

20 March 2024

Madam Chairperson,
Mr Representative of the Director-General,
Your Excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Commission for granting ISAU speaking time, honouring the values of dialogue enshrined in the Constitution of UNESCO.

Reminding our principles matters as we embark on a new biennium under the leadership of a new Chairperson of the Executive Board, whom I would like to welcome.

Reminding our principles matters at a time when a new Director of the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) is taking up her duties. On behalf of my ISAU colleagues, I would like to welcome her and express our willingness for constructive collaboration. We have no doubt that she will soon come to know the staff's dedication to their duties and our commitment to making UNESCO more effective.

As far as the Human Resources Strategy is concerned, the road map submitted to the Member States requires some explanation. Indeed, we were surprised to note that it includes actions and indicators that are different from those already discussed and approved by the Executive Board and the General Conference. Many elements are missing, and it is unclear what is going to happen to them: whether they are going to be deferred (and if so, for how long) or even abandoned, without the approval of the Member States, which is hardly conceivable.

Your Excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

If the road map recommended by the Administration is adopted as it stands at this session, uncertainties may arise as to which document will prevail between this road map and the Strategy adopted by the General Conference. Everyone here is aware of the risks that such uncertainties can create in terms of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Thus, the existence of two contradictory documents and the subsequent inability to evaluate the Human Resources Strategy and policies will undermine UNESCO's capacity for action and its credibility.

In substance, if we are to successfully implement the Strategy, we need to pay close attention to the most structural issues affecting human resources management. Recruitment raises such issues in the first instance, as it is central to the implementation of any strategy. Workforce planning must be clear and strategic, taking into account the findings of the report of the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS), and concrete measures must be taken to achieve this. Finally, career development remains a blind spot that has been highlighted in several evaluation reports.

Another area that raises structural questions is that of flexible working arrangements. We observe a reticence, often diffuse and sometimes obstinate, on the part of certain managers, who disregard the facts, as they confuse the supervision of assignments with the pernicky control of colleagues. All of this points to the need to modernize our human resources management culture. In the same vein, we ask the Administration to align itself with the practice of other United Nations organizations that have long since implemented other flexible working arrangements, such as compressed work schedules and teleworking outside the duty station.

We welcome the development of training programmes. However, we must insist that human resources management programmes for managers are no substitute for a clear framework of rules and assessment, otherwise we will perpetuate a culture of impunity that is highly detrimental to our Organization. With this in mind, we insist on the need to implement a true 360-degree assessment, integrated into our performance management policy and including clear elements of accountability.

Finally, the United Nations Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy reminds us that the issue of well-being must remain a priority. On this point, I must highlight the alarming increase in cases of harassment reported to us informally; an increase that is moreover confirmed by the Ethics Office in its report. We call for the urgent implementation of an action plan on well-being, based on existing benchmarks.

At a time when we have the pleasure of welcoming a new Director of HRM, I must point out that we face a vast task ahead if we are to improve the working environment within our Organization. Such an endeavour cannot succeed without a strong impetus from HRM, of whom we hold high expectations.

Thank you for your attention.