

## Executive Board

Two hundred and twenty-second session

PARIS, 26 September 2025  
Original: French

Item 4 of the 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

#### COMMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

##### SUMMARY

##### **B. Use of affiliate personnel, including consultants and service contract holders, for 2023–2024**

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.B).

1. ISAU takes note of the document presented by the Administration on the use of affiliate personnel. While this document does provide some information, it does not give a consolidated overview of the situation. Unlike the report submitted at the 217th session, which included detailed graphs and tables, notably of the overall UNESCO workforce ([Annex II, Table 1](#)), the current report is limited to a presentation by type of contract. This approach, which is too partial, limits our capacity for analysis and makes it more difficult to identify structural trends and levers for improvement. A more complete and coherent presentation would be desirable to enable Member States to fully evaluate the issues involved in the use of affiliate personnel, and to consider appropriate corrective measures.



2. In its 2024 annual report, the Ethics Office pointed out that the disproportionate use of affiliate personnel “erodes the independence and exclusively international character of the Secretariat and jeopardizes the sustainability of the international civil service”<sup>1</sup>. The report also noted that this disproportionate use led to high turnover, constant training needs, loss of institutional memory and redundant efforts to instil a culture of ethics. ISAU fully shares this view and reaffirms that budgetary constraints cannot justify the gradual dismantling of our Organization.

3. Finally, ISAU notes a regrettable confusion in the structuring of documents: certain elements relating to affiliate personnel now appear only in the document on geographical distribution ([222 EX/4.IV.C](#), Annex V). It would have been appropriate, however, for this data to have been included in the document being commented on, to ensure better visibility and coherent reading. The dispersal of information makes it difficult for Member States to analyse data and take appropriate decisions.

### **Service contracts**

4. While service contracts have the advantage of allowing flexibility in clearly defined cases, they are by nature precarious and open to abuse. Excessive use accentuates these risks. This fragility is even more pronounced for contracts in the field, which are not subject to any time limit. In practice, many colleagues have been on service contracts for several consecutive years, taking on permanent functions without enjoying the rights of staff. The absence of upper limits in field offices accentuates an inequality of treatment already denounced by ISAU. There is no objective justification for such a disparity. As we have already pointed out, we urgently need to harmonize these conditions to avoid further penalizing field staff, who are even more exposed to job insecurity.

5. The absence of the table showing the length of uninterrupted service of service contract holders (included in document [217 EX/4.IV.A](#), Annex II, Table 6) is a step backwards in terms of transparency. However, this information is essential for identifying posts for which there is a continuing need and envisaging their regularization. Such an omission weakens the credibility of the analysis and seems to reflect an implicit desire to minimize the scale of the problem.

6. The Administration reports a 1% increase in service contracts in 2023–2024, following a 4% increase in 2021–2022. Eighty per cent of these contracts concern field offices, thus revealing a persistent and disproportionate reliance on this type of arrangement in these offices.

7. Although some improvements have been noted, ISAU points out that the measures announced for the reform of service contracts are insufficient and do not meet the demands of Member States. The Director-General was invited to “develop a short- and mid-term policy to address the recurrent practice of employing non-staff both at Headquarters and in the field”<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, we fail to see how the revised policy will solve the problem of long-term precarious contracts. Moreover, no concrete figures are provided to assess the real impact. Furthermore, whereas in 2023 the Administration detailed a series of “key enhancements” (paternity leave, part-time employment, danger allowance), the 2025 report confines itself to vague, general formulations. This reduction in the scope of measures, combined with the absence of figures, gives the impression of a step backwards from the initial ambitions.

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<sup>1</sup> [Annual report of the Ethics Office, 2024, para. 40.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [202 EX/Decision 5.IV.A.](#)

8. The Administration cites the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on the use of non-staff personnel ([JIU/REP/2023/8](#)) as validation of its “good practice” with regard to service contracts. However, the JIU also highlighted these findings: dependence on extrabudgetary funding leading to a tendency to use more affiliate personnel (§43); the erroneous application of the employment relationship principle as a criterion for determining which contractual modality to use (§74); and affiliate personnel sometimes working for more than five years without the associated benefits due to staff members. These findings cannot be ignored. A selective reading of the report is not enough: the Administration is invited to respond in a transparent and structured way to the substantial criticisms made, by proposing concrete and verifiable measures to remedy the situations identified.

9. It should be recalled that recruitment on service contracts is not submitted to the Appointment Review Board (ARB), which fuels opacity in selection procedures and reduces the guarantees offered in terms of transparency and accountability.

### **Individual consultant contracts**

10. In 2024, 3,034 consultants were recruited (+1% in relation to 2023) for a total of 4,891 contracts (+5%). The increase is particularly marked at Headquarters, while field offices remain structurally dependent on these contracts. This trend confirms the massive and growing use of a temporary workforce, which raises questions about team stability, project continuity and skills development within the Organization.

11. It should be emphasized that consultants are recruited directly by the sectors, without the systematic involvement of HRM. While this mode of operation allows a certain degree of agility, it nevertheless raises important questions in terms of transparency, consistency of practice and the guaranteed quality of the profiles selected. The absence of centralized control can lead to disparities in hiring conditions and undermine the recruitment standards expected in an international organization.

12. It is also worrying to note that the remuneration rates applied to consultants are still based on scales dating back to 2013. In a context of high inflation and increased competition on the international market, this salary stagnation weakens UNESCO’s attractiveness and may compromise the Organization’s ability to recruit qualified profiles. It also contributes to a form of silent casualization, where highly competent professionals are recruited under conditions that reflect neither their level of expertise nor the demands of the missions entrusted to them.

### **Conclusion**

13. ISAU invites Member States to ask the Administration to put forward concrete proposals for a more balanced use of affiliated contracts and a tangible improvement in the working conditions of the staff concerned. It is essential for the Organization to recognize that many affiliate personnel perform functions of a permanent nature. It is unacceptable that colleagues with several years of continuous service at UNESCO should still be considered as temporary staff, without access to the fundamental rights accorded to staff members.

14. These staff, as well as holders of Project Appointments (PAs), should be considered as **internal candidates** for recruitment purposes, in line with the spirit of Recommendation 3 of the JIU report<sup>3</sup>. This involves, first and foremost, identifying critical posts of a continuous nature for the possible establishment of staff posts, insofar as available resources so permit.

15. In addition, the prolonged use of affiliate personnel raises a structural issue with regard to the pension scheme: by occupying permanent positions without contributing to the pension funds, these

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<sup>3</sup> “The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should conduct periodic reviews of their non-staff contractual modalities with a view to identifying critical positions of a continuous nature for the possible establishment of staff positions, funds permitting”.

staff involuntarily contribute to an imbalance in the system of intergenerational solidarity. This phenomenon can lead to:

- a loss of income for the pension funds, which do not receive the contributions associated with posts that have nevertheless been held continuously;
- social insecurity for the individuals concerned, who are deprived of pension rights despite their long-term appointment;
- a weakening of the international civil service, whose stability depends on consistent and inclusive social protection mechanisms.

16. It is therefore recommended that the Administration:

- assess the financial and institutional impact of the prolonged use of non-contributing staff;
- identify the permanent functions performed by affiliate personnel;
- explore mechanisms for partial affiliation or gradual regularization, in consultation with the social partners.

17. Finally, as long as the Administration continues to prioritize budgetary flexibility over the stability and coherence of the statutory framework, reliance on affiliate personnel will persist – at the cost of the independence, continuity and equity that should characterize UNESCO's action. The time has come for structural reform based on recognition of real contributions, transparency of contractual practices and respect for the fundamental principles of the international civil service.