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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 FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Management Strategy 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 216 EX/5.III.A).



Job: 202301143

General considerations

1. ISAU's comments on the proposed human resources management strategy for 2023–2027 take into account the [Division of Internal Oversight Services \(IOS\) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022](#). In this regard, ISAU is pleased to note that IOS finalized its evaluation in time to feed into the development of the new strategy.¹ We are convinced of the usefulness of such evaluations whose conclusions and recommendations must be carefully considered.

2. Nevertheless, ISAU regrets that document [216 EX/13](#), which presents a summary of the evaluation, does not reflect the content of its conclusions and recommendations as accurately as possible. We are also puzzled by the statement that “(t)he findings, conclusions and recommendations of the [...] evaluation were incorporated into the strategy document to be presented [...] at the 216th session of the Executive Board” (see paragraph 5 of document [216 EX/13](#)). While the Administration has provided responses and comments to the recommendations made by IOS, which are included in the IOS evaluation, it is not, in our view, the responsibility of IOS to judge whether and to what extent these recommendations have been formally and/or substantively taken into account in the development of the new strategy. It is, in fact, up to the Member States to assess this, and the opinion of IOS, or indeed of any unit of the Administration, should not be presented in such a way as to risk pre-empting the prerogatives of the Member States. The content of the Administration's document on the new human resources management strategy is to be studied by the Member States prior to its adoption and it is they who will decide on its content and relevance, including with regard to the IOS evaluation.

3. In addition, although it is clear that a summary requires a selection of the information provided, we feel that some particularly illustrative and relevant data and statistics should have been included in the summary of the IOS evaluation (document [216 EX/13](#)), such as staff opinions on the lack of participation in the development of the former strategy² and their difficulty in accessing the document,³ or Figure 11 on the Strategy elements showing the least progress.⁴

4. Finally, we regret that the full set of conclusions and recommendations presented from page 34 onwards of the IOS evaluation were not included in the summary of the IOS evaluation presented to the Board. Illustrating the rigorous work of IOS, these pages contain very specific measures and proposals and deserve to be studied by all stakeholders. In fact, the Administration's responses to the IOS recommendations should have been clearly and explicitly incorporated into the document on the new human resources management strategy (216 EX/5.III.A). This would have allowed Member States and all stakeholders to have an overview of the strategy contained in a single comprehensive document and not scattered about in different places.

On accountability in the implementation of the human resources management strategy for 2023-2027

5. HRM needs to draw appropriate lessons and critical conclusions from the IOS evaluation. An important general conclusion from the latter is that there is a lack of transparency that is felt very strongly by the Organization's staff. Indeed, IOS states that the “[c]ulture of **transparency/accountability** was cited as an underlying issue that influenced implementation [of the strategy]. [...] This element was thus seen by the evaluation team as an overarching theme of critical importance to the development and implementation of a future HRM strategy”.⁵

¹ See document [214 EX/5.III.A.Add.](#), paragraphs 4 to 6.

² Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, IOS/EVS/PI 207, p. 19, paragraph 51.

³ *Idem*, p. 19, paragraph 49

⁴ *Idem*, p. 28, paragraph 84

⁵ *Idem*, p. 28, paragraph 85

6. However, the Administration does not really address this general observation. It simply continues to emphasize “collective responsibility” in the implementation of the human resources management strategy.⁶ Naturally, it is important both for the Administration and the staff overall to take ownership of the strategy in order for it to be effective. Nevertheless, it is necessary to distinguish between the search for a voluntary and spontaneous desire to take ownership of the strategy through factors that motivate staff to commit themselves (“incentives”) and the promulgation of a unilateral relationship regime through terms such as “commitments”, “accountability mechanisms” and “collective responsibility”, which tend to place the burden of effort on the staff alone, who are required to mobilize themselves without any promise of something real in return for their efforts. In this respect, we note that the whole strategy seems to address the staff as a mere collection of individuals, without reference to the imperative for the implementation of the strategy to take into account the staff associations that represent them before the Administration and the Member States. On this point, ISAU deplors the fact that the staff associations are mentioned almost only as a token, to indicate that they had been consulted. Had the consultations for the development of the strategy been conducted in a timely and sincere manner, regular dialogue with the staff associations would have been recognized as an integral part of a human resources management strategy that is, in the words of the IOS evaluation criteria, “of relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency”.

7. In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, ISAU must also take issue with HRM’s attempt to shirk its responsibilities by making its action conditional, **right at the beginning of the strategy document**, on the availability of additional resources: “[t]he effective implementation of the strategy depends on the allocation of the necessary human and financial resources”. While ISAU supports the need for an increase in resources, it cannot accept this as an argument to justify inaction or lack of progress, or even regression in working conditions within our Organization. It is HRM’s role to determine the actions to be taken and the priorities to be set **according to the budget available for this purpose**. It should be recalled that in paragraph 107 of its evaluation, IOS states that “recommendations have been formulated based on the assumption that **UNESCO is expecting zero budget growth**. [...] Where additional financial and human resources are required, these will be sourced either by restructuring staffing and budgets, sourcing from external budgets or by tapping external resources”. In terms of efficiency, ISAU would like to stress that UNESCO would have more budgetary resources if the staff were managed in such a way as to avoid the exorbitant costs that the Organization incurs as a result of being condemned by the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT), with alarming regularity, which ISAU has denounced on many occasions.

8. It is therefore necessary to reject the inclusion in the human resources management strategy of precautionary language designed to exonerate HRM from its responsibilities in advance by invoking limitations beyond its control. It is unfortunate that HRM makes several uses of this argument in document 216 EX/5.III.A, such as in paragraph 9 (“implementation [...] depends to a large extent, on the collective ‘buy-in’ and responsibility of all stakeholders [...] as well as the provision and prioritization of adequate resources”), paragraph 19 of Annex I (“[t]he successful implementation of the strategy depends to a large extent on the buy-in and support from all levels of the Organization”) and the first paragraph of part IV in Annex I (“[a]chieving the aims of UNESCO’s HR strategy is a collective responsibility with a set of accountabilities to be undertaken by each concerned stakeholder”).

9. HRM’s proposed strategy should reflect HRM’s ambition to achieve its goals rather than proposing goals that it knows it cannot achieve. In that regard, it is particularly surprising that the document refers to “collective ‘buy-in’ and responsibility” of the staff associations, even though, as mentioned above, the document does not mention the need to implement the strategy through regular consultation with them. This objective would be all the more realistic and easier to achieve

⁶ See for example, *Idem*, p. 11: “[...] effective implementation, estimated timing and prioritization of the recommendations, [...] will depend to a large extent, on the collective responsibility of all stakeholders”.

since, for example, ISAU, a stakeholder if ever there was one, constantly reminds us of its availability for such support for the Administration.

10. In order to have a “committed” staff, which is a clear objective of the strategy, the Administration in general and HRM in particular must also be exemplary and show commitment. This starts with the post of Director of the Bureau of Human Resources Management. We believe that this post, which is of paramount importance not only because of its rank, but also because “UNESCO’s success rests largely on having a highly talented, skilled and committed workforce” which is “our most valuable resource”, should not be assigned to individuals on secondment from other organizations. Despite the value of staff exchanges and inter-agency mobility, it is imperative that certain posts be subject to stability and a real, deep and lasting involvement. Since 2015, UNESCO has had seven HRM Directors, if we include those who have served on an interim basis. Member States will agree that this kind of top-down instability undermines the whole system and impacts the effectiveness of human resources policies by depriving HRM of coherent leadership.

On the scope of the strategy

11. According to HRM, the new strategy is a **departure** from previous ones in that it “addresses the management and care for the entire UNESCO workforce”. This was also mentioned in the IOS evaluation, which stated that the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022 “**only covered staff with regular contracts**”. ISAU can only express its surprise at this statement. While it is true that the former strategy, when detailing the staff profile at the time, did not include non-staff personnel, specific measures for non-staff personnel were incorporated. Furthermore, all personnel, whether staff or non-staff and regardless of their contract, have been and remain directly affected by the reforms undertaken in the context of the strategy, such as the reform of the internal justice system.

Specific considerations: Annex I

12. With regard to the content of the new strategy, we welcome HRM’s decision to implement the recommendations of the Executive Board’s Working Group on Geographical Distribution. It is important to note that the progress made in terms of geographical distribution reported on by IOS is for the period 2021-2022. Yet, the representation rate dropped from 83% in June 2017 to 78% in June 2022, indisputably proving the need for action in this area. For this reason, the IOS recommendation to treat diversity and inclusion more “holistically”, despite its relevance, is not enough to address the geographical imbalance which needs to be closely monitored through the development and publication of statistics. In particular, we would like to point out that IOS suggested in its evaluation that the Organization should take example from the UNDP and UNICEF, which understand the issue of geographical diversity in terms of distinctions such as the global North and South, which is indeed a useful complement to the analysis by represented, under- or non-represented countries. ISAU has already pointed out how concerned it was, and still is, to observe that, within the professional category, nationals of the global South, as well as women, are much more numerous in assistance and implementation posts (P-2/P-3) than in facilitation and programming posts (P-4/P-5). ISAU asks Member States to request a study of UNDP and UNICEF practices in distinguishing between staff members from the global North and South.

13. With regard to the assessment made by the Administration of the evaluation of the previous HRM strategy by IOS, we must object, as it is unfortunately not as positive as presented in paragraph 11 of Annex I to document 216 EX/5.III.A. In the areas of workforce planning, recruitment and performance management, for example, we would like to refer to the IOS evaluation, which says: “the least progress was observed with staff well-being, workforce planning, classification, culture of transparency/accountability, the internal justice system, recruitment, and performance management.”⁷

⁷ Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, [IOS/EVS/PI 207](#), p. 8, paragraph 12.

14. The shortcomings highlighted are a matter of serious concern. They are alarming because they are in direct contradiction with the criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency that govern the development of the human resources management strategy. Worse still, they are also alarming because they are in contradiction with the values and ideals at the heart of UNESCO's work. The credibility of our work to promote human rights is significantly undermined when we read in an internal, but public, report that a significant proportion of staff feel psychologically insecure or that they feel they are working in an environment where transparency is an empty word. We must practice what we preach.

15. As for diversity and inclusion "in all its forms", mentioned in paragraph 18 of Annex I to document 216 EX/5.III.A, ISAU welcomes the fact that the Organization is seriously concerned about the inclusion of persons with disabilities, minority groups, members of the LGBTIQ+ community and youth. This issue, which is very real and has existed for several years, even decades, can no longer be neglected or put aside under the guise of a lack of resources or motivation. It is agreed that change and evolution of mentalities take time, but the Administration, as it has committed to do, must prioritize reviewing and updating physical and normative structures, which will in themselves, in addition to other measures such as training, bring about a change in mentalities among UNESCO staff. Member States can be assured that ISAU will be vigilant in this matter.

16. Finally, in the table "UNESCO core values", mention is made of "organizational change and reform", by leaders. As we have no further information or clarification, we repeat that it is appropriate and timely for the staff associations to be consulted without insincerity, that is, in due course, and above all, in good faith, taking into account any observations and recommendations we may make – in the interest of the staff and therefore of the Organization. We also regret that a work plan and timeline for the new strategy have not yet been presented to the Member States for reflection, discussion and analysis.

Key Objective I: "Develop a talented and qualified workforce that can deliver the UNESCO mandate effectively"

17. The actions and indicative measures of success under Key Objective I ("develop a talented and qualified workforce") appear to be largely insufficient in content and lack precision. This is all the more striking with regard to recruitment, given the worrying conclusions reached by IOS about the existing problems in this area (see above), which are in line with the warnings issued long ago by ISAU. The following need to be addressed:

- Significant lack of transparency in the recruitment process, including in field offices and category 1 institutes;⁸
- The lack of involvement of HRM, sometimes to the point of there being no HRM representative whatsoever on interview panels,⁹ including for senior posts;
- Appointment Review Board (ARB) opacity;
- The adoption of incomprehensible appointment decisions supposedly based on the results of interviews.

These problems undeniably reveal structural malfunctions and warrant the suspicion that recruitment is handled arbitrarily. Indeed, one may wonder how to ensure the adequacy and transparency of recruitments if HRM is not involved or not very invested in such a crucial phase of recruitment as interviews. For this reason, ISAU strongly supports IOS recommendation 5 that attention should be paid to improving the implementation and even the **design** of specific policies, including recruitment.

⁸ See, for example, Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, [IOS/EVS/PI 207](#), p. 28, paragraph 85.

⁹ See, for example, *Idem*, p. 31, paragraph 97.

18. Furthermore, when the Administration reports on the development of training programmes and the updating of training policy, it must not lose sight of the essential problem in this area, which is not the existence and number of training courses, but the link between training and learning on the one hand and career advancement on the other.¹⁰ As “career development” was part of the previous strategy, as well as the one covering the period 2011-2016, although without any progress made, we are entitled to ask ourselves whether this is, once again, just an empty promise made by the Administration. We thus ask for the implementation of a real **career advancement policy**, the only means of restoring equity and justice, of alleviating the frustrations of colleagues and of allowing them to “be responsible for their own career management” as the Administration so readily asks them to do, a formula which is difficult to determine whether it is a promise of benevolent support or the tacit recognition of a long-standing abdication of responsibilities.

19. In the same vein, an indicative measure of success should be established that will focus on the number of **internal promotions**, as well as the number of appointees who previously held long-term Project Appointment (PA) and temporary contracts. In this regard, we also draw attention, at the risk of sounding repetitive, to the fact that, in terms of indicators, it is not the number of qualified **candidates** from under- or non-represented countries that is important, but the number of people actually **appointed**. It cannot be overemphasized how the adoption of such an indicator, which equates staff diversification efforts with a mere display tactic, is likely to undermine not only the implementation of the objective advocated by the Member States, i.e., the rebalancing of the geographical distribution of staff, but also the ethical culture in the Organization, by having established a system that tends to reward cynicism.

20. The actions related to Key Objective II (“promote an organizational culture of accountability”) is also worthy of some comment. First, performance management overall was seen as “problematic” by IOS.¹¹ This is why it is requested that it be evaluated and reformed so that the necessary readjustments can be made, and staff performance may be evaluated with **objectivity and transparency**. In the same vein, ISAU warmly welcomes the objective of establishing a mechanism/scheme to recognize high-performing teams, although we would like to point out that this cannot be both an action and an indicative measure of success.

21. With regard to the laudable and promising project to assess the performance of supervisors in the area of human resources management, we believe that this cannot be measured through an indicator consisting of the establishment of “peer-exchange mechanisms [...] to support and foster good practices”. Naturally, evaluation does not exclude collegiality and learning, but these things do not overlap. In UNESCO’s hierarchical framework, an evaluation must at some point involve the notion of accountability, which cannot be achieved through a constructive but insufficient exchange between peers. Finally, we welcome the idea of equipping supervisors to manage underperformance and conflict. Nevertheless, it would be desirable to specify the means that could be used to achieve this objective and, above all, the ways to measure its effectiveness.

Aim 2 “Promote inclusion and diversity by achieving, in particular, equitable geographical distribution and gender balance”

22. ISAU considers that there is a lack of clarity and precision in several actions and indicative measures of success relating to Key Objective I (“Key Objective I: Foster an organizational culture that respects and enables inclusion, equity and diversity”), such as “[i]dentify and address barriers to effective participation/accessibility of targeted groups of staff in the work of UNESCO” or “[a]ction plan on gender parity developed and implemented”.

¹⁰ See, for example, Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, [IOS/EVS/PI 207](#), p. 25, para. 71: “Negative comments centred on the little incentive to take advantage of learning on offer since it was rarely considered during performance evaluations.”

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 29, paragraph 85.

23. As for the internship programme, ISAU would like to reiterate its support for the remuneration of interns whose contribution is essential for the accomplishment of the Organization's mandate.

Aim 3 "Adapt for the Future"

24. We support and will closely monitor the design and implementation of a pilot programme for the decentralization of human resources expertise and processes, as proposed by IOS in its evaluation, while drawing attention to the fact that this should not be confused with or overshadow the current, de facto decentralization of the recruitment process, which is not welcome because it dilutes HRM's responsibilities. On the contrary, HRM must have firm control over recruitment.

25. We also support the designation of human resources "business partners" in the programme sectors. However, on this point, we would like to have more details on how the Administration intends to implement this recommendation. This approach proposed by IOS is intended to strengthen HRM's effectiveness in ensuring that the human resources management strategy is implemented appropriately: it should not lead to a further reduction in HRM's responsibilities and control over issues concerning personnel.

Aim 4 "Attain better results and impact"

26. A policy on well-being, long requested, promised and expected, unfortunately did not see the light of day under the former strategy. However, the IOS findings on staff well-being,¹² which include lack of psychological safety and a lack of recognition, as well as a lack of attention dedicated to non-staff personnel, are more than alarming and should be a wake-up call to all of the Organization's stakeholders. This IOS finding brings to light situations that have long been denounced by the staff members and their representatives. We hope that, at this time, the "framework" provided by the Administration will finally lead to a **genuine policy for the well-being of staff** that will be developed and implemented in the near future.

27. We welcome some of the actions and indicative measures of success proposed by the Administration to achieve aim 4, namely the adoption of measures to facilitate return to work after extended leave, the proactive support to managers and personnel, through mediation, early prevention and conflict management, as well as the global staff survey feedback on staff-supervisor relations.

28. We are pleased that our long-standing and repeated request for 360-degree assessment has been heard and supported by IOS and taken up by the Administration. We note HRM's commitment to conduct a pilot programme, and we hope that the staff associations will be informed in advance and consulted on its findings.

29. Finally, we welcome the improvement of the geographical mobility programme. However, it is important to point out something that the IOS evaluation does not highlight, namely the very low number of assignments following the two geographical mobility exercises held during the previous strategy. Among the reasons for this is, of course, the increased number of deferments granted, without the reasons always being clear, an observation that was reasonably made by staff during IOS investigations and mentioned in the IOS evaluation. Accordingly, we welcome the indicative measure of success of a "decrease in the number of staff having exceeded their Standard Duration of Assignment (SDA)". For this reason, and in the interest of fairness and equity, the Administration would do well to follow our advice and amend paragraph 13 of Item 5.10 of the Human Resources Manual so that its application leaves no ambiguity or possibility of circumvention in obtaining a deferment.

¹² See, in particular, Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) evaluation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022, [IOS/EVS/PI 207](#), p. 28, paragraph 85.

Concluding remarks

30. ISAU agrees with the IOS recommendation to reduce the bureaucratic burden on HRM, which makes it less efficient. However, caution should be exercised in calling for “presenting to the Executive Board one annual report focusing on strategic outcomes” of the strategy. While it is appropriate for States to have reports that allow them to have an overview of the progress of the strategies they are adopting, they need a certain degree of detail and precision in order to fully understand the human resources situation and make appropriate decisions on how to proceed. From this point of view, the advantages and disadvantages of reporting on the strategy once a year rather than every six months will need to be considered, while taking into account what should continue to be reported on at each Board session.

31. In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the relevance of the process, called for by ISAU with insistence at previous sessions of the Executive Board, of conducting an evaluation of the current Human Resources Management Strategy prior to the debate of Member States on the proposal for the new strategy. This logic has been followed. We have noted that on several important subjects, the IOS evaluation pointed out gaps and shortcomings that we have regularly brought to the attention of the Administration and the Member States. This convergence of analyses between two such different bodies attests to the fact that the associations are indeed indispensable stakeholders in ensuring that our Organization meets the highest criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency in its human resources management.



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**FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED
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AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS**

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Management Strategy 2023-2027

In accordance with 215 EX/Decision 5.IV.A, the Director-General presents the new Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027, which takes into consideration the findings of the Division of Internal Oversight's evaluation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2017-2022. The effective implementation of this Strategy depends on the provision of the requisite human and financial resources.

Decision required: paragraph 10.



Job: 202300705

Introduction

1. This document introduces the new Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027 (hereafter referred as the “HR Strategy”), as requested by 215 EX/Decision 5, Part IV.A.
2. The full text of the HR Strategy is presented in **Annex I** to this document.

Background

3. The HR Strategy was developed following an extensive series of consultations with Member States, Senior Management, Directors, Staff at Headquarters and in the field/institutes, the staff associations and Young UNESCO. These consultations were followed by smaller thematic discussions which focused on specific aims of the Strategy.

4. The overarching objective of the HR Strategy is to support the implementation of UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy (41 C/4), its programmatic goals and priority actions. The Strategy also takes into consideration other strategies, policies, initiatives and best practices within UNESCO across key human resources functions, including recruitment, learning and development, geographical and functional mobility, performance and staff well-being, and other broader organizational strategies and processes, as well as those of the United Nations System. These include, *inter alia*, the UNESCO Advisory on Organizational Culture, the Global Staff Survey results of 2021, relevant recommendations of the Oversight Advisory Committee, the Joint Inspection Unit, and audits and evaluations of the Division of Internal Oversight (IOS), notably the evaluation of the HR Strategy for 2017-2022. A key component of the Strategy is the ongoing reorganization of the field network. Elements of the Strategy in this area are expected to evolve as the field reorganization continues to be elaborated.

5. In terms of the greater United Nations Common System, the work of CEB-led initiatives such as the Future of the UN Workforce, the UN Framework on Disability Inclusion, and ongoing working groups on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; HR Professionalization; and Work-Life Harmony have also served as foundations of the Strategy. The HR Strategy was developed, therefore, as a continuum and evolution of the previous Strategy (2017-2022).

6. By 214 EX/Decision 5, Part III.A, the Executive Board requested IOS to undertake an evaluation of the HR Strategy for 2017-2022, the findings of which would feed into the development of the new Strategy for 2023-2027. This Evaluation report is presented to the 216th session of the Executive Board and includes the Management’s response for each recommendation. Its findings are reflected in the new HR Strategy, including a key recommendation, which is a departure from previous HR Strategies, in so much as the new Strategy addresses the management and care for the entire UNESCO workforce, from fixed-term staff on regular budget and project appointments, to employees regularly referred to as “non-staff personnel” including service contractors, who frequently undertake regular, core functions, in particular in field locations.

The four strategic aims of the HR Strategy

7. At its 215th session, the Executive Board took note of the draft framework for the HR Strategy 2023-2027 that was presented at the 214th session of the Executive Board, and recommended four aims of the HR Strategy:

- (i) Attract and retain talent and expertise to effectively deliver UNESCO’s mandate;
- (ii) Promote inclusion and diversity by achieving, in particular, equitable geographical distribution and gender balance;
- (iii) Adapt for the future by ensuring an agile and flexible way of working; and
- (iv) Attain better results and impact by improving both the accountability and the well-being of UNESCO’s workforce.

8. The HR Strategy presented in **Annex I** is based on this structure. Each aim is composed of key objectives, with supporting actions and indicative measures of success making up the structure of the Strategy.

9. The effective implementation of this 5-year organizational-wide Strategy depends to a large extent on:

- the collective ‘buy-in’ and responsibility of all stakeholders, including UNESCO leaders, managers, the HRM Bureau, staff at large, staff associations and other interest groups, as well as the support of Member States;
- the provision and prioritization of adequate resources (human and financial), in particular in implementing corporate-wide training and development programmes, supporting the field reorganization, reassessing contractual modalities, capacity building for young talent, and adopting modern digital HR solutions and systems.

Proposed draft decision

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

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 215 EX/Decision 5.IV.A,
2. Having examined document 216 EX/5.III.A,
3. Takes note of the proposed human resources management strategy for 2023-2027,
4. Calls upon Member States and partners to provide voluntary contributions necessary for the successful implementation of this five-year human resources management strategy,
5. Requests the Director-General to present the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027 to the General Conference at its 42nd session, reflecting the outcome of its discussions at the present session.

ANNEX I

I. INTRODUCTION

1. UNESCO's success rests largely on having a highly talented, skilled and committed workforce, one which is empowered and supported by an organizational culture and environment that enables staff to grow, be creative, develop and realize their potential within a secure, inclusive, modern and flexible working environment.
2. To achieve its goals, UNESCO must attract and retain the very best of talent, provide innovative learning, career development and mobility opportunities to allow staff to reach their full potential, encourage and reward excellence, creativity, and high performance. The Organization must support its leaders and management as they conduct the necessary changes in UNESCO's organizational culture, by promoting, *inter alia*, a values-based culture that seeks diversity in all its forms, an inclusive workplace, equity for its personnel, mindful of staff well-being and fostering engagement.
3. We recognize that our people are our most valuable resource in the effective delivery of our strategic objectives across all its fields of competence, contributing to the ultimate achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in particular those where UNESCO has a strategic contribution to make and where its comparative advantage is recognized.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on progress towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda and has further magnified the challenges of global economic recovery, peace, and sustainable development. UNESCO, as a specialized United Nations agency with its unique yet broad mandate, will accelerate and prioritize actions aimed at achieving the SDGs; will support Member States across its recognized areas of expertise and leadership; will strengthen its commitment to its two global priorities: *gender equality and Africa*; and will step-up its involvement with the United Nations system and its network of partners.
5. The aims outlined in this ambitious five-year HR Strategy aligns with, and supports UNESCO's strategic, operational and programmatic priorities across all its fields of competence and functions as outlined in UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 ([41 C/4 Medium-Term Strategy](#)).

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

An enabling and inclusive approach

6. The Strategy was developed following a broad series of consultations held with key stakeholders including Member States, senior management, directors, staff at Headquarters and in the field/institutes, the staff associations and Young UNESCO. These consultations were followed by smaller thematic discussion focused on the strategic aims of the Strategy. A framework of the draft Strategy was also presented on three separate occasions to UNESCO's Executive Board to gauge their support and direction.
7. The results of [the Global Staff Survey](#) 2021 informed the Strategy. It was even more significant in that it was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic when occupational health and staff wellbeing gained prominence in service delivery. New ways of working (flexible working arrangements including telecommuting) were institutionalized thereafter.
8. This inclusive approach allowed for a range of valuable and diverse voices and resulted in the identification of four Strategic Aims (see Part V, below) as the main areas of focus for the next five years, with each aim interdependent to some degree on the other. In addition to our statutory governance reporting cycle, and a formal mid-term review of the implementation of the Strategy in

2024/2025, we will continue to reach out regularly to our key stakeholders to review and assess progress achieved and/or adapt the Strategy to emerging needs, at key milestones over the next five years.

III. KEY GUIDING COMPONENTS

A Strategy that considers broader strategies and processes

9. While its foundations are anchored on UNESCO's strategic directives and priorities, the Strategy also takes stock of recent recommendations emanating from internal and external audits, JIU and OAC recommendations as well as HR priorities formulated in a number of action plans on important issues such as the Prevention of Sexual Harassment, the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Gender Equality. One of the Strategic Aims focuses particular attention on the recommendations of the [Executive Board's Working Group on Geographical Distribution](#), approved by the 41st session of the General Conference in efforts to achieve equitable geographical distribution.

10. The Strategy also considered United Nations system-wide drivers, programmes and initiatives including [the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#), [the Secretary-General's Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme](#), [the Action Plan for Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All](#), [the Secretary-General's report on Multilingualism](#) as well as emerging initiatives from the ongoing CEB "Future of Work" initiative which builds on the lessons learned of COVID-19 on flexible ways of working and contractual modalities for all types of personnel. To the extent possible, UNESCO will align with these broader United Nations strategies all the while taking into account our unique requirements as a specialized agency.

A Strategy that builds on achievements and lessons learned

11. The Evaluation of HR Management Strategy for 2017-2022 led by the Division of Internal Oversight [[add hyperlink to document once issued](#)] confirmed that substantial progress was made in many areas, notably in improving gender equality amongst different levels of staff and the roll-out of successive mobility exercises. It was recognized that some progress had been made in other primary areas such as workforce planning, recruitment, and performance management but that efforts in these domains need to be intensified over the next five years.

12. Other recommendations on the decentralization of HR expertise and processes to support field operations, the designation of HR business partners in the sectors, a shift towards a more holistic approach to diversity and inclusion, as well as strengthened communication and data analytics functions have been integrated to the extent possible in the Strategy. With regard to learning and organizational development, the Strategy takes into account the need to incorporate training and capacity building as a vital element of workforce planning, employee retention, and other priorities, though this cannot be done without additional financial investment by the Organization.

A Strategy for the entire workforce

13. As at the end of January 2023, UNESCO's total workforce amounted to 4,757 individuals (cf. **Annex II**), including 2,319 staff and some 2,438 affiliate personnel located in 93 countries worldwide. Over the last years, UNESCO has seen a steady increase in its affiliate population, which currently represents 51% of the entire workforce.

14. The UNESCO affiliate workforce has become an essential part of the ability to meet ever-evolving operational requirements. We increasingly rely on their capacity and skills to complement those of staff. While these individuals work alongside UNESCO staff, they are employed under a range of different contractual modalities. It is for this reason that the HR Strategy considers the workforce as a whole: all personnel regardless of contract type. We must ensure fairness and equity vis-à-vis the application of HR policies and procedures, appropriate remuneration and conditions of

service, and access to learning opportunities and career support, in particular for long-serving personnel.

A Strategy that better supports field operations

15. Another key feature of this Strategy supports UNESCO's shift to a more field-centric approach. Over 64% of the workforce are based outside of UNESCO Headquarters (Paris): 15% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 14% in Africa, 12% Asia & Pacific, 7% in the Arab States, 3% in Europe & North America and 13% in category 1 institutes.

16. With the initiation in 2023 of the first phase of the UNESCO field network reorganization, the Strategy seeks to put in place robust HR structures and partnerships, by reviewing HR delegated authorities to streamline and empower decentralized decision-making and developing mechanisms to support and provide field operations with the necessary flexibility to rapidly respond to emerging challenges or crises including needs for specific expertise.

A Strategy that promotes and upholds the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion

17. One of the strategic aims identified by key stakeholders is to promote diversity and in particular an equitable geographical distribution and gender balance for which ongoing focus will be maintained in this regard with detailed action plans put in place and widely communicated. The IOS Evaluation salutes UNESCO's progress in terms of achieving gender parity across the Organization as well as the efforts and contribution made in collaboration with the Ethics Office in raising awareness of ethical commitments and standards of conducts at Headquarters and the field offices/institutes.

18. UNESCO will continue to commit to fostering and leveraging diversity and inclusion in all its forms including persons with disabilities, minority groups, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and youth, among others. This will however require substantial investment, both in funding and of time, as it entails updating physical and normative structures, and to some extent changing mindsets including addressing unconscious bias. The goal is to facilitate accessibility and ensure decent working conditions for our workforce.

An ambition requiring investment

19. The successful implementation of the Strategy depends to a large extent on the buy-in and support from all levels of the Organization. Without that, we will not have the requisite resources to adopting modern digital HR solutions and systems, implement corporate learning and development programmes, or outpost HR professional posts. Individuals cannot be provided learning opportunities – including on-the-job training such as short-term assignments – without complementary funding. The establishment of a fair and inclusive internship programme, which would contribute to the capacity-building of young talent from diverse backgrounds including non- and under-represented countries, requires a dedicated, predictable source of funding.

IV. AN ORGANIZATIONAL-WIDE STRATEGY: A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Achieving the aims of UNESCO's HR Strategy is a collective responsibility with a set of accountabilities to be undertaken by each concerned stakeholder, and not solely the responsibility of the Bureau of Human Resources Management.

UNESCO Core Values

Commitment • Integrity • Diversity • Professionalism

Leaders will:

- Lead by example by demonstrating the UNESCO core values of commitment to the Organization: integrity, respect for diversity, and professionalism;
- Establish & communicate strategic goals and organizational priorities;
- Drive & champion organizational change and reform;
- Refocus HR planning to better support future challenges such as field network reform.

Managers will:

- Inspire and motivate teams through open and continuous dialogue;
- Encourage and recognize high performance;
- Ensure personnel understand job responsibilities and expectations;
- Promote transparency by open and honest communications;
- Manage underperformance;
- Initiate the difficult discussions with personnel;
- Understand how to be inclusive and supportive of diversity;
- Ensure the wellbeing of their teams;
- Apply HR policies and processes in a consistent and fair manner;
- Nurture the careers of personnel;
- Avail of people management training opportunities.

Staff will:

- Conduct functions in a professional manner and with integrity;
- Maintain personal high performance;
- Take reasonable care of their health and safety and not place others at risk;
- Treat others with respect;
- Avail of career development and training opportunities;
- Be responsible for their own career management;
- Support a spirit of collaboration with colleagues and teams;
- Contribute to joint staff-management mechanisms ensuring staff perspective continues to feed into the Strategy.

The Director of HRM will:

- Lead, coordinate, monitor and assess the successful implementation of the Strategy;
- Provide strategic advice and guidance to managers;
- Develop, implement & communicate effectively with staff, managers and key internal stakeholders on new policies, tools and processes to ensure consistent and fair application across the Organization;
- Foster a culture of mutual trust and respect across the Organization;
- Ensure a safe and healthy work environment for all personnel;
- Embed diversity, equity and inclusion into policies and processes;
- Establish and maintain a network of strategic partners both within the Organization and with other United Nations agencies;
- Strive to build HR professional capacity and expertise.

V. OUR VISION

UNESCO is an agile and desirable place to work which attracts and retains qualified and talented individuals who are motivated to deliver on UNESCO's mission and programmes.

In order to achieve this, we will:

AIM 1

Attract and retain talent & expertise

- Develop a talented & qualified workforce that can deliver the UNESCO mandate effectively.
- Promote an organizational culture of accountability.

AIM 2

Promote inclusion & diversity by achieving in particular an equitable geographical distribution & gender balance

- Foster an organizational culture of mutual respect that enables inclusion, equity, and diversity in all its forms.
- Identify and address challenges to achieving equitable geographical distribution.

AIM 3

Adapt for the future

- Improve the agility and flexibility of the Organization.
- Put in place strong HR structures and partnerships to better assist managers and personnel to improve performance and operations.
- Enhanced HR systems to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of HR processes.

AIM 4

Attain better results & impact

- Ensure a safe and healthy work environment.
- Encourage positive and constructive staff-supervisor relationships.
- Support career development.

ACHIEVING AIM 1

ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT AND EXPERTISE

Key to ensuring that UNESCO can deliver on its mandate is ensuring a skilled & high performing workforce worldwide. Identifying qualified individuals and providing the necessary support, training and professional development opportunities to personnel (regardless of contract types) throughout their UNESCO careers is critical.

Key Objective I: DEVELOP A TALENTED & QUALIFIED WORKFORCE THAT CAN DELIVER THE UNESCO MANDATE EFFECTIVELY

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic workforce planning with sectors; • Deliver an effective recruitment and outreach strategy; • Establish in-house talent pools including leadership pools; • Develop 3 key/critical training programmes for upskilling the workforce; • Update learning policy; • Develop a comprehensive induction and on-boarding programme, consistent across the Organization; • Introduce improvements in an employee’s career experience: applying at UNESCO, joining the Organization, when moving within UNESCO, and upon separation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR biennial plans per sector in place and updated on a regular basis; • Increased number of qualified applicants from non- and under-represented countries; • Leadership talent pool in place by end 2024 • 3 skills development programmes delivered by 2026; • Global staff survey satisfaction on fostering a culture of continuous learning opportunities; • Induction & on-boarding programme/platform developed and implemented by 2025; • Pulse surveys for new staff and those transitioning to new posts undertaken twice per year. |

Key Objective II: PROMOTE AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Managers play a critical role in the organizational culture and are responsible for facilitating the development and performance of their teams. They are also responsible for creating an environment which enables personnel to thrive and be motivated.

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce an accountability framework for HR management with clear expectations of leaders as managers and role models; • Assess the performance of supervisors in people management with targeted development opportunities to address areas identified for improvement; • Equip supervisors to manage underperformance and conflicts; • Establish mechanism/scheme to recognize high-performing teams. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish mechanism/scheme to encourage innovation and recognize high-performing teams as from 2025 • People management element to be incorporated in (Leadership) Development Programme by end 2023; • Peer-exchange mechanisms with groups of managers established to support and foster good practices (e.g. provision of master classes) by end 2023; • Performance rating distribution. |

ACHIEVING AIM 2

PROMOTE INCLUSION & DIVERSITY BY ACHIEVING IN PARTICULAR AN EQUITABLE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND GENDER BALANCE

We are committed to creating an inclusive working environment where all staff feel valued and respected not only in terms of nationality and gender but also in terms of race, disability, religious beliefs, language, sexual orientation, age, as well as socio-economic background, qualifications, experience & skills.

Key Objective I: FOSTER AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE THAT RESPECTS AND ENABLES INCLUSION, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an Action Plan on gender parity for all levels of staff; • Introduce improvements in an employee's career experience: applying at UNESCO, joining the Organization, when moving within UNESCO, and upon separation; • Ensure inclusion by critically reviewing/updating policies, procedures and processes for institutional biases; • Identify and address barriers to effective participation/accessibility of targeted groups of staff in the work of UNESCO; • Review, update, and mainstream the UNESCO Competency Framework, including the core values. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Plan on gender parity developed and implemented; • Increased staff engagement and feedback (Global Staff Survey) in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) activities; • Diversity, equity and inclusion to be embedded in key policies and processes by end 2027; • Number of managers and personnel trained on unconscious bias [new staff within 6 months of on-boarding]; • UNESCO Internship Programme updated by 2024; • UNESCO Competency Framework revised to incorporate/strengthen DEI in the workplace by 2026. |

Key Objective II: IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING EQUITABLE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

We are committed to implementing the measures of the [General Conference Resolution 41 C/Res.64](#), adopted in November 2021 following the recommendations of the Executive Board Working Group on Geographical Distribution, and in particular the drive to increase the recruitment of qualified candidates from non-and under-represented countries.

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully implement all measures outlined in the 41 C/Res.64; • Ensure direct targeted outreach to increase the diversity of candidates from non- and under- represented Member States [diversity targets]; • Maximize the use of digital tools for better outreach; • Establish formal talent pools of high potential candidates; • Assess the implementation of the MLPP pilot programme; • Identify retention issues with regard to the Young Professionals Programme. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action plan on addressing geographical distribution developed and implemented taking into account the measures outlined in 41 C/Res.64; • Increased applicants through social media channels; • Talent pools in place and actively used for sourcing qualified candidates. |

ACHIEVING AIM 3

ADAPT FOR THE FUTURE

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought more flexible ways of working, further improvements are needed to ensure that UNESCO is able to adapt to future challenges and opportunities, in particular support to field operations in emergency or post-crises settings. This will involve decentralization and increased efficiency of HR and operational support including the provision of accurate information, advice and data to managers.

Key Objective I: IMPROVE THE AGILITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF THE ORGANIZATION

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a transparent selection process for emergency and post-crisis situations; • Develop a pilot programme for decentralization of HR expertise and processes as part of the implementation of UNESCO’s field network reform; • Strengthen career development opportunities for National Professional staff; • Review and update contractual frameworks for more flexibility and alignment with the present & future workforce; • Identify and upscale on smarter, more agile ways of working; • Implement measures to make UNESCO a more flexible and family-friendly Organization. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific mechanism/HR plans in place to support field operations by end 2024; • Mapping of HR processes and authorities to be delegated to the field by 2024; • Number of national staff promoted to Int. Professional posts; • Flexible working arrangements evaluated and further developed by end 2025; • Updated HR policies on parental leave (maternity, paternity etc.) in 2023. |

Key Objective II: STRONG HR STRUCTURES AND PARTNERSHIPS TO BETTER ASSIST MANAGERS AND PERSONNEL TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE AND OPERATIONS

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake functional review of HR functions by end 2023; • Align HR structures to business needs, taking into account the field reform; • Explore designation of HR business partners in programme sectors; • Position HR partnerships (external expertise) to complement the workforce in implementing UNESCO’s mandate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRM structure/staffing readjusted ensuring it is fit-for-purpose and will facilitate implementation of HR Strategy (for 2024/2025); • HRM staffing to allow for outposting of HR Int. posts (funds needed) to Regional Operational Platforms by 2026/2027; • Number of sectors making shift to designate HR business partner model; • Increased number of personnel working under HR partnerships framework. |

Key Objective III: ENHANCED HR SYSTEMS TO IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF HR PROCESSES

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and implement digital solutions for HR processes in line with UNESCO's IT Strategy; Develop SOPs for common procedures and processes to ensure consistent application of HR regulations; Increased communication of HR policies and processes using digital solutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR systems, applications and platforms harmonized by end 2027; SOPs for key processes developed by end 2027; HR dashboards upgraded to facilitate access to key stakeholders on real-time progress. |

ACHIEVING AIM 4

ATTAIN BETTER RESULTS AND IMPACT

Key Objective I: SAFE AND HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement an employee wellbeing framework focusing on occupational health and safety and accountability including prevention measures to address key mental health risks; Progressive transition of Medical Service to an Occupational Health Service [monitoring the health of the workforce, preventing work-related illness in the workplace by encouraging safe working practices, and monitoring and supporting the management of sick leave]. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes from wellbeing surveys including Global Staff Survey, and actions implemented; UNESCO's occupational health & safety policy developed by 2026; Measures to facilitate return to work after extended (sick or other) leave established; Sick/absenteeism rates. |

Key Objective II: POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE STAFF-SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIPS

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen supervisors' management skills with a focus on managing remote/agile teams; Expand 360-degree assessment and feedback for managers and implement relevant training (e.g. conflict mgmt.) based on feedback (2023); Proactive support to managers and personnel, as and when necessary [mediation, early prevention/ conflict management]; Develop Code of Conduct for UNESCO staff [Ethics Office: lead]. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of supervisors participating in management training; Number of managers undertaking 360° assessment programme; Global Staff Survey feedback on staff-supervisor relations; Code of Conduct developed (2023) and proactively communicated. |

Key Objective III: SUPPORT CAREER DEVELOPMENT

| Actions: | Indicative measures of success: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training not just for the job you have but for the job you want! • Develop a Leadership Development Programme to ensure a rapid and inclusive process for identifying Heads of Field Offices, with emphasis on people mgmt. skills; • Refine the Functional Mobility Programme based on lessons learned from the Pilot (2022/23); • Further improve the Geographical Mobility; Programme vis-à-vis candidate experience/feedback (2023/2024); • Provide career development advice and support service to managers and employees; • Develop new approaches for increased career opportunities for national and general service staff members. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Leadership Development Programme developed by 2025; • Number of functional mobility moves per year; • Decrease in the average time-in-post (all staff categories); • Decrease in the number of staff having exceeded their Standard Duration of Assignment (SDA); • Effective mechanism in place for Short-Term Assignment (STA) [including funding mechanism]; • Global Staff Survey satisfaction with regard to staff morale and motivation. |

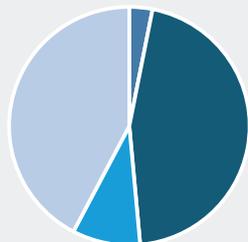
Communication, Monitoring and Reporting

20. The Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) will ensure an effective communication strategy with the aim of promoting collective ownership and raising awareness on the implementation of the various HR actions and initiatives outlined in the Strategy. HR personnel and Administrative Officers at Headquarters and the field will be trained on communicating more effectively about key messages of the Strategy, new initiatives, systems and tools which should contribute to improving transparency, coherence and effectiveness of HR policies and processes. With regard to monitoring and reporting, an on-line dashboard complete with KPI's will be established for the regular monitoring on the progress of the implementation of the proposed actions in complement to the annual reporting to the Executive Board on the overall strategic outcomes of the HR Strategy.

Annex II - UNESCO WORKFORCE AT A GLANCE - January 2023

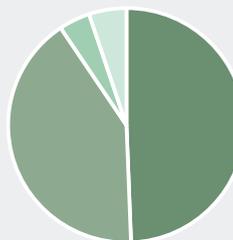
4757 PERSONNEL AT UNESCO

2319 Staff Members
49% of total workforce



STAFF MEMBERS BY CATEGORY

2438 Affiliate Workforce
51% of total workforce

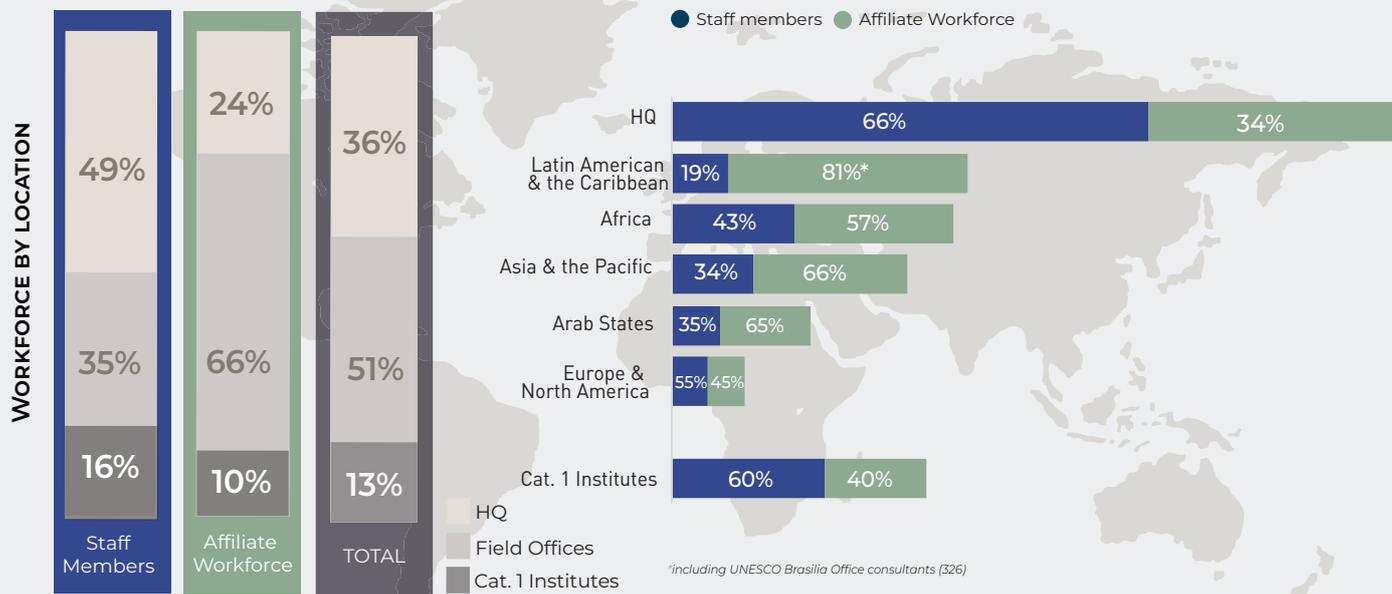


AFFILIATE WORKFORCE BY TYPE OF CONTRACT

Staff Members: Fixed-Term contracts, Junior Professional Officers, Project Appointments & Secondments. Staff on Leave Without Pay are not included.

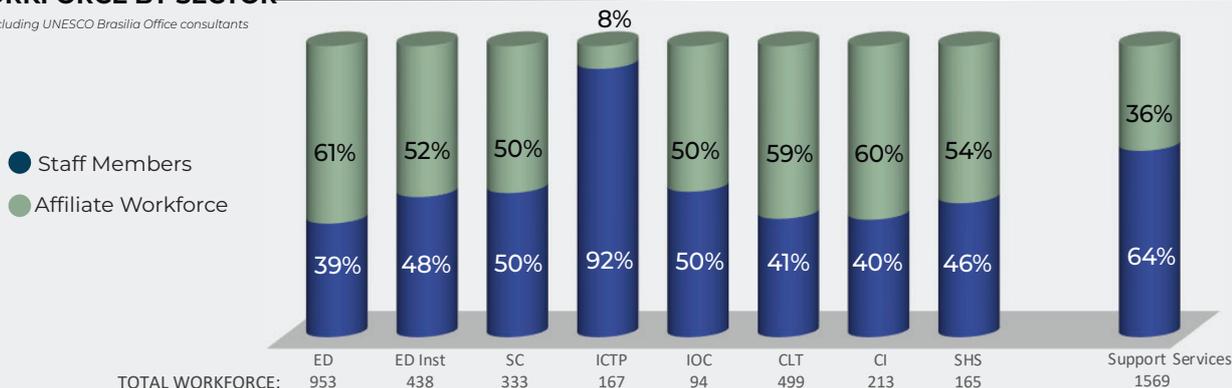
Affiliate Workforce: Temporary Appointments, Short-Term contracts for free-lance interpreters and translators, Service contracts, Short-term contracts, Consultants, UN Volunteers, Sponsored Trainees and Loans.

WORLDWIDE PRESENCE

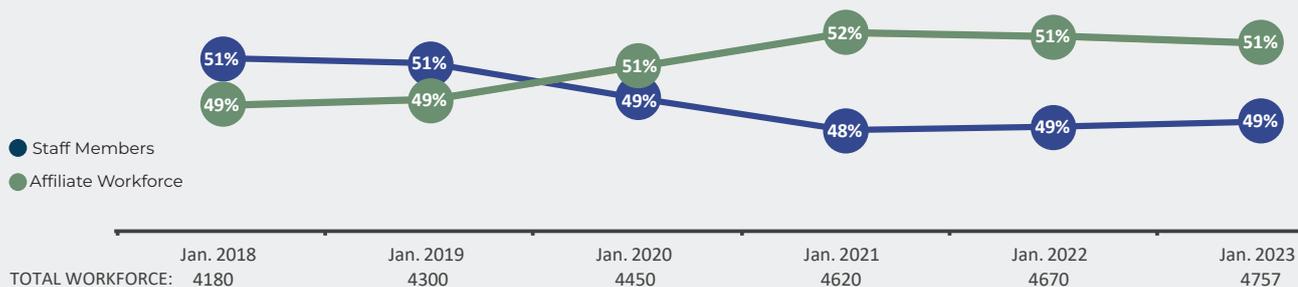


WORKFORCE BY SECTOR*

*not including UNESCO Brasilia Office consultants



EVOLUTION OF THE WORKFORCE SINCE JANUARY 2018

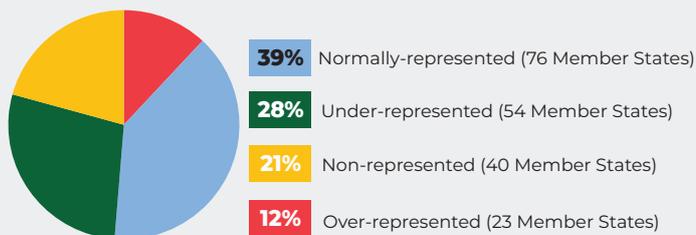


DIVERSITY

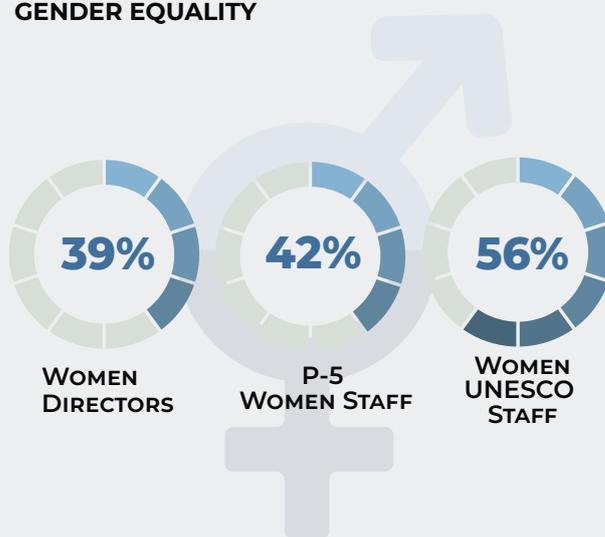
2319 STAFF MEMBERS FROM 168 NATIONALITIES

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

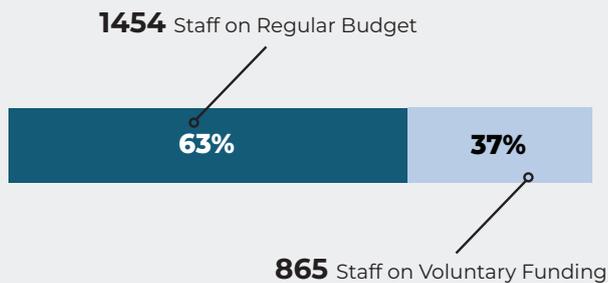
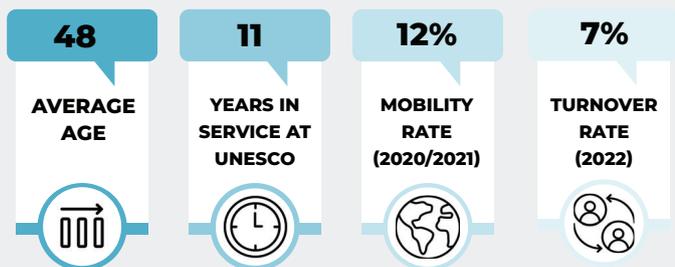
193 Member States of which 79% are represented [Geographical Professional posts only]



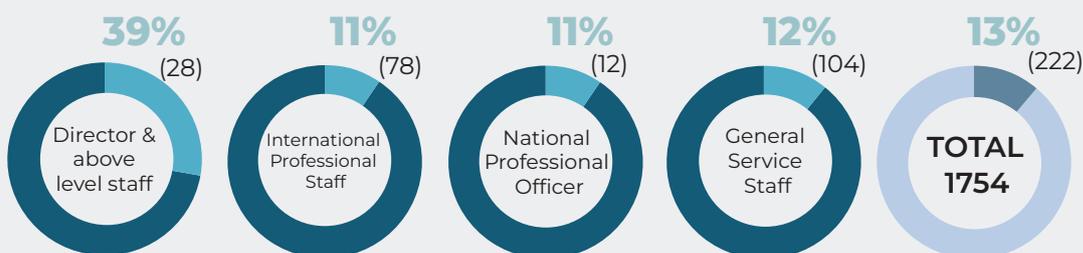
GENDER EQUALITY



FUNDING SOURCE



ANTICIPATED RETIREMENTS OF STAFF ON ESTABLISHED POSTS BETWEEN 2023 & 2027



For more detailed information, please refer to the Key Data on UNESCO Staff [January 2023]