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Executive Board
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<u>Item **5** of the provisional agenda</u>

**FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS**

PART III

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

ADDENDUM 2

COMMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

B.   Sustainability of the field network

Pursuant to Item 9.2.7 of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) submits its comments on management issues (document 220 EX/5.III.B).

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1.   Concerning the sustainability of the field network (220 EX/5.III.B), while commending the rationale of the new field network's two-tier structure as approved by the Executive Board at its 215th session, the implementation of Phase II of the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world should also be an opportunity to address long-pending issues concerning workforce planning and staff rights.

2.   In particular, it is crucial that staff associations are fully involved in the ongoing coordination with stakeholders led by HRM to develop the workforce planning guidance and support the process, which was launched as a priority action within the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027. Harnessing staff insights and experience is essential to inform a fairer, more effective, and sustainable workforce planning. This can only be achieved through comprehensive and inclusive consultation with all stakeholders, starting with staff members, to provide a more solid foundation for better career development, learning and talent outreach, succession planning, and mobility. The same applies to the dialogue coordinated by PAX between Headquarters and field offices. To enrich the dialogue with first-hand insights into the challenges and successes experienced in the field, the

process should be as inclusive and representative as possible and not limited to field office Directors. We recommend achieving this through office-wide dialogues allowing for broader staff involvement, the results of which can feed into the higher-level in-house dialogue.

3.   Bearing in mind the need to cope with limited resources, the question remains open as to the optimal use of the US $20 million envelope allocated for the field reform. The document indicates for instance that 60 posts will be created to staff the offices, which raises the issue of the sustainability of the funding of these net creations. We must stress the imperative need to allocate such additional resources with a primary focus on regularizing the status of short-term and precarious assignments. The document of the Administration rightly evokes the need for equity in carrying out the field reform and the issue of temporary personnel is clearly one of equity. What is more, there must be a concern for efficiency: to implement the reform properly – that is to maintain and improve capacity for delivery through change – UNESCO needs to rely on those individuals who possess invaluable in-house expertise and have demonstrated unwavering commitment to UNESCO's mission.

4.   Regarding the proposed net creation of 60 posts, ISAU is also concerned with the ratio of programme versus support and liaison positions and believes that the Administration should explain on which basis the proposed ratio was identified or attained. Indeed, with 43% of the proposed posts dedicated to support and liaison functions and only 57% to programme posts, one must ask the question of whether the field reform has been highly efficient or not since it was supposed to generate synergies and scale economies that would allow UNESCO to be more effective in terms of programme delivery at the country level.

5.   Another concern of ISAU lies with the fact that the integration of the field offices' action with the rest of the organization is not always clear and seems rather siloed, which raises serious issues with respect to staff mobility between field offices and other entities of UNESCO. For instance, there is no mention of category 1 institutes and decentralized Programme Units (such as the Third World Academy of Science – TWAS), which are integral parts of the Organization. This is in direct contradiction with the ambition of the document to present the Member States with "The overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world (2024-2025)".

6.   Likewise, the document mentions the sectors, but their role never strikes as being critical or instrumental in the design and implementation of the actions carried out by the field offices. To some extent, the document reads like a report on a section of PAX, not on how UNESCO as a whole deploys its presence in the world. For instance, even as regional offices are to become fully multisectoral, there is no clear delineation of the roles played both by the sectors and BSP to ensure that this key dimension of the reform is properly carried out. Reiterating our concern with the optimal management of staff mobility, we note that the document mentions the issue in relation to the management of human resources, but it is clear that the mobility policy cannot succeed without an integrated approach of all the entities managed by the Secretariat on the ground and without a programmatic integration of their action.

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FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS

PART III

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

SUMMARY

B.   Sustainability of the field network

Pursuant to 217 EX/Decision 4.III on Sustainability of the Field Network, and 219 EX/Decision 18 on the 2023 Annual Report of the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS), the Director-General hereby reports on the implementation of Phase II of the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world for the 2024-2025 biennium.

Decision required: paragraph 24.

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1.   As per 215 EX/Decision 5.III.A, the Executive Board approved the new organization of UNESCO field network, based on a uniform two-tier system. The reorganization provides a streamlined structure conducive to more effective accountability and reporting lines as well as responsibilities, and better alignment with United Nations system structures and practices.

2.   In line with decision 217 EX/4.III, the Executive Board further took note of the reorganization of the UNESCO field network composed of 20 Regional Offices, 30 Country Offices and four Liaison Offices, as well as of the roles and functions of the various entities and the indicative cost of the reorganization of the UNESCO field network.

3.   During Phase I of the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world (2022-2023), several immediate adjustments were made in line with the budget and staffing outlined in the 41 C/5 framework. This document focuses on Phase II of the strategy, covering the 2024-2025 period, with

the objective to operationalize the strategy within the resources allocated in the 42 C/5. In fact, to address the shortcomings identified by evaluations, such as UNESCO's uneven field presence and gaps in expertise, programme implementation, and oversight, the Director-General decided to increase resources for the field by US $20 million in the 42 C/5 compared to the 41 C/5. This increase will support the establishment of field positions, including a creation of programme specialists posts across programme design and implementation, to strengthen programme delivery. This move aligns with the priority of field reform, further dedicating more resources towards field operations.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE I OF THE OVERALL STRATEGY FOR UNESCO'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

4. To enable the Organization to better respond to Member States' needs, a series of immediate adjustments were proposed to be implemented within the available resources, in line with the recommendations of evaluations and audits of the field network. These were detailed in document 209 EX/5.II.B. The approval of the field network's two-tier structure by the Executive Board at its 215th session in 2022 was a significant milestone, paving the way for the implementation of these immediate adjustments starting in 2023, which contributed to the overall progress of the process.

5. The implementation of several crucial adjustments has already begun, with some already reaching completion. The remaining adjustments will be expedited with the goal of finalizing them by end of 2024, as part of Phase II of the overall strategy. Notably, the management and accountability framework is nearing completion, and the identification of capacity gaps through strategic workforce planning has been launched.

6. The adjustments already implemented include:

- **Transformation of Thematic Regional Bureaus**: Thematic regional bureaus have been restructured into regional offices that cover the entire mandate of the Organization.

- **Continuation of Regional Initiatives and Programmes**: Regional initiatives and programmes continue to be implemented by the regional offices that were previously responsible for their coordination under the old structure.

- **Functional balance between Regional Offices**: Gradual enhancement of capacities, through redeployment of staff, across regions where programme sectors are not evenly distributed. In 2023, a limited number of mobility actions occurred in alignment with sector strategies. This was partly due to the Secretariat's focus on preparing document 42 C/5, where the reinforcements in the field were planned to take place as part of the Phase II process.

- **Coordination with Regional Development and Cooperation Structures**: One regional office per region has been designated to coordinate with regional development and cooperation structures, including of the United Nations system.

- **Training for Senior Field-Office Managers**: Senior field-office managers have participated in a training programme to strengthen leadership and managerial skills, featuring sessions on change management, conflict management, delegation, and providing feedback. The training programme is complimented by a 360° feedback exercise, which provides feedback on 15 areas of management competence. **In addition, the Ethics Office organized Ethical Leadership Workshops targeting all Directors and Heads of UNESCO field offices. The workshops revolved around the promotion of values-based ethics actions and committing to enabling a speak-up culture and visible ethical leadership.** inter-agency cooperation tools.

II.   IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE II OF THE OVERALL STRATEGY FOR UNESCO's PRESENCE IN THE WORLD (2024-2025)

7.   Phase II focuses on implementing and completing the strategy as well as finalizing the initiatives started in Phase I, aligning with the 42 C/5 strategic framework. It also takes into account the Executive Board's requests to enhance efficient and effective communication, a streamlined flow of information between the field network and Headquarters, and its decision at the 219th session to advance UNESCO's field reform. This includes prioritizing three key initiatives: developing clear accountabilities and responsibilities for field offices, reviewing country and regional strategies, and creating coordinated workforce strategies tailored to the unique demands of the field.

8.   **Management Accountability Framework:** The harmonization of lines of accountability were broadly explained in document 217 EX/4.III: the 20 regional Directors and four Directors of liaison offices report to the Assistant Director-General for Priority Africa and External Relations (ADG/PAX) whereas the Directors and Heads of country offices report to the Director of the regional office to which they are attached[1]. While the broader Management Accountability Framework is clear, the success lies in the details, making it crucial to clearly define the accountabilities of both field offices and Headquarters for the framework to be effective. This framework needs to ensure the harmonization of business processes across sectors, despite the challenge that not all sectors have equal financial and human resources; it will be finalized in due course.

9.   **Guidelines for Regional and Country Strategies:** In line with the reorganization of the UNESCO field network, the new multisectoral nature of regional offices, and the strengthened relationship between regional and country offices, a consultative process to develop templates for multisectoral regional and country strategies is ongoing. These templates aim to (i) Clearly outline UNESCO's priorities in a given region or country (ii) Ensure alignment between the priorities of Offices with country and regional priorities, as well as with corporate strategies, particularly the eight-year Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4), and its quadrennial Programme and Budget (documents 42 C/5 and 43 C/5) and (iii) Highlight UNESCO's comparative advantage and strengths in a given context.

10.   A series of semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a selection of field offices and responsible Corporate Services at Headquarters. The expectations and feedback gathered from these interviews have been instrumental in developing guidance and a modular template that is light and flexible for such documents.

11.   The next steps include further in-house consultations to ensure Organization-wide buy-in and synergies. The guidance for regional and country strategic documents is aimed to be finalized by the end of 2024. This timeline will allow field offices to develop their documents in alignment with the strategic thrusts of the Programme and Budget (C/5), covering a four-year period.

12.   **Strategic Workforce Planning:**   A strategic workforce planning process has been launched and is a priority action within the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027. In this context, and as part of the 43 C/5 process, HRM is developing new guidelines for harmonization of job profiles, workforce composition (including grades and reporting lines), and appropriate use of contractual arrangements (the latter also to consider workforce duty of care). A dedicated unit within HRM has been created to ensure coordination with stakeholders in the Organization to develop the workforce planning guidance and support the process. Planning will also provide the foundation for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to succession planning, mobility, career development, learning and talent outreach.

13.   To ensure consistency and fairness, and to facilitate the mobility of staff and thus their career development, the job profiles are being reviewed and corresponding job descriptions across the field network are being harmonized. This will standardize expectations and responsibilities, reducing

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[1]   A specific line of authority has been established for the Brasilia Country Office, which, due to the volume of self-benefitting funds managed, also reports to ADG/PAX.

disparities and enhancing collaboration. Detailed staffing plans will be developed for field offices striving for balanced workloads and equity. The exercise should however allow for agility and flexibility depending on the context in which a particular country office is operating. This will involve a careful assessment by stakeholders (including Office Directors, Programme Sectors, and relevant Corporate Services) of each office's needs and the resources required to deliver on the objectives set while preventing inequalities and maintaining fairness across the network.

Other key initiatives under Phase II include:

14. **Strengthening collaboration between field offices and Headquarters**: The Division for Field Coordination in the Sector of Priority Africa and External Relations (PAX) initiated in May 2024 a series of dialogues between Headquarters and field offices. This will enhance discussions on various issues by fostering open communication, promoting mutual understanding, and ensuring alignment on goals and strategies. These dialogues create a structured yet flexible platform for sharing insights, addressing concerns, and collaboratively solving problems. Regular exchanges allow Headquarters to gain first-hand insights into the challenges and successes experienced in the field, while field offices benefit from direct access to organizational leadership and resources. Directors of field offices also are represented (on a rotational basis) in the relaunched in-house Programme Coordination Group. This ongoing interaction aims to bridge gaps, align initiatives with the broader organizational vision, and adapt strategies based on real-time feedback, ultimately leading to more cohesive and effective operations across all levels of the Organization.

15. By the time this document is published, five dialogues would have taken place on HR-related matters, the Summit of the Future, field offices' engagement in support of UNESCO's priorities relating to culture and emergencies, Resource Mobilization Strategy, and an interactive dialogue on the draft Programme and Budget for 2026-2029 (43 C/5). The forthcoming dialogues for the remainder of 2024 will focus on improving and harmonizing communication, implementing the framework of priorities (Global Priority Gender Equality), cybersecurity, and a briefing on the year-end financial closure.

16. **Enhancing Dialogue and Cooperation on Global Priority Africa:** Dedicated dialogues concerning Global Priority Africa occur between the Division for Priority Africa Coordination in PAX and the 17 field offices in Africa. These dialogues are integral to the implementation of the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa's five Flagship Programmes (2022-2029), alongside other projects and programmes that benefit Africa more broadly. Regular exchanges form the backbone of these dialogues, providing a platform to discuss opportunities and challenges in implementing the Flagship Programmes. Key issues such as resource mobilization and partnership building are addressed during these meetings. The participants typically include Heads/Directors of field offices and designated focal points for the Flagship Programmes at the field office, Sector, and PAX levels. Cooperation with field offices extends to working and interacting with regional entities such as the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Engagement with these entities also includes participating in high-level events such as the AU Summit, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, and the Regional Cooperation Platform.

17. **Investing in the field**: The expense for achieving the optimal field network structure, ensuring the network's ability to fully undertake its designated tasks, was estimated to range between $17 million and $37 million (Ref: Document 212 EX/5.III.C). An allocation of $20 million from the 42 C/5 has been earmarked to bolster capacities in the field in programme management, internal and administrative controls, as well as cross-sectoral capabilities (net creation of 34 posts for the programme sectors, 16 posts in key areas such as human resources, financial and budget management, and procurement, and 10 positions for UN Coordination, Liaison, Communication and Partnerships).

18. Given financial sustainability constraints, the optimal field network structure is being slightly adjusted to ensure that, at a minimum, the regional offices responsible for UN coordination are fully

equipped with cross-sectoral, in-house, and administrative oversight capacities. These regional offices will function as administrative backstops, offering support in gender equality, monitoring and evaluation, resource mobilization, and communication to the regional and country offices within their respective regions.

19.   Following close consultation with field offices to understand their needs, several initiatives have been implemented to enhance support for their partnerships and resource mobilization efforts. These initiatives include deploying partnership experts to 14 regional offices, strengthening staffing capacities at liaison offices, and providing seed funding to 12 country offices specifically for partnerships and resource mobilization activities. Throughout the current biennium, field offices will have the opportunity to apply for targeted support for high-potential resource mobilization opportunities. Additionally, Headquarters will continue to offer targeted technical expertise to field offices through strategic guidance, partnership intelligence, and capacity-building activities.

III.   CONSULTATIONS WITH MEMBER STATES

20.   Although the Secretariat's proposal to locate the Pacific regional office in Suva aligns with the Executive Board's decision to harmonize with the United Nations reform due to its established status as a United Nations hub, suggesting that UNESCO can benefit from synergies and logistical advantages by being closer to other United Nations agencies, the decision requires further consideration.

21.   UNESCO Internal Oversight Services has been requested to conduct an independent assessment on the optimal location of the regional office in the Pacific. This assessment will consider various factors, including specific regional needs, sustainability, efficiency, and budgetary implications. The assessment process will be thorough and inclusive, engaging relevant stakeholders and experts.

22.   The findings of this assessment will be presented to the Director-General, providing a data-driven basis for the final decision on the optimal presence of UNESCO in the Pacific.

23.   The decision to assess the proposed relocation of the Pacific regional office reflects UNESCO's commitment to making informed, strategic decisions that best serve its Member States. By considering the specific needs, sustainability, efficiency, and budgetary implications, the assessment will ensure that UNESCO's presence in the Pacific is optimized for maximum impact and effectiveness. Until then, the status quo will be maintained, with the Regional Office in Apia and Project Antenna in Suva, ensuring continued support for the needs of the Pacific.

Proposed draft decision

24.   In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1.   Recalling 209 EX/Decision 5.II.B, 210 EX/Decision 5.III.B, 212 EX/Decision 5.III.C, 215 EX/Decision 5.III.A, 216 EX/Decision 5.II.D, 217 EX/Decision 4.III and 219 EX/Decision 18,

2.   Having examined document 220 EX/5.III.B,

3.   Commends the Director-General on increasing resources in the Programme and Budget (2024-2025) and establishing new programme specialist posts as well as on administrative support for field offices;

4.   Takes note with satisfaction of progress made in the implementation of Phase II of the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world;

5. <u>Encourages</u> the Director-General to continue building the field network's capacities and strengthening decentralization as approved in document 42 C/5;

6. <u>Also encourages</u> the Director-General to continue consultations with Member States so as to reinforce their support and that of institutional partners for UNESCO's structure in the field, with a view to ensuring its sustainability and effectiveness;

7. <u>Requests</u> the Director-General to continue implementation of Phase II of the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world, and to report to it thereon at its 222nd session.