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

PART IV

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

ADDENDUM

COMMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Strategy for 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 224 EX/5.IV.A).

1. ISAU has taken note of the document submitted by the Administration on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027. However, we do not believe that it is possible to submit our comments on this document – which is crucial for guiding human resources reforms in the coming years – without referring to the conclusions of the latest report by the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system (JIU) on UNESCO's management and administration ([JIU/REP/2026/1](#)). To this end, we have included a summary note preceding our comments on the HR Strategy to help Member States understand the implications of the JIU report for human resources management at UNESCO.



Job: 2600239E

SUMMARY NOTE: Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on management and administration in UNESCO ([JIU/REP/2026/1](#))

A. An urgent call to action: move beyond “managing institutional decline”

The report concludes that UNESCO must, as a matter of urgency, move beyond merely “managing institutional decline” (para. 8) – a serious and troubling observation that should serve as a wake-up call to all of the Organization’s stakeholders. It is also noted that the Administration is “reactive” rather than proactive, which hampers the Organization’s strategic capacity (para. 3).

B. An outdated structure: silos and hyper-bureaucracy

- **Operational compartmentalization:** The Secretariat’s units operate in silos with weak digital integration (para. 3).
- **Bureaucratic red tape at the top:** The Cabinet’s structure is considered “**overly bureaucratic**”, with overlapping roles that dilute accountability (para. 2).
- **Obstacles to the mission:** Bureaucratic rigidity hinders staff innovation and, consequently, the agility that UNESCO needs in a complex world (para. 93).

C. A culture of arbitrariness and impunity in HR

- **Apparent compliance:** There is a critical gap between “procedural compliance” with the rules and the reality experienced by staff (para. 165).
- **Perception of irregularities:** Staff report opaque practices in recruitment, career progression and mobility arrangements (para. 160).
- **Weakened oversight:** There is a perceived weakening of oversight mechanisms (Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) and the Ethics Office (ETH)), giving rise to discretionary decision-making without meaningful accountability (paras. 160, 161 and 164).

D. HRM’s disengagement and the end of meritocracy

- **Abnegation of HRM:** The Bureau of Human Resources Management has relinquished its role in supporting staff and now limits itself to narrow administrative management (para. 180).
- **Lack of recognition:** The suspension of merit-based promotions (para. 179) and the absence of a system to reward excellence (para. 178) have severed the link between performance and career progression.
- **Crisis of confidence:** 57.1% of staff assess human resources negatively, citing excessive workloads and the risk of burnout (para. 183).

E. A superficial social dialogue

The report emphasizes the need to strengthen “**regular and structured**” consultation with staff associations (para. 168) in order to identify systemic issues that the outgoing administration has ignored for too long or concealed behind compliance statistics.

Conclusion: The JIU’s assessment is clear: UNESCO suffers from an excessively top-down hierarchical culture that has broken the staff’s trust in the leadership. Unless staff confidence is restored and merit is truly recognized, the Organization’s effectiveness and credibility will continue to erode. The JIU report emphasizes this point: the risks identified here are systemic and call for a reform of management culture that goes far beyond fragmented, short-term adjustments. Moving beyond “managing institutional decline”, as highlighted by the JIU, UNESCO must revive conviction in the need for its mandate – a conviction that can only be embodied by supported and motivated staff.

2. With an eye to the future, we have chosen to focus our analysis on part III of the report, which is intended to outline priorities for 2026–2027 and beyond, but which is particularly worrying. HRM offers no solutions to the systemic problems we have been highlighting for some time (deterioration of the work environment, staff demotivation, rising incidents of harassment and a lack of transparency in HR processes). No concrete measures are proposed to address these issues or respond to our criticisms, which have been corroborated by both the JIU and the IOS audit on performance management. This gap between the seriousness of the internal and external assessments and the inadequacy of HRM’s proposals is likely to reinforce the “superficial compliance” criticized by the JIU.

3. HRM seems to have resigned itself to the situation, hiding behind budgetary constraints to justify its inaction and lack of initiative, and thus merely states that “certain activities [...] will have to be slowed down, reduced in scope or postponed due to budgetary constraints”,¹ particularly in the most critical areas: recruitment and internal mobility, mental health and well-being, HR support to the field, and HR policy reform. Such a statement, which lacks any proposal for strategic adjustments, raises a legitimate question: if HRM considers it is no longer able to fulfil its core functions, what then is the value and role of the Bureau in implementing the Strategy that it is supposed to steer – a Strategy that is crucial to addressing the urgent challenges facing the Organization?

4. Budgetary constraints cannot justify simply abandoning or postponing the Strategy’s objectives. As the office held accountable for its implementation, HRM should have presented a clear list of priorities and proposed realistic, immediately implementable measures. Instead, nothing of the sort is being proposed. The priorities for 2026–2027 remain vague and general, with no revised road map.

5. Under these circumstances, must we wait until next spring – another year – only to find once again that no real progress has been made? We cannot be satisfied with the status quo. We urge Member States to demand that HRM submit, without delay, **specific measures** accompanied by a **timeline for implementation**, in order to address the urgent challenges facing the Organization.

6. A human resources strategy cannot be reduced to a mere exercise in administrative compliance. Its road map must be a dynamic tool for steering and accountability, capable of adjusting priorities according to needs and circumstances. As it stands, the road map presented does not fulfil any of these functions.

Priorities for 2026–2027

7. HRM merely annexes a list of targets, most of which, it has already indicated, cannot be achieved because of budgetary constraints. This purely declarative approach is by no means a road map: it sets out neither priorities nor a sequence of actions nor concrete measures, and does not establish any order of priority – which is essential in a context of limited resources.

8. Even more worryingly, many of the targets presented as “met” are actually activity indicators rather than effective results. For example, an “increase in the number of applicants” says nothing about the recruitment quality, the transparency of the processes, or their impact on geographical distribution. As we have pointed out time and again, an HR strategy cannot be reduced to such superficial indicators, which do not help assess real progress or inform the decision-making of Member States.

Revised road map

9. It is therefore regrettable that HRM did not include a revised road map in this report, especially since it had presented a road map for the implementation of the Strategy for 2026–2027 to the staff associations last February. Since the document remained too vague and general, ISAU drafted and

¹ [224 EX/5.IV.A](#), para. 6

submitted detailed comments to HRM, outlining clear priorities and proposing concrete measures, particularly regarding recruitment, performance, well-being, teleworking, internal justice and career development. It is therefore incomprehensible that a revised version of the road map incorporating ISAU's contributions was not included in this report, even though it was the logical basis for a strategic update for 2026–2027.

10. This absence is all the more problematic given that a key document submitted to the Executive Board at the current session – the UNESCO80 Roadmap ([224 EX/12.INF](#)) – sets out ambitious targets and timelines for 2026–2027. The report in question, which asserts that no significant progress can be made owing to budgetary constraints, **is totally at odds with the UNESCO80 initiative**, to which ISAU had submitted its contributions and which it welcomes. In this context, how can we believe that the UNESCO80 major structural reform concerning human resources, with specific milestones set for 2026–2027, will actually come to fruition when HRM has no solution, or at least has not adjusted its priorities, and simply states that the core activities of the HR Strategy will have to be “slowed down, reduced in scope or postponed”?

11. This strategic inconsistency is unacceptable. HRM cannot afford to effectively abandon the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023–2027 on the pretext of budgetary constraints, especially since it constitutes an essential pillar of the UNESCO80 reform.

12. Furthermore, we ask that HRM clarify what will happen to the unmet targets – will they be abandoned, postponed, revised, or replaced with alternative measures? – and that it submit a comprehensive revised road map that incorporates both the identified priorities and the concrete measures proposed by ISAU (see our recommendations at the end of the document).

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) ([JIU/REP/2026/1](#)) – thematic analysis of HR dysfunctions.

13. The JIU report paints a bleak picture of UNESCO's governance, human resources management and institutional effectiveness. It confirms the systemic dysfunctions that ISAU has criticized for years: weakened oversight mechanisms, inconsistent enforcement of rules, a perception that human resources processes lack transparency, a deteriorating work environment, a lack of rigorous follow-up on decisions made by governing bodies, and so on. Such findings should have prompted HRM to present a clear and immediate action plan. However, the document on implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023–2027 shows that HRM has not drawn any conclusions from this and has not proposed any corrective measures.

Recruitment

14. Among other things, the JIU report highlights the following shortcomings:

- Weakened oversight and inconsistent enforcement of rules;
- Reduction in oversight processes, particularly for appointments not subject to scrutiny by the Appointments Review Board (ARB);
- Lack of transparency in processes, and in particular a widespread perception of irregularities in recruitment, promotion and mobility arrangements;
- Lack of systematic communication of criteria, procedures and outcomes;
- Loss of staff confidence, low morale and a sense of injustice;
- Weak workforce planning and overreliance on temporary contracts.

15. All of this underscores the **urgent need to revise the recruitment policy**. In this regard, ISAU is awaiting the findings of the JIU's report on recruitment. Furthermore, we hope that our request to be heard in the context of the external audit requested by the Executive Board regarding all recruitments, reclassifications and promotions in 2024–2025 will be granted.

16. In reply to the JIU's conclusions, HRM affirms that such a process "will strengthen institutional efficiency, coherence and productivity, while reinforcing integrity safeguards, merit-based recruitment, equitable geographical distribution, gender balance – including at senior leadership levels – and staff well-being."² However, this stated goal directly contradicts the claim by HRM that recruitment is one of the activities that will have to be "slowed down, reduced in scope or postponed" because of budgetary constraints. It is difficult to understand how the Organization could simultaneously strengthen transparency, consistency and meritocracy in its recruitment practices while reducing its level of engagement.

Mental health, well-being, and work environment

17. The JIU report confirms the findings we have repeatedly highlighted – which are also supported by observations from IOS and the Ethics Office – and underlines a continuing and alarming deterioration in the work environment: a massive increase in cases of harassment, a loss of staff trust, a perception that protective mechanisms are weakening, and demotivation stemming from the lack of a link between performance, career development and recognition of good performance.

18. In this context, HRM's claims that "UNESCO strengthened its enabling environment" or that "UNESCO delivered a mental health and well-being strategy in 2025" are surprising. To date, we are still waiting for a strategy or a genuine framework for mental health and well-being that aligns with that of the United Nations system; well-being indicators are plummeting and, according to IOS, cases of moral harassment have increased by 72% compared to 2024. The measures mentioned by HRM (such as webinars or the unstructured action plan listing disparate initiatives on its intranet platform) do not, under any circumstances, constitute a strategy.

19. HRM states that the review of the flexible working arrangements policy, particularly regarding telework, will not be included in the strategy until 2028. This timeline is incomprehensible, and no rational explanation has been provided, even though the JIU has noted that restrictive teleworking policies are undermining staff morale. What valid reason could possibly prevent an immediate review of this policy – especially since such a measure would not require significant resources – other than a certain inertia on the part of HRM? HRM needs to provide an explanation.

20. It is worth noting once again that UNESCO is still the **only organization in the United Nations system to prohibit telecommuting away from the duty station**. The measures we are proposing (limited telecommuting away from the duty station, compressed work schedules) are virtually cost-free and can be implemented immediately. There is no justification for postponing this until 2028.

21. Furthermore, we would like to point out that recommendation 4 of the JIU report on the implementation of flexible working arrangements in United Nations system organizations ([JIU/REP/2023/6](#)) explicitly calls on governing bodies to request, by the end of 2025, periodic updates on the implementation of flexible working arrangements and teleworking policies.

Geographical distribution

22. It is regrettable that the Young Professionals Programme (YPP) and Mid-Level Professionals Programme (MLPP) could not be launched "due to the responsible management actions". Yet they are among the few effective and tangible measures for improving geographical distribution. The JIU emphasizes the importance of strengthening mechanisms for diversity and representation. The suspension of these programmes runs counter to these conclusions.

23. We also note that HRM has not provided any information on the implementation of the revised internship policy, which was announced in 2024 and could also make a tangible contribution to improving geographical distribution.

2 [224 EX/5.IV.A](#), para. 7

Internal control mechanisms and ethics

24. The JIU highlights certain shortcomings in internal controls, particularly those of the Ethics Office and IOS, as well as the inconsistent application of rules and procedures (for example, the mobility policy).³ Furthermore, inconsistent and delayed disciplinary actions, as well as the perception of a lack of transparency, undermine accountability and staff confidence. ISAU endorses the JIU's recommendation to reinforce procedural safeguards and transparency in disciplinary case handling, in particular by establishing clearer timelines and rationale for decisions, while ensuring alignment with due process standards.⁴

25. As with the 2024 report of Ethics Office, we have attached our comments on the annual report of the Ethics Office (2025) ([224 EX/20](#)) as an annex. It remains regrettable that the staff associations are still not permitted to comment directly on that document, even though its conclusions have a direct impact on working conditions and the protection of staff rights. This restriction is difficult to reconcile with the principles of transparency and social dialogue that the Organization claims to promote.

Internal justice system – Appeals Board

26. During our recent review of the case files, in accordance with the Statutes of the Appeals Board, we noted an increase in the number of times the Director-General has rejected recommendations that were favourable to the appellant. In addition to running counter to the principles of proper administration and the requirement of procedural fairness, such a practice also exposes the Organization to significant legal and financial risks before the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT).

27. It is therefore important to highlight a major structural flaw in UNESCO's internal justice system, as pointed out in the JIU report: the recommendations of the Appeals Board are non-binding.⁵ The JIU explicitly points out that **this non-binding nature poses a serious problem, as it undermines the protection of staff rights and limits the scope of a body that was designed to serve as the final instance of internal appeal.**

28. Furthermore, these rejections highlight a more troubling flaw. The Administration is defended and represented by the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs in disputes with staff. Up to this point, this representation does not pose any particular difficulties. However, once the Appeals Board issues its recommendations – including when they are favourable to the appellant – it is this same Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs that subsequently advises the Director-General on whether or not to accept them. This situation amounts to being both **judge and party in proceedings**, and raises a **fundamental issue regarding conflicts of interest, impartiality and ethics**. Indeed, when the Appeals Board rules in favour of the appellant, the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs finds itself in the paradoxical position of having to advise the Director-General on the validity of recommendations that contradict the position it has itself defended throughout the proceedings. In other words, the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs is called upon to advise the final decision-maker on the outcome of a case it has argued and lost.

29. In order to put an end to this practice, which is incompatible with the standards of the United Nations system, and to respond to the JIU's call to **strengthen the guarantees of independence and credibility of the internal justice system**, we ask that a review of this practice be undertaken without delay. There are two possible courses of action:

³ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), Executive Summary, para. 4; paras. 186–187.

⁴ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 244.

⁵ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 252.

- 1) The first option would be to revert to the previous system, under which HRM's legal service represented the Administration in internal disputes, and to ensure a clear separation in order to avoid conflicts of interest.
- 2) Amend the rules and statutes so that the Appeals Board's recommendations are binding, as suggested by the JIU.

30. ISAU wishes to point out that recommendation 2 of the JIU, in its Review of the internal pre-tribunal stage appeal mechanisms available to staff of the United Nations system organizations ([JIU/REP/2023/2](#), page 27), was not taken into account; it relates to the introduction of a provision for the suspension of the enforcement of contested administrative decisions during the pre-tribunal stage in the recent revision of the Statutes of the Appeals Board. In this regard, we welcome recommendation 1 of the JIU, which aims to improve the follow-up to the Executive Board's recommendations and the resolutions of the General Conference.⁶

Field network

31. It is mentioned that the two-tier field reform remains incomplete and that several structural weaknesses continue to limit its effectiveness. More importantly, although the field offices are supposed to manage the bulk of programme resources and ensure implementation on the ground, the reform has not come with a commensurate transfer of human and financial resources to the decentralized offices. This discrepancy seriously compromises its credibility, as well as the expected results.

32. The Organization's field operations continue to suffer from chronic staff shortages and structural inconsistencies. These issues not only affect essential support functions (procurement, human resources, finance and administration), but also severely upset programme implementation. These shortcomings justify the JIU's call for a **comprehensive assessment of staffing needs** across the field offices, and for the standardization of key operational functions and the harmonization of post levels.

33. These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of effective internal coordination mechanisms and inconsistent communication flows between Headquarters and the field. Strategic planning remains largely centralized and top-down, with field offices often excluded from decision-making processes. This reinforces silos, reduces effectiveness and creates operational fragmentation.

34. Taken together, these dysfunctions also fuel unhealthy competition for limited resources between Headquarters and the field offices, and even among the field offices themselves. This hinders the consistent distribution of functions and responsibilities in the field (examples include field projects managed from Headquarters, liaison offices carrying out operational activities, antennas going beyond their project mandates, and National Professional Officers (NPOs) taking on responsibilities outside their corresponding duty-station country).

35. Ultimately, the insufficient decentralization of human and financial resources (in the area of recruitment, inter alia) continues to weaken programme implementation and erode the Organization's effectiveness, responsiveness and credibility.

IOS audit report on performance management ([IOS/AUD/2025/11](#))

36. HRM merely states that "progress continued on implementing IOS' performance management audit recommendations", without specifying what measures have actually been taken or will be taken to achieve the objectives set by IOS. This lack of clarity is all the more problematic given that the IOS audit highlights deep-seated flaws, which we have been pointing out for years and which undermine the system's transparency, fairness and credibility and jeopardize professional development and talent retention:

⁶ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), Recommendation 1, page 9.

- Objectives set inconsistently;
- Inconsistent application of the rating system;
- Insufficient feedback, and a culture of conflict avoidance that leads to the transfer of struggling colleagues rather than the addressing of performance issues;
- A growing perception that performance reviews are being misused, particularly to justify non-renewals or as a form of retaliation.

37. We therefore welcome the agreed management actions (AMAs) recommending the revision of the performance management policy so that it includes:

- A clarification of the rating system by March 2026, including updated definitions and practical guidelines for supervisors;
- The extension of the remit of the Performance Review Board (PRB) to “partially meets expectations” ratings, in order to fill a procedural gap and reduce legal risks;
- The development of the performance management framework so that it incorporates 360-degree evaluation;
- The strengthening of managerial skills by implementing a mandatory certification programme for all supervisors.

It goes without saying that the staff associations must be fully involved in this revision process.

38. We therefore call for a concrete, time-bound and transparent action plan that will finally reform a performance management system which, as it stands today, fails to fulfil its role in fostering development, providing recognition or ensuring fairness, and is viewed merely as a burdensome administrative obligation.

Conclusion

39. The findings presented in this report demonstrate once again that HRM lacks any genuine willingness to commit resolutely to truly ambitious reforms that genuinely take staff perspectives into account, as highlighted in the JIU report. The inertia, lack of preparedness and absence of strategic vision now confirmed by the JIU highlight systemic flaws in governance, human resources management and the Organization’s ability to fulfil its own commitments. The JIU’s findings also show that HRM is overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges, unable to set priorities and too often out of touch with the reality experienced by staff. This damning report thus corroborates the objective criticisms we have been voicing for some time.

40. In this context, the preparation of the next Human Resources Management Strategy, for 2028 and beyond, cannot proceed without a **rigorous assessment of the current strategy**. The draft decision being presented to the Executive Board requests that the Director-General submit, at the 226th session, a report on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027, as well as an outline of proposals for a new or bridged human resources strategy. It would, however, be sensible and in keeping with best practices of the United Nations system to first conduct an assessment of the current strategy in order to identify errors and shortcomings and draw the necessary lessons before proposing a new strategic framework. We would like to point out that a similar debate took place during the previous strategy, and that the delay in the preliminary assessment had already been criticized. There is nothing preventing this assessment from being conducted within the allotted timeframe, as should have been the case since 2023.

41. Thus, the draft decision, proposed to the Executive Board, to take note of the progress achieved is inconsistent with the gravity of the findings which we have highlighted and which have been confirmed by the JIU. Member States must **demand that HRM submit a detailed action plan which addresses these well-founded criticisms and which includes concrete, time-bound measures**. Without a fundamental change in methods, governance and transparency, no current or future strategy will be able to meet the real needs of UNESCO and its staff.

42. Finally, we commend the commitment the Director-General has demonstrated since taking office to fostering an inclusive, ethical and merit-based workplace, as well as his stated intention to strengthen collaboration with the staff associations. We would, however, like to reiterate that this collaboration must be genuine and lead to tangible results. Consultations with HRM cannot be reduced to a mere formality intended to tick a box and give the appearance of social dialogue. Our recommendations deserve serious consideration and should be incorporated into decision-making processes, especially since the findings of the JIU and IOS have demonstrated that our criticisms are justified.

ISAU RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

ISAU, drawing on the findings of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2026/1) and the IOS performance audit (IOS/AUD/2025/11), wishes to draw the attention of the Member States and the Administration to the recommendations below in order to **align the Strategy's road map with that of UNESCO80** and to **restore trust** between the Organization and its staff.

ISAU recommends:

- I. **Prioritizing mental health and flexible working arrangements.** A genuine strategy for mental health and well-being should be established; it should allow telework outside the duty station, as well as compressed work schedules.
- II. **Improvement of performance management and career development.** The Administration should restore the link between individual performance and career development, particularly by revising the performance policy, reinstating merit-based promotions, addressing gaps in appeal mechanisms, and assessing the effectiveness of training programmes.
- III. **The securing of career paths.** A genuine policy for succession planning and skills development should be implemented to put an end to the erosion of specialized expertise highlighted by the JIU.
- IV. **Full transparency in all processes, particularly recruitment and mobility.** The Administration should: revise its recruitment policy, including a reform of the terms of reference of the Appointment Review Board (ARB) to give its members a role in decision-making; and conduct a thorough assessment, and possible revision, of the mobility policy, given its ineffectiveness and disproportionate cost.
- V. **Correcting of the irregularities in the internal justice system.** Senior management should ensure a clear functional separation in the handling of internal disputes or revise the applicable regulations to make the Appeals Board's recommendations binding.
- VI. **Reinforcement of the field network.** The Administration should enhance the effectiveness of the field network by: alleviating staff shortages and correcting structural inconsistencies; re-establishing effective coordination and communication mechanisms between Headquarters and the field; and clarifying the division of responsibilities to eliminate the overlaps and internal competition undermining programme implementation.
- VII. **The auditing of 'superficial compliance'.** An independent verification mechanism should be established to ensure that HR rules (on recruitment, mobility, telework) are

applied fairly and in a non-discretionary manner, in accordance with the JIU's concerns regarding the lack of transparency in the associated practices (paragraph 160 of the JIU report).

- VIII. **Effective social dialogue.** Consultation with the staff associations should no longer be a mere formality at the end of a process, but rather a structured stage early on in the development of any new HR policy (JIU recommendation in paragraph 168 of its report).
- IX. **The strategic transformation of HRM.** The Bureau of Human Resources Management should strive to once again become a supportive partner for staff, capable of listening and taking effective action in response to managerial dysfunction.
- X. **Decomartmentalization of operations and the elimination of silos.** The Administration should undertake a reform aimed at breaking down the structural silos (paragraph 3 of the JIU report) which hamper the Organization's agility and innovation. ISAU emphasizes that this compartmentalization is a symptom of rigid personnel-management which limits the sharing of expertise between units and undermines the effectiveness of operations, particularly in the field.

ANNEX

ISAU's comments on the implications for staff of the information contained in the annual report of the Ethics Office (2025)

Introduction

1. ISAU takes note of the publication of the annual report of the Ethics Office (2025) ([224 EX/20](#)). In an organizational work environment which remains particularly tense, the Ethics Office (ETH) continues to play a vital role in ensuring a professional climate in which staff are respected and ensuring that working conditions are in line with UNESCO's values. However, the report confirms the existence of persistent structural challenges, which we have already highlighted in our previous comments¹ and which call for an urgent response from the Administration.
2. As stated by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its report on the ethics function ([JIU/REP/2021/5](#)), it is important to note that a high level of both actual and perceived independence is necessary for the Ethics Office to function effectively². The Ethics Office, like the JIU and the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), emphasizes the need to finalize the hiring process for the post of Ethics Advisor. The post has been officially vacant since 2023, a situation that can only hinder the Ethics Office's effectiveness.
3. The JIU points out that internal oversight mechanisms, particularly the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) and the Ethics Office, are increasingly perceived by staff as having limited authority and capacity to act, especially in sensitive human-resources matters. This perception weakens staff confidence in internal safeguard and accountability mechanisms. The JIU emphasizes that such perceptions reflect an urgent need to reinforce transparency and improve communication within the Organization.³
4. The report of the Ethics Office confirms that the work environment remains challenging and, based on our observations, even toxic and conflict-ridden. In fact, feedback from colleagues, disputes brought to our attention and trends observed by the Ethics Office all lead to an undeniable conclusion: that the difficulties faced by staff are not isolated incidents, but systemic issues.
5. While the increase in the number of requests for ethics advice, which went from 421 in 2024 to 468 in 2025, certainly reflects greater visibility for ETH, it nonetheless also points to a deterioration in the work atmosphere. In both cases, this upward trend underscores the urgent need to strengthen ethics culture at the Organization and to address the expectations of staff, who are expressing a growing need for clarity and protection. An ethics office is not just another administrative unit; it must serve as a driver for the transformation of our work culture and human resources management, a transformation in which senior management and the Administration must set the greatest example.

Training

6. ISAU recognizes the Ethics Office's ongoing efforts in the areas of training and outreach, particularly with supervisors and new employees. However, staff still lack a clear understanding of reporting procedures, the mandate of the Ethics Office, and the distinction between its functions and those of IOS.⁴ This lack of information contributes to undermining staff confidence in internal mechanisms. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to assess the effectiveness of these training programmes, because despite the large number of them, we are seeing a worrying rise in cases of harassment.

¹ [221 EX/5.III.A Add.](#), Annex

² [JIU/REP/2021/5](#), Executive summary, section 3.

³ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 161.

⁴ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), paras. 227–228.

7. ISAU strongly supports the inclusion of ethical leadership indicators in the evaluation of supervisors, as well as the systematic assessment of managerial and ethical competencies during the recruitment process. However, these measures must be accompanied by a firm commitment from the Administration to sanction misconduct; otherwise, the measures will remain merely symbolic. We wish to reiterate the importance of 360-degree evaluation as a tool for identifying problem behaviour and guaranteeing quality management. As noted in the JIU report, there is an anomaly, or rather an incongruity, in the fact that this assessment is used solely as a tool for personal development without being formally integrated into the evaluation process. This limits its ability to reinforce the accountability and effectiveness of senior officers.

Protection of whistle-blowers

8. The increase in the number of official requests for whistle-blower protection, which went from two in 2024 to five in 2025, is a cause for concern. This increase is a reflection of the growing number of cases in which our colleagues fear reprisals for acting with integrity. It is a clear sign of the culture of impunity that persists within the Organization.

9. In this regard, the JIU, in its 2026 report on management and administration at UNESCO, noted that current ethics mechanisms did not provide a clearly defined procedure for reporting operational risks, particularly at the field level.⁵ This shortcoming exposes staff to undue pressure and an increased risk of reprisals when they attempt to report problems. The JIU therefore recommended establishing, in the Sector for Administration and Management (ADM), a confidential mechanism that is truly independent of local supervisors, in order to ensure effective protection for staff and to safeguard the reporting processes.

Harassment

10. The data on harassment are alarming. While the Ethics Office reports a decrease in requests for advice from 65 in 2024 to 54 in 2025, we must also immediately point out that these figures are contradicted by the number of cases cited by IOS in its annual report ([224 EX/19](#)): **allegations of moral harassment increased by 72% as compared to 2024** (going from 22 to 37).⁶ The same IOS report also cites five allegations of sexual misconduct in 2025, the same number as in 2024. The increase in reports remains a cause for concern and highlights the persistent challenges in preventing and addressing such behaviour. Everything points to a deterioration in the work climate, which makes it even more necessary and urgent to establish effective measures to combat harassment.

11. We are pleased to note that, at the same time, IOS has recorded a 44% increase in the number of allegations handled, which reached 39 in 2025. While this number reflects an effort to reduce the backlog of cases, it should not obscure the lingering concerns about the Organization's actual ability to address inappropriate conduct in a thorough and timely manner. The lack of resources highlighted by the JIU and the OAC poses a serious risk to the effectiveness of the investigative function and, by extension, to staff confidence in the fairness of the internal justice system.⁷

12. It is important to note that the JIU has observed that complaints regarding ethics and harassment are often followed up on poorly or belatedly.⁸ This observation is fully consistent with the feedback we receive from our colleagues, who describe procedures that are lengthy and opaque and lack adequate safeguards.

13. Furthermore, regarding disciplinary measures related to harassment, we do not understand why three cases processed in 2024 (i.e., after the completion of the IOS investigation report) are still

⁵ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 135.

⁶ [224 EX/19](#), para. 69 and figure 14.

⁷ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 296; [224 EX/21](#), para. 24.

⁸ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 192.

awaiting a final decision from HRM as at late 2025. All of this points to a breach of the principles of procedural fairness. ISAU is asking for a clear explanation of the reasons behind these delays and the measures that will be taken to ensure that they no longer recur.

14. It is also essential that UNESCO put an end to the practice of simply transferring individuals identified and reported as harassers from one unit to another; only a policy of effective and proportionate disciplinary measures will truly protect staff and restore confidence in internal mechanisms. Accountability must be reflected in effective measures.

15. We endorse the JIU's recommendations emphasizing the need to: strengthen procedural safeguards and transparency in the handling of disciplinary cases; establish clearer time frames; provide explicit justification for every decision; and ensure strict compliance with procedural standards.⁹

Ombuds office

16. The report confirms a situation that was already denounced in 2024: in the absence of an ombuds office, the Ethics Office is shouldering a considerable workload of mediation cases, to the detriment of its core functions. This situation overloads an already understaffed office and creates confusion about roles. ISAU reiterates its support for the establishment of an **independent** ombuds office. We emphasize the importance of following the JIU's recommendations in the establishment of this office¹⁰, particularly regarding consultation with the staff associations when drafting the terms of reference for the ombuds office (recommendation 1), as well as during the selection and appointment of the ombuds and in the decision-making concerning their dismissal or removal (recommendation 2). In addition, we insist on a clear mandate and guaranteed independence.

17. We would like to emphasize that the Administration bears direct responsibility in conflict prevention. All too often, it insists on resolving situations that clearly violate the rules, leading to costly disputes before the ILOAT. This lack of accountability is detrimental to the Organization and must stop.

Conclusion

18. ISAU agrees with the Ethics Office's assessment: building a lasting ethics culture depends above all on the decisions, behaviours and exemplary conduct of the Organization's leaders. However, this culture can only take root if the Administration truly adopts a policy of zero tolerance – one that has tangible effects and is not merely declarative – towards inappropriate behaviour, abuses of power and violations of ethical standards. Concrete and effective measures are essential, particularly the implementation of a genuine 360-degree evaluation, which enables more reliable identification of inappropriate behaviour and enables a response through proportionate disciplinary measures. Such a system is essential to ensuring a zero-tolerance policy towards any behaviour that violates the Organization's rules.

19. As institutional reform continues, ISAU wishes to emphasize that staff are at the very heart of UNESCO's work: without staff who are protected, respected and able to work with peace of mind, our organization cannot fulfil its mandate or meet the expectations of its Member States. Making the well-being, safety and dignity of staff a priority is not a choice, but an essential prerequisite for institutional effectiveness. A genuine transformation is needed. It can only be credible if it comes with effective accountability for supervisors, increased transparency, strengthened internal mechanisms, and a firm commitment to protecting staff and ensuring genuine and effective accountability.

⁹ [JIU/REP/2026/1](#), para. 244.

¹⁰ [JIU/REP/2025/5](#)

ISAU RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ETHICS OFFICE (224 EX/20)

Based on the recommendations of the JIU and the findings of the 2025 annual report of the Ethics Office, ISAU offers the recommendations below to Member States and the Administration, in order to ensure the integrity and independence of the ethics function.

ISAU recommends:

- I. **Stabilizing the Ethics Office.** The Administration should finalize, as soon as possible, the recruitment of the Ethics Advisor, as the prolonged vacancy of this strategic post (it has been vacant since August 2023) constitutes a major obstacle to the authority, independence and effectiveness of the office.
- II. **Strengthening institutional independence.** The actual autonomy of the Ethics Office in relation to senior management must be guaranteed, in accordance with the standards of the United Nations system, to ensure that the protection of whistle-blowers is not subject to any administrative interference.
- III. **Ensuring the appropriateness of resources for the Ethics Office's mission.** The Ethics Office's human and financial resources should be increased to address the rise in the number of requests for advice and protection cases, thereby preventing processing delays from discouraging staff from reporting inappropriate practices.
- IV. **Combating the culture of impunity.** The Administration should commit to taking systematic and transparent disciplinary action in accordance with IOS findings wherever reprisals or breaches are confirmed, in order to restore staff confidence in recourse mechanisms.
- V. **Promoting a culture of open communication.** The Ethics Office should be provided with the resources needed to conduct decentralized awareness-raising campaigns (in the field) specifically aimed at reducing the fear of reprisals, which ISAU has identified as the main obstacle to institutional integrity.



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United Nations
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and Cultural Organization

224 EX/5.IV.A

Executive Board

Two hundred and twenty-fourth session

PARIS, 6 March 2026
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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 IV

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

SUMMARY

A. Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027

Pursuant to [43 C/Resolution 71](#), the Director-General submits the annual report for 2025 on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027.

To achieve publishing efficiencies and reduce duplication, interactive links to more detailed HR data reports, portals and documents are integrated to the extent possible in the report.

Decision required: paragraph 10



Job: 2600148E

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with [43 C/Resolution 71](#), this annual report on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027 covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025.¹ It provides a strategic overview of progress achieved across the Strategy's four aims, also detailed in the implementation road map (**Annex I**), as well as the key challenges encountered.

The report is structured into three sections:

- I. Overview of UNESCO's workforce
- II. Key highlights and challenges across the four strategic aims
- III. Priorities for 2026-2027 and beyond

Section I: UNESCO's workforce composition (Annex II)

2. As at 31 December 2025, UNESCO's workforce stood at 5,189, comprising 2,571 staff members and 2,618 affiliate personnel, maintaining the approximately 50/50 composition as at end 2024. From 5,189 employees, 51% were assigned to field offices, 37% to Headquarters, and 12% to Category I Institutes. The majority of UNESCO's workforce (70%) are assigned in the programmes with 30% based in the support services, a slight decrease from 2024.

3. Overall [geographical representation](#) remained steady, with 81% (157) Member States represented in the Secretariat (professional and higher category posts subject to geographical distribution²), 4 percentage points off the 85% General Conference target. For illustrative purposes, if we include international professional staff members (D/P) on non-geographical posts e.g. temporary assistance (TA) and project appointments (PAs), junior professional officers (JPO's) and non-United Nations secondments, 84% (162) Member States are represented. Moreover, if we count the total staff member component (including general service (GS), national professional officers (NPOs), secondments and temporary staff), 87% (168) Member States are represented in the Secretariat.

4. [Gender parity](#) trends continued to advance, with women representing 58% of staff members, a 1 percentage point (pp) increase from end-2024. There was a marked increase in women at the P-5 level (+5 pp, reaching 45%). The proportion of women at the Director level and above has however decreased since December 2024 (from 45% to 39%). While sustained efforts are needed to improve representation at the senior management level, UNESCO nevertheless ranks second among United Nations specialized agencies in terms of the representation at this senior level, and is ahead of the World Health Organization (WHO) (33%), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) (37%) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (28%).³

5. Monthly updates on geographical representation and gender parity – UNESCO's C/5 diversity targets – continue to be published on the [Member States Portal](#). In complement, [the new HR Digital Report \(Dashboards\)](#) was launched in September 2025, available in English and French, with reports updated quarterly providing aggregated, anonymised data covering the entire workforce (all contract types) across locations, duty stations, and sectors, by category, grade, contract and post type. It also provides granular insights into representation by nationality, gender parity, and donor-sponsored HR partnerships, and has a complementary glossary with definitions of UNESCO's contractual modalities.

¹ Previous reports on the implementation of the HR Strategy: [219 EX/5.III.A](#), [220 EX/5.IV.A](#), [221 EX/5.III.A](#), [222 EX/5.IV.A](#) and [43 C/46](#).

² Geographical Distribution [methodology](#)

³ Source: CEB Personnel Statistics: [CEB/2025/HLCM/11](#)

Section II. Key achievements and challenges

Strategic Aim 1: Attract and retain talent and expertise

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

In 2025, UNESCO maintained its capacity to attract, develop and retain the talent necessary to deliver its mandate, despite the introduction of the responsible management actions (RMAs) in March. Essential hiring continued, engagement with Member States remained strong, and key initiatives advanced to strengthen workforce planning, enhance the employee experience, and reinforce a performance-culture.

Highlights include:

- Despite the slowdown in recruitments as a result of the RMAs, UNESCO recruited 107 staff members (all categories) of which 55 (51%) were external appointments and 52 (49%) were internal appointments, maintaining a strong balance between **external recruitment and internal progression**. The RMAs did however impact the recruitment timeline target of 130 days (75% of all posts), which in 2025 averaged 198 days. While the volume of fixed-term recruitments was curtailed, project-funded hiring increased, with 108 project appointments completed. Recruitment capability was strengthened through new toolkits and targeted training for hiring managers and candidates. **Outreach** to Member States, particularly non- and under-represented was sustained through engagement with National Commissions, United Nations partners, and participation in webinars and career fairs.
- To enhance workforce planning and strengthen operational agility, UNESCO developed a proposal for a **roster-based recruitment approach**, aligned with United Nations system practices, aimed at creating pools of pre-qualified candidates for recurring positions with similar profiles (e.g. Administrative Officers, Security Guards etc.). By [43 C/Resolution 67](#), the General Conference, at its 43rd session, approved an amendment to Staff Regulation 4.4.1., effective 1 January 2026, enabling the Organization to advertise positions/profiles in anticipation of future workforce needs. This will enhance operational agility for deployment across organizational units and duty stations, as required. The Secretariat is working on the operational guidelines to support implementation of the roster-based approach.
- **Workforce planning guidelines** (issued Q3.2024) continued to inform strategic staffing discussions in the context of the preparation of the revised Programme and Budget for 2026–2029 (43 C/5). Cross-sectoral reviews facilitated the monitoring between staffing proposals, organizational priorities and HR policy frameworks. The challenge remains that workforce planning operates within a severe budget constrained environment which restricts the implementation of optimal organizational designs and hampers the regularization of long-standing contractual arrangements, in particular those in UNESCO's field offices.
- The **employee career experience** was strengthened through enhanced on-boarding, in-boarding and off-boarding, with pulse survey satisfaction rates on these processes reaching or exceeding 80%. A redesigned exit survey now provides deeper insights to inform workforce planning and retention analysis.
- A strong **performance culture** was reinforced through sustained capability-building efforts. Over 2,400 staff participated in thematic skills-development activities and 1,450 attended performance information sessions, with supervisory capacity strengthened through targeted development activities. Progress continued on implementing IOS' performance management audit recommendations, and a mandatory performance management

certification programme for all managers will be launched in early 2026 to ensure consistent standards, high-quality feedback, and strengthened accountability.

- In line with Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) recommendations, HRM successfully led the **revision of the Statutes of the Appeals Board** (Annex A), including cross-stakeholder consultations and negotiations to align divergent positions and produce balanced, legally sound amendments which were approved by the General Conference at its 43rd session.
- A **mandatory conflict of interest disclosure declaration** developed by Ethics and HRM has been rolled out as part of the onboarding process of all staff members joining the Organization.

Strategic Aim 2: Promote inclusion and diversity by achieving in particular an equitable geographical distribution and gender balance.

- Identify and address challenges to achieving equitable geographical distribution.
- Foster an organizational culture that respects and enables inclusion, equity and diversity.

UNESCO advanced its inclusion and diversity agenda sustaining progress on geographical representation and gender parity C/5 targets (as reported under Section I) while accelerating efforts on disability inclusion and acting on the results of the 2024 employee engagement survey.

Highlights include:

- Targeted measures aimed at improving geographical representation have been effective, with **external appointments (D/P posts) from non- and under-represented countries** reaching 53% for the 2024-2025 biennium,⁴ exceeding the 50% General Conference target and improving on the 49% achieved for the previous biennium. Other measures designed to significantly improve geographical representation – the **Young Professionals Programme and Mid-Level Professionals Programme** – could not be launched as initially planned due to the responsible management actions resulting in an insufficient pool of vacant P1/P2 and P3/P4 posts, a challenge also highlighted in 43 C/5 staffing proposals.
- Significant progress was achieved in **disability inclusion**. UNESCO finalized draft guidelines on **reasonable accommodation** covering individualized workplace adjustments, cost considerations and roles and responsibilities, and advanced with the update of the policy on the employment of persons with disabilities. Disability inclusion focal points were appointed across sectors and field offices, forming a global “champions network” alongside a confidential support group for personnel who are caregivers of persons with disabilities. As part of the Core HR+ project, HRM has integrated disability inclusion elements and key guidance on reasonable accommodation into the functional specifications of the recruitment and onboarding workflows. While reasonable accommodation does not always entail additional costs, implementing the guidelines on reasonable accommodation will require additional financial resources for the Organization.
- In May, the results of the **2024 Employee Engagement Survey (EES)** were disseminated to managers and staff through global townhalls, sector-level leadership briefings, manager toolkits, and dialogues with staff associations. Engagement stood at 59%, a decline of 11 percentage points since 2021 and 19 percentage points below the United Nations benchmark median. Several HR Strategy roadmap targets used the EES as a baseline to measure progress. These engagement related targets were not achieved. While results reaffirmed staff commitment to UNESCO’s mandate, teamwork, and role clarity, they highlighted the need to rebuild trust, strengthen communication and reinforce leadership

⁴ For 2025 specifically, 31 of the 55 external appointments reported in Section I were to geographical (D/P) posts, of which 11 (35%) were appointments of nationals from under-represented Member States.

accountability. Subsequently, several targeted actions, described under Strategic Aim 4 below were put in place including an expanded 360-degree feedback exercise for managers, management development sessions on conflict resolution, and a series of career development support activities for staff and managers. The survey also highlighted concerns related to mental health and staff well-being. In response, UNESCO advanced its mental health and well-being strategy (cf. Strategic Aim 4). The strategy comprises a **psychosocial risk assessment (PRA)** as a key evidence-based tool to further identify and address issues raised in the EES. It is proposed to conduct the psychosocial risk assessment as a priority in 2026 and to defer the next employee engagement survey to 2027/2028, subject to the availability of funding and resources.

Strategic Aim 3: Adapt for the future

- Improve the agility and flexibility of the Organization.
- 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.

UNESCO advanced major HR modernization efforts to strengthen organizational agility, improve staff experience, and reinforce alignment with United Nations system standards. Key policies, systems and operational reforms progressed, laying the foundation for a more coherent, transparent and digitally enabled HR framework.

Highlights include:

- The **Core HR+ project**, central to UNESCO's digital transformation, made significant progress in 2025. The project aims to streamline recruitment, onboarding, learning and performance management into an integrated platform, thereby enhancing operational efficiency for all users. Despite a reduced scope due to financial constraints, implementation remains on track for early 2026, with further consolidation expected.
- Policy revisions advanced with the issuance of the **internship and parental leave policies**, and guidelines are being developed to operationalize the parental leave replacement and internship funds. Although the roadmap target of a 10% increase in interns from under- and non-represented countries was not met during 2025, representation remained stable at the 25% baseline. Enhanced outreach efforts will continue in order to achieve improved results. A review of allowances and entitlements for **hardship duty stations** was also undertaken to reinforce policy clarity, internal coherence, and alignment with the United Nations common system. In parallel, UNESCO developed and tested new calculation models for **short-term assignments (STAs)**. The objective is to complement functional and geographical mobility, incentivizing staff to expand their experience and exposure to different working and geographical environments while responding to operational needs and safeguarding the Organization's financial sustainability. Consultations with the staff associations have advanced both the finalization of the STA Guidelines and the review of hardship duty station entitlements.
- Key reforms were also advanced to ensure the sustainability of the **Medical Benefits Fund**. Updated reimbursement rates, with stronger emphasis on preventive care, were approved and implemented. The selection and onboarding of a new third-party administrator was put in place with accompanying transition measures beginning December 2025.
- UNESCO has maintained a strong focus on **HR partnerships** as a strategic complement to in-house talent. In total for 2025, UNESCO registered a total of 300 HR partnerships, of which 235 funded by 26 donors and 65 United Nations Volunteers (UNVs). HRM continues to promote various modalities, including loans, secondments, sponsored traineeships and UNVs, to Member States, academic institutions and other potential partners. Two

information sessions with the participation of the United Nations Volunteers partners were organized for the attention of the field offices.

Strategic Aim 4: Attain better results and impact

- Safe and healthy work environment.
- Positive and constructive staff-supervisor relationships.
- Support career development.

UNESCO strengthened its enabling environment by advancing staff wellbeing, occupational health, learning and career development. Efforts focused on building a healthier, more capable workforce while reinforcing systems that support sustained organizational performance and impact.

Highlights include:

- UNESCO delivered a **mental health and well-being strategy** in 2025, enabled by the temporary loan from the United Nations Secretariat of a project manager. The second United Nations mental health and well-being (MHWB) scorecard shows a major performance increase, with compliant indicators rising from 15% to 85%, positioning UNESCO as a visible contributor within the United Nations system. A strengthened support system for MHWB was established, embedding wellbeing into organizational practices through monthly webinars, a dedicated intranet platform and the expansion of counselling services from high-risk duty stations to all personnel. Draft frameworks were developed for periodic medical examinations, reasonable accommodation, and return-to-work after extended sick leave. The consultation and approval processes have been deferred, subject to a resource and budget estimation and prioritization linked to their rollout and implementation. The **Occupational Health Service (OHS)** advanced its transformation from reactive care to a prevention-focused model strengthening workforce health monitoring, ergonomic interventions, emergency-response readiness and preventative health upskilling. Core services were maintained despite resource constraints that limited progress on psychosocial risk-management and occupational-safety expansion. Sustaining momentum on the implementation of UNESCO's mental health and well-being strategy will be challenging due to lack of a dedicated expert resource in MHWB.
- Organizational capability was strengthened through an expanded suite of **learning and development initiatives**, including digital learning, mentoring, soft-skills development, coaching, onboarding, language training, and sector-specific programmes AI skills development. Overall, nearly 2,950 individual trainings including language learning were completed. Implementation, however, of the 360-degree feedback initiative was slightly delayed due to the responsible management actions. This being said, more than 50% of the target of 200 managers/supervisors have undergone or are in the process of completing this initiative. Work on updating the learning policy, initially foreseen for dissemination end 2025, was initiated, with completion expected in 2026. Key components, including benchmarking against other United Nations agencies, have been finalized.
- **Career development support** was reinforced through targeted skills-building workshops, career coaching, new on-demand e-learning modules, and an expanded virtual career hub. The design phase for a structured people management programme for new and first-time managers aligned with the United Nations system leadership framework and UN80 is advancing, with rollout planned for 2026. Leadership and talent development will continue through participation in UN Women's leadership initiatives, United Nations Career Development Week, and expanded peer-learning formats. The induction programme was broadened, and support for early-career professionals, including young professionals, JPOs and interns, was further expanded. A formal mentoring programme was implemented for latest cohort of the Young Professional Officers and Junior Professional Officers, complemented by a dedicated training week covering topics such as RBM, partnership development, resource mobilization, effective communication and risk-management.

- During 2025, **91 staff members changed functions**, of which 55% were promoted through competition and 45% moved at the same grade. Of the 91, 71% (65) were international professional staff of which 54% (35) changed duty stations. The majority (49%) were transferred between field offices, 34% from Headquarters to the field, and 17% from field to Headquarters. The fourth **geographical mobility exercise**, initially planned for Q4. 2025, was paused following the RMAs. Given the importance of mobility to staff members' career development, and further discussions with the staff associations, the review of the policy will be reinitiated as a priority with key stakeholders. Concurrently, UNESCO is participating in the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) HR Network Working Group on Interagency Mobility which is also encouraged in support of career development.

Section III: Priorities for 2026-2027 and beyond:

6. In light of HRM's 43 C/5 budget envelope, the full implementation of the HR Strategy as requested in [43 C/Resolution 85](#) will be challenging due to limited human and financial capacity. Certain activities highlighted in the annexed [roadmap](#) will have to be slowed down, reduced in scope or postponed due to budgetary constraints. This primarily affects programmes and initiatives such as recruitment and internal mobility, learning and development, mental health and wellbeing, HR support to the field, and policy reforms.

7. In line with the UNESCO80 Roadmap, HRM will adopt a phased and prioritized approach during 2026-2027 to ensure strategic, workforce alignment with mandate priorities and the evolving organizational design. A comprehensive review of operational requirements, available competencies and policy frameworks – informed inter alia by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) review of United Nations recruitment policies and practices and UNESCO's management and administration will guide the progressive reallocation and, where necessary, reprofiling of posts toward mission-critical functions. This process will strengthen institutional efficiency, coherence and productivity, while reinforcing integrity safeguards, merit-based recruitment, equitable geographical distribution, gender balance – including at senior leadership levels – and staff well-being

8. The outcomes of these reviews, together with pending policy assessments – notably the review of the flexible working arrangements policy – will inform the development of a renewed or transitional HR strategy for 2028 and beyond. Preliminary consultations with key stakeholders (Member States, senior management, staff and managers, staff associations, Young UNESCO and other community groups) will begin later in 2026, with a view to submitting preliminary proposals to the Executive Board at its 226th session (2027 spring session). This work will be closely aligned with the preliminary planning stages of the next UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy (C/4) for 2030 and beyond.

9. Since taking office in November 2025, the Director-General has underscored the importance of open communication and an inclusive, ethical workplace, reaffirming his commitment to equitable geographical representation, gender balance and merit-based, transparent recruitment and career development, all of which are core pillars of the HR Strategy. HRM will continue to work closely with key stakeholders, particularly the staff associations, whose engagement remains essential to sustaining progress and delivering UNESCO's mandate.

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 43 C/Resolution 71,
2. Having examined document 224 EX/5.IV.A,

3. Takes note of the progress achieved in implementing the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027 and encourages continued efforts, noting that some initiatives outlined in the road map for 2026-2027 may have to be slowed down, reduced in scope or postponed depending on the available funding and resources;
4. Requests the Director-General to submit to it at its 226th session the 2026 annual report on implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027, and to present to it an outline of proposals for a new or bridged human resources strategy for 2028 and beyond.

ANNEX I

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR 2023-2027: ROADMAP FOR IMPLEMENTATION

SCORES:		Achieved	On Track/Moving forward	Not yet achieved	Future phase	43 C/5 budget	Status as at 31 December 2025															
ACTION	TARGET	2023	2024				2025				2026				2027							
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4				
STRATEGIC AIM 1: Attract and retain talent and expertise																						
AIM 1 - Key Objective 1. Develop a talented & qualified workforce that can deliver the UNESCO mandate effectively.																						
1. Systematic workforce planning with Sectors	T.1: Workforce planning guidelines issued and communicated to Sectors & Field Offices.																					
	T.2: HR Plans for Programme & Support Sectors including PAX (Field Coordination) in place (C/5 preparation).																					
2. Deliver an effective recruitment and outreach strategy	T.1: Increase in % of applicants from non- and under-represented countries prescreened.																					
	T.2: 75% of all positions meeting the target timeline of 130 days.																					
	T.3: UNESCO Careers website available in at least one other official language.																					
3. Establish in-house talent pools including leadership pools	T.1: Talent pool/roster approach for Field Directors/Heads defined.																					
	T.2: Talent pool/roster approach for Field Directors/Heads implemented.																					
4. Develop 3 key/critical training programmes for upskilling the workforce	T.1: Minimum 2 soft skills programmes delivered per year.																					
	T.2: average of 80% satisfaction rating amongst participants successfully completing the programmes.																					
5. Update learning policy	T.1: Guidelines and updated Learning Policy communicated to Personnel.																					
	T.2: Target of 10% increase from respondents to 2024 Employee Engagement Survey expressing satisfaction with learning & development opportunities, as compared to 2021 survey.																					
	T.3: A further 10% increase from respondents to 2026 Employee Engagement Survey, as compared to 2024 survey.																					
6. Develop a comprehensive induction and on-boarding programme, consistent across the Organization	T.1: Induction Framework for all personnel in place.																					
	T.2: 80% of staff reporting satisfaction.																					
7. Introduce improvements in an employee's career experience: applying at UNESCO, joining the Organization, when moving within UNESCO, and upon separation.	T.1: Onboarding: 80 % of polled staff reporting a positive experience.																					
	T.2: Inboarding: 80 % of Staff satisfaction with handling of benefits and entitlements.																					
	T.3: Offboarding: 60 % of Staff completing the Exit Survey.																					
	T.4: 80 % of staff satisfied with offboarding experience.																					

ACTION	TARGET	20	2024				2025				2026				2027					
			2	3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
AIM 2 - Key Objective 2. Foster an Organizational culture that respects and enables inclusion, equity and diversity.																				
7. Develop an Action Plan on gender parity for all levels of staff;	T.1: Action Plan developed and implemented.						●													
	T.2: Detailed Annual report on gender parity.						●				●								●	
8. Ensure inclusion by critically reviewing/updating policies, procedures and processes for institutional biases;	T.1: Two policies/practices reviewed per year.						●				●								●	
	T.2: Updated policy on Employment of Persons with Disabilities issued and widely communicated.										●									
	T.3: Overall diversity charter developed.																			●
9. Identify and address barriers to effective participation/accessibility of targeted groups of staff in the work of UNESCO;	T.1: Diversity principles & unconscious bias trainings institutionalized.										●									
	T.2: At least 60% of personnel trained by end 2027.								●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	T.3: Revised internship programme implemented.						●													
	T.4: N° interns from non- and under-represented Member States increased by at least 10%.									●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	T.5: Guidelines on Reasonable Accommodation issued and widely communicated.											●								
10. Review, update, and mainstream the UNESCO Competency Framework, including the core values.	T.1: UNESCO Competency Framework developed and implemented (subject to the provision of resources).																			●

ACTION	TARGET	20	2024				2025				2026				2027				
			0	1	2	3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
																			3
AIM 3 - Key Objective 3. Enhanced HR Systems to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of HR processes.																			
11. Identify and implement digital solutions for HR processes in line with UNESCO's IT Strategy;	T.1: Harmonization of HR systems, applications and platforms and improved efficiency of HR processes.																		
12. Develop SOPs for common procedures and processes to ensure consistent application of regulations;	T.1: Mapping of HR SOPs, identification of improvements required and plan developed for updates. T.2: SOPs developed & finalized for each paper-based workflow moved to system.																		
13. Increased communication of HR policies and processes using digital solutions.	T.1: Target of 10% increase from respondents to 2024 Employee Engagement Survey expressing satisfaction that information is shared openly and honestly, and a further 10% increase in 2026 Survey.																		
	T.2: On-line info./sessions systematically implemented for each new or revised policy.																		
	T.3: Interactive/dynamic dashboards using data visualization software in place for stakeholders in line with business needs.																		
STRATEGIC AIM 4: Attain better results and impact																			
AIM 4 - Key Objective 1. Safe and Healthy work environment.																			
1. Develop and implement an employee wellbeing framework focusing on occupational health and safety and accountability including prevention measures to address key mental health risks;	T.1: UNESCO's overall Occupational Health & Safety Framework developed by 2026, including Mental Health component by 2025 in line with UN Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy.																		
	T.2: Target of 10% increase from respondents to 2024 Employee Engagement Survey expressing satisfaction on wellbeing, as compared to 2021 survey.																		
	T.3: A further 10% increase from respondents to 2026 Employee Engagement Survey, as compared to 2024 survey.																		
2. 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].	T.1: Framework & guidance for managers and staff developed and implemented.																		
	T.1: Workforce Health Monitoring Prg. & reporting mechanisms in place.																		

ACTION	TARGET	2023	2024				2025				2026				2027			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
AIM 4 - Key Objective 2. Positive and constructive staff-supervisor relationships.																		
3. Strengthen supervisors' management skills with a focus on managing remote/agile teams;	T.1: Increased number of supervisors participating in management training.		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	T.2: Target of 70% of managers supervising at least three staff members participating by end 2026.																	
4. Expand 360-degree assessment and feedback for managers and implement relevant training (e.g. conflict mgmt.) based on feedback (2023);	T.1: 200 supervisors participating by end 2025.																	
	T.2: Action plans included in Programme by 2026.																	
	T.3: 360° approach reviewed for potential integration in performance management process.																	
5. Proactive support to managers and personnel, as and when necessary [mediation, early prevention/ conflict management];	T.1: Increase in N° of managers participating in conflict management training workshops.		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	T.2: Target of 10% increase from respondents to 2024 Employee Engagement Survey feel their managers deal effectively with conflict, as compared to 2021 survey.			●														
	T.3: A further 10% increase from respondents to 2026 Employee Engagement Survey, as compared to 2024 survey.																	
6. Develop Code of Conduct for UNESCO staff [Ethics Office: lead].	T.1: Code of Conduct developed (2023) and proactively communicated.	●																

ACTION	TARGET	20	2024				2025				2026				2027			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
AIM 4 - Key Objective 3. Support career development.																		
7. Training not just for the job you have but for the job you want!	T.1: Guidelines and updated Learning Policy communicated to Personnel.																	
	T.2: Target of 10% increase from respondents to 2024 Employee Engagement Survey expressing satisfaction with learning & development opportunities, as compared to 2021 survey.																	
	T.3: A further 10% increase from respondents to 2026 Employee Engagement Survey, as compared to 2024 survey.																	
8. Develop an assessment and development process to ensure a rapid and inclusive identification of Heads of Field Offices, with emphasis on people mgmt. skills;	T.1: Assessment centre approach designed, deployed and evaluated, subject to resources.																	
9. Refine the Functional Mobility Programme based on lessons learned from the Pilot (2022/23);	T.1: Functional mobility programme reviewed & revised to make it fit-for-purpose.																	
10. Further improve the Geographical Mobility Programme vis-à-vis candidate experience/feedback (2023/2024);	T.1: Geographical Mobility Programme 2023/2024 reviewed and enhanced based on experience/feedback.																	
	T.2: Increase in % of geographic moves from staff due to participate in the mobility programme.																	
	T.3: Decrease in the % of IP staff having exceeded their Standard Duration of Assignment (SDA).																	
11. Provide career development advice and support service to managers and employees;	T.1: Guidelines (STA) communicated to Sectors & Field Offices.																	
	T.2: Increased number of STAs facilitated per biennium, with particular focus on locally recruited staff (all categories), subject to funding.																	
	T.3: Annual reporting to Executive Board on N° of internal vs. external appointments.																	
	T.1: Target of 10% increase from respondents to 2024 Employee Engagement Survey expressing satisfaction with available support to acquire skills and knowledge for career development, as compared to 2021 survey.																	
	T.2: A further 10% increase from respondents to 2026 Employee Engagement Survey, as compared to 2024 survey.																	
12. Develop Career Development Plan for Junior Professional Officers (JPOs), Young Professionals (YPs) and National Professional Officers (NPOs).	T.1: Development and implementation of the Framework.																	
	T.2: Three career support and/or learning & development opportunities proposed per year.																	

UNESCO WORKFORCE AT A GLANCE - December 2025

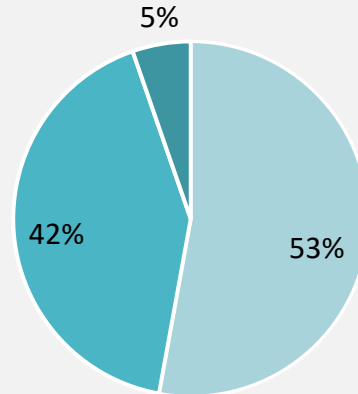
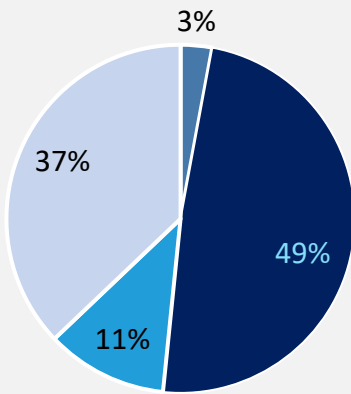
5189 PERSONNEL AT UNESCO

2571 Staff Members
50% of total workforce

2618 Affiliate Personnel
50% of total workforce

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

Affiliate Workforce: Consultants, Service Contracts, Short-Term contracts for freelance interpreters and translators, Loans, Short-term contracts, Stand-By-Personnel, UNV & Sponsored Trainees.



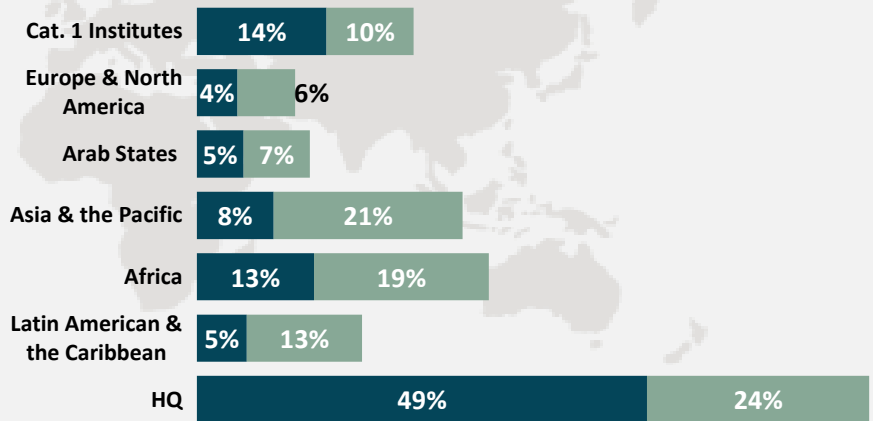
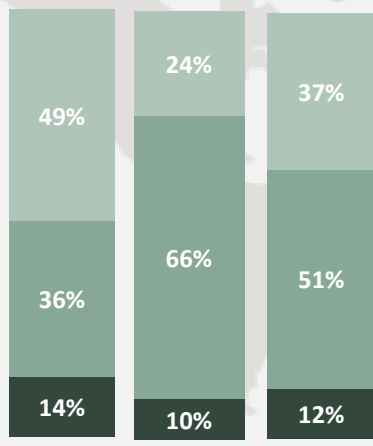
- Director & above level Staff (D+) : 75
- International Professional Staff (P) : 1252
- National Professional Officers (NPO) : 290
- General Service Staff (GS) : 954

- Consultants: 1384
- Service Contracts: 1095
- Loans, Stand-By-Personnel, Short-Term Contracts, UN Volunteers & Sponsored Trainees: 139

WORLDWIDE PRESENCE

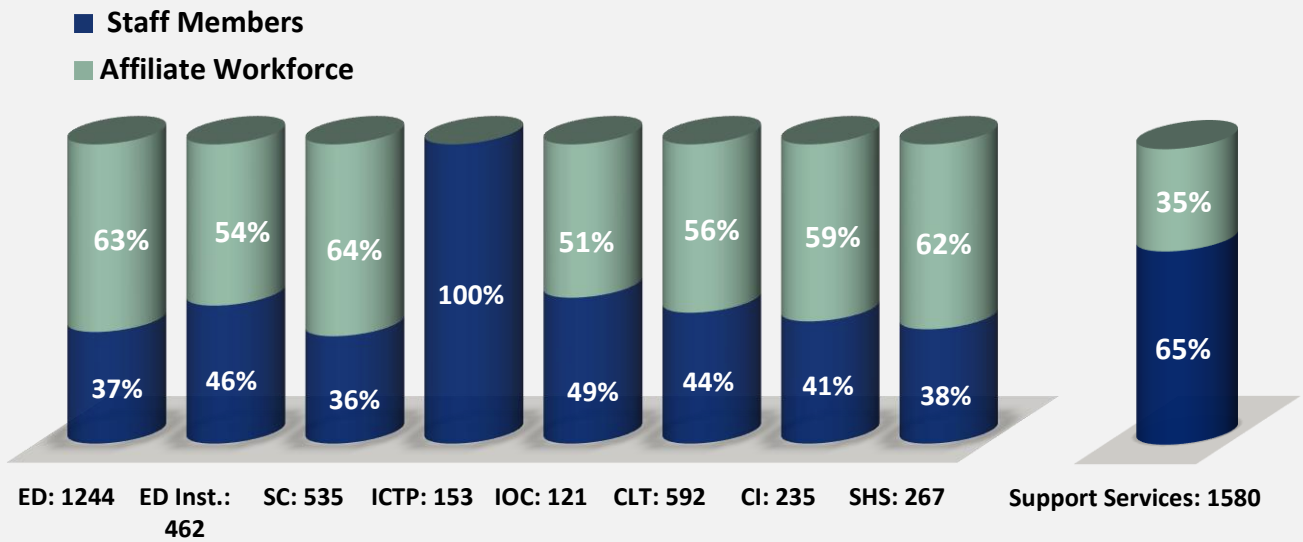
- HQ
- Field Offices
- Cat. 1 Institutes

- Staff Members
- Affiliate Workforce

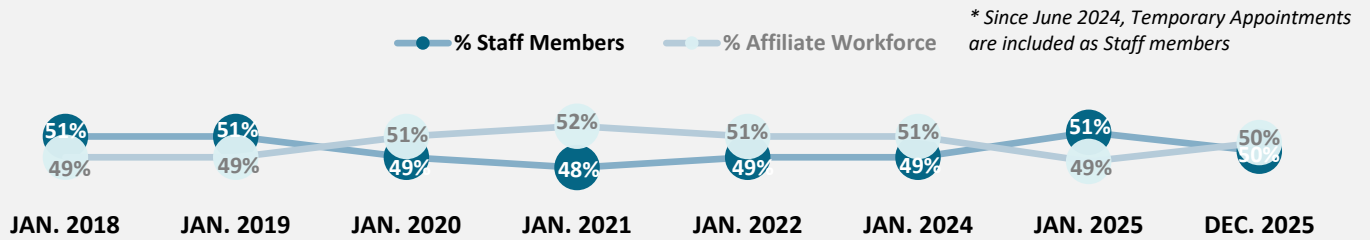


Staff Members Affiliate Personnel TOTAL

WORKFORCE BY SECTOR*



EVOLUTION OF THE WORKFORCE SINCE JANUARY 2018*

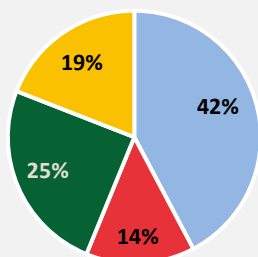


DIVERSITY

2571 STAFF MEMBERS FROM 168 NATIONALITIES

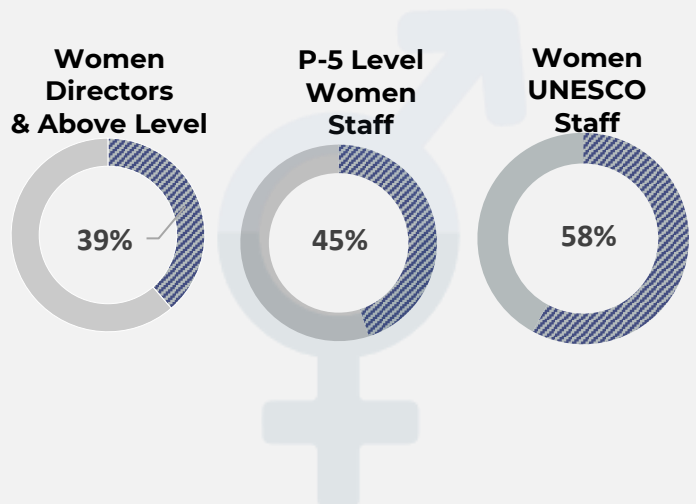
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

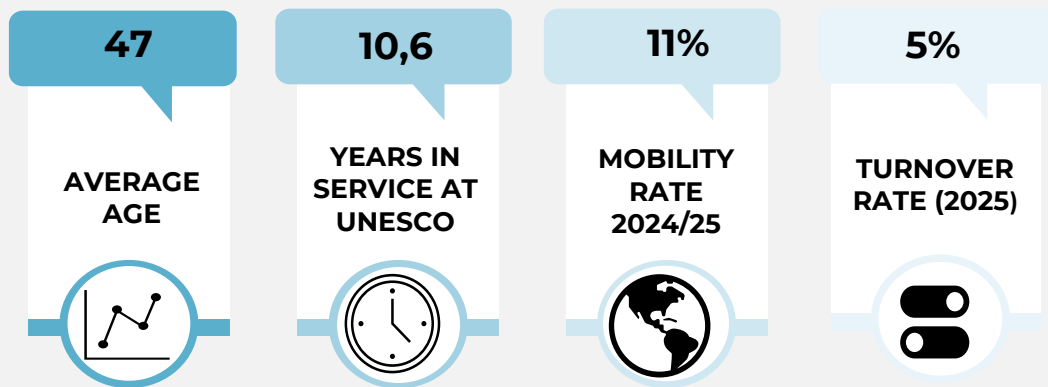
194 Member States of which **81%** are represented [Geographical Professional posts only]



- Normally represented (82 Member States)
- Over-represented (27 Member States)
- Under-represented (48 Member States)
- Non-represented (37 Member States)

GENDER PARITY





FUNDING SOURCE

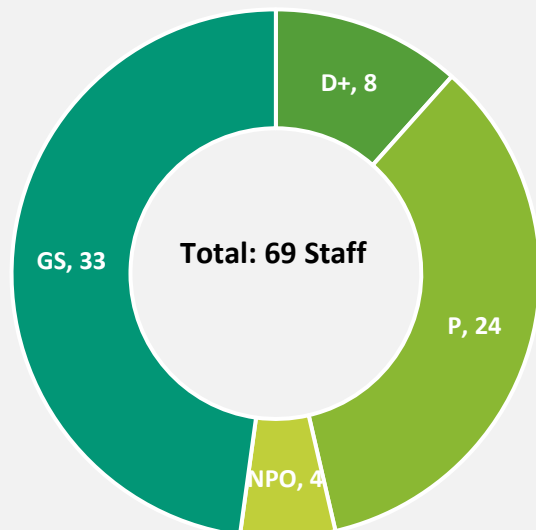
1576 Staff on Regular Budget



995 Staff on Voluntary Funding

ANTICIPATED RETIREMENTS OF STAFF ON ESTABLISHED POSTS BETWEEN 2026 & 2027

- Director & above level Staff (D+): 8, 11%
- International Professional Staff (P): 24, 35%
- National Professional Officers (NPO): 4, 6%
- General Service Staff (GS): 33, 48%



For more detailed information, please refer to the [Key Data on UNESCO Personnel](#).

To access the [digital HR Dashboard](#), please click here.