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**FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED
BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS**

PART III

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

ADDENDUM

COMMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

A. Preliminary proposals for a new UNESCO Human Resources Management Strategy covering the period 2023-2027

Pursuant to Item 9.2.7 of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) submits its comments on human resources issues (document 214 EX/5.III.A).

1. At a time when UNESCO faces many challenges and needs innovative approaches, a new strategy must be ambitious and put staff back at the heart of the Organization. More than ever, our colleagues need to be valued.
2. This strategy should be an opportunity to address the existing malfunctions in the system that undermine the fulfilment of UNESCO's mandate. The new strategy must address problems such as the length of time required for recruitment, the growing use of non-staff contracts and inequities in the performance evaluation system.



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3. The document submitted by the Secretariat largely consists of presenting the principles of the new strategy. ISAU agrees with all of these general ideas. However, in the experience of our association, it is the details of a strategy that matter. We would also like to emphasize that the proposed strategy will only be successful if the Bureau of Human Resources Management (ADM/HRM) has adequate human and financial resources to carry out its missions. As such, it is imperative that ADM/HRM assumes its role in personnel management, particularly in terms of recruitment. This is the first step in the pursuit of “excellence”.

Evaluation of the current Human Resources Management Strategy

4. It makes good sense to commission an evaluation and to draw lessons from the previous strategy in order to develop a new one. We are surprised to note, however, that ADM/HRM “intends to commission an evaluation of the current strategy during the course of 2023, for analysis and presentation in 2024”, so that its findings will “inform the mid-term review of the future human resources management strategy [...] anticipated for 2025”.

5. Logically, the General Conference should be presented with a new strategy that takes into account the results of the 2017–2022 Human Resources Management Strategy and proposes measures to remedy the errors and failures of current policies. An evaluation of the 2017–2022 strategy to serve as a mid-term evaluation of the 2023–2028 strategy would be of no practical use and would amount to devoting the Organization’s resources to a futile bureaucratic exercise.

6. ISAU therefore believes that an evaluation can still be carried out in the time available, that is to say, during the first half of 2023, **before** the presentation of the new strategy to the General Conference in November 2023. It should be noted that this evaluation in its effectiveness and efficiency should not be confused with conducting consultations, which merely provide a snapshot and not an analysis.

Preliminary consultations

7. The preliminary consultation process organized by the Bureau of Human Resources Management allowed the expression of all the views of the Organization’s stakeholders. However, what is the use of such consultations if, in the end, the Administration does not take into account the opinions, recommendations and concerns expressed by the staff members and the associations that represent them?

8. Even recently, and on a sensitive issue, the Administration did not take into account the recommendations made by ISAU on the principle of a **gradual** return to work on site, taking into account the **new working methods**, and on the publication and implementation of the **policy on flexible working arrangements**. In addition, in the online survey conducted by the Administration, the vast majority of staff expressed themselves directly in favour of teleworking, emphasizing the benefits of flexibility for the well-being of all at work. Staff also spoke in favour of a more agile and flexible UNESCO. In this context, the basis for the decision to abruptly impose a return to work on site as the single standard is difficult to understand. Indeed, this decision of a massive return to the office, in addition to being unilateral, is not based on any solid empirical basis. Digital tools have enabled organizational progress and flexibility at work that must be taken into account. Over the past two years, the staff has demonstrated exemplary commitment, showing the Organization’s ability to continue to excel under adverse conditions. ISAU hopes that the Organization will not miss an opportunity to move towards a more modern and efficient approach to human resources management.

Content of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027

9. ISAU takes issue with the Administration’s claim that “much progress” has been made under the current Human Resources Management Strategy. On the contrary, there has been a significant decline in the rights of the staff, with, for example, the abolition of the individual requests for

reclassification and the abolition of the Review Panel and the Reports Board, which we have opposed. We also note the persistence of long-standing problems, particularly in the recruitment process.

10. Aware of the inertia that is still affecting human resources management in our Organization, ISAU will continue to seek to cooperate with ADM/HRM in the next phase of the development of the new strategy, with the constant aim of respecting staff rights and improving their working conditions.

11. Below we propose some elements that we believe are critical and should be prioritized in the new strategy. We will not fail to provide more details and specific examples of our ideas during the next phase of consultations.

(a) Recruitment

- Centralize recruitment within the Bureau of Human Resources Management and ensure that it plays an effective role in order to ensure transparency and alignment with staff policies, particularly with regard to geographical distribution. We have already voiced our opposition to the “decentralization” of recruitment, which is currently in the hands of the sectors.
- Re-establish an internal recruitment process to consider applications from qualified internal candidates, including long-term temporary staff. In this regard, ADM/HRM should be allowed to recruit (or promote) directly a certain number of internal candidates by allocating to the Bureau a budget supplemented by funds corresponding to the flexibility granted by the General Conference to the Director General for the volume of posts.
- Establish a mechanism to regularize long-term Project Appointments (PAs), for example, by considering them as “internal candidates” for recruitment purposes, including for the internal recruitment process proposed above. Currently, PAs are considered as “external candidates” for recruitment purposes.
- Management of PA recruitment by ADM/HRM; subject to the Appointment Review Board (ARB) and the principle of geographical distribution.

(b) Performance management

- Re-establish the Review Panel and the Reports Board to ensure transparency and prevent wrongdoing.
- Introduce a 360-degree evaluation that would assess supervisors.
- Ensure that there is a connection between performance evaluation and career advancement.
- Reinstate the suspended Merit-Promotion Programme.

(c) Career development and advancement

- Develop and implement a career development policy for Professional (P) and General Service (G) staff that would include, but not be limited to:
 - Implementation of a career guidance programme;
 - Rewards for excellent performance;

- Reinstatement of the Merit-Promotion Programme, subject to clear and transparent principles;
- Linking learning and training to career advancement.
- Reinstatement of staff members' right to make individual requests for reclassification.
- Make it mandatory to provide the final report submitted by a reclassification expert during a desk audit as part of the reclassification process.
- Provide incentives (financial, professional or otherwise) for staff who have reached the highest level within their grades and have remained there for many years.

(d) Mobility

- Allow Project Appointment (PA) staff with more than four years' experience in the Organization to apply for posts subject to geographical mobility. Such staff carry out assignments that often give them significant experience in both their areas of expertise and in the working methods of the Organization.
- Actively promote functional mobility, especially for G staff, as well as intersectoral and inter-agency mobility.

(e) Geographical distribution and diversity

- Remunerate UNESCO interns, who contribute significantly to the functioning of the Organization.
- Ensure that any initiative related to diversity, equity and inclusion applies to all personnel, staff and non-staff contracts alike.

(f) Working conditions and well-being

The Administration's recent decision to impose an immediate and total return to the office does not inspire much hope for its commitment to promoting staff well-being and building an agile and flexible organization. Well-being must be a central element of the new human resources management strategy. Thus, we propose, among other things, the following:

- Implement the renewal of fixed-term appointments every five years, instead of every two years.
- Educate supervisors on promoting a healthy and creative work environment where an exchange of ideas can flourish.
- Instil a culture of well-being:
 - Facilitate the provision of dedicated space for sports classes, training workshops or on-site consultations with paramedical staff;
 - Request more flexibility from supervisors to enable sports activities during the lunch hour.
- Promote the mental health and family life of staff, including more active support for colleagues with children and dependents.

It is understood that all of the above measures must be applied both at Headquarters and in the field.

(g) Relations between the staff associations and the Administration

- **Take into account** the observations, comments and remarks of the staff associations so that consultation with them is not a mere formality as is often the case at present.
- Provide the equivalent of half a staff association post or a lump sum for a legal consultant, similar to the practices of other organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Cross-cutting considerations

12. ISAU wishes to draw the attention of Member States to the number of cases lost by the Organization before the ILO Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT), as well as to the cases resolved amicably to compensate for damage suffered by staff members. It should be noted that the ILOAT recently ordered the Organization to pay **three years' salary** to a P-4 staff member and the sum of €40,000 for moral damage. Such litigation entails considerable costs for the Organization, which must be taken into consideration upstream. It is as if the Organization was clearing bad managers of their mistakes by making Member States pay the cost of their ineptitude. We reiterate the need for transparent management that respects the rights of staff, which is ultimately a guarantee of efficiency.

13. Transparent management that respects the rights of staff also implies, of course, that the Administration and, in particular, ADM/HRM, respect the legal framework. We have found, however, that this is not always the case in practice. As an example, the current mobility exercise should have been preceded by an amendment to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules and the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, in particular with regard to the possibility for participants to apply for higher grade posts. However, as the exercise draws to a close, the provisions governing part of the process have not yet been published, leaving some of the decisions that will be made without a legal basis. Negligence of this nature can lead to litigation resulting in unnecessary expense to the Organization.

14. Finally, while the implementation and the scrupulous respect of the legal framework by the Administration is a prerequisite for the harmonious functioning of the Organization and the reduction of the number of disputes, it is still necessary that this legal framework be elaborated keeping in mind the well-being of the staff. To this end, we believe that the Ethics Office should be systematically consulted in the development and revision of the Organization's human resources policies. This would undoubtedly prevent the policies in question from creating situations where staff members, including supervisors, find themselves in an awkward position. For example, the Ethics Office was not consulted on the revision of the performance evaluation policy, which included the abolition of the Review Panel and the Reports Board. Consultation with the Ethics Office could have prevented the implementation of such an arbitrary policy that violates the rights of staff.

15. In conclusion, the cases lost before the ILOAT are clear evidence of internal malfunctions and could be avoided through a dynamic and efficient human resources management strategy that respects the rights of staff and is concerned with their well-being. The same concerns that we have expressed about human resources as a whole can be found in legal terms. The Administration must exercise foresight and judgment, starting with the implementation of the rules it prescribes and the principles it promotes. This is the commitment we expect from a new human resources strategy.