à glace et foncez vers les patinoires de la ville de Genève et de Carouge, accessibles jusqu'au 23 février 2022. Enfants et adultes de tout niveau pourront s'adonner aux joies du patin à glace sur la patinoire saisonnière du parc des Bastions, dans le centre-ville de Genève. C'est l'occasion de se dégourdir les jambes près de monuments phares de la cité de Calvin.

Limitrophe de Genève, Carouge est une ville attrayante de par son histoire et le charme de son architecture. La patinoire de Carouge est particulièrement appréciée des familles car elle offre un espace de jeux et de découverte. Juste à côté de la Patinoire, vous pourrez vous restaurer à l'Ice Bar en profitant de cette ambiance joyeuse. Et pour compléter votre expérience « patinage », faites un saut au Marché de Carouge où vous pourrez éveiller vos sens en dégustant les produits du terroir. bit.ly/31Wf3VF



CGN : CROISIÈRE HIVERNALE VERSION FONDUE

“Parce que fondue rime avec vue” – la Compagnie générale de navigation sur le lac Léman (CGN) vous embarque pour une expérience gourmande unique sur le Léman. Réservez à l'avance pour un vendredi à partir du 4 février 2022 et optez pour la formule vous donnant accès à une soirée de navigation autour d'une fondue fromage ou vigneronne. Ce forfait spécial comprend la croisière aller-retour au départ de Genève et le repas (l'offre existe également à partir de Lausanne et de Morges). Pour plus d'informations, n'hésitez pas à contacter le Kiosque Culturel du CAGI. bit.ly/3q0cVnx

NYON, VILLE D'HISTOIRE ET DE FESTIVALS

A 20 minutes de Genève dans le canton de Vaud, Nyon est une ville où il fait bon vivre, entre le Léman, le vignoble de La Côte et le Jura. Les châteaux et musées de Nyon font revivre son histoire patricienne et évoquent son passé franco-bernois. Le Château de Nyon accueille le Musée historique et des porcelaines. Tout près de là, visitez le Château de Prangins (Musée national suisse) et le Château de Coppet. Haut lieu de la gastronomie et de la culture viticole, Nyon regorge également de restaurants et de caves. Si vous êtes d'humeur musicale et pour bien commencer l'année, nous vous proposons d'aller tendre l'oreille au festival Hivernales, du 24 au 27 février 2022. Ce festival favorise la découverte musicale grâce à sa programmation



variée d'artistes de qualité. Il vous promène également dans toute la ville de Nyon, dans une approche sociale et environnementale. bit.ly/3q2J6CX

SPORTS D'HIVER, NATURE ET FONDUE DANS LE CANTON DE VAUD

Vaste, varié et voisin de Genève, le canton de Vaud est rapidement accessible. Il propose de nombreuses activités insolites

dans la neige, l'idéal pour celles et ceux qui souhaitent s'échapper de la ville pour profiter de la nature.

LA STATION DE ST-CERGUES

A seulement une heure de Genève, cette station propose de nombreuses activités pour découvrir les plaisirs de la neige. Ce lieu ancré dans le Parc du Jura vaudois offre une expérience unique de ski nocturne avec ses deux pistes éclairées en plein centre du village. Grâce à un forfait spécial combinant ski et fondue, vous aurez l'occasion de vous attabler dans le restaurant de votre choix pour vous réchauffer autour d'une savoureuse fondue. A tous les gourmands adeptes de sorties hivernales insolites : chaussez les spatules et chauffez les caquelons ! bit.ly/3GNimNp



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LA VALLÉE DE JOUX

Les très populaires pistes de luge qui environnent la Vallée de Joux attireront les plus grands amateurs des sports de glisse. Ne manquez surtout pas la visite du lac de Joux, qui est le plus grand plan d'eau du massif jurassien, considéré comme la patinoire naturelle la plus grande d'Europe. Cette immense surface lacustre gèle en plein cœur de l'hiver et offre un cadre idyllique aux amateurs de patin à glace. Le patin ou la marche sur le lac est un moment inoubliable, à vivre à tout prix. Le lac Ter, petit frère du lac de Joux, permet également, sur une surface beaucoup plus modeste, de patiner et de glisser en famille. L'accès au lieu se fait par le village du Séchey. bit.ly/3oYgH1u

GLACIER 3000

Ce célèbre glacier fait partie des endroits à visiter à tout prix! Point culminant du canton de Vaud, il propose des activités atypiques en plus des magnifiques pistes de ski du domaine des Diablerets. On découvrira au sommet un bâtiment moderne conçu par le célèbre et audacieux architecte suisse Mario Botta. Avez-vous entendu parler de ce pont suspendu entre deux sommets, conçu par le groupe Tissot ? Eh bien c'est ici ! On le nomme le Peak Walk. Cette expérience fera grimper votre niveau d'adrénaline et vous plongera en plein cœur de l'hiver dans le panorama sublime des plus beaux sommets des Alpes suisses. Il est également fortement conseillé aux adeptes de la nature et des animaux de découvrir les balades en traîneau à chiens de Glacier 3000, dans un cadre exceptionnel sur une vaste étendue de neiges éternelles. bit.ly/2Zhk89b



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UN VILLAGE D'EXCEPTION : GRUYÈRES (CANTON DE FRIBOURG)

Réel coup de cœur, la ravissante petite cité médiévale de Gruyères, qui figure au palmarès 2021 des villages touristiques de l'Organisation mondiale du tourisme, mérite pleinement un séjour romantique ou une excursion familiale. Il n'est donc pas question d'y échapper !

Son paysage rustique avec vue sur le lac de la Gruyère est également le lieu d'origine des vaches fribourgeoises tachetées de noir et blanc, dont le lait produit l'emblématique fromage de Gruyère AOP. Le village médiéval de Gruyères, entièrement réservé aux piétons, est couronné par son magnifique château du 13^e siècle hérissé de remparts. Le site abrite différents musées consacrés à l'architecture, l'histoire et la culture. Il héberge également le musée H.R. Giger, consacré à l'artiste suisse qui a imaginé les monstres de la production hollywoodienne "Alien". À ne pas manquer non plus, le bar du musée qui se trouve à l'autre côté de la ruelle, soigneusement meublé et décoré dans l'esprit fantastique de l'univers des Aliens. Le village recèle de nombreuses auberges où l'on



déguste les spécialités du terroir : la fondue, les fromages et évidemment les desserts confectionnés avec la succulente crème double de la Gruyère. Si vous voulez tout savoir sur le Gruyère AOP, la fromagerie propose des visites qui vous feront découvrir la fabrication du célèbre fromage. Enfin, si vous êtes plutôt d'humeur chocolat, faites un saut à la Maison Cailler, la Chocolaterie suisse, pour mettre vos sens en ébullition. bit.ly/3J6KYn5



QUI DIT BÂLE, DIT CARNAVAL

Manifestation pleine d'émotions, le Carnaval de Bâle (du 7 au 9 mars 2022) est l'un des fleurons de cette ville magnifique. Il est considéré comme le moteur de sa créativité culturelle et illumine la cité rhénane. Son caractère exceptionnel lui a valu d'être inscrit au patrimoine mondial culturel immatériel de l'UNESCO. Un séjour pendant le carnaval vous permettra en outre de découvrir la troisième ville de Suisse et de prendre goût à son terroir et à la culture. Bâle est en effet célèbre pour ses nombreux musées

et ses manifestations artistiques, notamment Art Basel. Le Kunstmuseum, qui est de loin le plus grand musée d'art en Suisse, et historiquement la première collection d'art (1661), mérite le détour. Ne manquez pas non plus la fameuse Fondation Beyeler, l'iconique Musée Tinguely et le Musée d'Art contemporain de Bâle.

Perdez-vous dans les ruelles de la vieille ville pour admirer les maisons anciennes et les bâtiments emblématiques des divers courants architecturaux de la région. Enfin, ne quittez pas Bâle sans y avoir dégusté ses délicieux Läkerlis! bit.ly/3bhYCU1

* Michael Cochet est le Responsable du Kiosque Culturel du CAGI à l'ONUG.



Mitres des filles publiques au XVIe à Genève

Genève, quartiers chauds à travers les siècles

Découvrez les lieux coquins et libertins des différentes époques, un autre regard sur Genève

Catherine Hubert Girod *

La Cité de Calvin évoque austérité et interdictions dans le domaine de la fête et du divertissement. Il est vrai qu'après la Réforme en 1536, le ton se durcit pour des raisons morales et d'ordre public jusqu'à réprimer les danses et chansons paillardes et bien entendu à interdire la prostitution.

Un quartier chaud au Moyen-Âge, la rue Etienne-Dumont dans la Vieille Ville

Ce lieu libertin se nomme d'abord la Carreira Lupanaris, située vers la Porta Burdelli, puis la rue des Belles-Filles avec l'impasse du Vieux-Bordel et la rue Chausse-Con (devenue Chausse-Coq au Moyen Âge). Au 15ème siècle, les prince-évêques de Genève restreignent ce commerce immoral mais très lucratif en le limitant à ce quartier de la haute-ville, puis aux "maisons de plaisirs" dirigées

par une mère maquerelle. Une d'entre elles, certainement une ancienne prostituée, considérée comme la Regina Bordelli, a le quasi-monopole de cette activité jusqu'à l'adoption de la Réforme et l'arrivée de Jean Calvin en 1536.

Le commerce des charmes est alors banni et se déplace hors les murs vers les faubourgs. Loin du regard des autorités, les Genevois peuvent continuer à s'encanailler et s'adonner aux plaisirs interdits. Les mœurs se relâchent au 18ème, siècle des Lumières mais aussi du libertinage, comme le décrit le grand séducteur vénitien Giacomo Casanova dans ses mémoires sur ses sulfureux séjours à Genève. Au 19ème siècle, les bourgeois ayant honte de leur adresse, la rue des Belles-Filles est renommée d'après le pasteur Etienne Dumont et le cul-de-sac du Vieux-Bordel devient la rue Maurice.

Autour de la rue de la Croix-d'Or : la Basse-Ville de la Belle-Epoque

Lors de l'annexion de Genève par la France de 1798 à 1813, les maisons closes réglementées sont instaurées afin de mieux contrôler la prostitution et les maladies sexuellement transmissibles, dont la syphilis. Recluses derrière des volets fermés, les filles de joie ne peuvent sortir qu'accompagnées. Elles sont inscrites à la police et doivent subir des visites sanitaires régulières. Dans le dernier quart du 19^{ème} siècle, il y a une vingtaine de ces "maisons de tolérance" dans les rues commerçantes de la Basse-Ville et dans celles qui montent vers la Haute-Ville. Une lampe rouge constitue la seule indication extérieure de l'existence de ces bordels autorisés. Cependant, des maisons clandestines s'installent aussi dans ces rues.

Les maisons de tolérance de la rue principale de la Croix-d'Or sont les plus connues et celles qui restent ouvertes le plus longtemps. Au numéro 5, la maison de Mme Adèle est très importante et paie les plus lourds impôts. Après le suicide en 1888 d'Anna S, une des pensionnaires endettée, le débat entre abolitionnistes et règlementaristes enflamme le public. Il faudra attendre 1925 pour qu'une décision du Département de Justice et Police proscrive les maisons closes à Genève. La prostitution dans les Rues-Basses résiste encore quelques décennies puis se déplace progressivement vers la rive droite, proche de la gare, des hôtels et des autres établissements de la vie nocturne.

“ La prostitution est légale en Suisse depuis 1942 ”

La rue des Etuves : quartier sulfureux de Saint-Gervais

Les étuves sont des bains publics chauffés, signalées à cet endroit depuis le 16^{ème} siècle. On y vient pour se laver, se raser ou se faire masser, mais également pour discuter, manger et plus si entente... Il faut souligner que ces établissements chaleureux et sensuels sont mixtes et attirent aussi les femmes de petite vertu. Malgré les nombreux efforts visant à mettre fin à ces activités autour des étuves, elles ne cessent qu'au 17^{ème} siècle avec la disparition de ces établissements suite à diverses épidémies.

Cependant, dès les années 1950, la rue des Etuves redevient haute en couleur. Également connue

comme la rue des accordéons, on y trouve une dizaine de cafés et bistrot où le petit peuple vient chanter et danser. Ici, c'est la clientèle hétéroclite qui fait le spectacle : ouvrier.ère.s, retraité.e.s, homosexuel.le.s... et filles publiques. Considérée comme "lieu de perdition", voir les "bas-fonds" de Genève, on ressort dans les années 1980 une ancienne loi interdisant le bal musette dans les cafés. Une banque s'installe dans les immeubles côté Rhône et la gentrification du quartier est lancée. Les péripatéticiennes se dirigent alors vers les Pâquis.

“ Ici comme ailleurs, le plus vieux métier du monde s'adapte ”

Quartier des Pâquis : Red Light District

Avec la démolition des fortifications de la ville dès 1850, une trentaine d'années après l'entrée de Genève dans la Confédération, les faubourgs sont transformés et le quartier des Pâquis est créé avec de nouvelles rues nommées d'après les villes suisses - Lausanne, Fribourg, Zurich et l'ancienne rue de l'Entrepôt devient la rue de Berne. C'est ici que s'installent les racoleuses des Rues-Basses et des Etuves, bientôt suivies par de nouvelles arrivées.

La prostitution est légale en Suisse depuis 1942, renforcée par une nouvelle loi fédérale en 1992 qui doit être appliquée par les cantons, responsables de la réglementation du travail du sexe tarifé. A Genève, la loi cantonale de 2010 autorise toute personne majeure et consentante à exercer cette activité économique et profession en tant qu'indépendant.e. La personne intéressée doit s'inscrire à la police et suivre une séance d'information sur ses droits et obligations. Aujourd'hui le quartier chaud ou "red light district" proprement dit se situe entre quatre rues : Monthoux, Sismondi, Berne et Charles-Cusin. Ici comme ailleurs, le plus vieux métier du monde s'adapte sans cesse aux changements sociétaux, aux crises sanitaires, aux transformations urbaines et surtout aux multiples efforts de contrôle et de surveillance de la part des autorités. ▶

* Catherine Hubert Girod, guide touristique indépendante à Genève, a auparavant travaillé pour différentes organisations internationales et des ONG.



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Erik Orsenna, Président d'Initiatives pour l'avenir des grands fleuves

Porter la voix des fleuves

Erik Orsenna fait part de son amour pour les fleuves et plaide pour une meilleure reconnaissance de leur rôle de la part de la communauté internationale

Alexandre Carette *

Erik Orsenna, membre de l'Académie française, était de passage à Genève avec les membres de son association « Initiatives pour l'avenir des grands fleuves » pour échanger avec des scientifiques, des universitaires, des acteurs institutionnels et économiques et des représentants de la société civile sur la thématique : « Fleuve, lac et Ville : les conditions d'une alliance réussie ». Il avait entre autres été question de la bonne coopération en matière de gestion du Léman et du Rhône. A cette occasion, M. Orsenna a accordé un entretien à UNtoday. Il y explique l'importance, pour la

communauté internationale, de se saisir au plus vite de la question des fleuves.

Erik Orsenna, si l'on connaît l'homme de lettres mais aussi celui qui parle à l'oreille des grands dirigeants du monde, on connaît un peu moins l'amoureux des cours d'eau. D'où vient cet amour dont vous dites qu'il ne vous a jamais quitté ?

Tout d'abord, je suis un navigateur, un navigateur sur la mer en Bretagne mais aussi un peu partout dans le monde. Il y a 12 ans j'ai écrit un livre qui s'appelle « L'Avenir de l'eau » pour lequel j'ai voyagé

dans le monde entier durant deux ans et demi. C'est vous dire que j'ai une relation particulière avec la navigation, l'eau douce, l'eau salée et avec les fleuves.

Enfin, pour moi rien n'est plus beau qu'un fleuve ou une rivière. C'est au fond l'allégorie du temps qui passe. Tout fleuve est singulier : des tout petits fleuves comme les fleuves côtiers chez moi en Bretagne ou les immenses fleuves transfrontaliers.

Quels sont les grands objectifs de votre fondation « Initiatives pour l'avenir des grands fleuves » ?

Le premier objectif est de porter la voix des fleuves en tant que tels, c'est à dire reconnaître leur nécessité pour la vie et reconnaître aussi leur fragilité et leur unité. L'idée est de redonner une dignité à ces "êtres vivants". Il faut aussi comprendre que les fleuves reposent comme tous les écosystèmes sur des équilibres très fragiles.

Comment préserver ces équilibres ?

Il faut d'abord développer une bonne gouvernance de l'eau. Il y a malheureusement peu de bons exemples dans ce domaine. Il faut considérer le fleuve comme un bien commun. Dans la plupart des régions du monde, la partie du fleuve qui traverse un pays est considérée par ce pays comme lui appartenant, sans considération pour ce qui se passe en aval ou en amont. Les rapports des Nations Unies montrent d'ailleurs que les conflits ayant l'eau comme objet sont de plus en plus nombreux. Ce qui me passionne à l'ONU c'est qu'il y a de plus en plus cette conviction qu'une « hydrodiplomatie » est nécessaire car la rareté de l'eau est source de conflit et le réchauffement climatique risque d'entraîner des guerres de l'eau.

Pour sauvegarder les fleuves et leur équilibre, il faut, au fond, d'abord les connaître pour les aimer et quand on les aime les protéger et les protéger de manière extrêmement concrète.

Que peuvent faire les Nations Unies dans ce domaine ? En octobre dernier, la Commission économique pour l'Europe des Nations Unies a organisé au Palais des Nations la 9e session de la réunion des Parties à la Convention sur l'eau. Cette approche multilatérale va dans le bon sens ?

Cette approche est très intéressante car ce que les gens ne savent pas, c'est que plus de la moitié des bassins hydrographiques du monde sont

transfrontières et que les zones aquifères, les eaux souterraines, se moquent complètement des frontières. Il faut donc multiplier les accords pour aboutir à un partage équitable des eaux et éviter ainsi que la règle dans ce domaine soit la loi du plus fort. Il faut des accords à l'échelle des bassins, c'est ce qu'on appelle la « Blue Peace ».

Votre association est née dans la foulée de la COP21 et de l'Accord de Paris sur le climat. Lors de ces réunions internationales, on évoque rarement les répercussions du réchauffement climatique sur les fleuves et les rivières.

C'est extraordinaire, parce qu'on a morcelé la question des conséquences du réchauffement climatique. La pensée humaine aime bien morceler et on ne se rend pas compte que tout est lié. La pandémie a eu au moins le mérite de faire prendre conscience de l'interdépendances de tout ce qui est vivant. Par exemple, si l'environnement est pollué, cela aura des conséquences sur le monde végétal, et donc sur le monde animal et sur les êtres humains. C'est la même chose avec le réchauffement climatique. En Suisse par exemple, si les glaciers fondent, le Rhône ne sera plus alimenté, avec des conséquences importantes pour le Léman et la suite du parcours du Rhône en France.

A Genève, il y a bien sûr le Lac, et le Rhône, qui poursuit sa route vers la France. C'est un exemple concret de fleuve transfrontière.

Ici à Genève et en Suisse, c'est l'exemple à suivre. Genève n'a pas beaucoup d'habitants, c'est une ville riche et il y a une bonne entente avec la France. En plus, la démocratie suisse est exemplaire pour deux raisons. D'abord parce qu'on consulte la population par votations mais aussi parce que tous les niveaux de pouvoir sont concernés comme par exemple la ville et le Canton. Il faut ainsi trouver, pour les fleuves, la bonne échelle de coopération. La situation en Suisse et à Genève est un modèle et on essaie de voir comment l'appliquer dans d'autres pays du monde où il y a beaucoup plus de population ou moins de richesses. C'est ce que nous sommes venus chercher ici à Genève.

Pour écouter l'interview d'Erik Orsenna, rendez-vous sur le site du Podcast ONU Info Genève: onuinfogeneve.podbean.com ▶

* Alexandre Carette est spécialiste de l'information, Service de l'information, Nations Unies.

Abou Nidal de Genève, chanteur ivoirien, défenseur des ODD

Contraint au travail à 10 ans, obligé de quitter l'école, il devient célèbre et s'implique dans la réalisation de l'Agenda 2030

Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga *

Issu d'une famille polygame de 38 enfants, Aboubacar Doumbia naît à Divo (Côte d'Ivoire) en décembre 1974. Son père, commerçant, estimait que ses filles étaient plus vulnérables et qu'il était donc important de les « armer » en les scolarisant. Concernant ses fils, sa position était bien différente. Il considérait que les garçons naissent « homme » et doivent se battre pour s'en sortir.

Vous étiez très jeune lorsque vous avez commencé à travailler.

Dès l'âge de 10 ans, je travaillais le weekend comme cireur de chaussures. Je donnais une partie de mes gains à ma mère et le reste servait à payer mon déjeuner et mon goûter pendant la semaine. L'école étant à quatre kilomètres de notre lieu d'habitation,

il était exclu de rentrer en cours de journée. La seule solution était d'acheter quelque chose aux marchandes installées en face de l'établissement scolaire. Mais comme nous étions très nombreux et que la priorité était donnée aux filles et aux aînés, je devais me débrouiller pour avoir de quoi payer ma nourriture.

Vous luttez activement contre le travail des enfants depuis près d'une décennie. On imagine que c'est votre expérience personnelle qui motive ce combat.

Je regrette d'avoir été contraint au travail alors que j'aurais préféré jouer. J'estime que tout enfant doit être libre de conserver son innocence, d'avoir des activités de son âge et de suivre une scolarité normale.

Le chanteur Abou Nidal de Genève console un élève ému par la récompense qui vient de lui être remise pour son excellent résultat scolaire



Votre père ne vous a pas laissé finir vos études.

A la fin de ma 3ème, il a été décidé que je devais apprendre un métier qui permettrait de contribuer aux besoins de la famille. C'est ainsi que j'ai été envoyé chez un oncle à Abidjan.

Cet envoi vers la capitale économique de la Côte d'Ivoire a été le début d'un parcours atypique avec comme étapes importantes New York, Paris et la cité de Calvin, d'où votre nom de scène « Abou Nidal de Genève ».

J'ai vécu quelques années en Suisse avant de rencontrer le succès comme auteur-interprète de « coupé-décalé ». Ce courant musical auquel sont rattachés danse, art vestimentaire et comportement de vie a été lancé en Côte d'Ivoire aux débuts des années 2000. Ce concept est rapidement devenu populaire auprès des adolescents.

“ Je regrette d'avoir été contraint au travail alors que j'aurais préféré jouer ”

Vous avez acquis la notoriété grâce à une musique qui, au départ, faisait l'apologie d'une existence légère, mais parallèlement vous avez toujours défendu des causes très éloignées de la superficialité.

Certes, je suis un artiste. Mais ma famille m'a inculqué le respect, la tolérance et l'importance du dialogue. Je profite de l'influence que je peux exercer sur un public jeune pour partager une partie de mon expérience de vie.

En matière d'activisme social, vous avez commencé par vous investir dans le domaine de la santé. En 2020 vous avez composé une chanson sur la Covid pour informer les populations sur les gestes barrières conseillés par l'OMS.

C'est exact. J'ai commencé à utiliser ma célébrité pour participer à la lutte contre le VIH/Sida et soutenir les malades. Mon public étant essentiellement composé de jeunes gens, il me semblait évident de les associer à ce combat en les informant sur la maladie. En 2021, l'efficacité des actions de proximité du « Wara Tour » a été

reconnue par le Ministère de la santé. Notre contribution a été demandée pour encourager la jeunesse à se vacciner contre la Covid-19, raison pour laquelle je me suis fait vacciner en public.

Vous venez d'évoquer le « Wara Tour », caravane de sensibilisation à l'éducation de qualité dont vous êtes l'initiateur. Vous avez même composé un hymne intitulé, « Va à l'école ! ». Pouvez-vous nous en dire plus ?

Depuis 6 ans cette campagne itinérante dont le slogan est « Eduquer – Encourager – Divertir », célèbre l'école et l'excellence en milieu scolaire. Au cours des deux tournées annuelles, des kits scolaires, des cartables solaires, des tablettes tactiles, des ordinateurs sont offerts aux meilleurs élèves des villes traversées. À chaque visite je prends le temps de m'adresser aux élèves et à leurs parents pour expliquer l'importance de suivre une scolarité complète.

Vous n'hésitez pas à aborder aussi la question des maux qui minent l'école.

L'absentéisme, la drogue, le tabagisme, les grossesses précoces, l'intolérance, l'augmentation de la violence en milieu scolaire sont des phénomènes qui se sont aggravés au fil des ans. Les conséquences de la pandémie, et de la crise sociale qui en découle, touchent en premier les plus démunis. Il est donc primordial de les soutenir matériellement mais aussi en rappelant l'importance de vraies valeurs.

Comment êtes-vous devenu défenseur des objectifs du développement durable ?

En réalité, je défendais les 17 objectifs du développement durable de l'ONU à l'horizon 2030 avant même de connaître leur existence. Ils résument parfaitement des urgences du terrain auxquelles il faut contribuer pour améliorer le bien-être des nations. Cette année le « Wara Tour » mettra l'accent sur l'accès à l'eau propre et à l'assainissement, ainsi que sur la lutte contre le changement climatique dont on constate les conséquences dans la région. Des puits seront creusés à proximité des écoles visitées et des arbres seront plantés par les enfants. ▶

* Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga est journaliste, vice-présidente du Club Suisse de la Presse.

other words, what if our software, instead of always wanting more, desired less?

When we talk about less, we are talking about less posts, but more exposure, ergo more interaction?

Well, at least more genuine interaction that isn't driven by feed algorithms or interface patterns such as 'like' counts.

One reason today's social media platforms algorithmically filter our feeds is because they know we'd be overwhelmed if we saw every post. There are too many! But of course they built the system to encourage more posting and more friending because more data equals more profit. And, while their algorithms reduce the volume, they also let them tailor what we see in ways that keep us on their sites. This not only makes more revenue for the companies possible but, unfortunately, is also a key feature that's enabled the rise of viral mis- and dis-information, challenges to teen self-esteem, and existential threats to democracy.

Reducing the number of posts on the feed reduces or eliminates the need for an algorithm to filter it. If the volume is low and the network is small, then users can read everything without getting overwhelmed. That means there's no confusion over who sees what. It also means that users don't have to game the algorithm to get their posts seen by writing, for example, the most divisive speech they can imagine (because they've learned that such posts get more reactions and, thus, visibility).

“ What if, for example, social media wasn't engineered to produce endless growth? ”

Another feature of Minus is that it has no likes or other 'reactions'. That means the only ways to interact on Minus are to make a new post yourself or to write comments under existing posts.

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Ben Grosser in Illinois, USA, 2021

Many of the posts on conventional social networks do not reach all of our contacts. Is it accurate to say that by limiting posts we are getting more people to see what your network publishes?

A higher percentage of the network, at least. One irony about TikTok or Instagram is that while any single post might be seen by more people than are in our friend network, it might hardly be shown to any of our friends. Because Minus is just one collective network, a space without followers or friends where everyone shares the same reverse chronological feed, the whole group can, by definition, see your post. The 100-post limit functions to make sure the feed never gets too crazy, to encourage more consideration by users before they post at all, and to make space for new users on the feed after others have exhausted their allotment.

Is Minus meant to be a compressed and enhanced version of a particular social network?

It's meant to allow us to experience familiar social network design features—such as posts, replies, and feeds—in new ways. One of the best ways to figure out how a system affects us is to reduce it to its barest essentials. Minus is probably most similar to Twitter in form, though almost nothing from Twitter is left. Minus has no retweets, followers, likes, trends, messages, categories, hashtags, bookmarks, lists, or notification metrics. Its posts can't have images or video. And, perhaps most importantly, there are no ads and no algorithm deciding what you see and what you don't. In my view, those reductions are an enhancement.

If you had to define the age range of the community you would like to create, what would it be?

18-100+.

We are in the year 2025. What is the status of Minus?

Three years is an eternity for a social network that's only been around for four months! So, I can't say for sure. One point I'll note is that it may not last. It is, after all, a 'finite' social network! I'm a single person running a site with (intentionally) no revenue and no profit motive. So, it might just disappear. However, my hope is that three years from now it's a vibrant place with a rich culture of interaction, a place where we've already seen generations of 'older' users (old in time on platform, not age) transition from posters to commenters, thus always making room for the latest arrivals to craft their own 100. A sort of slow shifting of the conversation from one group to the next.

Perhaps most importantly, I hope Minus continues to do one thing it seems to be doing well so far, which is to encourage critical consideration about who benefits most when Big Tech platforms always want more and how the world could be different if our software was, instead, designed for less. ▀

* Julián Ginzo is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.



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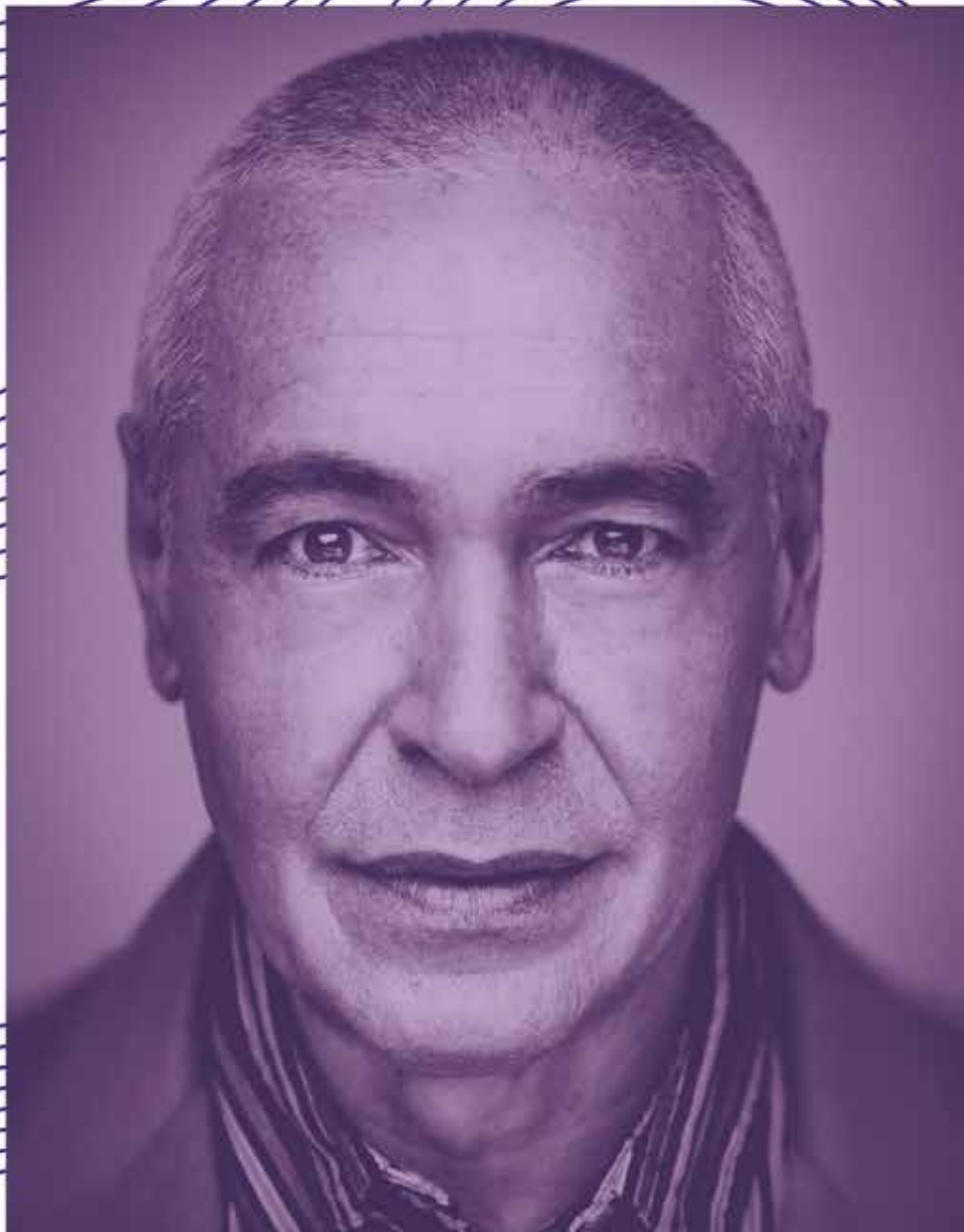
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