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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 FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Management Strategy 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 216 EX/5.III.A).



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General considerations

1. ISAU's comments on the proposed human resources management strategy for 2023–2027 take into account the [Division of Internal Oversight Services \(IOS\) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022](#). In this regard, ISAU is pleased to note that IOS finalized its evaluation in time to feed into the development of the new strategy.¹ We are convinced of the usefulness of such evaluations whose conclusions and recommendations must be carefully considered.

2. Nevertheless, ISAU regrets that document 216 EX/13, which presents a summary of the evaluation, does not reflect the content of its conclusions and recommendations as accurately as possible. We are also puzzled by the statement that "(t)he findings, conclusions and recommendations of the [...] evaluation were incorporated into the strategy document to be presented [...] at the 216th session of the Executive Board" (see paragraph 5 of document 216 EX/13). While the Administration has provided responses and comments to the recommendations made by IOS, which are included in the IOS evaluation, it is not, in our view, the responsibility of IOS to judge whether and to what extent these recommendations have been formally and/or substantively taken into account in the development of the new strategy. It is, in fact, up to the Member States to assess this, and the opinion of IOS, or indeed of any unit of the Administration, should not be presented in such a way as to risk pre-empting the prerogatives of the Member States. The content of the Administration's document on the new human resources management strategy is to be studied by the Member States prior to its adoption and it is they who will decide on its content and relevance, including with regard to the IOS evaluation.

3. In addition, although it is clear that a summary requires a selection of the information provided, we feel that some particularly illustrative and relevant data and statistics should have been included in the summary of the IOS evaluation (document 216 EX/13), such as staff opinions on the lack of participation in the development of the former strategy² and their difficulty in accessing the document,³ or Figure 11 on the Strategy elements showing the least progress.⁴

4. Finally, we regret that the full set of conclusions and recommendations presented from page 34 onwards of the IOS evaluation were not included in the summary of the IOS evaluation presented to the Board. Illustrating the rigorous work of IOS, these pages contain very specific measures and proposals and deserve to be studied by all stakeholders. In fact, the Administration's responses to the IOS recommendations should have been clearly and explicitly incorporated into the document on the new human resources management strategy (216 EX/5.III.A). This would have allowed Member States and all stakeholders to have an overview of the strategy contained in a single comprehensive document and not scattered about in different places.

On accountability in the implementation of the human resources management strategy for 2023-2027

5. HRM needs to draw appropriate lessons and critical conclusions from the IOS evaluation. An important general conclusion from the latter is that there is a lack of transparency that is felt very strongly by the Organization's staff. Indeed, IOS states that the "[c]ulture of **transparency/accountability** was cited as an underlying issue that influenced implementation [of the strategy]. [...] This element was thus seen by the evaluation team as an overarching theme of critical importance to the development and implementation of a future HRM strategy".⁵

¹ See document 214 EX/5.III.A.Add., paragraphs 4 to 6.

² Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, IOS/EVS/PI 207, p. 19, paragraph 51.

³ *Idem*, p. 19, paragraph 49

⁴ *Idem*, p. 28, paragraph 84

⁵ *Idem*, p. 28, paragraph 85

6. However, the Administration does not really address this general observation. It simply continues to emphasize “collective responsibility” in the implementation of the human resources management strategy.⁶ Naturally, it is important both for the Administration and the staff overall to take ownership of the strategy in order for it to be effective. Nevertheless, it is necessary to distinguish between the search for a voluntary and spontaneous desire to take ownership of the strategy through factors that motivate staff to commit themselves (“incentives”) and the promulgation of a unilateral relationship regime through terms such as “commitments”, “accountability mechanisms” and “collective responsibility”, which tend to place the burden of effort on the staff alone, who are required to mobilize themselves without any promise of something real in return for their efforts. In this respect, we note that the whole strategy seems to address the staff as a mere collection of individuals, without reference to the imperative for the implementation of the strategy to take into account the staff associations that represent them before the Administration and the Member States. On this point, ISAU deplors the fact that the staff associations are mentioned almost only as a token, to indicate that they had been consulted. Had the consultations for the development of the strategy been conducted in a timely and sincere manner, regular dialogue with the staff associations would have been recognized as an integral part of a human resources management strategy that is, in the words of the IOS evaluation criteria, “of relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency”.

7. In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, ISAU must also take issue with HRM’s attempt to shirk its responsibilities by making its action conditional, **right at the beginning of the strategy document**, on the availability of additional resources: “[t]he effective implementation of the strategy depends on the allocation of the necessary human and financial resources”. While ISAU supports the need for an increase in resources, it cannot accept this as an argument to justify inaction or lack of progress, or even regression in working conditions within our Organization. It is HRM’s role to determine the actions to be taken and the priorities to be set **according to the budget available for this purpose**. It should be recalled that in paragraph 107 of its evaluation, IOS states that “recommendations have been formulated based on the assumption that **UNESCO is expecting zero budget growth**. [...] Where additional financial and human resources are required, these will be sourced either by restructuring staffing and budgets, sourcing from external budgets or by tapping external resources”. In terms of efficiency, ISAU would like to stress that UNESCO would have more budgetary resources if the staff were managed in such a way as to avoid the exorbitant costs that the Organization incurs as a result of being condemned by the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT), with alarming regularity, which ISAU has denounced on many occasions.

8. It is therefore necessary to reject the inclusion in the human resources management strategy of precautionary language designed to exonerate HRM from its responsibilities in advance by invoking limitations beyond its control. It is unfortunate that HRM makes several uses of this argument in document 216 EX/5.III.A, such as in paragraph 9 (“implementation [...] depends to a large extent, on the collective ‘buy-in’ and responsibility of all stakeholders [...] as well as the provision and prioritization of adequate resources”), paragraph 19 of Annex I (“[t]he successful implementation of the strategy depends to a large extent on the buy-in and support from all levels of the Organization”) and the first paragraph of part IV in Annex I (“[a]chieving the aims of UNESCO’s HR strategy is a collective responsibility with a set of accountabilities to be undertaken by each concerned stakeholder”).

9. HRM’s proposed strategy should reflect HRM’s ambition to achieve its goals rather than proposing goals that it knows it cannot achieve. In that regard, it is particularly surprising that the document refers to “collective ‘buy-in’ and responsibility” of the staff associations, even though, as mentioned above, the document does not mention the need to implement the strategy through regular consultation with them. This objective would be all the more realistic and easier to achieve

⁶ See for example, *Idem*, p. 11: “[...] effective implementation, estimated timing and prioritization of the recommendations, [...] will depend to a large extent, on the collective responsibility of all stakeholders”.

since, for example, ISAU, a stakeholder if ever there was one, constantly reminds us of its availability for such support for the Administration.

10. In order to have a “committed” staff, which is a clear objective of the strategy, the Administration in general and HRM in particular must also be exemplary and show commitment. This starts with the post of Director of the Bureau of Human Resources Management. We believe that this post, which is of paramount importance not only because of its rank, but also because “UNESCO’s success rests largely on having a highly talented, skilled and committed workforce” which is “our most valuable resource”, should not be assigned to individuals on secondment from other organizations. Despite the value of staff exchanges and inter-agency mobility, it is imperative that certain posts be subject to stability and a real, deep and lasting involvement. Since 2015, UNESCO has had seven HRM Directors, if we include those who have served on an interim basis. Member States will agree that this kind of top-down instability undermines the whole system and impacts the effectiveness of human resources policies by depriving HRM of coherent leadership.

On the scope of the strategy

11. According to HRM, the new strategy is a **departure** from previous ones in that it “addresses the management and care for the entire UNESCO workforce”. This was also mentioned in the IOS evaluation, which stated that the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022 “**only covered staff with regular contracts**”. ISAU can only express its surprise at this statement. While it is true that the former strategy, when detailing the staff profile at the time, did not include non-staff personnel, specific measures for non-staff personnel were incorporated. Furthermore, all personnel, whether staff or non-staff and regardless of their contract, have been and remain directly affected by the reforms undertaken in the context of the strategy, such as the reform of the internal justice system.

Specific considerations: Annex I

12. With regard to the content of the new strategy, we welcome HRM’s decision to implement the recommendations of the Executive Board’s Working Group on Geographical Distribution. It is important to note that the progress made in terms of geographical distribution reported on by IOS is for the period 2021-2022. Yet, the representation rate dropped from 83% in June 2017 to 78% in June 2022, indisputably proving the need for action in this area. For this reason, the IOS recommendation to treat diversity and inclusion more “holistically”, despite its relevance, is not enough to address the geographical imbalance which needs to be closely monitored through the development and publication of statistics. In particular, we would like to point out that IOS suggested in its evaluation that the Organization should take example from the UNDP and UNICEF, which understand the issue of geographical diversity in terms of distinctions such as the global North and South, which is indeed a useful complement to the analysis by represented, under- or non-represented countries. ISAU has already pointed out how concerned it was, and still is, to observe that, within the professional category, nationals of the global South, as well as women, are much more numerous in assistance and implementation posts (P-2/P-3) than in facilitation and programming posts (P-4/P-5). ISAU asks Member States to request a study of UNDP and UNICEF practices in distinguishing between staff members from the global North and South.

13. With regard to the assessment made by the Administration of the evaluation of the previous HRM strategy by IOS, we must object, as it is unfortunately not as positive as presented in paragraph 11 of Annex I to document 216 EX/5.III.A. In the areas of workforce planning, recruitment and performance management, for example, we would like to refer to the IOS evaluation, which says: “the least progress was observed with staff well-being, workforce planning, classification, culture of transparency/accountability, the internal justice system, recruitment, and performance management.”⁷

⁷ Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, IOS/EVS/PI 207, p. 8, paragraph 12.

14. The shortcomings highlighted are a matter of serious concern. They are alarming because they are in direct contradiction with the criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency that govern the development of the human resources management strategy. Worse still, they are also alarming because they are in contradiction with the values and ideals at the heart of UNESCO's work. The credibility of our work to promote human rights is significantly undermined when we read in an internal, but public, report that a significant proportion of staff feel psychologically insecure or that they feel they are working in an environment where transparency is an empty word. We must practice what we preach.

15. As for diversity and inclusion "in all its forms", mentioned in paragraph 18 of Annex I to document 216 EX/5.III.A, ISAU welcomes the fact that the Organization is seriously concerned about the inclusion of persons with disabilities, minority groups, members of the LGBTIQ+ community and youth. This issue, which is very real and has existed for several years, even decades, can no longer be neglected or put aside under the guise of a lack of resources or motivation. It is agreed that change and evolution of mentalities take time, but the Administration, as it has committed to do, must prioritize reviewing and updating physical and normative structures, which will in themselves, in addition to other measures such as training, bring about a change in mentalities among UNESCO staff. Member States can be assured that ISAU will be vigilant in this matter.

16. Finally, in the table "UNESCO core values", mention is made of "organizational change and reform", by leaders. As we have no further information or clarification, we repeat that it is appropriate and timely for the staff associations to be consulted without insincerity, that is, in due course, and above all, in good faith, taking into account any observations and recommendations we may make – in the interest of the staff and therefore of the Organization. We also regret that a work plan and timeline for the new strategy have not yet been presented to the Member States for reflection, discussion and analysis.

Key Objective I: "Develop a talented and qualified workforce that can deliver the UNESCO mandate effectively"

17. The actions and indicative measures of success under Key Objective I ("develop a talented and qualified workforce") appear to be largely insufficient in content and lack precision. This is all the more striking with regard to recruitment, given the worrying conclusions reached by IOS about the existing problems in this area (see above), which are in line with the warnings issued long ago by ISAU. The following need to be addressed:

- Significant lack of transparency in the recruitment process, including in field offices and category 1 institutes;⁸
- The lack of involvement of HRM, sometimes to the point of there being no HRM representative whatsoever on interview panels,⁹ including for senior posts;
- Appointment Review Board (ARB) opacity;
- The adoption of incomprehensible appointment decisions supposedly based on the results of interviews.

These problems undeniably reveal structural malfunctions and warrant the suspicion that recruitment is handled arbitrarily. Indeed, one may wonder how to ensure the adequacy and transparency of recruitments if HRM is not involved or not very invested in such a crucial phase of recruitment as interviews. For this reason, ISAU strongly supports IOS recommendation 5 that attention should be paid to improving the implementation and even the **design** of specific policies, including recruitment.

⁸ See, for example, Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, IOS/EVS/PI 207, p. 28, paragraph 85.

⁹ See, for example, *Idem*, p. 31, paragraph 97.

18. Furthermore, when the Administration reports on the development of training programmes and the updating of training policy, it must not lose sight of the essential problem in this area, which is not the existence and number of training courses, but the link between training and learning on the one hand and career advancement on the other.¹⁰ As “career development” was part of the previous strategy, as well as the one covering the period 2011-2016, although without any progress made, we are entitled to ask ourselves whether this is, once again, just an empty promise made by the Administration. We thus ask for the implementation of a real **career advancement policy**, the only means of restoring equity and justice, of alleviating the frustrations of colleagues and of allowing them to “be responsible for their own career management” as the Administration so readily asks them to do, a formula which is difficult to determine whether it is a promise of benevolent support or the tacit recognition of a long-standing abdication of responsibilities.

19. In the same vein, an indicative measure of success should be established that will focus on the number of **internal promotions**, as well as the number of appointees who previously held long-term Project Appointment (PA) and temporary contracts. In this regard, we also draw attention, at the risk of sounding repetitive, to the fact that, in terms of indicators, it is not the number of qualified **candidates** from under- or non-represented countries that is important, but the number of people actually **appointed**. It cannot be overemphasized how the adoption of such an indicator, which equates staff diversification efforts with a mere display tactic, is likely to undermine not only the implementation of the objective advocated by the Member States, i.e., the rebalancing of the geographical distribution of staff, but also the ethical culture in the Organization, by having established a system that tends to reward cynicism.

20. The actions related to Key Objective II (“promote an organizational culture of accountability”) is also worthy of some comment. First, performance management overall was seen as “problematic” by IOS.¹¹ This is why it is requested that it be evaluated and reformed so that the necessary readjustments can be made, and staff performance may be evaluated with **objectivity and transparency**. In the same vein, ISAU warmly welcomes the objective of establishing a mechanism/scheme to recognize high-performing teams, although we would like to point out that this cannot be both an action and an indicative measure of success.

21. With regard to the laudable and promising project to assess the performance of supervisors in the area of human resources management, we believe that this cannot be measured through an indicator consisting of the establishment of “peer-exchange mechanisms [...] to support and foster good practices”. Naturally, evaluation does not exclude collegiality and learning, but these things do not overlap. In UNESCO’s hierarchical framework, an evaluation must at some point involve the notion of accountability, which cannot be achieved through a constructive but insufficient exchange between peers. Finally, we welcome the idea of equipping supervisors to manage underperformance and conflict. Nevertheless, it would be desirable to specify the means that could be used to achieve this objective and, above all, the ways to measure its effectiveness.

Aim 2 “Promote inclusion and diversity by achieving, in particular, equitable geographical distribution and gender balance”

22. ISAU considers that there is a lack of clarity and precision in several actions and indicative measures of success relating to Key Objective I (“Key Objective I: Foster an organizational culture that respects and enables inclusion, equity and diversity”), such as “[i]dentify and address barriers to effective participation/accessibility of targeted groups of staff in the work of UNESCO” or “[a]ction plan on gender parity developed and implemented”.

¹⁰ See, for example, Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, IOS/EVS/PI 207, p. 25, para. 71: “Negative comments centred on the little incentive to take advantage of learning on offer since it was rarely considered during performance evaluations.”

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 29, paragraph 85.

23. As for the internship programme, ISAU would like to reiterate its support for the remuneration of interns whose contribution is essential for the accomplishment of the Organization's mandate.

Aim 3 "Adapt for the Future"

24. We support and will closely monitor the design and implementation of a pilot programme for the decentralization of human resources expertise and processes, as proposed by IOS in its evaluation, while drawing attention to the fact that this should not be confused with or overshadow the current, de facto decentralization of the recruitment process, which is not welcome because it dilutes HRM's responsibilities. On the contrary, HRM must have firm control over recruitment.

25. We also support the designation of human resources "business partners" in the programme sectors. However, on this point, we would like to have more details on how the Administration intends to implement this recommendation. This approach proposed by IOS is intended to strengthen HRM's effectiveness in ensuring that the human resources management strategy is implemented appropriately: it should not lead to a further reduction in HRM's responsibilities and control over issues concerning personnel.

Aim 4 "Attain better results and impact"

26. A policy on well-being, long requested, promised and expected, unfortunately did not see the light of day under the former strategy. However, the IOS findings on staff well-being,¹² which include lack of psychological safety and a lack of recognition, as well as a lack of attention dedicated to non-staff personnel, are more than alarming and should be a wake-up call to all of the Organization's stakeholders. This IOS finding brings to light situations that have long been denounced by the staff members and their representatives. We hope that, at this time, the "framework" provided by the Administration will finally lead to a **genuine policy for the well-being of staff** that will be developed and implemented in the near future.

27. We welcome some of the actions and indicative measures of success proposed by the Administration to achieve aim 4, namely the adoption of measures to facilitate return to work after extended leave, the proactive support to managers and personnel, through mediation, early prevention and conflict management, as well as the global staff survey feedback on staff-supervisor relations.

28. We are pleased that our long-standing and repeated request for 360-degree assessment has been heard and supported by IOS and taken up by the Administration. We note HRM's commitment to conduct a pilot programme, and we hope that the staff associations will be informed in advance and consulted on its findings.

29. Finally, we welcome the improvement of the geographical mobility programme. However, it is important to point out something that the IOS evaluation does not highlight, namely the very low number of assignments following the two geographical mobility exercises held during the previous strategy. Among the reasons for this is, of course, the increased number of deferments granted, without the reasons always being clear, an observation that was reasonably made by staff during IOS investigations and mentioned in the IOS evaluation. Accordingly, we welcome the indicative measure of success of a "decrease in the number of staff having exceeded their Standard Duration of Assignment (SDA)". For this reason, and in the interest of fairness and equity, the Administration would do well to follow our advice and amend paragraph 13 of Item 5.10 of the Human Resources Manual so that its application leaves no ambiguity or possibility of circumvention in obtaining a deferment.

¹² See, in particular, Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, IOS/EVS/PI 207, p. 28, paragraph 85.

Concluding remarks

30. ISAU agrees with the IOS recommendation to reduce the bureaucratic burden on HRM, which makes it less efficient. However, caution should be exercised in calling for “presenting to the Executive Board one annual report focusing on strategic outcomes” of the strategy. While it is appropriate for States to have reports that allow them to have an overview of the progress of the strategies they are adopting, they need a certain degree of detail and precision in order to fully understand the human resources situation and make appropriate decisions on how to proceed. From this point of view, the advantages and disadvantages of reporting on the strategy once a year rather than every six months will need to be considered, while taking into account what should continue to be reported on at each Board session.

31. In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the relevance of the process, called for by ISAU with insistence at previous sessions of the Executive Board, of conducting an evaluation of the current Human Resources Management Strategy prior to the debate of Member States on the proposal for the new strategy. This logic has been followed. We have noted that on several important subjects, the IOS evaluation pointed out gaps and shortcomings that we have regularly brought to the attention of the Administration and the Member States. This convergence of analyses between two such different bodies attests to the fact that the associations are indeed indispensable stakeholders in ensuring that our Organization meets the highest criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency in its human resources management.