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BACKGROUND PAPER



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The IMF and Fragile States: IEO Survey of IMF Staff

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IEO Background Paper
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Abstract

The paper reports the findings of an IEO survey of IMF staff conducted from September to October 2017. The survey asked the staff's views on aspects of the institution's work on countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS), including: (i) impact on and approaches to FCS; (ii) the IMF's work on FCS; (iii) staff incentives; (iv) the 2012 Staff Guidance Note on Engagement with FCS; and (v) FCS definition and terminology.

The views expressed in this Background Paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the IEO, the IMF or IMF policy. Background Papers report analyses related to the work of the IEO and are published to elicit comments and to further debate.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFR	African Department (IMF)
APD	Asia and Pacific Department (IMF)
APR	annual performance review
EUR	European Department (IMF)
FAD	Fiscal Affairs Department (IMF)
FCS	countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations
ICD	Institute for Capacity Development (IMF)
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office (IMF)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MCD	Middle East and Central Asia Department (IMF)
MCM	Monetary and Capital Markets Department (IMF)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RES	Research Department (IMF)
RTAC	regional technical assistance center
SGN	staff guidance note
SPR	Strategy, Policy, and Review Department (IMF)
STA	Statistics Department (IMF)
TA	technical assistance
WB	World Bank
WHD	Western Hemisphere Department (IMF)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The IEO conducted a survey of IMF staff members from September to October 2017 to gather their views on the institution's work on countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations (fragile states or FCS). The response rate was 19 percent, concentrated among economists with FCS experience. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- **Impact on and approaches to FCS.** More than 60 percent of all respondents believed that the IMF had a greater impact on fragile than on non-fragile states. Respondents expressed a range of views on whether FCS deserved a dedicated approach by the IMF, but fewer than 10 percent thought that FCS should be treated like any other country.
- **The IMF's work on FCS.** The majority held the view that the IMF had sufficient instruments to address the needs of FCS (52 percent), and that the level of access to Fund resources and the strength of conditionality were adequate (51 and 57 percent, respectively). The majority also gave a positive assessment of how the IMF collaborated with development partners across different activities (surveillance, programs, technical assistance) (59-72 percent) and of the overall effectiveness of IMF TA across different types of assistance (fiscal, monetary, statistical) (68–82 percent).
- **Staff incentives.** More than 70 percent of all respondents thought that FCS work did not receive sufficient institutional recognition, with 44 percent even considering that it had a negative impact on their IMF careers. At the personal level, however, most with FCS experience found it rewarding and enriching (78 and 68 percent, respectively) and expressed willingness to accept another FCS assignment (79 percent).
- **Staff Guidance Note.** Thirty-three percent of the staff was unfamiliar with the Staff Guidance Note on the Fund's Engagement with FCS, but only 7 percent questioned its usefulness.
- **FCS definition and terminology.** At least 60 percent of respondents with FCS experience stated that the label "fragile" had helped sharpen some aspects of their work. Fifty-one percent of all respondents saw no need for the IMF to devise its own definition or list of FCS.

I. INTRODUCTION

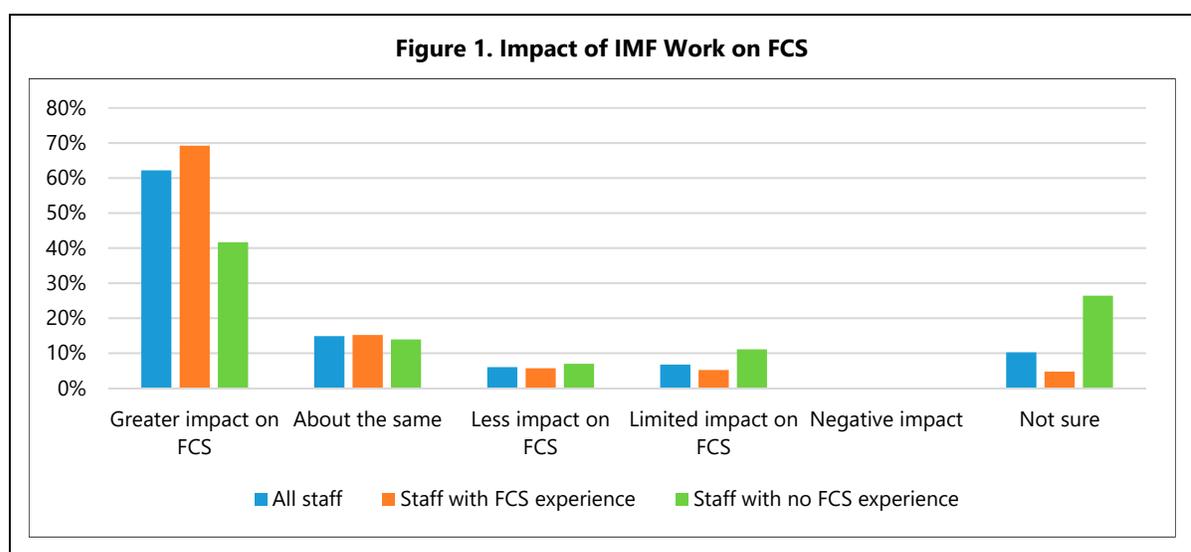
1. This background paper presents the results of an IEO survey of IMF staff undertaken for the evaluation “The IMF and Fragile States.” Conducted between September 5, 2017, and October 27, 2017, the survey was sent to 1,494 economists on the staff of the IMF and achieved a response rate of 19 percent (see Appendices 1 and 2 for details). Its purpose was to gather the staff’s views on the institution’s work on countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations (fragile states or FCS).

2. Interest in the survey was much higher among staff members with FCS experience; in fact, three-fourths of the respondents had such experience (currently, about 11 percent of all IMF economists have assignments to work on FCS). Where relevant, the analysis below differentiates the responses of staff members with and without FCS experience. Most responses were provided by staff at the senior economist level (61 percent), and the African Department was the most responsive, accounting for 18 percent of the responses.

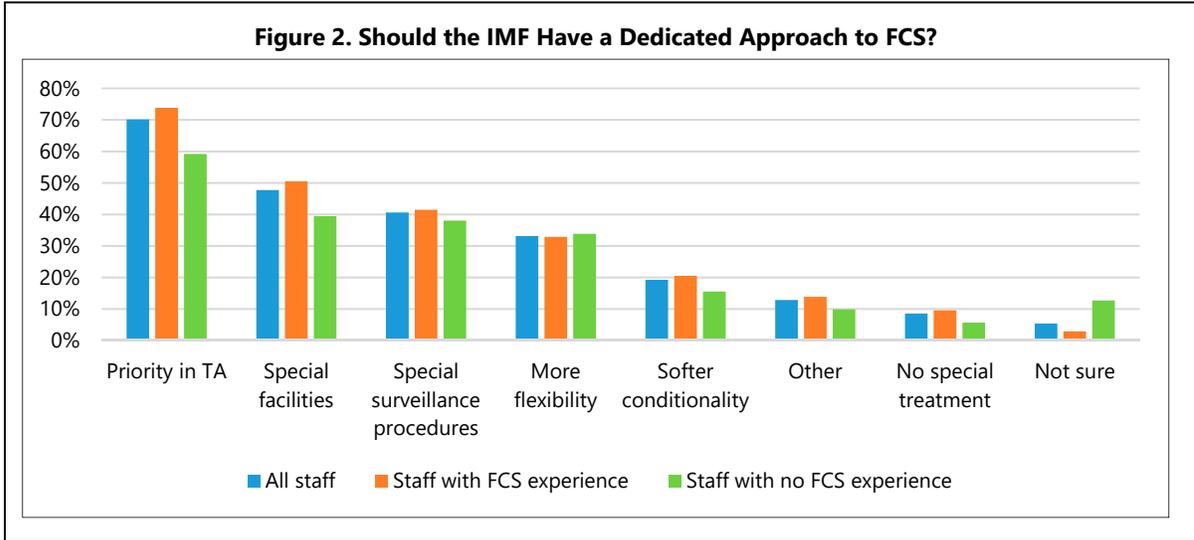
3. The rest of this paper reports the survey results grouped in five main areas: (i) the IMF’s impact on and approaches to FCS, (ii) the IMF’s work on FCS (program, coordination, and technical assistance), (iii) staff incentives to take on FCS assignments, (iv) staff views on the Staff Guidance Note, and (v) FCS definition and terminology.

II. THE IMF’S IMPACT ON AND APPROACHES TO FCS

4. Survey respondents strongly believed that the IMF had a greater impact on FCS than on non-FCS (Figure 1). Up to 70 percent of respondents with FCS experience, and 62 percent of those with no such experience, shared this view. Only 5 percent of respondents with FCS experience believed that the Fund’s impact was limited.

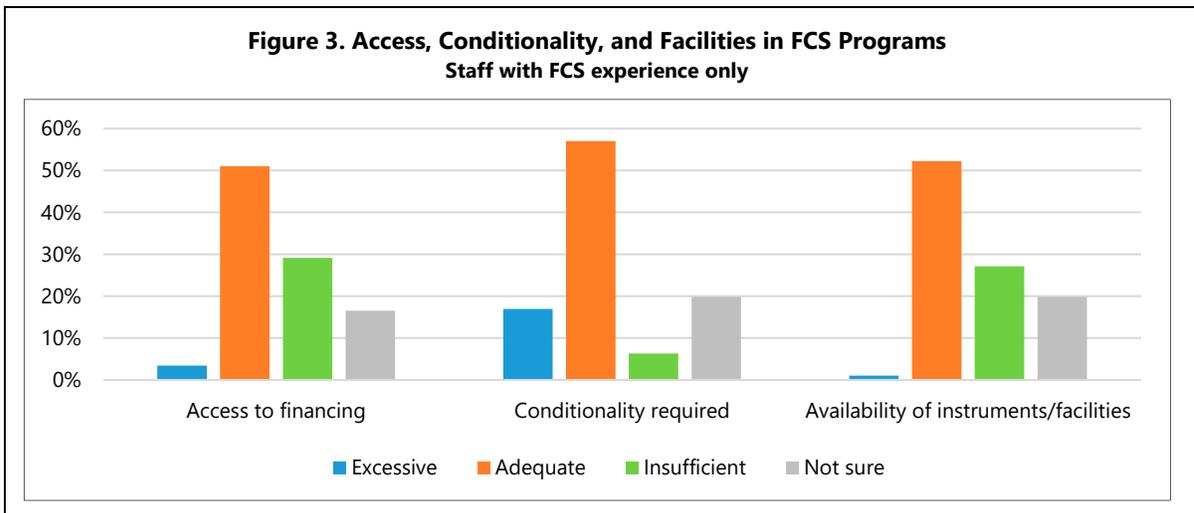


5. A range of views were expressed concerning whether the IMF should have a dedicated approach to FCS (Figure 2), but fewer than 10 percent of respondents considered that FCS should be treated “just like any other countries.” Giving FCS priority in the provision of TA received the strongest support from respondents (around 70 percent), but some also saw merit in according these countries special (long-term) financing facilities and simplified surveillance procedures, and in allowing more flexibility when interacting with them.

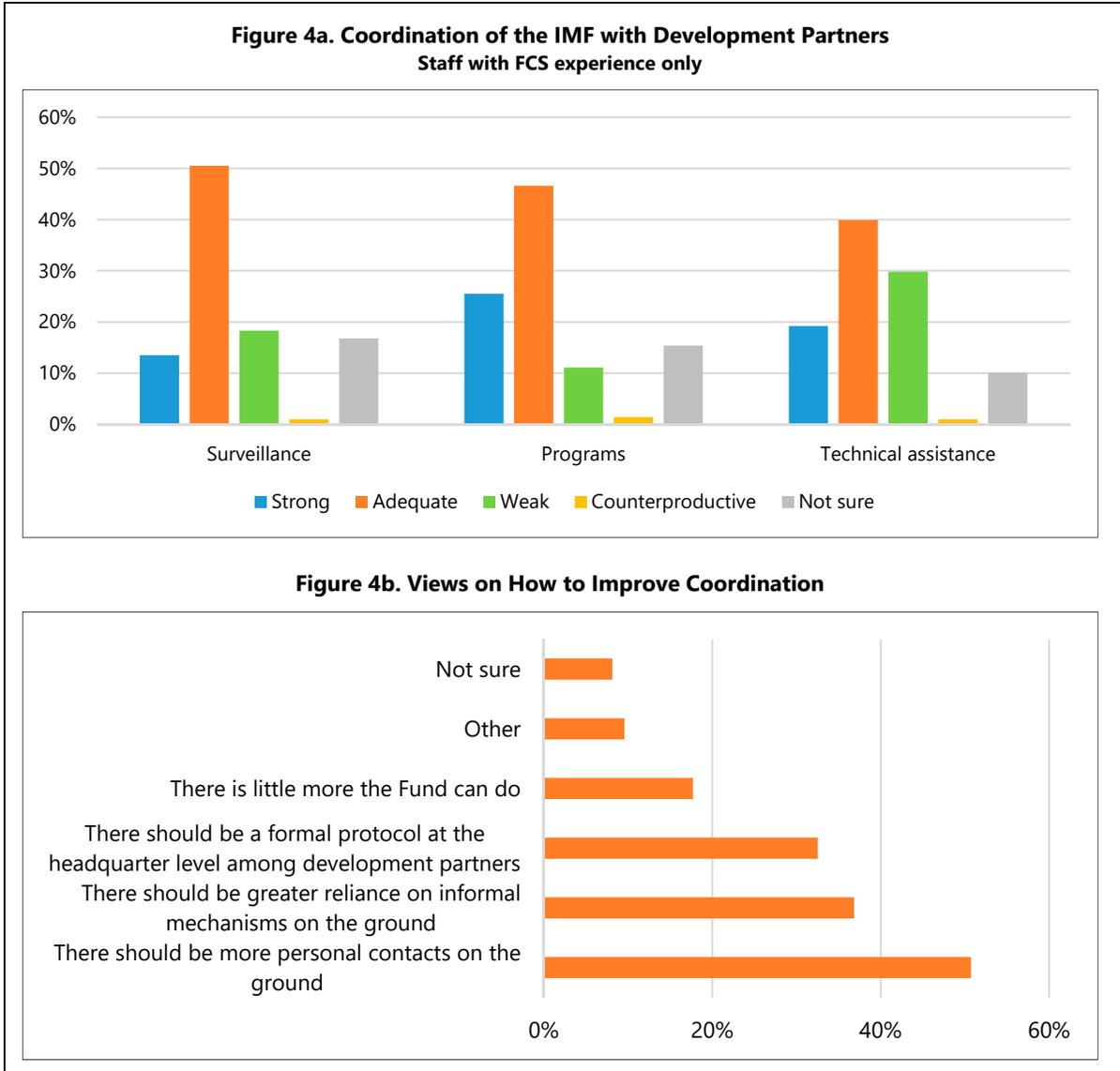


III. THE IMF’S WORK ON FCS

6. The majority view (in the range of 51–57 percent of respondents with FCS experience) considered the level of access to Fund resources, the strength of conditionality in IMF-supported programs, and the range of instruments and facilities available as adequate for FCS (Figure 3). There were significant dissenting views: close to 30 percent believed that FCS did not have sufficient access or lacked suitable facilities; and 17 percent considered the conditionality in FCS programs as excessive.

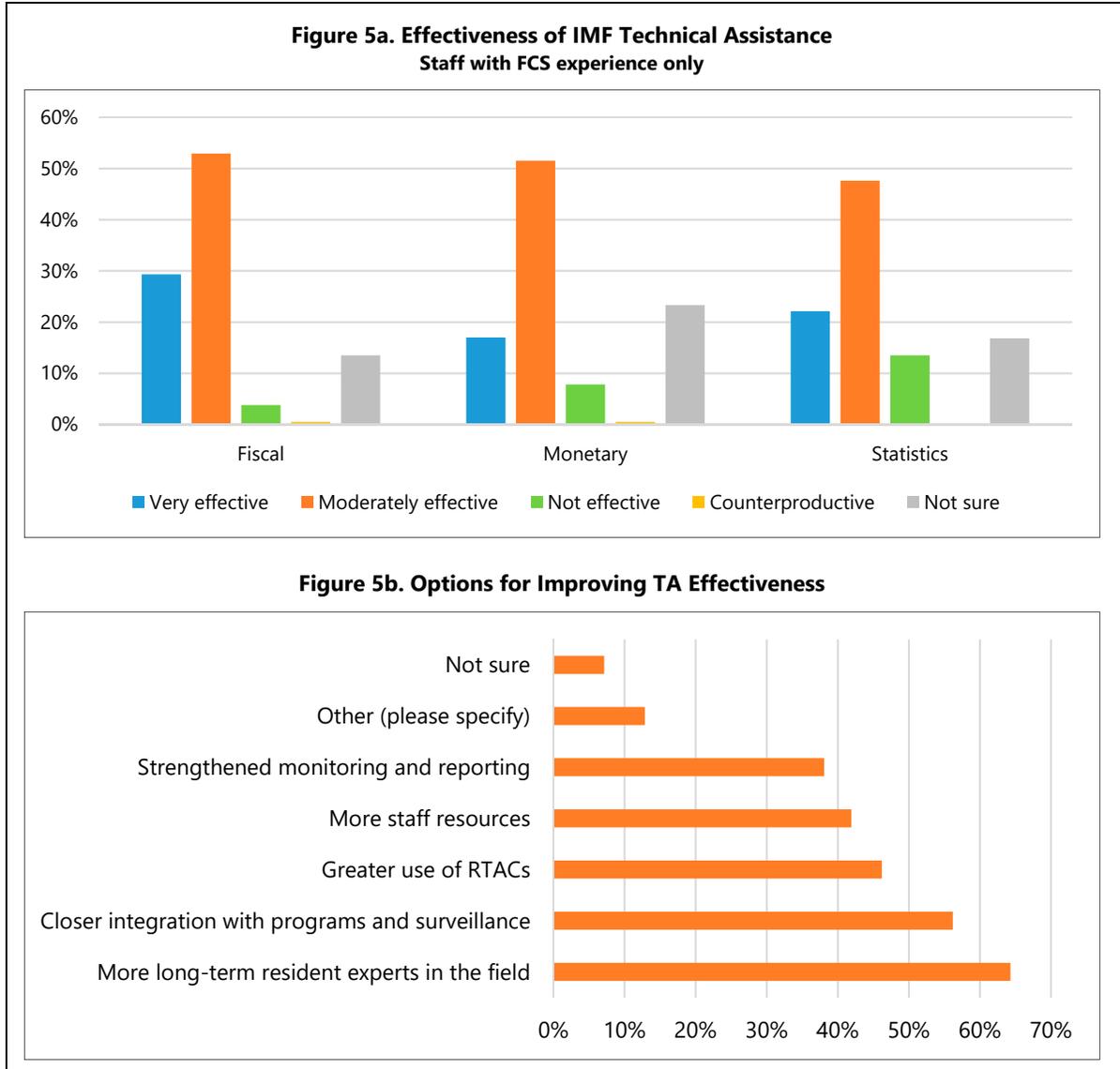


7. A good majority of respondents with FCS experience assessed favorably (“adequate” or “strong”) the coordination between the IMF and development partners in three main areas of the IMF’s work: surveillance, programs, and TA (Figure 4a). The coordination of TA received the lowest rating (but still nearly 60 percent), with almost one-third of respondents considering it as weak. On how to improve coordination (Figure 4b), more than half supported the idea of strengthening personal contacts on the ground, while 37 and 33 percent, respectively, endorsed giving greater reliance on informal mechanisms on the ground and establishing institution-level (as opposed to country-level) formal protocols.

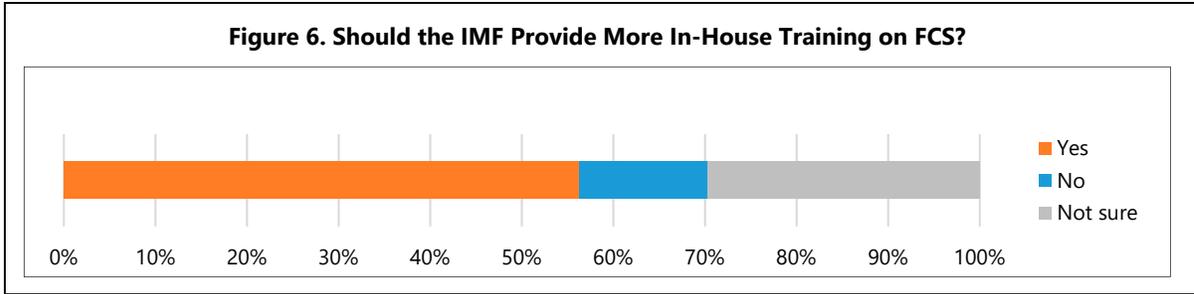


8. The majority of respondents with FCS experience also valued positively the effectiveness of IMF technical assistance (Figure 5a). TA on public finances (“fiscal”) had the largest share of positive responses, with 82 percent, while TA in monetary and statistical areas received 70 percent. Greater use of long-term resident experts and closer integration of TA with program and

surveillance work were clearly considered the best ways to improve TA effectiveness, with the support of 65 and 56 percent, respectively, of respondents (Figure 5b). Increasing the use of regional technical assistance centers (RTACs), allocating more staff resources, and strengthening monitoring and reporting also received significant backing.

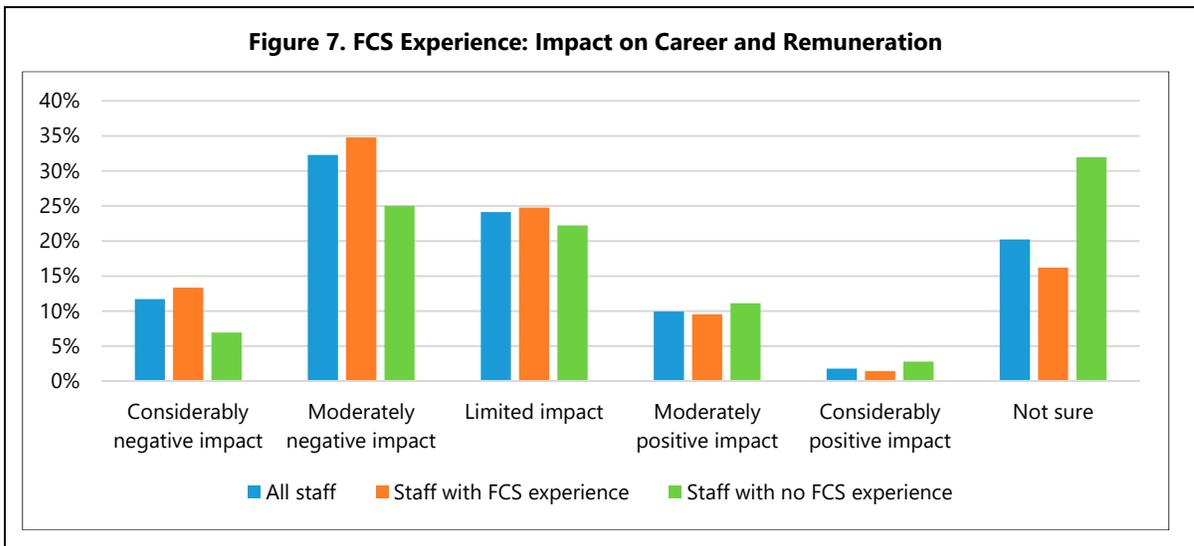


9. The majority of respondents considered that the IMF should provide staff with more in-house training as a means to improve the effectiveness of the IMF's work on FCS (Figure 6). Such a view was expressed by 55 percent of those with FCS experience and 60 percent of those without.



IV. STAFF INCENTIVES TO TAKE ON FCS ASSIGNMENTS

10. Almost three-quarters of survey respondents with FCS experience thought that FCS work had a negative or limited impact on their IMF careers and remuneration (just 10 percent considered the impact to be positive). Among those without FCS experience, the responses followed a similar pattern but were more equivocal: one-third of them were unsure about the impact of FCS work on their careers (Figure 7).



11. Compounding the lack of incentives, more than 70 percent of all respondents believed that FCS work was undervalued in the IMF (Figure 8a). This view was shared by respondents with and without FCS experience. Among those who had worked on FCS, only one in eight believed otherwise. On how to increase the institution’s recognition of such work, a similar share of each group (about or slightly more than 30 percent) thought that higher remuneration or additional compensatory leave was needed (Figure 8b). Support for linking FCS work to promotions and performance ratings was much higher among respondents with FCS experience than those without (39/32 vs. 10/15 percent). Similarly, the idea of encouraging all IMF staff members to gain FCS experience at some point in their careers received much stronger support among those with FCS experience than those without (71 vs. 42 percent) (Figure 8c).

Figure 8a. Recognition of FCS Work

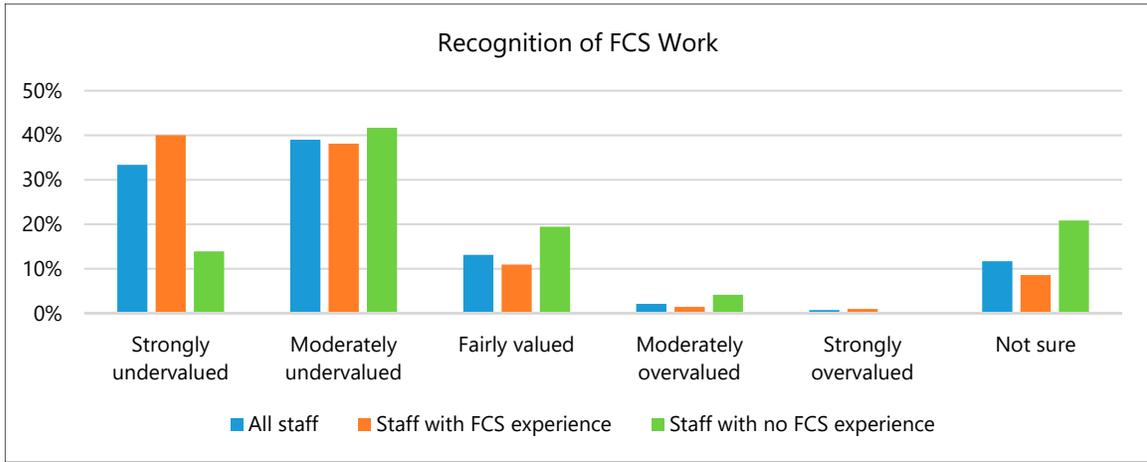


Figure 8b. How to Recognize FCS Work

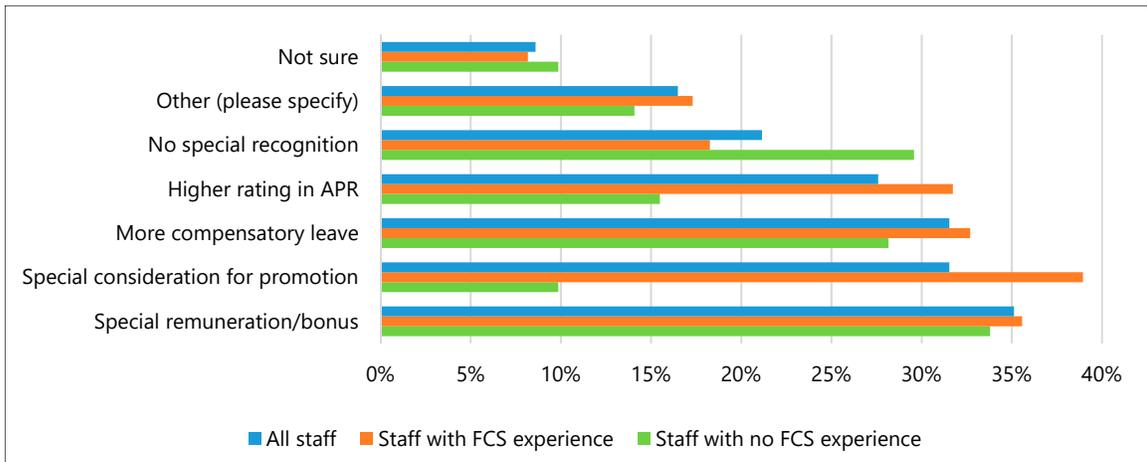
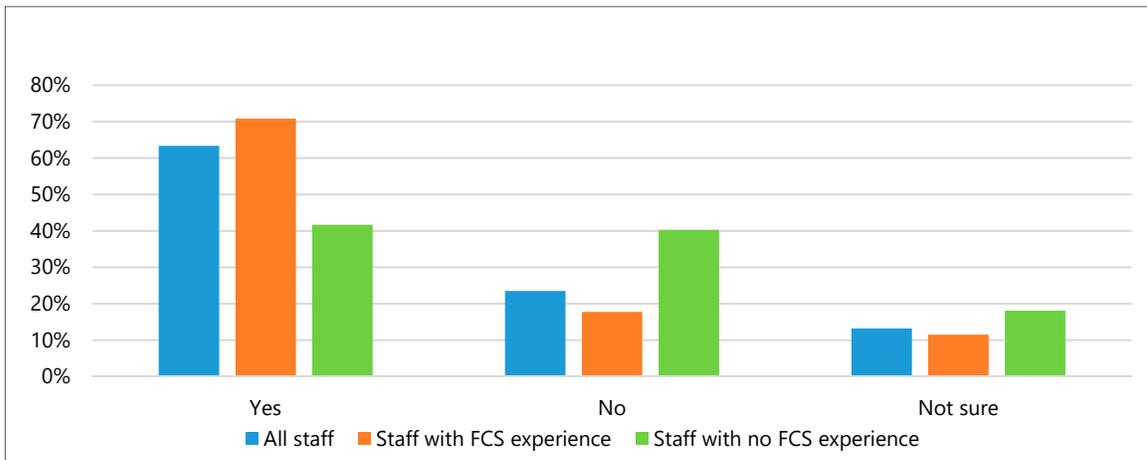
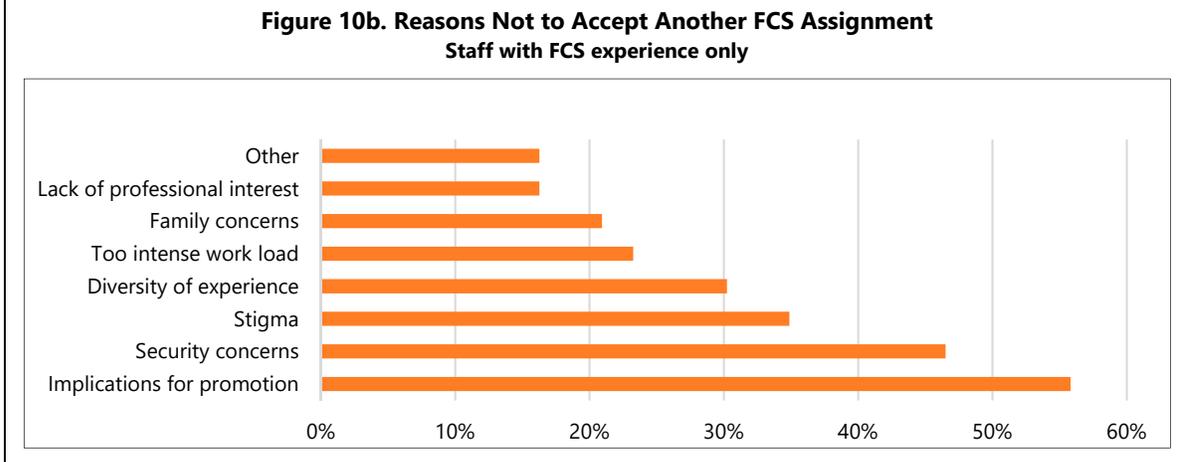
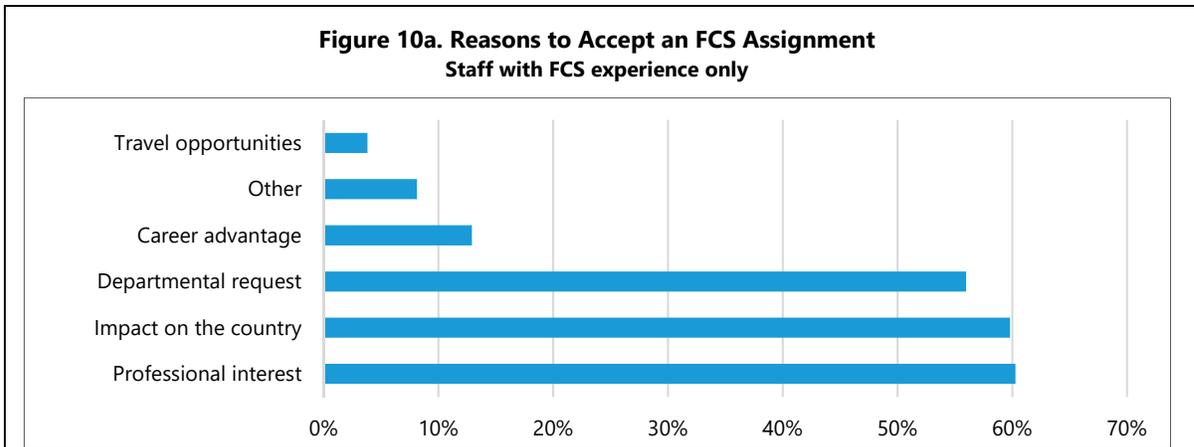
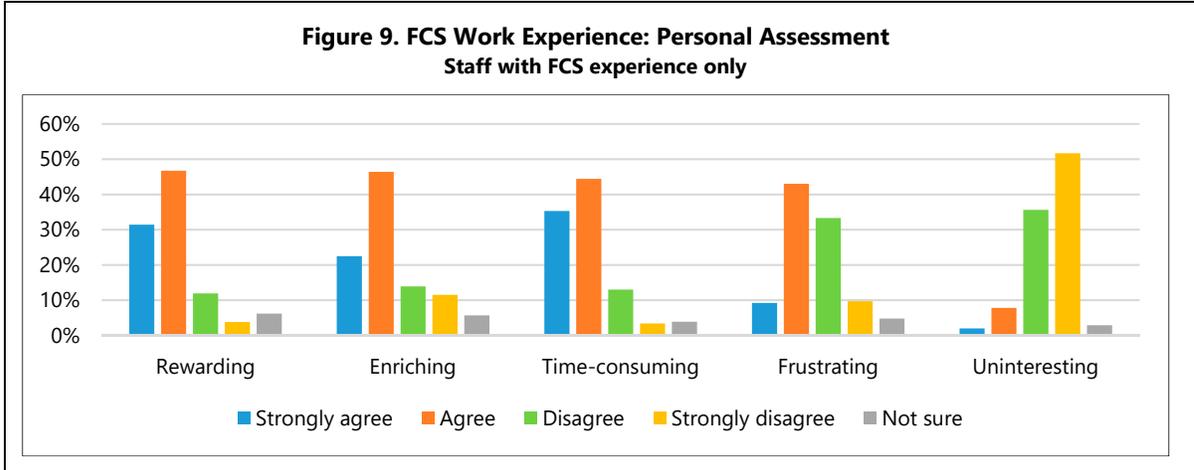


Figure 8c. Should All Economists Be Encouraged to Work on FCS?

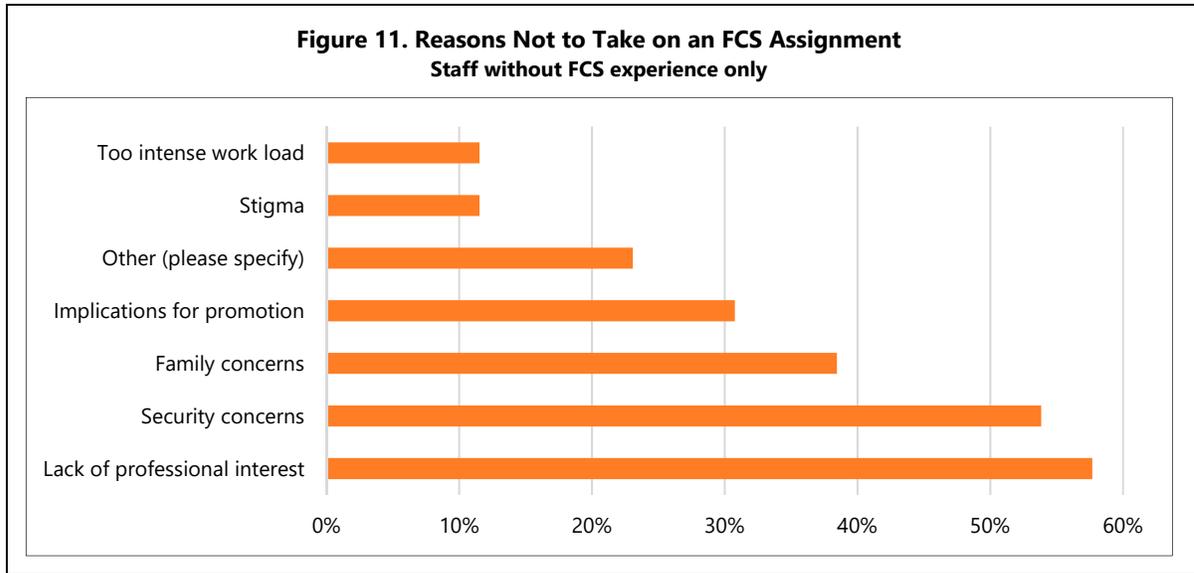


12. Despite the negative perceptions of institutional recognition and reward, more than 70 percent of respondents considered FCS work experience interesting, enriching, and rewarding, albeit time-consuming and frustrating, compared to non-FCS work (Figure 9). Few thought that it was uninteresting.



13. The IEO survey asked respondents with FCS experience why they had accepted an FCS assignment (Figure 10a). Three reasons stood out, with around 60 percent of respondents concurring: professional interest, impact on the country, and a departmental request. Four-fifths of respondents with FCS experience stated that they would accept another FCS assignment. Those unwilling to take another assignment pointed to the negative implications for their promotion prospects and to security concerns as their main reasons and, to a lesser extent, to stigma, diversity of experience, and workload (Figure 10b).

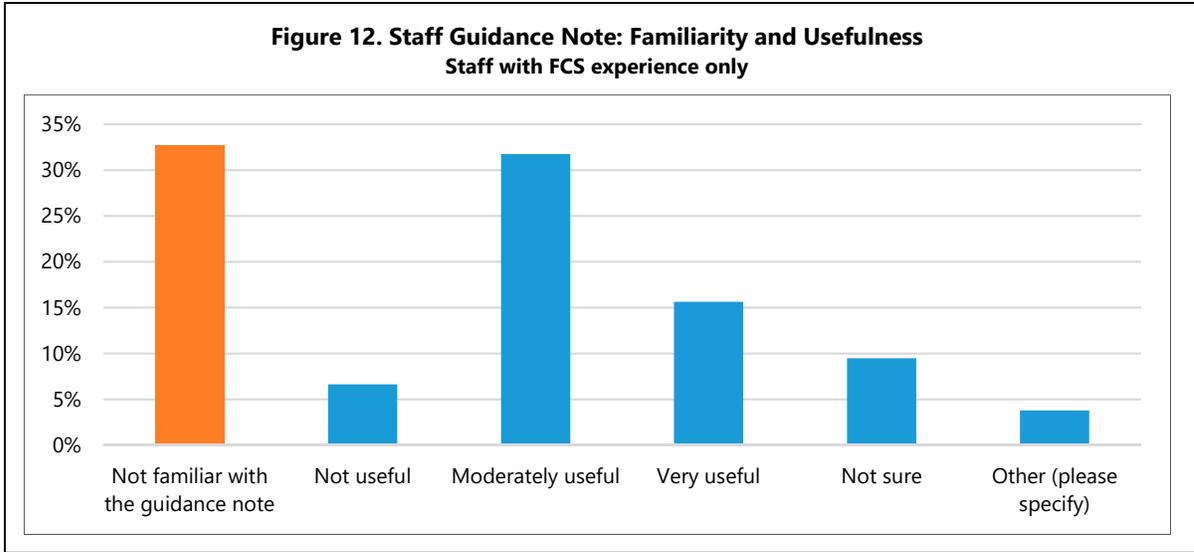
14. Asked whether they would be willing to take on an FCS assignment, 63 percent of those without FCS experience stated that they would. The survey then asked those who were unwilling to accept a first FCS assignment to state the reason(s). Two reasons were prominent: 58 percent of respondents without FCS experience stated lack of professional interest, and 54 percent security concerns (Figure 11).



V. STAFF GUIDANCE NOTE

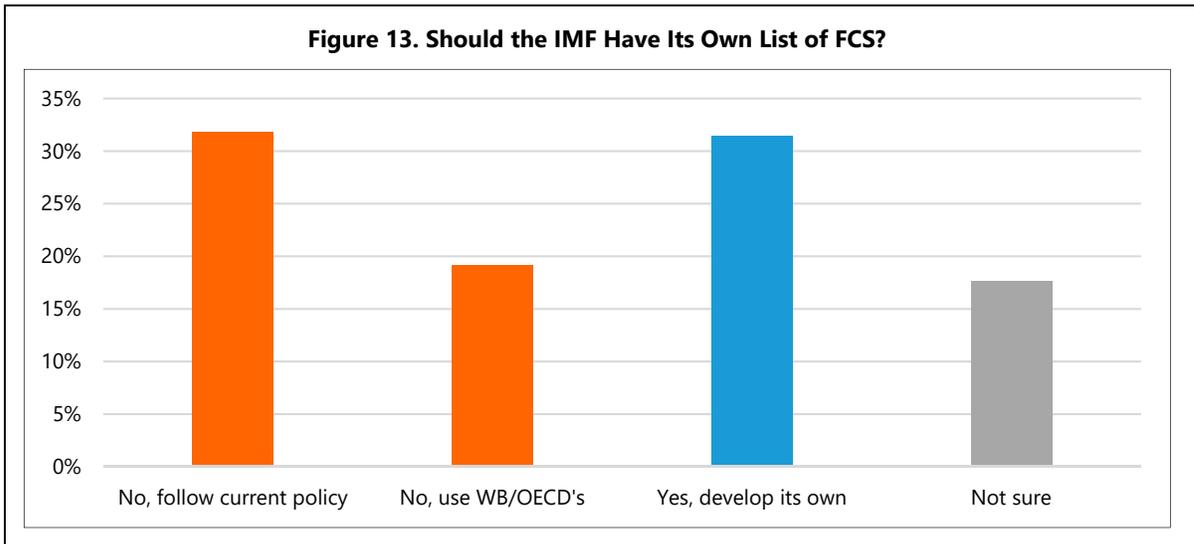
15. The survey asked staff questions concerning the 2012 Staff Guidance Note (SGN), which should guide the IMF's work on fragile states.¹ One-third of respondents with FCS experience were not familiar with the SGN. Among those who were familiar, only 47 percent had a positive view of its usefulness, and one-fourth thought it was not applied well in practice, with 61 percent attributing the failure to pressure from review departments (Figure 12).

¹ International Monetary Fund, 2012, "Staff Guidance Note on the Fund's Engagement with Countries in Fragile Situations," Washington.



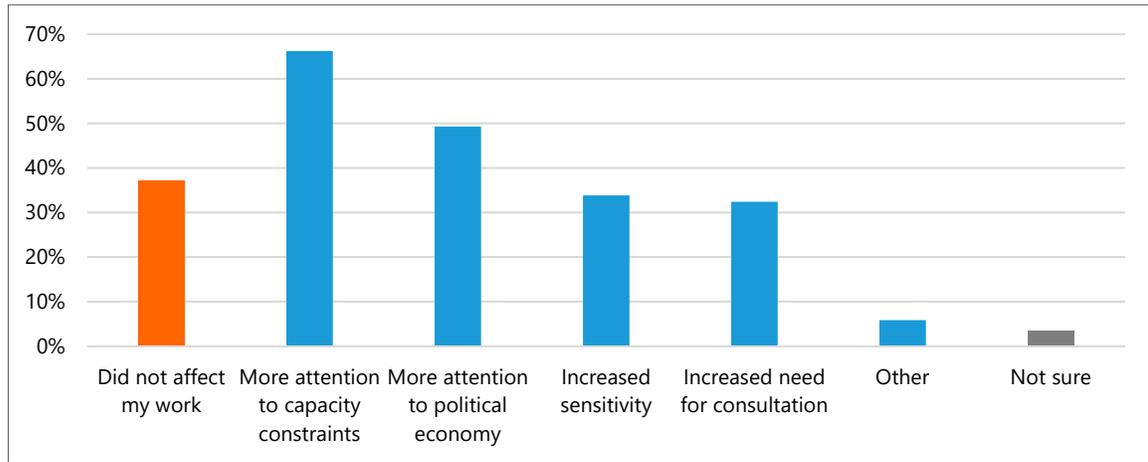
VI. FCS DEFINITION AND TERMINOLOGY

16. With little difference between those with and without FCS experience, more than 50 percent of respondents saw no need for the IMF to develop its own list or definition of FCS, while one-third saw a need. Thirty-two percent thought that the IMF should maintain its existing policy of considering the fragility characteristics of each country without relying on a particular list, while 19 percent supported using a list developed by another organization, such as the World Bank. (Figure 13).



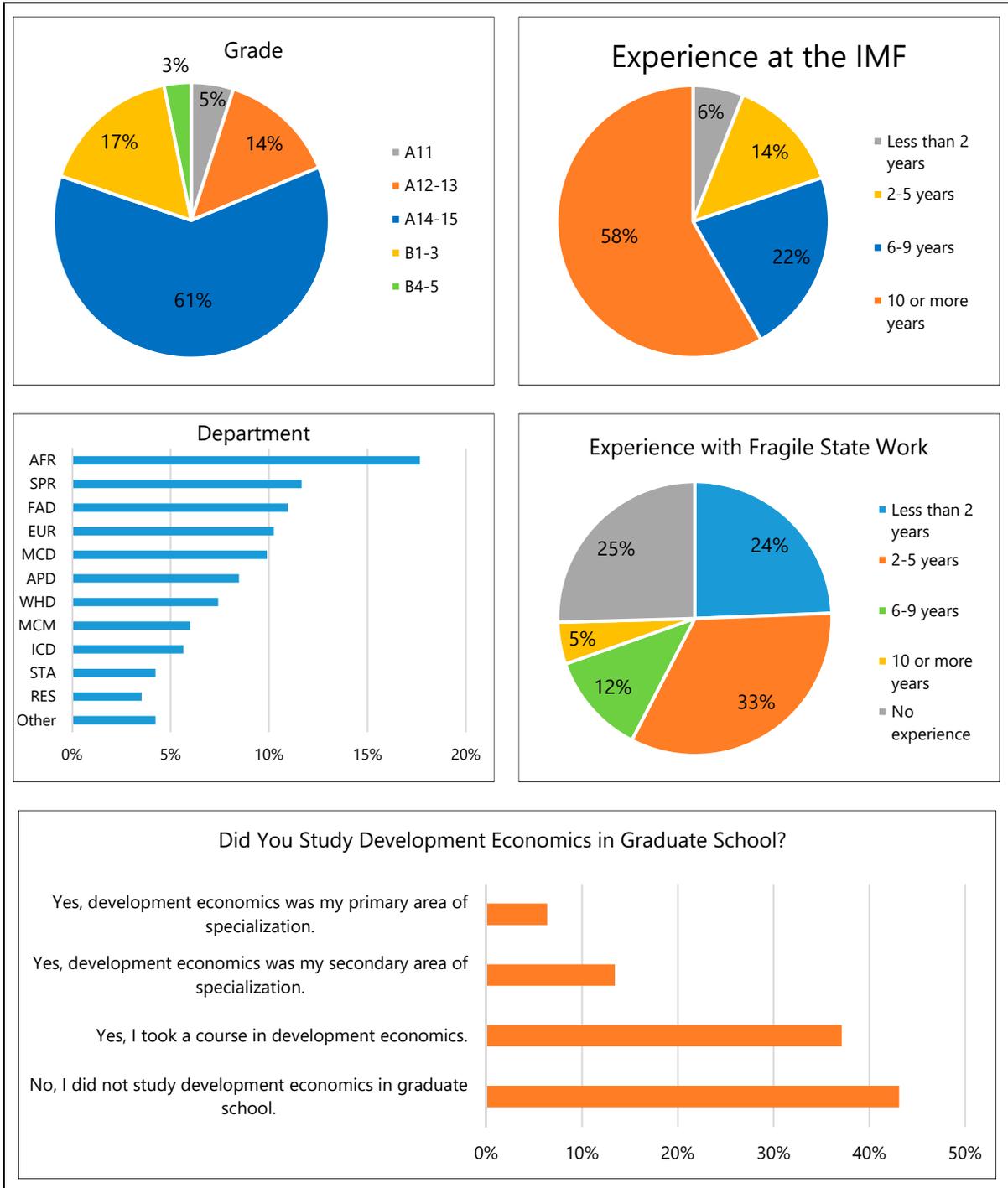
17. Around one-third of respondents with FCS experience reported that being assigned to countries labeled as “fragile” did not affect their work. The remaining two-thirds considered that the label had sharpened aspects of their work, including making them more attentive to capacity constraints and to political economy issues (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Impact of the Label “Fragile” on Your Work
Staff with FCS experience only**



APPENDIX 1. SURVEY DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

Responses	283
Rate of response	18.94 percent
Dates	September 5, 2017–October 27, 2017



APPENDIX 2. DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS

Distribution of answers in percentage		All respondents	Respondents' experience in FCS	
			With experience	No experience
Background of respondents				
	Number of responses	283	211	72
Which of the following describes your current position in the IMF?	A11	5	6	3
	A12-13	14	11	21
	A14-15	61	64	56
	B1-3	17	17	17
	B4-5	3	3	4
	Number of responses	283	211	72
What is your current department?	AFR	18	22	4
	APD	8	9	8
	EUR	10	9	13
	MCD	10	12	4
	WHD	7	5	14
	FAD	11	10	13
	ICD	6	6	6
	MCM	6	6	7
	RES	4	1	10
	SPR	12	11	13
	STA	4	3	7
	None of the above	4	5	3
	Number of responses	283	211	72
How long have you worked at the IMF?	Less than 2 years	6	5	8
	2-5 years	14	13	15
	6-9 years	22	18	32
	10 or more years	58	63	44
	Number of responses	283	211	72
Did you study development economics in graduate school?	No, I did not study development economics in graduate school.	43	41	49
	Yes, I took a course in development economics.	37	38	33
	Yes, development economics was my secondary area of specialization.	13	13	14
	Yes, development economics was my primary area of specialization.	6	7	4
	Number of responses	283	211	72
Did you have professional experience working on FCS prior to coming to the IMF?	Yes	14	17	7
	No	86	83	93
Views on FCS assignments				
	Number of responses	283	211	72
How long have you worked in an assignment involving FCS during your IMF career?	No experience	25	0	100
	Less than 2 years	24	33	0
	2-5 years	33	45	0
	6-9 years	12	16	0
	10 or more years	5	7	0
	Number of responses	209	209	0
Please indicate your reasons(s) for accepting the assignment to work on FCS (select up to three reasons)	Professional interest	60	60	0
	Potential impact on the country	60	60	0
	Travel opportunities	4	4	0
	Career advantage	13	13	0
	Departmental request	56	56	0
	Other (please specify)	8	8	0

Distribution of answers in percentage		All respondents	Respondents' experience in FCS		
			With experience	No experience	
		Number of responses	210	210	0
Will you be open to another assignment on FCS?	Yes	79	79	0	
	No	21	21	0	
		Number of responses	43	43	0
Please indicate your reason(s) for not being open to another assignment on FCS. (select up to three reasons)	Security concerns	47	47	0	
	Family concerns	21	21	0	
	Implications for promotion and other career prospects	56	56	0	
	Stigma	35	35	0	
	Lack of professional interest	16	16	0	
	Too intense work load	23	23	0	
	Diversity of experience	30	30	0	
	Other (please specify)	16	16	0	
		Number of responses	72	0	72
Will you consider working on FCS?	Yes	63	0	63	
	No	38	0	38	
		Number of responses	59	0	59
Please indicate your reason(s) why you would not consider working on FCS. (select up to three reasons)	Security concerns	54	0	54	
	Family concerns	38	0	38	
	Implications for promotion and other career prospects	31	0	31	
	Stigma	12	0	12	
	Lack of professional interest	58	0	58	
	Too intense work load	12	0	12	
	Other (please specify)	23	0	23	
Impact of FCS work					
		Number of responses	283	211	72
How do you assess the impact of IMF work on FCS?	The Fund has greater impact on FCS than on other countries	62	69	42	
	The Fund has about the same impact on FCS as on other countries	15	15	14	
	The Fund has less impact on FCS than on other countries	6	6	7	
	The Fund has limited impact on FCS	7	5	11	
	The Fund has negative impact on FCS	0	0	0	
	Not sure	10	5	26	
		Number of responses	281	210	71
Do you think the Fund should have a different approach to its work on FCS? (select all that apply)	The Fund should treat FCS just the same as any other countries	9	10	6	
	The Fund should have the same set of facilities and procedures but use them more flexibly	33	33	34	
	The Fund should have special (e.g., simplified) procedures for conducting Article IV surveillance	41	41	38	
	The Fund should have special (e.g., longer-term) financing facilities	48	50	39	
	The Fund should have softer conditionality	19	20	15	
	The Fund should give priority in providing technical assistance	70	74	59	
	Other (please specify)	13	14	10	
	Not sure	5	3	13	

Distribution of answers in percentage		All respondents	Respondents' experience in FCS		
			With experience	No experience	
		Number of responses	261	194	67
Do you think the IMF should have its own list or definition of fragile states?	Yes, the IMF should develop a list of FCS based on its own definition.	31	31	31	
	No, the IMF should use an externally developed list (such as by the World Bank or the OECD).	19	20	16	
	No, staff should consider the fragility characteristics of each country without relying on a list (which is the current policy stated in the guidance note).	32	32	30	
	Not sure	18	16	22	
Nature of FCS work					
		Number of responses	207	207	0
How did the label "fragile" affect your work? (select all that apply)	No, the label did not affect my work as I treated each FCS just like any other country by paying attention to its unique characteristics on a case-by-case basis	37	37	0	
	It made me aware of the sensitivity required to approach the country	34	34	0	
	It made me aware of the need to consult more widely with various stakeholders	32	32	0	
	It made me pay more attention to political economy issues in crafting programs or policy advice	49	49	0	
	It made me pay more attention to capacity constraints in crafting programs or policy advice	66	66	0	
	Other (please specify)	6	6	0	
	Not sure	3	3	0	
How do you describe your experience working on FCS (compared to other countries)?	Uninteresting (e.g., due to lack of economic diversity)	Number of responses	205	205	0
		Strongly agree	2	2	0
		Agree	8	8	0
		Disagree	36	36	0
		Strongly disagree	52	52	0
	Not sure	3	3	0	
	Time-consuming (e.g., due to inadequate statistics)	Number of responses	207	207	0
		Strongly agree	35	35	0
		Agree	44	44	0
		Disagree	13	13	0
		Strongly disagree	3	3	0
	Not sure	4	4	0	
	Frustrating (e.g., given capacity constraints or need to coordinate with partners)	Number of responses	207	207	0
		Strongly agree	9	9	0
		Agree	43	43	0
		Disagree	33	33	0
		Strongly disagree	10	10	0
	Not sure	5	5	0	
	Enriching (e.g., in terms of Fund career or professional experience)	Number of responses	209	209	0
		Strongly agree	22	22	0
Agree		46	46	0	
Disagree		14	14	0	
Strongly disagree		11	11	0	
Not sure	6	6	0		
Rewarding (e.g., in terms of impact on the country)	Number of responses	210	210	0	
	Strongly agree	31	31	0	
	Agree	47	47	0	
	Disagree	12	12	0	
	Strongly disagree	4	4	0	
Not sure	6	6	0		

Distribution of answers in percentage		All respondents	Respondents' experience in FCS			
			With experience	No experience		
		Number of responses	211	211	0	
How do you assess the usefulness of the Staff Guidance Note on the Fund's Engagement with Countries in Fragile Situations in your operational work?		I am not familiar with the Guidance Note	33	33	0	
		Very useful	16	16	0	
		Moderately useful	32	32	0	
		Not useful	7	7	0	
		Other (please specify)	4	4	0	
		Not sure	9	9	0	
		Number of responses	119	119	0	
In your experience, how well was the staff guidance note (e.g., need to adapt conditionality to political realities or capacity constraints) applied in practice?		Very well	6	6	0	
		Moderately well	70	70	0	
		Not very well	21	21	0	
		Not at all	3	3	0	
		Number of responses	28	28	0	
What do you think contributed to the insufficient application of the Staff Guidance Note in specific cases? (select all that apply)		The staff guidance note is unrealistic	18	18	0	
		IMF culture that places value on best international practice	39	39	0	
		Expectations of senior front office staff	25	25	0	
		Pressure from review department(s)	61	61	0	
		Other (please specify)	32	32	0	
		Not sure	0	0	0	
		Number of responses	206	206	0	
From your experience, please state your views on the following three aspects of the Fund's program relations with FCS	Access to funds/funding	Excessive	3	3	0	
		Adequate	51	51	0	
		Insufficient	29	29	0	
		Not sure	17	17	0	
			Number of responses	207	207	0
	Conditionality required	Excessive	17	17	0	
		Adequate	57	57	0	
		Insufficient	6	6	0	
		Not sure	20	20	0	
			Number of responses	207	207	0
	Availability of instruments/facilities	Excessive	1	1	0	
		Adequate	52	52	0	
Insufficient		27	27	0		
Not sure		20	20	0		
		Number of responses	208	208	0	
From your experience with FCS, how do you assess the effectiveness of coordination between the IMF and other development partners in the following areas?	Surveillance	Strong	13	13	0	
		Adequate	50	50	0	
		Weak	18	18	0	
		Counterproductive	1	1	0	
		Not sure	17	17	0	
			Number of responses	208	208	0
	Programs	Strong	25	25	0	
		Adequate	47	47	0	
		Weak	11	11	0	
		Counterproductive	1	1	0	
		Not sure	15	15	0	
			Number of responses	208	208	0
	Technical assistance	Strong	19	19	0	
		Adequate	40	40	0	
		Weak	30	30	0	
		Counterproductive	1	1	0	
		Not sure	10	10	0	

Distribution of answers in percentage		All respondents	Respondents' experience in FCS			
			With experience	No experience		
		Number of responses	209	209	0	
How do you think the Fund can improve its coordination with other development partners in FCS? (select all that apply)		There is little more the Fund can do	18	18	0	
		There should be more personal contacts on the ground	51	51	0	
		There should be greater reliance on informal mechanisms on the ground	37	37	0	
		There should be a formal protocol at headquarters level among development partners	33	33	0	
		Other (please specify)	10	10	0	
		Not sure	8	8	0	
From your experience in FCS, how do you assess the effectiveness of IMF TA in the following three areas?	Fiscal	Number of responses	208	208	0	
			Very effective	29	29	0
			Moderately effective	53	53	0
			Not effective	4	4	0
			Counterproductive	0	0	0
		Not sure	13	13	0	
	Monetary	Number of responses	206	206	0	
			Very effective	17	17	0
			Moderately effective	51	51	0
			Not effective	8	8	0
			Counterproductive	0	0	0
		Not sure	23	23	0	
	Statistics	Number of responses	208	208	0	
			Very effective	22	22	0
			Moderately effective	48	48	0
		Not effective	13	13	0	
		Counterproductive	0	0	0	
	Not sure	17	17	0		
		Number of responses	210	210	0	
How do you think the Fund can improve the effectiveness of its TA in FCS? (select all that apply)		More long-term resident experts in the field	64	64	0	
		Greater use of RTACs	46	46	0	
		Strengthened monitoring and reporting	38	38	0	
		Closer integration with programs and surveillance	56	56	0	
		More staff resources	42	42	0	
		Other (please specify)	13	13	0	
		Not sure	7	7	0	
Staff incentives to work on FCS						
		Number of responses	282	210	72	
How do you think work on FCS affects a Fund economist's career and remuneration?		It has a considerably negative impact	12	13	7	
		It has a moderately negative impact	32	35	25	
		It has limited impact	24	25	22	
		It has a moderately positive impact	10	10	11	
		It has a considerably positive impact	2	1	3	
		Not sure	20	16	32	
		Number of responses	282	210	72	
How do you think work on FCS (relative to other countries) is recognized in the Fund?		Strongly undervalued	33	40	14	
		Moderately undervalued	39	38	42	
		Fairly valued	13	11	19	
		Moderately overvalued	2	1	4	
		Strongly overvalued	1	1	0	
		Not sure	12	9	21	

Distribution of answers in percentage		All respondents	Respondents' experience in FCS		
			With experience	No experience	
		Number of responses	279	208	71
Do you think work on FCS should receive special recognition in the Fund? (select all that apply)	It should not receive any special recognition	21	18	30	
	It should receive special consideration for promotion	32	39	10	
	It should receive higher rating in annual performance review	28	32	15	
	It should receive special remuneration/bonus	35	36	34	
	It should receive more compensatory leave	33	33	28	
	Other (please specify)	16	17	14	
	Not sure	9	8	10	
		Number of responses	281	209	72
Do you think that working on FCS should be encouraged for all economist staff at some point in their Fund career?	Yes	63	71	42	
	No	23	18	40	
	Not sure	13	11	18	
		Number of responses	279	207	72
Do you think the IMF should provide more in-house training to improve the effectiveness of its work on FCS?	Yes	56	55	60	
	No	14	14	14	
	Not sure	30	31	26	