



**unesco**

United Nations  
Educational, Scientific  
and Cultural Organization

**217 EX/4.IV.C Add.**

**Executive Board**

Two hundred and seventeenth session

PARIS, 4 October 2023

Original: English

Item 4 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**

**ADDENDUM**

**COMMENTS BY THE UNESCO STAFF UNION (STU)**

**SUMMARY**

**C. Human Resources Management Strategy 2023-2027**

Pursuant to Item 9.2.E.7 of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, the UNESCO Staff Union (STU) submits its comments on the report by the Director-General.



Job: 202303232

## A. General considerations

1. The STU welcomes the new Human Resources Management Strategy for 2023-2027, acknowledging the efforts made to take into consideration the findings of the Division of Internal Oversight Services' evaluation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2017-2022, as well as the efforts in collecting inputs through an extended consultation of all concerned stakeholders, to which STU participated with a constructive and proactive spirit. Nevertheless, STU regrets the lack of in-depth consultation, follow-up and feedback on the proposals put forward by some of the stakeholders, such as Young UNESCO.

2. STU wishes to reiterate its deep concern that the implementation of this ambitious strategy will depend to a large extent on the financial and human resources made available for this purpose to HRM itself, which, in a context of constant contraction of resources available to the Organization (in real terms), could lead to an exercise that is likely to remain a dead letter, generating more frustration than improvement in staff well-being and performance. Accompanying similar continuous transformation processes (including the Field Reform), providing adequate coaching, training and capacity building opportunities, developing and implementing modern digital HR solutions and systems, requires appropriate resources that today do not exist.

3. STU welcomes the affirmed principle of the proposed draft HR Strategy for 2023-2027 to strengthen the role of human resources management in ensuring transparency and compliance with rules and regulations of recruitment and continue to enhance the internal justice system.

4. In this respect, STU notes with concern the limits of the current mechanism for ensuring compliance with the staff regulations, rules and administrative provisions in force, with respect to the recruitment processes. In particular, the STU regrets that the recommendations of the Appointment Review Board are non-binding in case of non-compliance with the rules, because its recommendations are of an advisory nature only.

## B. Specific Comments

### A Strategy for the entire workforce

5. STU appreciates that the new HRM Strategy intends to pay particular attention to the new reality of UNESCO's workforce, which is composed of more than 51% of "affiliate personnel", *"ensuring 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"*.

6. STU appreciates the efforts which have been spent already to improve contracting arrangements for the affiliate personnel, but still deplores the confusion which still lies in terms of effective rights and duties for the affiliate personnel who, too often and in the field in particular, do not just complement capacities and functions of the regular staff but cover mission-critical functions related to both administration and programme implementation, as testified in particular when these contracting arrangements lose their temporary nature and are de-facto maintained in the long run.

7. STU is looking forward to continuing its dialogue and collaboration with the Administration to achieve further improvement of the work conditions for our affiliate colleagues, in particular service contract holders in the field, who are in urgent need of adequate social security and healthcare coverage. In this regard, STU welcomes the efforts of the Organization in exploring the provision of a global medical scheme for field-based service contract holders.

8. STU also asks that better and clearer information be provided to these affiliates, in particular for those in the field, concerning their effective rights and duties as well as their career perspective, compared to those of UNESCO regular staff. These are not the same, nor are their expectations or career prospects at UNESCO. While implementing this new strategy, particular attention should be

paid to the training and monitoring of managers in the field in this respect, and to providing concrete career support opportunities to affiliates. If, as mentioned in the IOS report on the HR Strategy 2017-2022, such opportunities are still awaited by fixed-term staff, it is rather unclear how the whole UNESCO workforce needs will be addressed under the new HR Strategy for 2023-2027.

### ***A Strategy that better supports field operations***

9. Better support to field operations from a HRM point of view should be conducted in line with the reorganization of the field network as presented in document 217 EX/4.III. Regrettably, once again, major structural changes are conditioned to limited available financial resources, in so undermining the real strategic transformation of UNESCO and the move to a more field-centered approach. The need to improve the sound administrative and financial management of UNESCO's field offices cannot be addressed only with the creation of very few additional posts as foreseen in the 42 C/5. The STU welcomes this proposal, considering it to be just an initial step, and underlines the urgent need for major efforts and tailored capacity building to address structural weaknesses in most of our field offices.

10. The transformation under course will also require an appropriate level of training and coaching of managers and programme officers, whose mandate and functions will radically evolve in many cases (from serving a region to serving a limited number of countries, from delivering a particular project/programme to being responsible for an entire sector of activity, and vice-versa). Adequate resources will have to be identified also for supporting a process which could be seen as a kind of functional mobility.

11. For a number of colleagues, this transformation will also imply geographical displacements and, in this respect, STU would like to express the wish that the next geographical mobility exercise could serve this field reform process. The STU recognizes that the second round of geographical mobility, conducted in 2021/2022, improved compared to the previous cycle. However, mobility cycles still provide very limited opportunities for those who have reached their SDAs, particularly in the field, where too often those who really should be moving are left in place for long periods of time. It remains difficult to move from the field to Headquarters, with the result that Headquarters staff fear what is perceived as a one-way movement to the field. This circle needs to be broken once and for all: geographical mobility is a condition of United Nations service, but planning and predictability of life is a condition of human well-being. HRM should ensure that SDAs are respected in all duty stations so that UNESCO staff members and their families can plan and organize their professional and personal lives accordingly. In this regard, STU regrets once again that geographical mobility (AIM 4, Key Objective III) is not directly linked to sectors' workforce planning (AIM 1, Key Objective I), which would allow staff and sectors to deploy the skills and competencies necessary for UNESCO to fulfil its mandate.

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

12. STU salutes progress made as regards gender parity and ethical commitments and standards of conducts. However, UNESCO's glass ceiling for women has been located at P-4 level for several years and STU does not see any significant progress in this regard. There is still a low percentage of women who make it to P-5 and above levels. HRM strategies so far are not proving successful enough and a more proactive approach would be needed, such as ensuring that this priority is pushed forward in practice during recruitment processes.

13. STU welcomes the commitment of the Organization to fostering diversity and inclusion and is ready to work with the Administration in this sense. However, it would be important to identify as of now some concrete interventions to translate this commitment into real action, even despite very limited financial means. Initiatives involving for instance young as well as LGBTIQ+ colleagues already exist at UNESCO, and this can represent a valid starting point to further reflect collectively on effective ways to uphold these core principles of our Organization.

14. STU welcomes the statement concerning the enhancement of the internal justice system and will be pleased to work with the Administration to decrease the number of cases pending before the Appeals Board. At the same time, STU notes with deep concern that there is a lot to improve to ensure that the internal justice system is in line with the principles of a fair process. As an example, in the hearings of the Appeals Board the staff is *de-facto* denied the support of a lawyer (as no person outside the Organization is allowed to attend such meeting), while the Administration defends itself with the support of a team of internal lawyers.

***An ambition requiring investment***

15. STU fully adheres to the stated guiding component that “*An ambition require[s] investment*”. Welcoming the efforts of the Administration to develop a fair and inclusive paid internship programme, the STU adheres to this call by our young colleagues hereabove to put in place transitional measures without delay.

16. At the same time, STU expresses its concern about the emphasis and budget devoted to the continuous modernization of the Organization's human resources systems, with little visible results, as also recognized by the IOS evaluation of the previous human resources strategy. Rather than continuing to acquire expensive software, more resources could be allocated to providing staff with access to real learning opportunities leading to professional and career development, making or keeping their profiles competitive with those of external candidates.

***Achieving Aim 1 – Key Objective I: Developing a talented and qualified workforce that can deliver the UNESCO mandate effectively***

17. STU strongly agrees that UNESCO can only fulfil its mandate if it has a skilled and highly performing workforce worldwide. Career development opportunities are essential to motivate UNESCO staff, which is why an interesting initiative could indeed be the establishment of internal talent pools, including leaders, to accompany colleagues in their career progression and in the exercise of new roles and functions. This should result in a significant increase in the recruitment of internal candidates, compared to that of external ones.

18. As also pointed out in paragraphs 9 and 10 above, lifelong learning and professional training are necessary to achieve such a goal, and this cannot be limited to online resources primarily in the areas of languages, administration, security or human resource management. In a specialized agency like UNESCO, with such a wide mandate, a qualified and performing workforce also needs to update its knowledge in more programmatic areas, to remain competitive and motivated.

***Achieving Aim 1 – Key Objective II: Promote an organizational culture of accountability.***

19. STU has been calling on several occasions for a strengthened culture of accountability for managers. Giving UNESCO's personnel the possibility to assess the performance of supervisors in people management is crucial for improving the overall performance and accountability culture of the Organization. STU recognizes that a second and more extended phase of the 360°Feedback programme could contribute to that objective, on the condition that transparency and objectivity would be guaranteed in the process of selecting those colleagues, in particular supervisees, who would participate in such an exercise.

20. STU agrees on the need to identify tools and ways for supervisors to manage underperformance and conflicts on one hand, but also to acknowledge high performances over expectations so as for staff to be fully committed and motivated. More generally, supervisors should be encouraged and equipped to take care of career development and growth.

***Achieving Aim 3 – Key Objective I: Improve the agility and flexibility of the Organization.***

21. STU calls upon the Administration to continue to effectively implement measures to make UNESCO a more flexible and family-friendly Organization, crucial for the well-being of staff. This

should be ensured at Headquarters, but particular attention should also be given to colleagues in the field, especially in the framework of geographical mobility, where HRM should do its best to ensure a smooth movement of staff but also of their families, for instance in accompanying partners in finding job opportunities or children in schooling and adapting to a new environment.

***Achieving Aim 4 – Key Objective I: Safe and healthy work environment.***

22. STU regrets that the results of the United Nations-wide health survey conducted by the JIU in 2022 came a little bit too late to be formally adopted as a baseline on which to build the new human resources management strategy. This survey provides up-to-date, detailed and statistically significant data on the mental and physical health of UNESCO staff, as well as comparisons with other United Nations agencies, showing that UNESCO is not rating high in this respect, having almost 40% of its staff declaring to be stressed at work.

23. The JIU issued in 2023 its report on the “***Review of mental health and well-being policies and practices in United Nations system organizations***” which contains important recommendations that STU would be more than happy to review with HRM and the Administration. In this view, STU would like to recommend the establishment of a working group (within the framework of the UNESCO Advisory Committee on Health and Safety at Work?), to address the many issues that this survey highlights and to explore together possible solutions to their root causes and, thus, further guide the implementation and updating of the HRM strategy itself.

***Achieving Aim 4 – Key Objective II: Positive and constructive staff-supervisors’ relationships.***

24. STU is concerned that the present strategy does not mention any grievance or appeal mechanisms, but rather focuses on the role of managers in developing a culture of accountability and calls on action to “*Equip supervisors to manage underperformance and conflicts*”. In the view to build a “*positive and constructive staff-supervisor relationships*”, conflict prevention and resolution seem to be considered and managed only as a top-down issue. When it comes to performance evaluation, all staff at Headquarters and in the field should be granted the same rights to a fair and balanced review, guaranteeing also to colleagues in the field the right to involve a second-level reviewer when their direct supervisor is the Head/Director of the Office.

25. STU will continue to monitor the implementation of the new strategy in this regard, to ensure that current procedures provide equal rights and tools to all staff, at Headquarters and in the field, when it comes to performance assessment, mediation, early prevention and conflict management. A safe and healthy environment also stems from being sure that, should it be necessary, managers and staff will be held accountable for their actions.

26. In this regard, STU expresses its appreciation to the Ethics Advisor and her team for their work on the new Handbook for Ethical Conduct, to which it has contributed. STU stands ready to cooperate with the Ethics Advisors for its dissemination and use as a reference in trainings.

***Achieving Aim 4 – Key Objective III: Support career development***

27. Functional and geographical mobility programmes are key to address some weaknesses of the Organization such as the high average time-in-post or important number of staff having exceeded their Standard Duration of Assignment (SDA) which are chronic administrative issues for UNESCO. The idea of establishing a New Leadership Development Programme is an encouraging one, providing career perspectives and motivation to staff, that STU wants to encourage. Supporting the rapid deployment of skilled human resources for programme implementation, Short-Term Assignments (STA) can also represent a good way to prepare staff for mobility, giving them the possibility to experience new tasks and functions and, by doing so, to better orient their career decisions. However, STAs should be granted only if key principles, such as effectiveness, fairness and transparency can be applied and ensured.

**Annex III**

28. STU welcomes the statement related to the settlement of disputes of non-staff members through mediation, negotiation, and arbitration. However, it wishes to stress that mediation and negotiation are non-legally binding. Only arbitration is legally binding. To accelerate the arbitration, STU requests the Administration to reinforce the secretariat of the Appeals Board with a view to streamlining consideration of cases submitted for arbitration.

29. STU highlights that the resolution of disputes involving non-staff members, by their intrinsic temporary nature, would most likely happen after their separation from the Organization.

**C. CONCLUSION**

30. With this Addendum, STU would like to draw the attention of the Member States and the Administration to several crucial areas that will require careful consideration and ongoing effort. As demonstrated over the past year, STU remains dedicated to working collaboratively and constructively with the administration for an effective implementation of the new Human Resources Strategy for 2022-2027 ensuring that personnel rights are respected and protected. We believe that by continuing to focus on these important issues, we can create a more equitable and productive workplace for everyone involved, staff and affiliates.