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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific  
and Cultural Organization

**214 EX/5.III.A Add.**

**Executive Board**

**Two hundred and fourteenth session**

PARIS, 30 March 2022  
Original: French

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

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

**PART III**

**HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES**

**ADDENDUM**

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

**SUMMARY**

**A. Preliminary proposals for a new UNESCO Human Resources Management Strategy covering the period 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 214 EX/5.III.A).

1. At a time when UNESCO faces many challenges and needs innovative approaches, a new strategy must be ambitious and put staff back at the heart of the Organization. More than ever, our colleagues need to be valued.
2. This strategy should be an opportunity to address the existing malfunctions in the system that undermine the fulfilment of UNESCO's mandate. The new strategy must address problems such as the length of time required for recruitment, the growing use of non-staff contracts and inequities in the performance evaluation system.



Job: 20220979

3. The document submitted by the Secretariat largely consists of presenting the principles of the new strategy. ISAU agrees with all of these general ideas. However, in the experience of our association, it is the details of a strategy that matter. We would also like to emphasize that the proposed strategy will only be successful if the Bureau of Human Resources Management (ADM/HRM) has adequate human and financial resources to carry out its missions. As such, it is imperative that ADM/HRM assumes its role in personnel management, particularly in terms of recruitment. This is the first step in the pursuit of “excellence”.

### **Evaluation of the current Human Resources Management Strategy**

4. It makes good sense to commission an evaluation and to draw lessons from the previous strategy in order to develop a new one. We are surprised to note, however, that ADM/HRM “intends to commission an evaluation of the current strategy during the course of 2023, for analysis and presentation in 2024”, so that its findings will “inform the mid-term review of the future human resources management strategy [...] anticipated for 2025”.

5. Logically, the General Conference should be presented with a new strategy that takes into account the results of the 2017–2022 Human Resources Management Strategy and proposes measures to remedy the errors and failures of current policies. An evaluation of the 2017–2022 strategy to serve as a mid-term evaluation of the 2023–2028 strategy would be of no practical use and would amount to devoting the Organization’s resources to a futile bureaucratic exercise.

6. ISAU therefore believes that an evaluation can still be carried out in the time available, that is to say, during the first half of 2023, **before** the presentation of the new strategy to the General Conference in November 2023. It should be noted that this evaluation in its effectiveness and efficiency should not be confused with conducting consultations, which merely provide a snapshot and not an analysis.

### **Preliminary consultations**

7. The preliminary consultation process organized by the Bureau of Human Resources Management allowed the expression of all the views of the Organization’s stakeholders. However, what is the use of such consultations if, in the end, the Administration does not take into account the opinions, recommendations and concerns expressed by the staff members and the associations that represent them?

8. Even recently, and on a sensitive issue, the Administration did not take into account the recommendations made by ISAU on the principle of a **gradual** return to work on site, taking into account the **new working methods**, and on the publication and implementation of the **policy on flexible working arrangements**. In addition, in the online survey conducted by the Administration, the vast majority of staff expressed themselves directly in favour of teleworking, emphasizing the benefits of flexibility for the well-being of all at work. Staff also spoke in favour of a more agile and flexible UNESCO. In this context, the basis for the decision to abruptly impose a return to work on site as the single standard is difficult to understand. Indeed, this decision of a massive return to the office, in addition to being unilateral, is not based on any solid empirical basis. Digital tools have enabled organizational progress and flexibility at work that must be taken into account. Over the past two years, the staff has demonstrated exemplary commitment, showing the Organization’s ability to continue to excel under adverse conditions. ISAU hopes that the Organization will not miss an opportunity to move towards a more modern and efficient approach to human resources management.

### **Content of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027**

9. ISAU takes issue with the Administration’s claim that “much progress” has been made under the current Human Resources Management Strategy. On the contrary, there has been a significant decline in the rights of the staff, with, for example, the abolition of the individual requests for

reclassification and the abolition of the Review Panel and the Reports Board, which we have opposed. We also note the persistence of long-standing problems, particularly in the recruitment process.

10. Aware of the inertia that is still affecting human resources management in our Organization, ISAU will continue to seek to cooperate with ADM/HRM in the next phase of the development of the new strategy, with the constant aim of respecting staff rights and improving their working conditions.

11. Below we propose some elements that we believe are critical and should be prioritized in the new strategy. We will not fail to provide more details and specific examples of our ideas during the next phase of consultations.

(a) Recruitment

- Centralize recruitment within the Bureau of Human Resources Management and ensure that it plays an effective role in order to ensure transparency and alignment with staff policies, particularly with regard to geographical distribution. We have already voiced our opposition to the “decentralization” of recruitment, which is currently in the hands of the sectors.
- Re-establish an internal recruitment process to consider applications from qualified internal candidates, including long-term temporary staff. In this regard, ADM/HRM should be allowed to recruit (or promote) directly a certain number of internal candidates by allocating to the Bureau a budget supplemented by funds corresponding to the flexibility granted by the General Conference to the Director General for the volume of posts.
- Establish a mechanism to regularize long-term Project Appointments (PAs), for example, by considering them as “internal candidates” for recruitment purposes, including for the internal recruitment process proposed above. Currently, PAs are considered as “external candidates” for recruitment purposes.
- Management of PA recruitment by ADM/HRM; subject to the Appointment Review Board (ARB) and the principle of geographical distribution.

(b) Performance management

- Re-establish the Review Panel and the Reports Board to ensure transparency and prevent wrongdoing.
- Introduce a 360-degree evaluation that would assess supervisors.
- Ensure that there is a connection between performance evaluation and career advancement.
- Reinstate the suspended Merit-Promotion Programme.

(c) Career development and advancement

- Develop and implement a career development policy for Professional (P) and General Service (G) staff that would include, but not be limited to:
  - Implementation of a career guidance programme;
  - Rewards for excellent performance;

- Reinstatement of the Merit-Promotion Programme, subject to clear and transparent principles;
- Linking learning and training to career advancement.
- Reinstatement of staff members' right to make individual requests for reclassification.
- Make it mandatory to provide the final report submitted by a reclassification expert during a desk audit as part of the reclassification process.
- Provide incentives (financial, professional or otherwise) for staff who have reached the highest level within their grades and have remained there for many years.

(d) Mobility

- Allow Project Appointment (PA) staff with more than four years' experience in the Organization to apply for posts subject to geographical mobility. Such staff carry out assignments that often give them significant experience in both their areas of expertise and in the working methods of the Organization.
- Actively promote functional mobility, especially for G staff, as well as intersectoral and inter-agency mobility.

(e) Geographical distribution and diversity

- Remunerate UNESCO interns, who contribute significantly to the functioning of the Organization.
- Ensure that any initiative related to diversity, equity and inclusion applies to all personnel, staff and non-staff contracts alike.

(f) Working conditions and well-being

The Administration's recent decision to impose an immediate and total return to the office does not inspire much hope for its commitment to promoting staff well-being and building an agile and flexible organization. Well-being must be a central element of the new human resources management strategy. Thus, we propose, among other things, the following:

- Implement the renewal of fixed-term appointments every five years, instead of every two years.
- Educate supervisors on promoting a healthy and creative work environment where an exchange of ideas can flourish.
- Instil a culture of well-being:
  - Facilitate the provision of dedicated space for sports classes, training workshops or on-site consultations with paramedical staff;
  - Request more flexibility from supervisors to enable sports activities during the lunch hour.
- Promote the mental health and family life of staff, including more active support for colleagues with children and dependents.

It is understood that all of the above measures must be applied both at Headquarters and in the field.

(g) Relations between the staff associations and the Administration

- **Take into account** the observations, comments and remarks of the staff associations so that consultation with them is not a mere formality as is often the case at present.
- Provide the equivalent of half a staff association post or a lump sum for a legal consultant, similar to the practices of other organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

### **Cross-cutting considerations**

12. ISAU wishes to draw the attention of Member States to the number of cases lost by the Organization before the ILO Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT), as well as to the cases resolved amicably to compensate for damage suffered by staff members. It should be noted that the ILOAT recently ordered the Organization to pay **three years' salary** to a P-4 staff member and the sum of €40,000 for moral damage. Such litigation entails considerable costs for the Organization, which must be taken into consideration upstream. It is as if the Organization was clearing bad managers of their mistakes by making Member States pay the cost of their ineptitude. We reiterate the need for transparent management that respects the rights of staff, which is ultimately a guarantee of efficiency.

13. Transparent management that respects the rights of staff also implies, of course, that the Administration and, in particular, ADM/HRM, respect the legal framework. We have found, however, that this is not always the case in practice. As an example, the current mobility exercise should have been preceded by an amendment to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules and the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, in particular with regard to the possibility for participants to apply for higher grade posts. However, as the exercise draws to a close, the provisions governing part of the process have not yet been published, leaving some of the decisions that will be made without a legal basis. Negligence of this nature can lead to litigation resulting in unnecessary expense to the Organization.

14. Finally, while the implementation and the scrupulous respect of the legal framework by the Administration is a prerequisite for the harmonious functioning of the Organization and the reduction of the number of disputes, it is still necessary that this legal framework be elaborated keeping in mind the well-being of the staff. To this end, we believe that the Ethics Office should be systematically consulted in the development and revision of the Organization's human resources policies. This would undoubtedly prevent the policies in question from creating situations where staff members, including supervisors, find themselves in an awkward position. For example, the Ethics Office was not consulted on the revision of the performance evaluation policy, which included the abolition of the Review Panel and the Reports Board. Consultation with the Ethics Office could have prevented the implementation of such an arbitrary policy that violates the rights of staff.

15. In conclusion, the cases lost before the ILOAT are clear evidence of internal malfunctions and could be avoided through a dynamic and efficient human resources management strategy that respects the rights of staff and is concerned with their well-being. The same concerns that we have expressed about human resources as a whole can be found in legal terms. The Administration must exercise foresight and judgment, starting with the implementation of the rules it prescribes and the principles it promotes. This is the commitment we expect from a new human resources strategy.



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Educational, Scientific  
and Cultural Organization

**214 EX/5.III.A**

**Executive Board**

**Two hundred and fourteenth session**

PARIS, 4 March 2022  
Original: English

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

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**PART III**

**HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES**

**SUMMARY**

**A. Preliminary proposals for a new UNESCO Human Resources Management Strategy covering the period 2023-2027**

Pursuant to 41 C/Resolution 63, this document provides preliminary proposals for the outline of a new UNESCO Human Resources Management Strategy covering the period 2023-2027, following a first series of consultations with key stakeholders.

Decision required: paragraph 20.



Job: 202200494

## Background

1. By 41 C/Resolution 63, the General Conference requested the Director-General to present preliminary proposals for a new human resources management strategy for 2023-2027. Accordingly, this report presents an overview of the preliminary consultations that took place during the month of January 2022. It also proposes the principles and identifies the main elements for the development of the strategy and outlines the next steps.

2. Many initiatives were successfully developed and implemented under the current 2017-2022 Human Resources Management Strategy; UNESCO has regularly reported its progress to the Governing Bodies [cf. documents [205 EX/5. IV](#), [207 EX/5.IV.B](#), [209 EX/5.III.A](#), [211 EX/5.III.B](#) and [212 EX/5.IV.A](#)]. A further and final progress report on initiatives and activities ongoing in 2021-2022 will be presented to the Executive Board at its 215th session, at the same time as a new draft Strategy for 2023-2027. The new Strategy will take into account progress achieved in the implementation of the current Strategy, as well as lessons learned, including the need to set realistic and achievable objectives, and the resources and capacity required. The new Strategy will be grounded in UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 and will aim at achieving its Enabling Objective 'Foster an enabling environment for the efficient and effective delivery of UNESCO's priorities' thus addressing the need for "*an agile, accountable and proactive Organization*". The new Strategy will also be informed by results from the 2021 Global Staff Survey, and best practices within the United Nations system. It will support the further efforts for ensuring a stronger focus on results, as well as on strengthening UNESCO impact at country and regional levels.

## Preliminary consultations

3. Preliminary consultations were organized by the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) throughout the month of January 2022, to hear the views of various stakeholders. These consultations targeted nine different stakeholder groups over 11 sessions to accommodate for different time zones.

4. Preliminary consultations were undertaken with the following stakeholder groups:

- Member States
- Senior Management (ADGs)
- Directors/Heads of Bureaux/Institutes and Offices away from Headquarters
- Directors of Bureaux and Division at Headquarters
- Staff at Headquarters and field
- HR staff
- Staff Associations (AIPU and STU)
- Young UNESCO

Nearly 1,000 individuals participated in the consultations. Both oral and written interventions were solicited during these meetings; staff also had the opportunity to give feedback anonymously online.

5. Each consultation began with an identical introductory presentation outlining overall aims of a new HR Strategy, to better support the Organization to meet its goals. It was emphasized that the Strategy should be an organizational management tool to support the implementation of UNESCO's mandate. The expected outcomes of the Strategy would be the continued development of a highly talented, diverse, skilled, and motivated workforce; a values-oriented organizational culture; and a healthy and positive working environment.

6. Feedback from the consultations indicated broad support for the following areas: excellence, staff well-being, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Suggestions included changing the names of the focus areas, expanding the elements within each area, and adding other areas. HRM was urged to continue building on the progress made under the current HR Strategy 2017-2022, as well as incorporate learning from the implementation of that Strategy. It was repeatedly stressed that the new Strategy must be clearly grounded in and support ongoing organizational strategies and efforts, while also considering broader United Nations initiatives and processes.

### **The Human Resources Management Strategy 2023-2027**

7. The preliminary consultations marked the first phase of the development of the Human Resources Management Strategy. The next phase envisages consultations which will be more focused on the development of specific aspects of the Strategy. Based on the feedback received, the following elements are proposed:

#### **Guiding principles**

8. **Support and link to broader UNESCO efforts:** The new Strategy must be grounded in the Organization's vision and support relevant strategies and process, including *inter alia* the Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029, Sustainability of the field network, and the [41 C/5 Programme and Budget](#). The Strategy will also be informed by UNESCO's assessed top corporate risks and consider various audit recommendations and evaluations including those by the Oversight Advisory Committee, the Joint Inspection Unit, internal and external audits, and by the Internal Oversight Service.

9. **Build on progress achieved:** The Strategy will build on progress made and lessons identified under the current 2017-2022 Human Resources Management Strategy and ongoing human resources initiatives including the continued streamlining of HR policies and processes. It will also incorporate learning from the impact of COVID-19 crisis on ways of working and feedback from the global staff survey. In this regard, HRM intends to commission an evaluation of the current Strategy during the course of 2023, for analysis and presentation in 2024. Its findings will also inform the mid-term review of the future HR Strategy 2023-2027, anticipated for 2025.

10. **Reflect and consider United Nations system initiatives and processes:** The Strategy will consider relevant broader United Nations initiatives and processes, including, *inter alia*, the United Nations-wide system "Future of Work", the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, and the Secretary-General's "Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being" Programme. It will build on learning from the human resources strategies of United Nations sister organizations.

11. **Foster inclusive buy-in and ownership:** Key to the success of the Strategy's implementation will be ensuring inclusivity and broad buy-in and ownership from across UNESCO's workforce, managers, and Member States. Efforts will be made to ensure that it reflects the concerns and perspectives of staff from both the field and Headquarters, particularly given the field reform process. The new Strategy must also keep in mind all contract types, rather than concentrating solely on the "core" workforce.

#### **Proposed elements of the strategy**

12. While the specific structure of the Strategy is pending further, more in-depth consultations, the following three global focus areas are proposed:

- ✓ Attaining excellence;
- ✓ Accelerating results through diversity; and
- ✓ Adapting for the future/Agility

## Attaining excellence

13. A key theme of the consultations was the focus on maintaining UNESCO as an organization of excellence, embodied by the quality of its human resources. For this to happen, many basic elements of human resources must be strengthened. Much progress has been made – and will continue to be made in 2022 under the current HRM Strategy – in this area.

14. Elements under this focus area could include, *inter alia*, the following:

- **Quality Recruitment**, with indicators related to increasing the capacity of, and understanding of the process by hiring managers; establishing a reasonable recruitment timeline; increased communication with candidates; and more efficient succession planning.
- **Performance Management**, addressing non-performance and acknowledging excellence.
- **Mobility**, including allowing opportunities for general service staff and exploring inter-agency opportunities.
- **Career Development and Support** at all levels, balancing specialist/generalist positions, and the development of national staff in field offices.
- Continued, and strengthened **Induction and Management Training**.
- **Managing mental health and stress**.

## Accelerating results through diversity

15. UNESCO, as a United Nations agency, has its strength in its diversity. Elements here include going beyond encouraging applications and increasing outreach, to creating a community that understands, adopts and adapts itself to embrace diversity in all forms. The Strategy will also reflect on the achievements realised thus far, will strive to implement the recommendations of the Working Group on geographical distribution as endorsed by the General Conference at its 41st session and will continue to explore new avenues to improve geographic diversity and gender parity at all levels. The Strategy will also consider other forms of diversity, equity and inclusion as a means of improving the quality of the work of UNESCO by acknowledging the various perspectives and experience that this would bring.

## Adapting for the future/Agility

16. The Strategy will seek to address the challenges facing UNESCO in the future, including at the country level around the United Nations reform, sustainability of the field network, and the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The Strategy will be closely linked to the field reform process to support resulting changes, including the agility needed to support field offices in conflict or post-conflict settings.

17. Adapting for the future also requires looking at how UNESCO can better attract and retain staff and others in its workforce, including ensuring the right balance between specialists and generalists. Flexibility in ways of working and teleworking, building on the lessons from the COVID-19 crisis, could contribute to ensuring a positive and healthy working environment, as well attracting more highly qualified candidates.

## Cross-cutting considerations

18. The Strategy will identify and address a number of cross-cutting themes, for example ensuring accountability and increasing data-driven decision-making. Further themes may emerge as the Strategy develops.

### Proposed process and timetable

19. HRM proposes that the Strategy be developed through in-depth discussions with various stakeholders around the overarching focus areas, as well as around specific elements within those areas as and when necessary, in the coming months.

| Actor                             | Actions  | Timeframe         |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| HRM                               | HRM to continue carry out various focused discussions and consultations with a broad range of stakeholder groups to elicit ideas and get feedback on specific elements of the draft Strategy | Feb. to July 2022 |
| HRM                               | Submit the new draft HR Strategy for examination by the Executive Board (215th session)  | August 2022       |
| Executive Board (215th session)   | Review and adoption, on a provisional basis, of the new HR Strategy 2023-2027, pending endorsement by the General Conference (42nd session)  | Autumn 2022       |
| HRM                               | Begin implementation of the HR Strategy 2023-2027  | January 2023      |
| Executive Board (216th session)   | Review first progress report of the new Strategy and recommend adjustments, as necessary;  | Autumn 2023       |
| General Conference (42nd session) | Endorsement of the HRM Strategy 2023-2027  | November 2023     |

### Proposed draft decision

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

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 214 EX/5.III.A,
2. Takes note of the work accomplished to date in the elaboration of a new UNESCO human resources management strategy for 2023-2027 and invites the Director-General to pursue this work with a view to submitting a draft strategy to it at its 215th session.