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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

ADDENDUM

COMMENTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

C. 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 212 EX/5.III.C).

1. On the basis of the document provided, the reform of the field offices seems to have been conceived solely from the point of view of field office management, without consultation with human resources, let alone staff associations. It should be noted, for the sake of pragmatism, that a structural reform of this magnitude cannot achieve a satisfactory result if it does not take into account, from the outset, matters concerning human resources and staff. ISAU also wishes to reiterate that there is a need for management to regularly consult with staff associations on these points, in a transparent manner and in good faith.

2. In paragraph 9, for example, the reform principles listed under "Competency" only address the issue of human resources training for field managers. Apart from the fact that one may wonder why field managers would have more specific needs in this area than managers based at Headquarters, one might also wonder about the absence, in this passage and in the document as a whole, of any reflection on or reference to mobility policy. The same paragraph refers to a "clear and coherent decentralization policy of human and financial resources to the field across the sectors". Why mention only movement towards the field offices? Such an assertion is shocking given that it is not connected to an integrated and effective mobility policy. It would appear that there is no



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communication between the Bureau of Human Resources Management (ADM/HRM) and the Field Coordination Unit. Let us not forget that working in silos is always detrimental to efficiency and detrimental to staff, who are treated here as a veritable adjustment variable. To emphasize this, it suffices to note that ADM/HRM has included in its future work the adaptation of its strategy to the office reforms, which sounds like a clear admission that these reforms are being developed without extensive consultation or any real strategic coherence.

3. Paragraph 15 refers to the possibility of financing new transversal functions either through extrabudgetary funds or the redeployment of staff. However, this hypothesis makes no reference to any mobility plan. Given the central role that these additional functions are expected to play in the reform of the field offices, one may wonder about the extent to which this issue has been prepared for. Without a link to the mobility policy, the allocation of these posts is likely to be problematic.

4. In general, the reform as envisaged will strengthen the regional offices. ISAU needs to know what management plans to do about staff management and the need to ensure that the directors of regional offices do not grant themselves unwarranted prerogatives in respect of the staff reporting to them. If the reform puts an emphasis on reviewing the reporting lines between field offices and Headquarters, it will also be necessary to ensure that information mechanisms are established upstream. For example, should decentralized control procedures not be integrated from the outset in the area of ethics? In view of the key role that the regional offices are called upon to play, we also ask that consideration be given to taking the regional representation of staff associations into account, which will undoubtedly make it possible to ensure free-flowing dialogue on a strategic level.



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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

C. Sustainability of the Field Network

Pursuant to [209 EX/Decision 5.II.B](#), the Director-General presents herein an updated overall strategy for UNESCO's field presence in line with the overall strategic objectives of the draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41/C4). It also takes into account the specificities and needs of each region and subregion and the latest developments of the ongoing United Nations reform in the field.

Decision required: paragraph 33.



Job: 202102847

INTRODUCTION

1. By decision 209 EX/Decision 5.II.B, the Executive Board took note of the two proposed options for an overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world presented in document 209 EX/5.II.B, and requested the Director-General to present, at its 212th session, an overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world with budget estimates.
2. This document introduces the updated strategy, which takes into account lessons learned from evaluations and audits, the views of Member States as expressed during several Executive Board sessions, the results of consultation processes, the latest developments within the reform of the United Nations development system, as well as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on UNESCO's work in the field.
3. It is worth recalling that discussions on the field network have been ongoing in UNESCO since nearly two decades, with major reforms introduced in 2001 and 2011. The history of decentralization and field reform is well documented, for instance in the report of the Evaluation Office on lessons learned from UNESCO's field reform in Africa ([IOS/EVS/PI/143/Rev.2](#)) and the external audit report on the field network ([204 EX/21.INF](#)). In essence, these and other reports emphasize the need for a uniform management structure across all regions with clearer accountabilities for results and resources among different types of field presence. Evaluations and audits also pronounced themselves in favour of two-tier model considered as providing a streamlined structure conducive to more effective accountability and reporting lines and responsibilities, more optimal distribution of human and financial resources, and better alignment with United Nations system structures and practices.
4. The consultation process took place between July 2019 and January 2020 and is outlined in document [210 EX/5.III.B](#). Member States expressed their views during several Executive Board sessions, including on the link between UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 and the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world, and other strategies such as those concerning each of the two global priorities, Africa and Gender Equality, and the priority groups, which are also implemented through UNESCO's field presence. These consultations confirmed the need for UNESCO to take advantage of experience and knowledge acquired over the years in the field, in particular at regional level. In general, there was strong support for the reinforcement of UNESCO's presence at the regional level, since it facilitates stronger coordination of UNESCO's various mandates, including normative work and thought leadership. Field work is a powerful mean to translate UNESCO's initiatives into tangible impacts for the people across the world. Regional presence is a common feature of many United Nations entities and hence simplifies interaction among internal and external stakeholders, including national governments and the United Nations system. While cross-border cooperation is being strengthened, it was recalled that the regional structure is crucial, and that any adjustment of the network should help reinforce cooperation with existing regional groupings, and should be aligned, to the extent possible, with the geographical coverage of these structures.
5. The field strategy is informed by the ECOSOC quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development, including the latest proposals by the United Nations Secretary-General on the repositioning of the United Nations development system (UNDS) at regional level and the reinvigorated resident coordinator system.¹ The appropriate structure of the network will thus have to take into account the reform of the United Nations system but also regional needs and contexts, thus responding to the diversity and cultural, economic and social specificities of the regions and countries covered. Following the establishment of Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) and the Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) in all regions in the last quarter of 2020, UNESCO field offices have engaged actively in the work of the new Platforms. The UNDS entities

¹ See also specific information on the implementation of the United Nations reform and its implications for UNESCO (document 212 EX/III.5.A).

continued to implement the Multi-Country Office (MCO)² review, with a focus on strengthening each entity's and system-wide support to small island developing States (SIDS) and other countries covered by MCOs. A strengthened offer to, and enhanced physical presence in the SIDS, and the tailoring of UNESCO's presence in response to regional contexts are reflected in this strategy.

6. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the benefits and limits of physical presence and the importance of robust management arrangements that enable networked collaboration across sectors and offices. UNESCO's limited financial and human resources must be optimally positioned to enable the provision of adequate support to Member States in the recovery from the pandemic and the pursuit of the SDGs.

I. Main objective and principles of the strategy

7. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda, along with the ongoing repositioning of the United Nations development system (UNDS), coincides with UNESCO's ambition to redefine its comparative advantage, to review its global, regional, and country presence and to reform its working modalities, within the strategic transformation process. A strong and sustainable field network is essential to UNESCO's mission, and field offices play a key part in delivering UNESCO's results.

8. As stated in document [209 EX/5.II.B](#), the main objective of UNESCO's transformation in the field is to enable it to respond to Member States expectations, needs and priorities in an adequate, united, coherent and cost effective manner, while maintaining the Organization's strategic position and alignment within the United Nations system for the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

9. For UNESCO to act as "One" organization and to deliver on and achieve its global and sectoral strategic priorities and objectives, as well as to better align itself with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) reform, the new strategy will rely on a set of principles³:

- **Unity and Complementarity**: UNESCO's action should be mainstreamed across all units at Headquarters and in the field.
- **Subsidiarity**: a clear definition of roles and accountabilities of entities at headquarters and in the field with regards to planning, implementation and monitoring of operational and programme activities, as well as a clear and coherent decentralization policy of human and financial resources to the field across the sectors.
- **Accountability and Authority**: a clear system of delegated authority and accountability across the Organization.
- **Competency**: a clear policy of empowering field managers through improved human resources practices, including appropriate training and skills development, to ensure more efficient and effective programme delivery.
- **Commitment**: a supportive environment in terms of political and financial commitment of Member States and partners to advocate and support the work of UNESCO in the field.

10. It is important to note that the proposed strategy gives due consideration to UNESCO's global priorities as well as its priority groups and addresses the need for strengthening expertise in key areas of programme management areas, such as resources mobilization, monitoring and evaluation.

² MCOs are organizational setups for effective and tailored delivery of United Nations services in countries and territories with specific needs including vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. There are currently eight MCOs in the Pacific, Caribbean, and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Seas (AIS) regions, covering 41 countries and territories, of which 38 are SIDS.

³ The consultation process reaffirmed the relevance and usefulness of the principles set out in the annex to document [206 EX/5.II.A](#).

II. Options for UNESCO's future presence in the field⁴

11. The future network will feature a consistent management approach across all regions. Based on lessons learned from audits and evaluations, UNESCO's network of field offices will be organized using a **two-tier system composed of multidisciplinary regional offices and country-level presences**. It is to be noted that, in order to better serve the SIDS and in line with the United Nations reform, the multi-country offices structure will be maintained in the Pacific and the Caribbean regions. The Organization's capacities will be adapted and the multidisciplinary regional offices equipped with the level and diversity of expertise to better align with the needs and priorities of their respective country groupings based on a regional needs analysis. The expectation is that field offices will increasingly support countries collectively as one team irrespective of their immediate location. The directors of regional offices will be empowered to participate in regional UNSDG efforts in line with the Secretary-General's United Nations reform proposals.

12. UNESCO presence in countries (country offices and antennas) will be supported by the regional office to which they will report. Considering the specificity and uniqueness of its mandate, UNESCO should ensure a critical, appropriate level of presence at country level necessary to respond to national needs and priorities and achieve the Organization's strategic objectives, as well as to demonstrate its added value and warrant its position within the United Nations system coordination and programmatic mechanisms and initiatives, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Hence, the location of the regional offices takes into consideration UNESCO's existing regional capacities and structures and financial limitations, and the location of relevant regional offices of United Nations entities.

13. Roles and responsibilities of the different entities:

- **At headquarters level:**

- Headquarters defines the Organization's overall strategy and its programme and budget, which, once approved by UNESCO governing bodies, provide the framework for UNESCO's action globally and at regional and country levels. In general, Headquarters ensures that UNESCO's functions as laboratory of ideas, clearing house, standard-setter, catalyst for international cooperation, and capacity-builder its areas of competence are fulfilled through all its presences. In their interaction with field offices, Programme Sectors in Headquarters provide strategic guidance, programmatic support, and coordination for the implementation of sectoral and intersectoral programmes at regional level. Headquarters may also implement global programmes, which have regional or country-oriented components.
- Central services concerned with field offices operations support the overall governance and management of UNESCO's programmes in the field in all other aspects: provision of political guidance and strategic coordination and relations with Member states and United Nations partners; financial and administrative management including human resources; technical backstopping for the mobilization of extrabudgetary resources, among others.
- This might imply structural realignment of Headquarters responsibilities and accountabilities.

- **At field level:**

- **Regional offices**, in close coordination with the programme sectors and concerned central services in Headquarters, will provide strategic and programmatic direction and coordinate programme planning and implementation at the regional level. In order to

⁴ As of today, UNESCO field network is composed of 53 field offices and 30 flexible field entities such as Antennas and Project offices.

be able to do so, minimum critical mass of expertise shall be established to ensure appropriate leadership and programme delivery in UNESCO's areas of competence. In addition to serving as a decentralized regional operational platform for administration, regional offices will also provide technical and coordination support to all offices in the region with regard to specific transversal functions, e.g. monitoring of gender equality initiatives on the ground, programme monitoring and evaluation, documentation and knowledge management, resource mobilization and public information and communications. They will ensure the overall coordination of UNESCO's participation and representation in United Nations regional governance structures, ensure liaison with the regional UNSDG and UNESCO's contribution to the United Nations reform. All regional offices will report to Headquarters.

- **Country offices** will be in charge of programme implementation at the country level and provide technical support to the national authorities in relation to national development priorities, within the framework of the Organization's Approved Programme and Budget. To achieve planned results, field offices will exercise delegated control over the necessary financial and human resources and other local assets. They will also ensure UNESCO's representation to the host country and enhance UNESCO's contribution to UN cooperation mechanisms at country level, in particular through active participation in the elaboration and implementation of the UNSDCF. Maintenance of country presence may be time-bound and subject to sunset clauses. All country offices would report to their respective regional office.
- **Liaison offices** will ensure UNESCO's relations and institutional cooperation with key regional partners. Where possible, increased focus will also be placed on partnership building and resource mobilization.

14. In line with United Nations reform discussions and considering the importance of addressing sustainable development needs of SIDS, UNESCO offices would be maintained in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, and the four liaison offices would continue to ensure their inter-agency coordination and partnerships functions. The title of "Cluster" Offices will be discontinued.

15. In order to strengthen UNESCO's regional capacities, additional transversal functions such as monitoring gender equality initiatives in the field, resource mobilization, programme monitoring and evaluation, documentation and knowledge management and public information and communications will be established at the regional level. These functions would be, in principle, funded through voluntary contributions or through redeployment of staff.

16. Administrative and operations officers are the cornerstone of field office management. They assist field office directors in maintaining proper control environment and risk management systems, support programme specialists in managing their budgets and contracts in accordance with established rules and procedures, handle personnel, premises and security issues. In response to audit observations, and to achieve economies of scale, as appropriate, in both options the back-office functions will be consolidated in hub offices.

17. It is to be noted that both options will require a substantial increase of UNESCO's current budget, either through the augmentation of the core budget or through the mobilization of voluntary contributions from Member States.

18. Based on the feedback from evaluations and audits and stakeholder consultations, it is clear that a **two-tier system** that is applied consistently across all regions will serve UNESCO best. In this regard, **two options** for a two-tier system are presented hereafter. The proposed two-tier structure reflects a greater effort to align with the UNSDG reform objectives to enhance United Nations global coherence, harmonization, and cost rationalization among agencies in the field. The proposed two options focus on the enhancement and improvements to the regional level and do not

foresee at this stage any structural changes to the existing country offices, which may be addressed at an ensuing stage to the current implementation process.

OPTION 1 – COUNTRY-FOCUSED TWO-TIER SYSTEM:

19. This two-tier system puts strong emphasis on country-level presence, and entails profound changes to the field network, including the gradual concentration of expertise and staffing at the regional level

- (i) **8 regional offices**, which would ensure programme coordination and administrative oversight with regard to the field offices within their region. There would be one regional office per region, except in Africa, which would have two regional offices. In addition, two multi-country offices would be present in the Pacific and in the Caribbean regions. These regional offices would be strengthened through the creation of new transversal and operational functions and ensure overall coordination with the United Nations system in the region. The directors of the regional offices would report to Headquarters, and the heads of all country-level presences would report to the director of their respective regional office.
- (ii) **42 country offices**, each endowed with the capacity for programme delivery adapted to respond to priority needs of Member States.

20. The ideal structure of regional offices in this option would be:

	Management	Additional Functions	Programme	Operational Platform
Regional office	Regional Director (D-2) Deputy Director (D-1) Support staff (secretary, assistant, driver)	Resource Mobilization (P-4) Gender Equality (P-4) Monitoring & Evaluation (P-3) Public Information & Communication (P-3)	5 Regional Advisers (P-5) 3 Regional Advisers (P-4) 3 Programme Officers (P-3) 2 Programme Officers (P-2) Support staff	Senior Operations Officer (P-4) Procurement Officer (P-3) Finance & Budget Officer (P-3) IT Assistant (G-7) 2 Finance & Budget Assistants (G-6) Human Resource Assistant (G-6) Secretary (G-4)

OPTION 2 – REGION-FOCUSED TWO-TIER SYSTEM

21. This two-tier system puts strong emphasis on regional presence with intra-regional coordination:

- (i) **18 regional offices**, of which five will provide intra-regional coordination to strengthen UNESCO's action at the regional level, including in collaboration with the regional mechanisms of the United Nations development system. All regional offices would report to Headquarters.
- (ii) **32 country offices** dedicated to providing flexible and adaptable responses to priority needs of Member States. All country offices would report to the director of their respective regional office.

22. This option seeks to take advantage of the strengths of the current structure and reinforce the existing network with only limited structural changes. However, roles, functions and lines of authority would be significantly redefined and harmonized throughout the network. As in Option 1, regional offices will provide strategic direction and political guidance, coordinate programme planning and implementation at the regional level, including by liaising with programme sectors and central

services in Headquarters. As opposed to Option 1, five regional offices would provide sectoral and intersectoral coordination functions for the entire region; however, all regional offices would continue to report directly to Headquarters. The Gender specialists will report equally to the Director of Gender Equality in Headquarters in order to ensure coherence and quality oversight across the organization for the implementation of the global priority Gender Equality. The directors of the five regional offices with intra-regional coordination function would be at D-2 level and serve as members of the regional UNSDG, while the directors of the remaining regional offices would be at D-1 level.

23. Country offices would focus on the implementation of programmes at national level in alignment with national priorities and would benefit from solid sectoral expertise at regional level.

24. The following ideal structure of regional offices is presented below. The distribution of programmes posts in each office will be aligned with programme priorities and needs of regions and sub-regions. Regional offices with intra-regional coordination functions include additional functions to cover regional resource mobilization and programmatic monitoring of gender equality initiatives in the field, monitoring and evaluation, and public information and communication for the region.

	Management	Additional Functions	Programme	Operational platform
Regional office with intra-regional coordination function	Regional Director (D-2) Support staff (secretary, assistant, driver)	Resource Mobilization (P-4) Gender Equality (P-4) Monitoring & Evaluation (P-3) Public Information & Communications (P-3)	2 Regional Advisers (P-5) 2 Regional Advisers (P-4) 3 Programme Officers (P-3) 2 Programme Officers (P-2) Support staff	Senior Operations Officer (P-4) Procurement Officer (P-3) Finance & Budget Officer (P-3) IT Assistant (G-7) 2 Finance & Budget Assistants (G-6) Human Resource Assistant (G-6) Secretary (G-4)
Regional office	Regional Director (D-1) Support staff (secretary, assistant, driver)		2 Regional Advisers (P-5) 2 Regional Advisers (P-4) 3 Programme Officers (P-3) 2 Programme Officers (P-2) Support staff	Operations Officers (P-3) Operations Officer (P-1/2) IT Assistant (G-5) 2 Assistants (G-5, G-4) Secretary (G-4)

III. Financial implications

25. In order to be effective, both options would require a significant increase as compared to the [41 C/5](#) proposal if they were to achieve a concrete change and therefore ability to deliver more effectively and respond to Member States' needs.

26. Both options present "ideal" structures, i.e. an optimal staff capacity to enable the field network to fully assume and implement the functions assigned to them in each scenario. At this stage the calculation of potential costs of each of the options has been made based on estimated calculation of location-specific proforma staff costs for the field structure. Depending on the selected field structure, further costs and efficiencies will be calculated, in particular, as regards operating budget, security and transformation costs.

27. Based on the ideal structure presented above, **additional biennial costs related to Option 1 would range from \$30 million to \$42 million** over the current re-costed structure of \$138 million.

28. Based on the ideal structure presented above, **additional biennial costs related to Option 2 would range from \$17 million to \$37million** over the current re-costed structure of \$ 138 million.

29. The final cost estimate will depend on the degree of implementation of the ideal structure. As indicated in paragraph 24, Option 2 provides for flexible alignment of staff capacity to the regional, and sub-regional specificities and needs foreseen which has the advantage of better targeting of available resources and offers more opportunities to shift functions from Paris or between field offices.

IV. Implementation of the Strategy

30. Further consultations with Member States will be undertaken by the next 212th Executive Board session and will be pursued following the discussions and decision made during that session.

31. Following the decision by the Executive Board, a transition into the new field presence strategy is necessary to properly plan for financial and human resource implications. The new structure will be implemented in a progressive manner, in phases, based on a time-bound action plan starting in 2022 (41 C/5). In accordance with the budget planned under the draft document 41 C/5, the 2022-2023 biennium will focus on elements that do not have significant financial and human resource implications. Structural realignments, such as the consolidation of staffing and offices, would be planned for, and implemented during the next 2024-2025 biennium.

32. Several actions would be taken in the 2022-2023 biennium: As a matter of priority, regional structures would be established and empowered, accompanied by the assignment of required capacities, resources, accountability, and the establishment of revised/new reporting lines. To fulfil their new multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral responsibilities, regional offices will draw on the expertise of staff situated in all offices within the same region and under their respective authority. In parallel, alternatives for progressive transformation of other field offices would be considered, including the placement of professional staff in Resident Coordinator's offices. The timeline for changes at the country level would vary from one country to another and would be based on series of bilateral and regional consultations, taking into account national needs and priorities and the Organization's overall Programme and budget framework (C/5 documents), and in-depth review of the existing structures *vis-a-vis* principles and criteria for a field presence. Modalities of field coordination and Headquarters' support to field offices will be considered. Following the decision by the Executive Board, all internal and external stakeholders will be informed of the impending changes through a communication strategy based on this presence strategy.

Proposed draft decision

33. 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 and 210 EX/Decision 5.III.B,
2. Having examined document 212 EX/5.III.C,
3. Takes note of the two options proposed for an overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world, including the phased approach and the cost implications;
4. Endorses the principle of the two-tier system presented under both options;
5. Requests the Director-General to pursue consultations on both of these options with Member States, on a bilateral or multilateral/regional basis;
6. Also requests the Director-General to report to it at its 214th session on the phased implementation of the overall strategy for UNESCO's presence in the world, reflecting the consultations with Member States.