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**Executive Board**

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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 OF THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)**

**SUMMARY**

- B. Report on the geographical distribution and gender balance of the staff of the Secretariat and on the implementation of the measures taken to redress any imbalance**

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 217 EX/4.IV.B).



Job: 202303184

## Introduction

1. The International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) takes note of the Administration's report on geographical distribution and gender balance and welcomes the implementation – or the beginning of the implementation – of the measures adopted by the General Conference following the publication of the report of the Executive Board's Working Group on Geographical Distribution.
2. We welcome the increase in the total number of Member States represented, which in July 2023 stood at 80%, although there is obviously still work left to do before we reach the final objective of 85% representation. We also note that the distribution of non- and under-represented countries has improved within the sectors.
3. This positive assessment must, however, be significantly tempered, as it cannot be applied to a large part of this report, where the presentation of data is often biased or even disingenuous. This raises more general questions about governance, since the principles of rigour and transparency are compromised to such a degree that they undermine the trust which must exist between the governing bodies and the Secretariat.
4. At the beginning of its document, the Administration states that the date of January 2022, which began the period covered by the report for the purposes of calculating percentages, figures and statistics, "corresponds to the starting point for the implementation of the measures adopted by the General Conference" mentioned above. However, it should be noted that the Administration's previous report on geographical distribution and gender balance (document [215 EX/5.IV.C](#)) presented data for the period from **June 2021 to June 2022**. In other words, the present report contains both new data and data of which the Executive Board has already been informed. It is therefore neither relevant nor logical to use data from a period for which a report has already been produced. By combining the data, the current report prevents Member States from making all the comparisons necessary for assessing the effectiveness of the measures adopted and implemented, and from establishing an action plan for the short and medium term. The Administration must bear in mind that rigorous reporting is essential to the proper conduct of the Member States' debates, as it makes transparency and efficiency possible.
5. Another failure to comply with reporting requirements concerns the period covered by the reports. In Annex IV of its document, the Administration provides "data on external recruitment from January 2022 to July 2023". However, the Executive Board had asked the Director-General to "report to it **annually** on the recruitment process outcomes" in this area ([216 EX/Decision 5.III.A](#), emphasis added). It is surprising that the Administration should have proceeded in direct contravention of the decision of the Member States, and it would be appropriate for it to explain why it did so.
6. To conclude this section on the failure to comply with a request from Member States, ISAU wishes to emphasize that the presentation of data is not a trivial matter. This is a governance issue which concerns, among other things, the effective management of an organization with a view to ensuring transparency and accountability. Above all, this matter raises the issue of trust between the governing bodies and the Secretariat, which can only be undermined if the latter adopts practices which expose it to the risk of being qualified as disingenuous.

## **Part I – Geographical distribution of staff**

### **A. Recruitment and appointments**

7. The first paragraph of the document states that the percentage of Directors and Assistant Directors-General (ADGs) from Group I went from 40% in 2018 to 36% in July 2023. However, such an assertion proves to be biased, if not disingenuous, when we refer to table 4, where we can see that the percentage corresponding to regional group I has risen from 31% in January 2022 to 34% in July 2023, which is an increase of three points.

8. Using figures from 2018 to argue that progress has been made is misleading for Member States. Moreover, it is regrettable that data cannot be accurately compared from one case to another because of the different reporting periods and the inclusion of “Directors from non-Member States” in one case and “staff at Director level and above” in the other. The Administration is multiplying the criteria for grouping and presenting data, which runs counter to the principles of clear and transparent reporting.

9. The report also lacks a detailed presentation of the Organization’s 1,768 non-geographical posts, which account for more than twice the 850 posts subject to quotas. To make the data more understandable, ISAU was obliged to draw up table 1 (below), for non-geographical posts.

**Table 1: Non-geographical posts (July 2023)**

Non-geographical posts - Distribution by grade and regional group									
Regional group	D/P		Total	%	NPO	GS		Total	%
	HQ	Field				HQ	Field		
Europe and North America	173	115	288	52%	1	304	141	734	42%
Eastern Europe	14	14	28	5%	8	35	14	85	5%
GRULAC	30	16	46	8%	43	24	70	183	10%
ASPAC	62	27	89	16%	43	37	96	265	14%
Africa	18	46	64	12%	107	57	118	346	20%
Arab States	27	12	39	7%	22	44	50	155	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>554</b>		<b>224</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>1,768</b>	
Non-Member States									
Israel	0	0			0	1	0	1	

10. In terms of appointments, to both geographical and non-geographical posts, the situation is more worrying than what the Administration would like to acknowledge. Table 2 below shows a clear increase (13 points) in the representation of regional group I, with the percentage going from 24% to 37% between June 2022 and June 2023. How can we expect better geographical distribution if we continue to recruit more people from the same group? We must say it again: balanced geographical distribution can only be achieved through recruitment. So, while we welcome the progress made towards achieving 50% of recruitment from non- and under-represented countries, we encourage further efforts to achieve the objective set by the Member States.

**Table 2: Appointments to geographical and non-geographical posts (combined)**  
(based on movement-of-personnel data published by HRM)

Appointments*									From 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022
From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023									
Regional group	D-2	D-1	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	Total	%	%
Europe and North America	2	1	3	3	14	1	24	37%	24%
Eastern Europe	-	-	-	1	5	1	7	11%	20%
GRULAC	1	-	2	3	1	-	7	11%	10%
ASPAC	-	1	-	-	7	4	12	19%	24%
Africa	-	1	-	1	2	3	7	11%	17%
Arab States	-	1	1	1	3	1	7	11%	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>64</b>		

(\*) Including inter-agency transfers

11. Table 3 below also shows that the rate of appointments with promotion for Europe and North America remained equally high over the same period.

**Table 3: Appointments with promotion to geographical and non-geographical posts**  
(based on movement-of-personnel data published by HRM)

Appointments with promotion									
From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023									From 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022
Regional group	D-1	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	P-1	Total	%	%
Europe and North America	1	2	3	3	3	-	12	29%	29%
Eastern Europe	-	1	2	2	-	-	5	12%	16%
GRULAC	-	1	2	1	-	1	5	12%	13%
ASPAC	-	1	8	3	-	-	12	29%	22%
Africa	-	2	1	2	-	1	6	14%	16%
Arab States	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	4%	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>		
<b>Non-Member States</b>									
United States of America	-	1	-	-	-	-	1		
Israel	1	-	-	-	-	-	1		

12. A comment is in order with regard to the appointment data as presented by the Administration in table 2 of the document in question. The percentages therein do not appear to be accurate, as they do not correspond to the figures in the right-hand column. We urge the Administration to correct this error or, if necessary, to provide an explanation which would enable us to understand and use these data appropriately.

13. Finally, with regard to the representation of staff at Director level and above, it is unfortunate that the trend is the opposite of what was sought. Table 4 shows that there were six separations corresponding to the Europe and North America group; they were immediately “offset” by nine appointments within the same group. This is certainly not the way to reverse the trend. We will be closely monitoring the new data which will be presented to the Board, as announced by the Administration in paragraph 12 of its document.

14. More generally, ISAU must continue to stress that geographical imbalances are also found in the distribution of groups within grades, which means that there are problems not only with recruitment (which is both internal and external), but also, and especially, with promotion. Such a situation must be taken as a serious symptom which indicates that nationals from certain groups have career opportunities which are effectively closed to others, exposing UNESCO to possible accusations of discriminatory practices, which would be an unacceptable risk in view of the Organization's mandate. This situation is worrying and requires greater attention on the part of the Administration, which must set an example in this area.

15. Considering the set of criteria applicable for the analysis of geographical distribution within the Secretariat, it bears noting that, in its report on human resources (IOS/EVS/PI 207, March 2023), the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) had indicated that other United Nations organizations and programmes classified countries according to world groups, such as the global South. It would be advisable for the Administration to present the data in this way, if only on an experimental basis.

## **B. Other measures for remedying the geographical imbalance**

16. ISAU applauds the Young Professionals Programme (YPP), whose importance lies not only in its direct impact in terms of geographical distribution of staff, but also in the fact that it reflects the image and culture which UNESCO must promote in this area, as an employer in a highly competitive job market. More specifically, with regard to the use and effectiveness of the recruitment pool, we encourage the Administration to remove any obstacles it believes to have hampered its effectiveness, and to consider other means of outreach and recruitment if the pool proves to be insufficient. The flexibility and agility required of staff must also permeate all the Administration's practices.

17. In this respect, we look forward to learning about the results of the new Young Professionals Programme launched in the summer of 2023. On that subject, we believe that the coaching and mentoring programme currently being established for the 2021-2022 cohort of young Professionals should also cover the new cohort arriving in 2023. Personal and professional support which begins **right from the start of a young Professional's experience** at the Organization, rather than two or three years after his/her arrival, would be more relevant and useful, especially given the increased mobility of young Professionals today.

18. As far as raising awareness among Assistant Directors-General (ADGs) and Directors is concerned, ISAU believes that the recommendations it has been making for years have had little effect, an observation corroborated by the fact that, as pointed out by IOS, the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) is often absent from recruitment interviews, for example. The sectors' recruitment processes should be subject to regular recruitment audits, the summaries of which would be presented to the Member States, which would then be able to hold the sectors directly to account for their practices and decisions, particularly as regards P-1 to P-4 posts, which fall under their almost exclusive supervision, on account of HRM's relative passivity, observed by IOS.

19. Finally, we would like to draw the attention of the Member States, which, as we know, are all very attached to the principle of equitable geographical distribution, to the need to establish a paid internship programme, as many other international organizations have done, changing their practice in this regard in recent years. This measure, which is necessary to the rebalancing of geographical representation, is also essential to preserving — or even restoring — UNESCO's image as an employer which is concerned about the well-being of its staff and which applies the principles and values which it itself advocates.

## **Part II – Gender balance**

20. The gender balance of UNESCO staff remains at a commendable level and should continue to serve as an example for other United Nations organizations and agencies.

21. However, at the risk of repeating ourselves, we wish to stress, once again, the importance of adopting and implementing concrete measures to achieve parity at the following levels: P-5, Director and above. In fact, the number of women at the P-5, D-1 and ADG levels has fallen as compared to the number in **June 2022**, contrary to what might be suggested by the data in table 5 of the Administration's document, which takes January 2022 data into account. Here again, ISAU calls for data to be carried over from one year to the next to enable objective comparison. Consequently, when efforts to increase the representation of women at the P-5 level and above are reported, we would like to see these efforts translate into results and progress from one year to the next.