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

PART IV

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

ADDENDUM

COMMENTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Management Strategy

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 215 EX/5.IV.A).

1. ISAU remains perplexed by the content of the new Human Resources Management Strategy and by the manner in which it was developed. We were hoping to see a document with clear objectives, bold measures and innovative ideas aimed at revitalizing human resources management at the Organization and at solving chronic problems. Instead, we have found a hollow draft strategy with vague objectives, reflecting a lack of effort and inspiration, if not outright apathy, on the part of the Bureau of Human Resources Management (ADM/HRM).
2. In July 2022, despite the very short time limit (one week) given to us by ADM/HRM, ISAU submitted its detailed comments on the draft Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023–2027. Our criticisms were focused and constructive, and we made concrete proposals to include



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measures which would improve the draft strategy. It is with great regret and frustration that we note today that none of our observations and proposals have been taken into account in the document submitted to the Executive Board. Despite what the document claims, therefore, the Administration cannot be considered to have conducted genuine consultations in order to develop its Human Resources Management Strategy. This is a clear sign of ADM/HRM's unwillingness to collaborate, truly and effectively, in order to build a better UNESCO.

PART I: UPDATE ON 2021-2022 INITIATIVES OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR 2017-2022

Geographical mobility 2021/2022 exercise

3. It is true that there have been improvements in the implementation of the 2021/2022 geographical mobility exercise as compared to that of 2019. It was better organized and the support and follow-up provided by ADM/HRM throughout the various stages in the process are noticeable. However, the number of reassignments remains very low. Indeed, out of the 179 posts included in the mobility exercise, there were only 46 reassignments, making for a proportion of only 26%. We therefore feel that the enhanced-mobility objective set out in the Human Resources Management Strategy which is coming to an end has unfortunately not been achieved. We encourage the Administration to review the system of deferment for personal and operational reasons, as well as the resetting of the standard duration of assignment (SDA) where there is a job change. These measures are often taken in order to get around the mobility requirement for staff in the Professional category and above, which often results in a feeling of injustice and inequality among colleagues.

4. In addition, we regret that three months before the end of the 2017–2022 strategy, no functional mobility has taken place, even though this practice could have provided career advancement opportunities, especially for staff in the General Service category.

Recruitment

5. ISAU welcomes the improvement in the recruitment timeline for P-1 to P-4 posts. However, we are worried about the timeline for more senior-level posts, which is still far from the 130-day objective set by the Executive Board. What measures does the Administration plan to take in order to close this gap?

6. ISAU has submitted its comments on geographical distribution and gender parity in a separate document.

Introduction of new and/or updated HR policies

7. ADM/HRM was considering the adoption of flexible working arrangements to support staff work-life balance. However, the revised telecommuting policy is surprisingly more rigid and restrictive than the one in place before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, despite the lessons which should have been learned over the past two years and the opinions expressed by our colleagues in the corresponding survey conducted by ADM/HRM. For example, staff can telecommute for a maximum of two days per week, whereas previously telecommuting was permitted for up to three, or even five, days per week. It is unfortunate that decisions seem to have been based on outdated habits and inertia rather than on empirical and rational grounds. The “staggered working hours” policy, for its part, does not meet staff expectations. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of flexibility when the basic time slots established are from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

8. ISAU welcomes the measures taken to improve the working conditions of service-contract holders. However, it is necessary to address the question of their job insecurity and to regularize long-term service-contract holders.

Occupational Health and Safety framework

9. ISAU will be paying close attention to the results of the United Nations health survey which was conducted at UNESCO. Indeed, the data from this survey should be used by ADM/HRM in the development of the long-awaited workplace well-being policy.

UNESCO Internship Programme

10. We would like to emphasize, once again, the importance of identifying appropriate sources of funding in order to launch the paid internship programme as soon as possible, and we encourage Member States to intensify their efforts to that end. It makes sense to do this, not only with a view to improving the geographical distribution of staff, but also with a view to providing appropriate compensation for the valuable work done by our young colleagues.

11. Pending the establishment of a paid internship programme, document 215 EX/5.IV.A states that “managers are being encouraged to consider and facilitate to the extent possible requests for internships from candidates from under- and non-represented countries”. Do the Organization’s officers really comply with these instructions? Are their efforts monitored and assessed?

12. ISAU applauds the integration of the recommendations issued by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) with regard to interns and encourages the Administration to continue its efforts in this regard.

PART II: DRAFT HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR 2023-2027

General comments

13. This draft strategy, which almost exclusively consists in formulating very general, or even abstract, principles, is excessively vague and lacks substance. There are essentially no new elements as compared to the preliminary proposals submitted by the Administration at the 214th session of the Executive Board. We are surprised that the Administration could submit such a hollow document for adoption. A detailed human resources management strategy and workplan should have been presented to the Board at its 215th session in order to be implemented as of January 2023.

14. The lack of any concrete measures is alarming. ADM/HRM maintains that the objective is to separate the Human Resources Management Strategy from the workplan. However, not only would such a distinction be artificial; it would also not absolve ADM/HRM of its responsibility to develop a real strategy rather than a mere collection of vague sentences and meaningless objectives.

15. It is extremely important that specific measures be taken to remedy current problems, such as ADM/HRM’s lack of transparency and its non-involvement in recruitment, the lack of career development, and the job insecurity of long-term temporary staff. How can progress be assessed and the strategy be properly implemented if no concrete actions are defined?

16. In respect of this point, we wish to note that the proposals for a human resources management strategy for 2017-2022 set out in document 200 EX/5 Part IV (B) were much more detailed than the current draft strategy prepared by ADM/HRM. They included many tangible measures concerning, for example: the recruitment and selection process; the learning strategy; and the adjustment of the duration of contracts so that they are valid for five, instead of two, years.

17. In addition, ADM/HRM had originally intended to “commission an evaluation of the current strategy during the course of 2023, for analysis and presentation in 2024”, which means that it would have been obligated to submit a detailed human resources management strategy far before the evaluation of the previous one. Thus, the fact that the report on the evaluation conducted by the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) will be submitted to the Board at its 216th session should in no way constitute an impediment to the development of a detailed human resources management strategy with a clear workplan and timeline. Why is ADM/HRM postponing this task?

General comments

18. We agree that ADM/HRM must have adequate human and financial resources in order to accomplish its mission. ISAU has emphasized this on many occasions, in particular at the previous session of the Executive Board. However, this cannot and should not be used as an excuse for ADM/HRM to compromise with a human resources strategy which perpetuates current problems and fails to fulfil promises and expectations. This should certainly not be a condition for the implementation of a human resources strategy adopted by the Member States of UNESCO. We are therefore concerned about the use of the “resources argument” in three scenarios where ADM/HRM mentions the importance of the availability of financial resources and expressly states that implementation of the Human Resources Management Strategy is dependent on this availability.

19. In addition, instead of becoming more involved and taking on more responsibility, as called for by ISAU, ADM/HRM is, we are astonished to note, trying to absolve itself of any responsibility when it states that “human resources management is a collective responsibility, and that for an HR Strategy to be successfully implemented, it must have the buy-in of the whole of the Organization”. Statements of this nature have no place in a human resources management strategy because they dilute responsibilities at a time when Member States and staff need transparency and clarity in this area. This reveals, at the very least, that ADM/HRM leadership is unwilling to take a truly innovative approach to personnel management. Moreover, we are convinced that if a strategy includes measures which are fair and transparent and which take into account the concerns and well-being of the staff, staff will most certainly subscribe to it.

20. The goal of the new human resources strategy needs to be more specific. The statement that the strategy for 2023–2027 will “work to put in place the optimal systems to ensure more efficient human resources processes across the Organization” is devoid of any concrete meaning.

21. Since the Administration admits that the strategy “covers the entire workforce of UNESCO (including personnel on non-staff contracts)” and that “this inclusive approach was a critical element highlighted throughout the consultations”, the strategy needs to describe specific measures for solving the chronic problem of job insecurity caused by the types of contract used by the Organization.

22. Paragraph 25 mentions that the development of the human resources strategy will take into account a series of surveys, decisions and reports. However, once again, we see no proposals for concrete measures aimed at effectively implementing the recommendations made by the various interested parties.

23. ADM/HRM says that it “will lead and facilitate the effective management of its workforce”. Here again, no concrete measures have been put forward.

24. With regard to overarching aim 1, in order to “attract talented, qualified, and diverse candidates”, the step which ADM/HRM should take first, and which we insist must be explicitly stated in the new human resources strategy, is that of becoming fully involved in the recruitment process.

25. Overarching aim 2 is to “adapt for the future by ensuring agile and flexible ways of working”. ISAU is very sceptical about this aim, given the new and more restrictive policy on flexible working arrangements which was recently established. We would therefore like to know what concrete measures will be included in the new strategy to effectively and significantly build on the “lessons from [the] COVID-19” pandemic.

Conclusion

26. Certainly, ISAU can agree with the basics of the draft, as well as with some of the ideas it contains (including those related to “promot[ing] an organizational culture of accountability”, “promot[ing] and support[ing] positive relations between managers and personnel”, “support[ing]

professional development”, and so on). However, we regret the absence of specific actions and measures, such as those proposed by ISAU in document 214 EX/5.III.A Add. We also regret that a workplan and timeline for implementation have not been included in this draft strategy.

27. It would be inappropriate to describe this Human Resources Management Strategy as ambitious, given the absence of specific measures concerning important matters such as recruitment, career development, performance management, and the regularization of long-term temporary staff. The vast majority of staff members feel that these matters are handled quite arbitrarily; we have often said that this arbitrariness is brought on by ADM/HRM's lack of involvement. We therefore request that concrete measures be included in the strategy which is to be submitted at the 216th session of the Executive Board.