Director’s Introduction

The 2018-2019 biennium was very significant for the organization: it was challenging and exciting at the same time. In August 2018 I became the Interim UNICC Director and was tasked with starting a process of transforming UNICC into a more agile, nimble, and cost-effective organization.

The UNICC Director’s Report 2018-2019, which I am pleased to introduce, is designed to present UNICC’s highlights from our achievements in the biennium, the renewed vision that drives us, as well as some context of the direction the organization is taking in the coming years. I am particularly grateful for the hard work and dedication of the UNICC staff, our Management Committee, and all our partners and stakeholders who have helped to make this transformation happen.

No one in UNICC could have predicted the challenges that 2020 and COVID-19 would have brought. However, UNICC was well prepared as we had built our resilience and moved core functions to the cloud during the 2018-2019 biennium. This allowed working-from-home as a technological effortless process. Thanks to our partnership with Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, Hyperledger, the Cloud Security Alliance and ServiceNow, among many strategic vendors and relevant stakeholders, UNICC has transitioned from a shared-infrastructure provider to a shared-platform provider, and we are well on our way to becoming a shared-solutions expert.

During the same period, 2018-2019, UNICC extended its operations in Valencia, Spain. In partnership with the Government of Spain and local authorities, Valencia is now a key Enterprise Data Centre and is also well on its way to become the Centre of Excellence for business digital solutions in the United Nations system.

UNICC has redoubled its focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a special focus on SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 9: Innovation, and SDG 17: Partnerships, and in line with the UN Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies. 2030 is around the corner and we need to redouble all efforts to achieve the SDGs, reduce the gap on technologies and leave no one behind.

We, in UNICC, started this past biennium with our Officer in Charge Director, Ray Compton, who I would like to thank for steering the organization until August 2018. I am also thankful for the support of UNICC’s Management Committee and its Advisory Group, especially to Daniel Couture and Dino Cataldo Dell’Accio, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Management Committee respectively for this biennium, who provided sage advice and good guidance over the biennium.

The work achieved in 2018-2019 to both fiscally transform itself and reprioritize its services has positioned UNICC to enable innovative digital delivery and leadership, which proved to be vital to the success of the 2020 response to COVID-19. As the CIO for UNICEF, success equals results for children and I am pleased to partner with UNICC as we continue to deliver to those results in the digital space.

Daniel Couture
Chief Information Officer, UNICEF

I hope you find this report as exciting as the biennium was for all of us in UNICC and our Partners, Users and relevant stakeholders, and hope it manages to paint a good snapshot of UNICC, its services and its unique position as the shared services digital solutions provider for the UN system.

Truly yours,
Sameer Chauhan
Director, UNICC
Biennium Highlights

Biennium At-a-glance

- 8 New Clients
- 53 Partners
- 8 User Organizations
- 4 Meetings of MC

Certifications

- COBIT
- PRINCE2
- ITIL4
- ISO 27001
- ISAE 3402
- ISO 9001

Finance (Budget)

- 2014-2015: 148.7M USD
- 2016-2017: 149.5M USD
- 2018-2019: 150.6M USD

Services

- Professional Services
- Information Security
- Data and Analytics
- Software Services & Cloud
- Infrastructure Services
- Platform Services
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The United Nations International Computing Centre (UNICC) was created in 1971 by a Memorandum of Agreement between the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). In line with General Assembly Resolution 2741 (XXV) of 17 December 1970, UNICC was born as an inter-organizational body to provide a common electronic data processing (EDP) facility.

UNICC established a hosting agreement with WHO, which also provided the first data centre. The initial agreement between the three founding organizations explicitly encouraged other UN Agencies to join the newly born Inter-agency set-up.

During the 1980’s UNICC provided mainframe services to its growing number of Partner Organizations. Low speed lines between UNICC and its Partners’ premises were mostly used as dedicated links for accessing UNICC’s mainframe system.

In the following decade, UN organizations began to deploy Local Area Networks (LANs) and by the middle of the 1990’s UNICC installed an Internet gateway. Access to the Internet was initially provisioned through the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), with an initial access bandwidth of 64 Kilobytes per second (KBps). In 1995, UNICC started offering Internet access as well as Gopher and World Wide Web (www) hosting services; UNICC also installed a messaging hub which allowed clients to exchange emails.

UNICC expanded with a global footprint including client-facing offices in New York, USA, in 1995 and in Rome, Italy, in 1999. UNICC opened operational Centre of Excellence in Brindisi, Italy, in 2002 and in Valencia, Spain, in 2012, after signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Department of Field Support (DFS) – now named the Department of Operational Support (DOS) – for the use of office space and data centre facilities in the United Nations Support Base (UNSB) premises.

UNICC has grown from an Inter-Agency organization of three members to over sixty in 2019. A small organization with a limited number of staff supporting mainframe computers, infrastructure, networking, storage and computing has now grown to over 450 staff and consultants supporting an entire spectrum of reliable digital services driven by best practices, offering world class technology, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and a system wide cross domain experience of knowledge and data, enabling customers to achieve their SDG mandate through accelerated digital delivery.

UNICC’s portfolio now covers more than 61 Partner and User Organizations in the UN system, providing more than 48 trusted services and digital business solutions in five strategic operation locations around the world (Brindisi, Geneva, New York, Rome and Valencia). UNICC is a full cost-recovery organization. More details about UNICC’s history by scanning the QR code at the top of this page.
UNICC is governed by a Management Committee (MC) comprised of one representative from each of its Partner Organizations. All Partner Organizations, 35 by the end of the 2018-2019 biennium, share responsibility for key decisions, providing guidance in devising UNICC’s strategic direction and approving the Centre’s budget, financial reports, and services rates. The MC meets twice a year, in spring and in fall. During this biennium, the MC was hosted by the World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome, Italy (April 2018), UN Secretariat (OICT) in New York, USA (October 2018), UN Secretariat (Global Service Center) in Valencia, Spain (March 2019) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, The Netherlands (October 2019).

An Advisory Group consisting of a subset of the MC members works throughout the year with the UNICC Director to undertake preliminary work on topics of interest, to provide advice on MC agendas and to make recommendations on items presented for decision to the MC. The Advisory Group is composed of the MC representatives of the top five contributors to UNICC, one to three additional MC members suggested by the Chair of the MC and endorsed by the MC members, the Chair of the MC who also chairs the Advisory Group, as well as the Director of UNICC.

Towards the end of the biennium, the UNICC MC Audit Sub-Group was established as an advisory and oversight body, independent from UNICC management, reporting to the Management Committee. The UNICC MC Audit Sub-Group is tasked with an advisory and oversight role to assist the MC in fulfilling its obligations in financial reporting, audit and assurance process, system of internal controls, compliance with applicable regulations and risk management. The Audit Sub-Group is composed of at least three and a maximum of five members nominated and appointed by the MC from its membership, based on interest and expertise from the members. Audit Sub-Group members serve impartially in their personal capacity and in the interest of the Management Committee.
UNICC started the biennium with economic difficulties and budgetary challenges. The Management Committee had approved the organization’s budget for 2018-2019 in its 100th meeting (October 2017) with a forecast for revenue of USD 126.1 million. This meant an anticipated USD 30 million decrease from the previous biennium 2016-2017 forecast for revenue (USD 156.7 million). However, UNICC proposed a series of cost control measures in 2019 that were presented to and approved by the MC to bring UNICC back into a positive position by the end of the biennium. These controls were implemented successfully with a 6.6% increase of total revenue from services in 2019, so that UNICC ended with a total of USD 150.7 million for the whole biennium of 2018-2019. This ensured the organization managed to deliver more services to the UN system and realize a higher revenue than the previous two biennia 2014-2015 (USD 148.7 million) and 2016-2017 (USD 149.5 million).

When reacting to this difficult situation, UNICC developed and implemented a detailed plan that was approved by the Management Committee to bring the organization’s costs in line with its budget. The Centre started implementing cost efficiencies as early as January 2019, with the aim that by end of that year it had reduced the operating costs by USD 3 million. The measures that were taken and the associated cost savings were mainly in the following areas:

a) Human Resources
b) Rationalization of pool of contractors
c) Negotiation of contractual agreements and prices with vendors
d) Restrictions on duty travels, with consideration given to clients’ projects
e) Reduction of training costs by promoting virtual training, negotiating further discounts and using out-of-the-box approaches
f) Reduction of office space footprint, delinking the space footprint from grade and position
g) Reduction of other operational expenses, including the freeze of some internal projects

The efforts in those areas yielded results that were even better than projected and, by the end of 2019, the organization managed to save USD 4.6 million without affecting the quality and delivery of its services.

Another financial challenge that the organization faced was the decision taken by the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILO-AT), issued on 3 July 2019, regarding the contested reduction in the Geneva post adjustment for UN Professional Staff. This meant an additional expenditure of approximately USD 700,000 to cover for retroactive payments to UNICC professional staff based in Geneva.

A combination of top line growth and aggressive operational controls allowed UNICC to demonstrate a significant increase in productivity and, in May 2019, UNICC’s income and expenditures were balanced for the first time in the biennium. Throughout this biennium, UNICC also developed significant cost transparency through a number of tools that allowed the Centre and its Partners to better understand and control the expenditures.

Overall, as a result of all of these concerted efforts, UNICC was able to regain the trust of its partners and consequently experienced growth in signed contracts when directly compared to previous years.
The biennium of 2018-2019 was not only very significant for the organization, but at the same time it was challenging and exciting. In August 2018 Mr Sameer Chauhan became head of the organization and started a process of transforming UNICC into a more agile, nimble, and cost-effective organization. One of Mr Chauhan’s first actions as Director was to develop a strategic roadmap outlining the future of the organization.

In October 2018 I attended the first Management Committee as head of the organization and I presented my vision to transform UNICC. The Transformation Plan for UNICC outlined a strategic roadmap for the future of the organization. That roadmap translated into the Director’s Strategy with five main transformation principles or dimensions of change: develop new capabilities; optimize the organization; build strategic vendor partnerships; deepen client focus; and strengthen cultural values. These principles are in line with the UN Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies and his urge to transform the way the UN works, strongly focusing on shared services and technology.

Sameer Chauhan
Director, UNICC

The transformation of UNICC progressed significantly during the first half of 2019. Following the endorsement by the MC of the Director’s Strategy, 11 workstreams were developed:

1) On-premise strengthening
2) Development of cloud capabilities and services
3) Enhancement of professional services
4) Strengthening corporate processes (running back-office functions more effectively from lower cost locations)
5) Corporate tools selection and implementation
6) Human Resources changes (mobilising staff to more competitive duty stations)
7) Data centre efficiencies
8) Cloud and other vendor partnerships
9) Business Relationship Management (BRM) optimization (to deepen relationships with partners)
10) Culture
11) Robotic process automation (RPA)

These actions brought immediate results by reducing costs across the entire set of services provided by UNICC to its Partners and Users. The vision of the Strategy, to reshape UNICC into a Shared Digital Professional Services Organization providing solutions, expertise, and application services to the entire UN family, embracing new partnerships, and growing its offices in the cost effective locations, brought a transformation making the organization more flexible, nimble, and resilient. UNICC was evolving from a shared-infrastructure provider into a shared-solutions provider.
In order to fast track the changes and remain committed to its Partner and User Organizations, UNICC demonstrated that it remains a strategic player by developing a) agility and responsiveness in its work; b) cost-effectiveness and transparency; c) relevant expertise and services in a timely fashion; and d) stronger understanding of client needs. These changes permeated into all the activities of the organization, widening the range of Professional Services to include solution architecture, business analysis and cloud products like Salesforce, Workday, ServiceNow, Microsoft Dynamics, among others.

Building a strategic vendor partnership was essential for UNICC’s cloud services, which has focused on two of the main global service providers: Amazon Web Services (AWS - including S3, Route 53, Cloudfront, IAM, among others) and Microsoft (O365, including Teams, Power BI, SharePoint, Dynamics, Security Forefront and Essentials, Azure, etc.). Other strategic partners, leaders in their market, have assisted UNICC on its evolution to better serve the UN family. Some examples are Automation Anywhere, Blue Prism, Women in Technology and Entrepreneurship in New York (now Break Through Tech), Center for Internet Security, Cloud Security Alliance (CSA), FIRST, Hyperledger, ID2020 Alliance, ServiceNow, SWIFT, UiPath, among many other important stakeholders in the ICT ecosystem.

UNICC and Microsoft have also worked jointly to design and develop solutions for the UN family such as Manage Service Provider (MSP) solutions, that allowed UNICC to seamlessly manage the Azure and O365 tenants for all Partners, and a customized solution based on Microsoft Dynamics that has specifically been designed for UN organizations. UNICC migrated its own corporate email to O365 in 2019 enabling UNICC staff to work remotely.

Inter-agency partnerships also increased during the period 2018-2019, in line with the UN Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies, to share services and incorporate common infrastructure across UN Agencies. Common shared services enabled the UN to devote more resources to its core mandate and to further advance on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reducing poverty and reinforcing the three pillars of the UN system: protection of human rights, supporting international law, and peace and security.

UNICC partnerships go beyond the UN ecosystem, including the wider spectrum of international and not-for-profit organizations, and for the first time, a partnership with a United Nations Member State. UNICC and the Spanish Government partnered to grow UNICC’s presence at its office in Valencia, Spain.
The combination of a talented pool of people, who have the required experience and expertise to innovate and create solutions to facilitate the UN mandate, added to the cost efficiencies and the quality of services and life, has made this office a clear choice and an essential part of UNICC’s transformation journey. Besides the Spanish Government, UNICC is also establishing new partnerships with local universities to encourage recruitment and develop ICT and leadership programs.

To reinforce the importance of the Valencia office, UNICC hosted for two days in June 2019 the Common Secure Conference’s annual meeting. The purpose of the conference was to share intelligence on cyber practices to build a strong network of security-aware partners, and to move forward on the vision of a UN family that collects and shares information to keep the UN system secure and aware. A workshop was also held for vendors and regional stakeholders, including the Computer Emergency Response Teams from the Spanish Government and the City of Valencia.

DIGITAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN VALENCIA SPAIN

A key partner in UNICC’s journey of transformation is the Spanish Government. This special partnership has enabled UNICC to rapidly position its office in Valencia as a Centre of Excellence, moving from an Enterprise Data Centre to a UN Hub for information and digital solutions to mature expertise, skills, moving bigger and faster, together with the UN system. UNICC’s presence in Valencia, specifically at the United Nations Support Base (UNSB), started in 2012 and has developed since then to the biggest office of the Organization accounting for 41% of the total UNICC staff, during the biennium 2018-2019, equivalent to 198 staff, local and international.

The rapid growth of UNICC’s office in Valencia is indirectly intertwined with the UN Reform and the Digital Transformation of the UN system. Trusted shared services and digital business solutions are very much the way forward for the UN to remain cost-efficient and to create economies of scale. These were reinforced by the growing portfolio of innovative and disruptive technology services offered by UNICC, from information security to data and analytics, big data, machine learning, RPA and AI, many of them based in the Valencia office, making that office more attractive for the UN system as a Centre of Excellence for digital services.
JIU REPORT ON CLOUD COMPUTING

The United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was established by a UN General Assembly Resolution in December 1976, as the only independent external oversight body of the United Nations system mandated to conduct evaluations, inspections and investigations system-wide. The JIU works to ensure managerial and administrative efficiency, and to promote greater coordination between UN Agencies and with other internal and external oversight bodies.

In the second half of 2019, the JIU published a report titled “Managing cloud computing services in the United Nations system.” In it, the inspectors intended to “argue for a more balanced approach in facing the potential benefits of the cloud, considering associated risks, and the potential synergies from a United Nations system-wide perspective that could be achieved by maximizing the potential of UNICC, a specialized entity created precisely to serve the system.”

The JIU report goes further and proposes that “UNICC could and should be one of the pillars supporting the digital transition, including the use of cloud computing. UNICC could offer additional opportunities in its potential role as a cybersecurity hub for partner organizations to make their use of cloud services safer and their emergency response more effective.”

These findings are of considerable importance for UNICC, reinforcing its current status as the organization in the UN family that is better positioned to offer cloud services, which are secure and reliable, and in general to develop digital services and solutions to the UN system-wide, maximizing the economies of scale without compromising risks or quality of services.
Information security has become an important element for providing technology solutions to international organizations, including those in the UN family. An information security programme aligned to the mandate of the organization enables UNICC to mitigate risks of negative reputational impact, loss of valuable information, exposure to malicious acts as well as sophisticated and complex cyber-attacks. Organizations without a well-defined information security roadmap are susceptible to exposure, attacks, financial damage as well as an unquantifiable loss of information.

Based on its proven record of managing end-to-end information security, UNICC is committed to maintaining appropriate levels of information security to its subscribers. In 2018 and 2019, UNICC launched six new information security services: i) Common Security Operations Center (cSOC) and Common Security Information and Event Management Services (cSIEM); ii) Security Awareness Services that include Phishing simulations; iii) Vulnerability management; iv) Incident response and forensics; v) Penetration testing; and vi) Common PKI services; added to the existing two services offered, namely CISO Support and Common Secure Threat Intelligence. These services have the goal to protect organizational assets, intellectual property, sensitive data and reputation. The services leverage the shared expertise umbrella of UN Clients and is adaptable to Client’s needs.

Another milestone during the biennium was the number of Partner and User Organizations supported by UNICC on various information security services, reaching 31 organizations in total. In June 2019 UNICC hosted the Common Secure Conference, with 16 UN entities attending the Conference that took place at UNICC’s Centre of Excellence in Valencia, Spain. The purpose of the conference was to share intelligence on cyber practices to build a strong network of security-aware partners, and to move forward on the vision of a UN family that collects and shares information to keep the UN system secure and aware.

As other UN entities see the value in risk mitigation and security preparedness, UNICC’s information security services have grown exponentially covering a wide range of professional services offered to the UN family. Several UN entities use PKI services as a framework of encryption and cybersecurity to protect their communication, and six UN entities were using SOC services by the end of 2019.

At the same time and with the aim to further support the cybersecurity services growth, UNICC maintained the following certifications: ISO 27001, ISAE 3402, COBIT 5, PRINCE 2, ITIL V3, ISO 20000, and it was recognized with the CSO50 Award for its security initiatives demonstrating outstanding business value and leadership in the field. UNICC offers consulting services to assist Clients to obtain this key Information security management system (ISMS) certification.
INNOVATION

Following the rapid development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the call of the UN Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, during the presentation of the UN Innovation Toolkit to "be bold, be revolutionary and disrupt, because without innovation there is no way we can overcome the challenges of our times." UNICC strives to become the UN system internal and external innovation hub. Keeping in mind that almost all innovation-related initiatives are technology-driven in nature and aligned to the SDGs, UNICC is determined to become the preferred partner for ideation, incubation and delivery of innovative products and solutions.

UNICC is a member of the UN Innovation Network (UNIN), an informal, collaborative community of UN innovators interested in sharing their expertise and experience with other interested UN partners to promote and advance innovation within the UN family. UNICC has partnered with the UN Secretariat, different UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, to design, develop, and implement different innovative projects and tools using frontier technologies upon request of its clients.

During the 2018-2019 biennium and emphasizing emerging and frontier technologies, UNICC partnered with the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) and Hyperledger to deliver an innovative digital tool to improve and secure pension processes worldwide. Thus, enabling UN Pension Fund’s beneficiaries to confirm, digitally, their identity, making the storage of biometrics not only secured but also easy to access through the download of a mobile app.

More information

UNICC developed the IPPC ePhyto solution together with the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). A tailor-made service by UNICC creating value to customer by standardising data, centralising industry exchange, and supporting emerging countries who don’t have the resource to build their own solutions, directly assisting on delivering the mandate, and accelerating the achievement of SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 15, among others.

More information

UNICC has a growing number of innovative products and tailor-made services for its Partner and User Organizations, assisting them in fulfilling their mandates and missions.

More information
I hope you enjoyed reading this report and found it as inspiring as the biennium was for all of us in UNICC. We will stay committed to our mandate and to our Partners, Users, and stakeholders to continue delivering digital solutions to the UN system and to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for the greater good of humanity.

I would like to thank all my colleagues, from UNICC and outside, for giving their best during this period. Even during difficult times, we all kept the Mission, Vision, and Values of the organization front and center, and stayed committed to deliver reliable digital services driven by best practices. I am particularly grateful to the Management Committee for trusting UNICC and supporting it further into its journey as the preferred operational and shared service centre of excellence for the UN system.

We stand now in the front steps of a new decade, the UN Decade of Action to accelerate the achievements and delivery of the SDGs by 2030. As UNICC prepares for its Golden Jubilee, we will continue to strive to deliver the most appropriate digital tools and solutions at scale to the UN family. For the new biennium, UNICC is committed to aligning itself to the UN Secretary-General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and to the five sets of recommendations to innovate, enable and protect.

COVID-19 has exposed many unresolved problems that we have become too comfortable with, like the global digital gap, gender inequalities, cybercrime, etc. We in UNICC want to build back better our community by focusing on Clients, executing with agility and maturing capabilities. We will continue innovating and digitalizing, without forgetting that only a sustainable digital cooperation will enable us to go further, think better, move faster and travel together. We remain committed to developing further, offering world class technology, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and a system-wide-cross-domain-experience of knowledge, data, enabling customers to achieve their SDG mandate through accelerated digital delivery.

Already, since the end of the two-year period covered by this report, both the real and digital worlds have changed in ways nobody could have predicted. We have seen the first ever data led response to a global emergency and with it, an incredible uptake in digital culture, cooperation and applications for humanitarian and development work that was expected to take years. Unfortunately, the step change is also revealing the limitations of global infrastructure, the socio-economic risks from growing digital divide and the accompanying threats of cybercrime. How UNICC and its Partners engage will help define the humanitarian landscape far beyond the two years of our next report.


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Enrica Porcari
CIO of the United Nations World Food Programme

Together with the newly appointed Chair of the Management Committee, Ms Enrica Porcari, Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Vice-Chair, Mr Anthony O’Mullane, Director, Operations Support Division, Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT), UN Secretariat, we will use this coming biennium to steer UNICC to overcome the challenges that COVID-19 represents and continue striving to implement the vision that drives us, to further digitalising processes, creating economies of scale, and assisting the organizations in fulfilling their mandates and missions.

Sameer Chauhan
Director, UNICC