Executive Board

Two hundred and twentieth session

PARIS, 7 October 2024
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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 2

COMMENTS BY THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Strategy for 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 220 EX/5.IV.A).

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1.   We are pleased to note that, following the comments made by ISAU at the last session of the Executive Board ([219 EX/5.III.A Add](#).) and as requested by the Executive Board itself ([219 EX/Decision 5.III.A, paragraph 6](#)), HRM has revised the road map to include all the actions and indicators in line with what was adopted by the General Conference. We commend DIR/HRM for her proactive approach in sharing a draft of the road map with the staff associations to gather their feedback prior to its submission to the Executive Board. This consultation enabled ISAU to identify and correct certain inconsistencies in the newly added objectives and performance indicators, as well as requesting the inclusion of key missing elements. The road map now explicitly includes as a target the implementation of the accepted recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) concerning flexible working arrangements ([JIU/REP/2023/6](#)). Similarly, at our request, HRM has

finally announced the development of a UNESCO action plan on mental health and well-being **in line with** the [United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy](#).

Recruitment and career development

2.   However, we must express our disappointment at the omission of certain aspects that we raised, and which are crucial to the Strategy. One of our major concerns is the persistent indifference to the issue of transparency in recruitment processes. HRM's role is often passive, limited to forwarding applications, while appointments are actually in the power of the sectors. We are regularly called upon by colleagues regarding, among other things, biased interviews, tailor-made vacancy notices and external candidates being given preference over internal candidates, even though some of them are already fulfilling the responsibilities of the post advertised. One might judge these recriminations to be subjective, but the fact is that current reality does not belie them. This creates a poisonous climate that undermines colleagues' confidence in UNESCO's commitment to efficiency and legitimacy in recruitment and career development.

3.   The lack of transparency in recruitment, highlighted moreover by the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) in its evaluation report on the Strategy for 2017–2022 ([IOS/EVS/PI 207](#), paragraph 84), is a serious problem that must be resolved to ensure the Organization's credibility and effectiveness. It should also be recalled that the Executive Board had asked the Administration to revise the Strategy in order to "strengthen the role of the Bureau of Human Resources Management in ensuring transparency and compliance with rules and regulations of recruitment ..." ([216 EX/Decision 5.III.A, paragraph 4 (iii)](#)).

4.   HRM also neglects the crucial question of the **link** between training and learning on the one hand, and career advancement on the other. Yet this link is essential to coherent, motivating career development.

360-degree feedback

5.   We note HRM's efforts, having included in its targets "360° approach reviewed for potential integration in performance management process" (Aim 4 Action 4 Target 3). Nevertheless, we regret that this integration is only "potential". In addition, we deplore the ambiguous language that HRM continues to use. Indeed, in the [English version](#) (original document), HRM repeatedly refers to "360° *feedback*" instead of "360° *assessment*" as adopted by the General Conference ([42 C/Resolution 65](#)). We have already informed HRM of our opposition to their plan to replace the 360° assessment with simple "feedback", which, as everyone will agree, has neither the same scope nor the same value. We would like HRM to confirm that this is indeed an *assessment*. It is essential that the Strategy's actions and indicators as adopted by the General Conference are scrupulously respected and monitored. Any deviation would set a dangerous precedent and compromise the integrity of the decision-making process.

Internship policy

6.   In its previous document on the Strategy ([219 EX/5.III.A, paragraph 4](#)), HRM stated that "[t]he new internship policy will apply from July 2024". To date, however, the policy has not yet been implemented. HRM states in a rather confused manner that "The transitional measures for the implementation of the revised Internship Policy are being established to allow the interns who are onboarded as of the Policy enactment date to benefit from enhanced entitlements" (page 5 of the document commented on). This wording is hard to understand. In the interests of transparency, it was the Administration's responsibility not only to communicate the delay in the policy, but above all to provide a clear explanation for the delay and a timetable for remedying it.

7.   We would like to reiterate that remuneration for interns is not only essential if we are to rebalance geographical representation, but also constitutes fair and decent recognition of the

valuable contributions they make to the Organization. It is imperative that this policy be implemented without further delay, and that all commitments made be honoured.

8.   If, as we have been led to believe, the delay is due to funding problems, this raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the Organization's planning and management. HRM worked on the policy for months in collaboration with the staff associations. It is incomprehensible that this fundamental issue is only now being raised, when the Administration had all the time it needed to prepare funding for a policy which is designed at heart to *fund* interns. This failure raises questions about the consistency of the other actions and measures proposed. Will they really be implemented, or will the Administration go back on the commitments it made to the Member States?

9.   It would also appear that the number of volunteer contracts is currently on the rise. ISAU has alerted HRM to the risk of volunteer contracts being misused so as to circumvent the policy of paid internships. Measures must be taken to ensure that sectors do not take advantage of the legal uncertainty to render the new policy meaningless.

HRM's commitment

10.   Generally speaking, ISAU once again deplores HRM's practice of shirking its responsibilities by making its action conditional on the availability of additional resources. For instance, as early as in paragraph 4 of the document under review, HRM states that a "request for increased capacitation of UNESCO's Bureau of Human Resources Management will be submitted in the context of the Draft Programme and Budget 43 C/5 for the period 2026-2027. Unless the additional support required is confirmed, certain targets may require adjustment and/or revision". Does this mean that in the absence of additional funding the Strategy is doomed to failure?

11.   We would like to emphasize that the fact that HRM holds consultations and information sessions with key stakeholders in order to reinforce collective responsibility (paragraph 2 of the document commented upon) can in no way serve to exonerate it from its own responsibilities. Furthermore, consultations with the staff associations must not amount to merely going through the motions. Our proposals, comments and concerns must be taken seriously and incorporated into the decision-making process.

Staff health and well-being

12.   Taking into account the impact of work on employee health is essential, both at Headquarters and in the field. ISAU therefore deplores the fact that there is no target for occupational health and safety **before 2026** (Aim 4 Action 2). In the meantime, a number of measures could be put in place:

-    Bringing UNESCO into line with best practice in terms of teleworking **without further delay** would simultaneously contribute to the health and well-being of staff and to the fulfilment of the Organization's mandate by reducing the number of work-related sick days and incapacities. It is important to note that a clear link has been established between flexible working arrangements and employee mental health.[1] It should also be remembered that the 2023 JIU report (JIU/REP/2023/6) showed that UNESCO was less flexible than other organizations in terms of authorized teleworking time and compressed working hours, and above all that it was the only one not to authorize teleworking away from the duty station.

-    Improving planning of working hours to regulate workloads and avoid burnout, particularly for services with atypical working hours (e.g. security service).

-    Facilitating access to healthcare for staff in the field.

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[1]   United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy

Geographical mobility exercise

13.   In view of the broadly unsatisfactory results of the last mobility exercise, we have every right to question the usefulness of continuing this programme. In fact, out of 157 posts subject to mobility, of which 29 were volunteers, there were only 29 reassignments. This number raises questions, especially as we have no information on the number of volunteers included in the reassignments.

14.   The mobility exercise is often perceived as a bureaucratic stratagem that rarely seems to respond to principles of efficiency, consistency and fairness, and seems instead to be guided by a certain arbitrariness characterized by the lack of any real career management by HRM. The mobility policy continues to generate considerable stress for staff, while mobilizing significant human resources. It therefore seems essential to us that an evaluation of the relevance of the programme be carried out in order to thoroughly reform it and correct its flaws (e.g. standard durations of assignment, criteria for alternating Headquarters and field posts, application of deferral criteria, etc.).

Geographical distribution

15.   We invite you to read ISAU's detailed comments on geographical distribution (220 EX/5.IV.B Add.2).

Specific questions on the road map

16.   We note that some of the performance indicators and targets added by HRM, far from reinforcing the aims, actions and indicators previously adopted by the General Conference, dilute their impact and weaken their effectiveness, or lack relevance and precision (a few examples are given below). It is crucial to ensure that the indicators and targets fit coherently and appropriately into the road map.

- Several targets (e.g. Aim 1 Action 2, Aim 3 Action 3 and Aim 4 Action 10) are reduced to the "increase" or "decrease" of certain data, without specifying the target rate or threshold. Would any variation, however small, be sufficient to consider that the aim in question has been achieved?

- Aim 1 Action 2: The target should be to increase the number of **appointed applicants** from under- or non-represented countries. Establishing the number of qualified **applicants** as an indicator of success is a sign of bad faith, since it would be enough to claim that the objectives have been achieved simply by relying on the existence of applicants.

- Aim 2 Action 1: While transparency and accountability are essential to the successful implementation of the Strategy, the mere publication of reports is not in itself sufficient to achieve the Strategy's objectives.

- Aim 2 Action 6: The Young Professionals Programme (YPP) retention/promotion rate per biennium (which was included in the draft road map submitted by HRM) was a measurable and objective performance indicator. Why was it replaced with "level of satisfaction from Young Professionals"? While it is interesting to have feedback from Young Professionals on their experience, this does not constitute an objective criterion for measuring the effectiveness of a programme, as would be their retention, which should be seen as the natural outcome of this investment by the Organization.

- Aim 3 Action 1: Why do the indicator and target refer to a "*deployment*" process, when the action refers to developing "a transparent *selection* process"? Furthermore, we fail to understand why the introduction of support mechanisms for field operations has been postponed by one year compared with what had been decided by Member States.

- <u>Aim 4 Action 2</u>: As the indicative measure of success adopted is "reduction in sick /absenteeism rates", it would have been more effective if the target had been a defined rate rather than the implementation of a monitoring programme.

- <u>Aim 4 Action 5</u>: Would a comparison between the percentage of appeals and the percentage of administrative reviews not be a more relevant indicator than the number of managers participating in training workshops on conflict management? With regard to the management of disputes between staff and the Administration, we invite you to read ISAU's comments on International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT) judgements (220 EX/5.IV.INF Add.).