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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**

**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 222 EX/4.IV.A).

1. ISAU takes note of the Administration's document on the follow-up to the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027. Although identified as a management tool, this document gives the impression of a Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) in need of renewal, repeating observations already made in previous reports without providing concrete measures or a clear strategic vision. In a context marked by the announced withdrawal of the United States of America, a more proactive and innovative stance would have been expected from HRM.
2. Furthermore, the lack of clarity in the annexes prevents any rigorous analysis of the actual progress made. This exercise seems to be more about administrative compliance – ticking boxes – than a genuine human resources management strategy based on measurable objectives and tangible results.
3. Finally, the late submission of draft revisions to regulations and the hasty publication of circulars without prior consultation of the staff associations, on the eve of this session of the



Executive Board, attest to worrying flaws in the planning and governance of the HRM process. These practices undermine the quality of social dialogue and weaken the legitimacy of the reforms proposed.

4. As previously denounced by ISAU, HRM continues to hide behind the budget argument. Lack of funding cannot be used as a permanent excuse; there are many low-cost measures which could improve the situation (telecommuting away from the duty station; flexible working hours; better compliance on the part of the Administration with its own rules and procedures in order to avoid high costs associated with the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal [ILOAT]; the review of ineffective policies, such as the mobility programme, whose results are not conclusive; and so on).

5. Even more worryingly, the document does not propose any measures for dealing with the critical problems which we reported, and which were confirmed by the Ethics Office (ETH) ([221 EX/30](#)) and by the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) ([221 EX/29](#)) in their respective 2024 reports: harassment, an unhealthy working climate, loss of staff trust. This omission undermines HRM's credibility.

6. Thus, while HRM claims to pursue its four strategic aims "at a steady pace", this claim is contradicted by the number of aims not achieved, as demonstrated in the road map (Annex I). The findings contained in the 2025 MOPAN (Multilateral Performance Network) assessment report<sup>1</sup> confirm this discrepancy: "UNESCO's progress [...] has been notably slow, particularly in field network reform, human resources management, and the deployment of core digital platforms".

### **Strategic Aim 1: Attract and retain talent and expertise**

7. The organization of induction workshops, as mentioned in paragraph 4 of the document in question, remains largely insufficient for addressing chronic weaknesses in workforce planning. There have been no responses or concrete measures to address the findings published in the MOPAN and Ethics Office reports, particularly with regard to recruitment:

- In its report (figure IV, p. 4), the Ethics Office reveals that conflict-of-interest issues related to recruitment constitute the category of third-most frequently handled cases.
- The 2025 MOPAN assessment report (p. 41) states that the extreme centralization of recruitment decisions on professional-level assignments by the Director-General is "highly unusual" and "has led to delays in recruitment".

8. ISAU would like to point out the recurring problems associated with recruitment and performance management: lack of transparency, suspicions of nepotism, tailor-made vacancy notices, biased interviews, the nearly complete impossibility of contesting performance evaluations, absence of the staff members concerned from meetings of the Performance Review Board (PRB).

9. With regard to the performance management framework, we take a positive view of the Performance Insights series. We look forward to the conclusions and recommendations of the IOS audit of the performance management framework. We already know that the reform will have to be structural. As the Appeals Board pointed out in its 2024 annual report (initial version), the absence of a competent body to review "partially meets expectations" evaluations requires a review of the policy.

10. ISAU once again stresses the importance of establishing a link between training, rewarding good performance and career development. We therefore recommend:

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<sup>1</sup> [MOPAN Assessment Report: UNESCO, 8 July 2025, p. 57.](#)

- A reform of the performance management framework which ensures transparency and effective remedy;
- The re-establishment of the Evaluation Committee and the Reports Board;
- The introduction of 360° evaluations for all managers;
- The introduction of concrete incentives (e.g., additional leave for exceptional performance, as at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

### **Strategic Aim 2: Promote inclusion and diversity by achieving in particular an equitable geographical distribution and gender balance**

11. We welcome the development of the HR Dashboards platform, which is essential for data transparency.

12. ISAU welcomes measures to include persons with disabilities and remains ready to work closely with HRM on this issue. However, we emphasize that such measures should not depend on “the availability of resources”; reasonable accommodation is a right, not a budgetary option.

13. The internship policy also illustrates this lack of rigour. It is strange to have to note that this initiative, announced at the 219th session of the Executive Board for implementation in July 2024, will only be **partially** implemented in October 2025. The elimination of the remote internship option and the unjustified deferral of the monthly allowance, inter alia, continue to increase geographical imbalances. These changes in the implementation of this policy are all the more problematic in that they were decided by HRM without consulting the staff associations or Young UNESCO.

### **Strategic Aim 3 – Adapt for the future**

14. The parental leave policy and the policy on daily breaks for breastfeeding parents are still “pending [...] publication”. This inertia is incomprehensible; if transitional measures already granting these benefits are applicable, why wait until the approval of document 43 C/5 to formalize their adoption?

### **Strategic Aim 4 - Attain better results and impact**

15. HRM claims that it “continues to advance” initiatives in mental health, well-being and career development. However, this assertion is called into question by the UNESCO Employee Engagement Survey 2024, as well as by the reports of the Ethics Office and IOS.

16. Indicators are down sharply compared to 2021: -14% for perception of UNESCO’s attention to well-being, -6% for support for dealing with stress, -8% for work-life balance. These figures, well below United Nations system standards, demonstrate the urgent need for a strategy specifically dedicated to mental health, aligned with the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy.

17. In general, HRM downplays the results of the [UNESCO Employee Engagement Survey 2024](#), which are alarming compared to those produced in 2021:

- Only 59% of employees recommend UNESCO as a good place to work (versus 70% in 2021);
- A 7% drop in mental health and well-being;
- An 11% drop with regard to transparent and effective information-sharing;
- Only 21% see real career opportunities;

- 31% feel supported in managing stress (versus 37%);
- 36% feel that UNESCO helps them strike a work-life balance (versus 44%);
- A 10% drop in confidence that management will act in response to the survey results (-24% compared with the reference median);
- An 11% drop in the effectiveness of the geographical mobility programme in terms of career development.

18. These results paint a worrying picture: while our colleagues are committed and proud of their mission (94% feel responsible for their tasks, 86% understand their contribution), they do not seem to receive the institutional support necessary. This discrepancy highlights persistent weaknesses in the structures of leadership and management, whose inability to create a safe and fair working environment continues to affect staff morale.

19. The Ethics Office and IOS, in their respective reports, confirm this deterioration:

- 55 claims in 2024 (versus 35 in 2023);
- 26 cases substantiated after investigation (versus 6 in 2023);
- 22 cases of moral harassment (versus 15 in 2023);
- 57% increase in allegations recorded by IOS in one year.

20. In this context, holding a few discussion meetings, however well intentioned, does not constitute a sufficient response. It is now essential that the Organization adopt concrete structural measures: credible disciplinary mechanisms, reinforced protection systems for victims, and the reform of managerial practices. The sheer scale of these figures demands action equal to what is at stake.

21. To demonstrate its commitment to concretely improving staff well-being, the Administration could start by implementing simple, low-cost, high-impact measures. These – accessible and immediately feasible – actions would constitute a clear sign of commitment to a healthier and fairer working environment: telecommuting away from the duty station (e.g., a maximum of 60 days per year), compressed or staggered working hours, and so on. These reforms could be implemented without delay. It bears noting that UNESCO is still the only organization in the United Nations system to prohibit telecommuting away from the duty station, a position which is difficult to reconcile with the principles of flexibility and adaptability which the Organization also promotes. This restriction contributes directly to the negative results reflected in the survey with regard to work-life balance, and demands an urgent review of current practices.

22. As far as learning and career development are concerned, we lament the fact that the 360° evaluation exercise involved only 14 additional participants. This was a significantly low figure given the significant managerial shortcomings identified.

### **Regulatory changes**

23. ISAU expresses its deep concern over the presentation of a regulatory reform (Regulation 4.4.1 and new Regulation 4.4.3 of UNESCO's Staff Regulations and Staff Rules) to the Executive Board without prior consultation of the staff associations. This is a clear breach of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual (provision 1.1.D, paragraph 11), which explicitly states that "DIR/HRM shall ensure that the Staff Associations are consulted on proposed amendments to the Staff Regulations. He/she shall also obtain clearance by LA on such proposed amendments, before submitting to the Director-General for his/her approval".

24. Compliance with this procedure is not a formality; it is a fundamental principle of participatory governance and social dialogue. By omitting this step, the Administration is weakening the legitimacy of the reform process and compromising trust between management authorities and staff representatives. Such an omission, in an area as sensitive as statutory provisions, can only be interpreted as a breach of the established normative framework. It calls for immediate clarification, as well as a firm commitment to following consultation procedures in the future.

25. In addition, we have been informed by HRM that an addendum will be submitted at this session of the Executive Board in order to present the draft **amendment to the Statutes of the Appeals Board**. At the time of writing, said addendum had not yet been published. Nonetheless, ISAU already wishes to express its strong opposition to the non-consideration of Recommendation 2 of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) ([JIU/REP/2023/2](#)) concerning the introduction of a provision for suspension of action of contested decisions at the pre-tribunal stage<sup>2</sup>.

26. At meetings of the Advisory Council on Personnel Policies (ACPP), in which ISAU participated as an observer, and in our written comments submitted to HRM, we expressed our strong opposition to not taking this recommendation into account in the working document. However, the draft revision initially submitted to the ACPP explicitly included this suspension measure. Despite our request, HRM categorically refused to work on the initial document, thus depriving the ACPP of a debate on this subject.

27. The reason given by HRM for excluding the measure was that the Administration does not have the resources to implement such a mechanism. It should be noted that the JIU report was published in **early 2023**. More than two years later, such an argument is unacceptable. Moreover, why wait until one month before the opening of the session of the Executive Board to submit this draft to the ACPP? Rushing and putting pressure on the ACPP, citing the risk that the other recommendations will not be implemented quickly if the draft is not submitted at this session, show not only a lack of rigour, but also a certain contempt on the part of HRM.

28. The JIU's recommendations are the result of in-depth work and are based on solid grounds. In paragraph 118 of its report, the JIU explicitly states that the "implementation of certain decisions while the contested decision is still pending judgment can cause irreparable damage, as the organization could be obliged to pay compensation" (emphasis added). The introduction of a suspension measure, therefore, would not only provide an essential guarantee for staff, but also serve the Organization's interests, particularly its financial ones. In this respect, it bears recalling that, from January 2025 to date, the compensation which the Organization has had to pay, pursuant to ILOAT decisions, amounts to over US \$270,000.

29. ISAU acknowledges certain advantages of the roster-based approach to recruitment, including the possibility of encouraging internal candidates and reducing recruitment times. However, these advantages require strict, transparent oversight. Several key questions remain unanswered: For how long will applications be valid? Who will manage these candidate pools and according to what criteria will they do so? Which posts will be affected, and on what basis will they be selected?

30. In the absence of clear criteria and solid guarantees, such a system would instead risk exacerbating existing biases and limiting transparency.

31. Finally, it is imperative that recruitment conducted via this mechanism continue to be subject to examination by the ARB (Appointment Review Board). Any dispensation from this control would undermine transparency and procedural guarantees. In this respect, we wish to point out that Project

<sup>2</sup> "The executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should, by the end of 2025, introduce into their regulatory frameworks a provision for suspension of action of contested decisions at the pre-tribunal stage, ex officio or upon the appellant's request, in cases of prima facie unlawfulness of the decision, error of fact, particular urgency or when implementation of the decision could cause irreparable damage; or propose the introduction of this provision for decision to their legislative organs or governing bodies."

Appointments (PAs) and temporary posts are not subject to examination by the ARB, and thus remain somewhat opaque.

## **Conclusion**

32. Generally speaking, there is a worrying gap between the institutional rhetoric promoted by HRM and the reality experienced by staff, as revealed by converging data from the survey, the Ethics Office, IOS and the Appeals Board. This discrepancy undermines the credibility of the commitments made and fuels a sense of mistrust within the Organization.

33. In this context, it is essential that guarantees be given as to the timetable for deployment of the policies announced. The chronic delays observed in the implementation of HRM initiatives raise questions as to their actual feasibility and the Administration's ability to translate its intentions into action. The budget factor, often invoked, cannot justify inertia. What we expect today are tangible signs of a real desire to improve working conditions, through concrete, consistent and sustained measures.

34. Finally, ISAU calls on HRM to fulfil its obligation to consult staff associations, to implement concrete measures without delay, and to apply a clear and transparent methodology. Otherwise, the confidence of staff and Member States in UNESCO's human resources management will continue to erode, to the detriment of the Organization's credibility.