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HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR 2023-2027

ADDENDUM

COMMENTS BY THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

OUTLINE

In accordance with item 9.2.7 of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) submits its comments on the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027 (document 42 C/49).

1. The International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) submitted its detailed comments on the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027 during the last Executive Board session in document 217 EX/4.IV.C Add.2 (see document in Annex). Nevertheless, we would like to make a few additional comments that we feel are important.

2. We welcome the decision taken by the Member States at the last session of the Executive Board to request a roadmap for the implementation of the new Strategy. We would, however, like to reiterate our surprise that this roadmap, along with a timetable and an action plan, was not submitted earlier. The roadmap will be presented at the 219th session of the Executive Board, which is taking place next spring. However, even if it were to be immediately accepted and approved by Member States, this would mean that it would not be applied until a year and a half after the start of the Strategy's implementation. This situation not only defies logic, but also runs counter to the Organization's previous practices. Let us simply recall that, for the purposes of drawing up the previous Strategy for 2017 to 2022, a work plan had previously been presented to the Executive



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Board in **2016** (see, for example, document 200 EX/5.IV.B, Annex I). It goes without saying that, without a roadmap, a strategy is doomed to remain theoretical, and its implementation will be impossible to evaluate.

3. Furthermore, the absence of a human resources director is not a situation that we find reassuring regarding the decisions to be taken and implemented. We can only hope that someone capable of carrying out this important project will soon join our Organization to implement the Strategy, apply the decisions adopted by the Member States and respect the commitments made to them.

4. As such, we must reiterate our concern about the willingness of the HRM to meet the commitments it has made to Member States. We are referring to the “360-degree assessment” for managers, a measure included in the Strategy presented to Member States. Despite this explicit commitment, the project submitted to us by HRM is in no way an assessment. It is merely a request for feedback, akin to coaching for managers. Clearly, feedback is not the same as a true 360-degree assessment, which must include, at the very least, some degree of accountability. Lack of accountability, at whichever level, means impunity, problematic situations being repeated or perpetuated, and a heavy price paid by the Organization, not only in financial terms, but also in terms of its reputation and operations. We therefore reiterate our request that the Administration implement a 360-degree **assessment**, since it made that commitment to Member States (see Annex I, p. 11 of the document commented on here). More than anything, this is a matter of principle, and a worrying indication that other commitments could just as easily be ignored.

5. In conclusion, we would like to clarify paragraph 12 of our previous comments, presented here in the Annex. We denounced the fact that the Administration had deleted a reference to the internal internship programme in its document. We would like to inform you that HRM has since submitted to us a draft internship policy. We commend the Administration on this comprehensive and detailed draft, which provides a framework for the employment of interns and brings significant improvements, including awarding them with an indemnity. ISAU is delighted that this long-awaited policy has finally seen the light of day. It will likely help to improve the geographical distribution of UNESCO staff, while recognizing the significant work of interns. The policy is a tangible and promising measure, which is worthy of being incorporated into a human resources management “strategy”.

ANNEX



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217 EX/4.IV.C Add.2

Executive Board

Two hundred and seventeenth session

PARIS, 5 October 2023
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Item 4 of the revised provisional agenda

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 2

COMMENTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

C. 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 217 EX/4.IV.C).



The principles set out and reflected in the new strategy

1. We note that the draft human resources management strategy submitted to the Executive Board at its 217th session makes no concrete revisions, despite the decisions adopted by the governing body at its last session. In fact, the document is virtually identical to the latest draft presented to the Member States. We had hoped that, following the shortcomings raised by the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) in its evaluation of the previous human resources management strategy (IOS/EVS/PI 207) and the comments and suggestions made by ISAU, a more ambitious draft strategy, with a workplan and timetable, would have been presented to the Organization's governing bodies this autumn. That is not the case.
2. For example, the Member States had requested from the Administration a revised version of the strategy which would, *inter alia*, "strengthen the role of the Bureau of Human Resources Management in ensuring transparency and compliance with rules and regulations of recruitment, and continue to enhance the internal justice system" ([216 EX/Decision 5.III.A, paragraph 4\(iii\)](#)). While there are a few proposals in the section of the document dealing with "key guiding components" (paragraphs 9 to 19 of Annex I to document 217 EX/4.IV.C), we do not see any measures to strengthen HRM's role in recruitment among the actions and indicative measures of success included in the rest of the document, which make up the body of the strategy. The strategy does not, for example, address the observation by IOS that HRM has a low level of involvement in the recruitment processes. While it is certainly appropriate for HRM to step up initiatives aimed at improving the Organization's human resources processes, it is doubtful whether its action can be truly effective in the long term if the sectors are not subject to real control, which is the only way to nurture a genuine culture of accountability. We reiterate that IOS highlighted the lack of transparency and accountability within our Organization.
3. The Administration refers to "training in leadership and accountability", which would support "effective performance management with the aim of fostering a culture of trust [and] transparency", as well as conflict resolution, which would be "a key feature of management training". Paradoxically, however, this type of accountability programme does not entail any obligations, and ISAU continues to believe that resolution of conflicts between staff will be all the more effective if staff rights are guaranteed.
4. The "360-degree" assessment is another example of a subject on which HRM demonstrates the same contradiction between its desire to promote a culture of accountability and its refusal to hold the sectors to account. So, while this 360-degree assessment could be one of the most ambitious actions of the new strategy, we note that it has been reduced to a coaching tool with no connection whatsoever with professional assessments.
5. Indeed, in document 217 EX/4.IV.C, Annex I, page 10, Key Objective II of Strategic Aim 4 clearly states that 360-degree assessment and feedback for managers¹ will be developed, the success of which will be measured by the number of managers undertaking the 360-degree assessment programme.² However, despite an apparent willingness to increase transparency, foster a culture of accountability and establish "a **respectful and ethical work environment**", the Administration's intentions seem, once again, destined to remain a dead letter. During ISAU's meetings with HRM, the latter stated that its project in this area was not to set up an "assessment", but a kind of feedback. HRM contradicts itself in its explanations, asserting, on the one hand, that the terms "assessment" and "feedback" are interchangeable, but that, on the other, the use of the second term would be more constructive in that it emphasizes a cooperative approach and the creation of an environment conducive to growth, development and open communication. This is all the more surprising given that the strategy document refers to assessment, not feedback. There is

¹ In the English version of document 217 EX/4.IV.C, under "Actions" it says: "Expand 360-degree assessment and feedback for managers".

² In the English version of document 217 EX/4.IV.C, under "Indicative measures of success", it says: "Number of managers undertaking 360° assessment programme".

plenty of scope to mislead Member States into adopting what they think is a performance assessment policy when in fact the proposal is to invest in a personalized coaching programme.

6. HRM replied that there is already a formal performance appraisal procedure which applies to directors, as to all staff. However, it is precisely because this procedure is largely flawed that the systemic shortcomings of human resources management in terms of transparency and accountability must constantly be brought to the attention of Member States.

7. HRM asserts that it is a question of perception, not reality. In other words, the HRM project is essentially about obtaining subjective feedback on directors' skills, rather than making an objective assessment of their performance. Ultimately, the aim appears to be simply to improve their managerial skills. However, we will not be able to improve personnel management if we assume from the outset that not all the skills managers should possess will be fully taken into account in their appraisal, and that some will simply be subject to feedback which, moreover, will be confidential. Establishing two parallel processes – one formal and compulsory, the other informal – makes no sense, and will be neither effective nor efficient. It is therefore important that the 360-degree assessment becomes an integral part of current performance management policy.

8. Given that HRM's project has not yet been finalized, and that ISAU has submitted its comments and recommendations to HRM, we urge Member States to demand that HRM revise its project in order to ensure a genuine 360-degree staff assessment policy, rather than simply offering personalized coaching.

9. It should be recalled that these failings in terms of transparency and accountability, in addition to the suffering unjustly caused and sometimes prolonged by these failings, end up costing UNESCO exorbitant amounts in the many lawsuits it loses before ILOAT (see in particular [215 EX/Decision 5.IV.A](#)).

10. Transparency and accountability, which are necessary for performance assessment, are also necessary for recruitment. In this respect, we are delighted to read, in paragraph 17 of document 217 EX/4.IV.C, that “[s]taff appointments will be made through a transparent, competitive process” and that “the selection of staff will be made”, finally, “without distinction as to race, sex or religion”. These principles, obvious as they are, heralded and enshrined since the foundation of the Organization, have been neglected for too long, and we can only hope that they will eventually be applied.

Content of the new strategy

11. The revised strategy document, currently being presented to Member States, refers to the “physical and normative structures” that “will be updated [...] the aim being to facilitate accessibility for all UNESCO personnel and to ensure decent and engaging working arrangements”. These new objectives are welcome, as they reflect a more concrete commitment than that expressed in the previous version of the strategy, which, referring to the promotion of diversity and inclusion in all their forms, stated that “[t]his will, however, require substantial investment, both in funding and of time, as it entails updating physical and normative structures, and to some extent changing mindsets” (document 216 EX/5.III.A, Annex I, paragraph 18). ISAU fully supports the updating of the physical and normative structures outlined in the new version of the strategy, but we ask that this policy be accompanied by key objectives and precise success indicators, which alone will enable the implementation of these commitments to be monitored and evaluated over time.

12. We also wonder why the reference to a “fair and inclusive internship programme” was deleted from paragraph 19 of document 217 EX/4.IV.C (see document 216 EX/5.III.A, Annex I, paragraph 19). In view of the importance of this measure, which is constantly highlighted in our comments on the Board document concerning geographical distribution, we regret that the new strategy does not mention it at all.

13. We have already drawn attention to the fact that it is not the “number of qualified applicants from non- and under-represented countries” that is important (see indicative measures of success under Key Objective I in document 216 EX/5.III.A), but the number of people from these Member States who have actually been appointed. We note that an additional role has been assigned to the Director of HRM, who will henceforth be responsible for establishing key performance indicators for senior managers in terms of geographical staff representation. While this is a positive step, it is felt that the only change this measure will bring is that managers will be asked to provide an overall justification for the recruitment of individuals which they have already justified at the time of recruitment. We would like to reiterate the serious imbalances that Member States have vigorously contested in recent times and emphasize that only greater involvement of HRM in the recruitment process will ensure the effective application of all existing rules and regulations in this area.

14. Transparency and accountability are at the heart of ISAU’s concerns, as they are the only guarantees of efficiency and justice within an organization. The elements discussed above are just one example of a more general attitude on the part of the Administration, which tends to pay lip service to transparency and accountability, but then thwarts its commitments by implementing procedures that systematically evade its obligations. We thus see HRM multiplying the number of training courses, but most of our colleagues complain of constantly encountering obstacles to their career development. In this respect, the measures aimed at contributing to career development, however laudable, must not be limited to young professionals and mid-level professionals. A career development support programme must involve all the Organization’s staff, who are constantly pointing out the obstacles they encounter in this area.

Issues relating to affiliate personnel

15. As a preliminary point, we must call attention to what we consider to be an inaccuracy in the presentation of the data in Annexes II and III of document 217 EX/4.IV.C. In 216 EX/Decision 5.III.A, concerning the human resources management strategy, the Executive Board requested the Director-General to “report on the financial and legal implications of the possibility of applying the new UNESCO human resources strategy to **non-staff**”, and invited her to provide “a mapping on the **non-staff** by location and strategy” (see paragraph 6 of 216 EX/Decision 5.III.A).

16. We note, however, that the “affiliate workforce” (Appendix II) and “non-staff” (Appendix III) include temporary staff. However, individuals hired on temporary contracts are considered as staff members in accordance with Item 13.6 of the Human Resources Manual. Moreover, the Administration itself confirms this on several occasions, for example in paragraphs 1 and 6 of Annex III to document 217 EX/4.IV.C, and also in document 217 EX/4.IV.A on the use of affiliate personnel (see, for example, table 1 of Annex II to document 217 EX/4.IV.A). We would like to have an explanation of this presentation of a category of staff as “non-staff” and, if necessary, a rectification in the matter.

17. The situation of these personnel, as described by the Administration in document 217 EX/4.IV.C, illustrates the urgent need to remedy this problem. Among other things, it is impossible for affiliate personnel to have access to the internal justice mechanisms, and this inequality is all the more damaging as it significantly increases their risk of exposure to injustices against which, by definition, they have no recourse. This is unquestionably an extremely worrying situation for an organization that claims to defend and promote human rights.

18. Inequalities are apparent on many levels, such as between Headquarters and the field. HRM recalls that holders of service contracts in the field are not subject to any maximum contract duration, unlike service contracts at Headquarters, resulting in long-term insecurity that no mechanism can correct.

19. Finally, the high percentage of people with a significant number of consecutive years of service at UNESCO are equally worrying and should prompt Member States to act more decisively on this issue. As the Administration itself admitted in the initial version of its document: “[c]onsecutive extensions of contracts for lengthy periods of service contract holders working alongside fixed-term

staff with different conditions of service, is in itself an increasing legal and financial challenge”.³ The Administration asserts that people hired for periods of six, eight or ten years would be medium- or long-term employees, as if there could be any structural justification for the temporary and precarious nature of their contracts. Everything suggests that sectors and many offices are systemically abusing the provisions of temporary contracts, sometimes to save money and often to avoid having to engage in the procedures required by the most protective contracts. In any case, it is not possible to argue that people present for such long periods would be performing tasks that do not in fact correspond to regular and permanent tasks of the Secretariat, and that it is HRM’s responsibility to regularize them. Here again, HRM fails to be transparent and accountable, since its practice of passively observing the continued presence of many staff on temporary contracts that have been diverted from their intended purpose amounts to an endorsement of what is tantamount to genuine arbitrariness on the part of the sectors (which choose to keep certain individuals in precarious employment, while creating new posts and granting decent contracts to others).

20. The implementation of an end-of-service grant or separation payment is certainly commendable but does not remedy the professional instability experienced by these staff, nor the impact this instability has on their lives and mental health. Moreover, the Administration is fully aware of this, since it was able to reveal the real reason behind the introduction of such a grant, which, in reality, “[would reduce] the risk of service contract holders filing lawsuits before national courts or pursuing litigation against the Organization”.⁴

21. The same applies to the search for a global health insurance scheme for service contract holders. While ISAU supports the spirit of this initiative insofar as it provides better protection for individuals in situations of vulnerability, we must warn Member States against its undesirable effects, since it risks endorsing the practice of constant renewal of this type of contract, which would remain highly precarious by its very nature.

22. Solutions that could help solve the problem include recruiting such staff under other types of contracts. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the main obstacle to this measure is not so much the absence of applications from affiliate personnel “for vacant posts at UNESCO”, as the Administration seems to suggest, but rather their non-recruitment when they do apply.

23. Obviously, the essential and main solution to the problem would be to “regularize” them, a term that the Administration even used before modifying it in paragraph 13 of its document.⁵ ISAU therefore fully and firmly supports the regularization of “core, continuous functions” through the creation of “more stable positions in particular in the context of the field reform”. Printed on recycled paper

³ Paragraph 10 of Annex III of the initial French version of document 217 EX/4.IV.C:
“As noted in para. 3 above, there are 1005 persons employed under the service contract modality as at January 2023 of which 805 (80%) are located in the Field. 11% (91 persons) have cumulated more than 10 years of consecutive service, 14% (113 persons) have between 6 and 10 years and 28% (226 persons) between 2 and 6 years of service with UNESCO, all of which can be categorized as medium to long-term employment. Consecutive extensions of contracts for lengthy periods of service contract holders working alongside fixed-term staff with different conditions of service, is in itself an increasing legal and financial challenge [...]”.

⁴ Paragraph 10 of Annex III of the initial French version of document 217 EX/4.IV.C:
“[...] This being said, one of the enhancements in the conditions of service introduced in January 2023 for service contract holders is the implementation of an end-of-service grant/separation payment, which reduces the risk of service contract holders filing lawsuits before national courts or pursuing litigation against the Organization.”

⁵ Paragraph 13 of Annex III of the initial French version of document 217 EX/4.IV.C:
“The Joint Inspection Unit is currently undertaking a review of ‘non-staff’ personnel in the UN common system, the recommendations of which should assist in shaping a longer-term UN and organizational-wide strategy which will review and assess from both a programmatic and budgetary perspective the intent and purpose, adjusting and refining the terms and usage, including where possible the regularization of core, continuous functions through more stable positions in particular in the context of the field reform, with due regard to the nature of, and predictability in earmarked funding”.