



unesco

United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

219 EX/5.III.A Add.2

Executive Board

Two hundred and nineteenth session

Paris, 11 March 2024

Original: English

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

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

PART III

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

ADDENDUM 2

COMMENTS BY THE UNESCO STAFF UNION (STU)

A. Human Resources Strategy for 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: 202400384

A. General considerations

1. STU takes note of the document 219 EX/5.III.A including a report on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027 and a timetable for its implementation during the coming four years. Before commenting on this document in more detail, STU invites Member States to take into consideration the detailed comments on the Human Resources Management Strategy 2023-2027 already submitted to their attention at the 42nd session of the General Conference in document [42 C/49 Add.2](#), which are still valid when considering this first stage of implementation of the Strategy.

2. Whereas statistics published by HRM in January 2023 were showing 2,319 staff (49% of total headcount) and 2,438 affiliate staff (51% of total headcount), statistics published in June 2023 were showing rapid changes: in just 6 months, staff members remained stable at 2,311 (42% of total headcount) while affiliated staff significantly increased to 3,154 (58% of total headcount). STU remains very alarmed by such rapid change, which we believe will continue to move in this direction. STU wishes to reiterate its call for an in-depth examination of the impact of such a transformation on the future and functioning of our Organization as a specialized agency, on the inequalities between the different contractual arrangements, and on the very meaning of belonging to the international civil service in such a changing context. Savings and flexibility cannot be the only criteria guiding us through this complex transformation, and STU is ready to contribute proactively to any in-depth reflection on this issue.

3. STU will also continue to stigmatize the fact that “in the hearings of the Appeals Board, staff is de-facto denied the support of a lawyer (as no person outside the Organization is allowed to attend such meetings), while the administration defends itself with the support of a team of internal lawyers”, and reiterates its call for a drastic change in this regard, strongly supported in this by the findings and recommendations contained in a recent report of the Joint Investigation Unit of the United Nations on its “Review of the internal pre-tribunal-stage appeal mechanisms available to staff of the United Nations system organizations” ([JIU/REP/2023/2](#)). This report recognizes that “Adjustments to the regulatory frameworks of organizations that continue to impose restrictions on the ability of their staff to choose legal counsel freely and without restriction are overdue” and, therefore, recommends (Recommendation 7) that “The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should, by the end of 2025, adjust the regulatory frameworks of their organizations and remove all restrictions regarding legal representation of their staff in internal justice processes, with the aim of allowing staff to choose their legal counsel freely and without restriction”.

4. Therefore, STU requests that the regulations concerning the Appeal Board be modified as soon as possible in order to include a norm that allows staff members to benefit from qualified legal assistance. Such an adjustment would not only represent an opportunity to finally make the internal justice system more equitable and fair, but would also contribute to increasing efficiency while reducing costs. STU strongly believes that such improvement would also contribute to achieving Aim 1 – Key Objective II of the HRM Strategy for 2023-2027, aiming at promoting an organizational culture of accountability.

B. Specific Comments

AIM 1: ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT AND EXPERTISE

5. STU welcomes HRM’s efforts to attract more applicants from unrepresented and under-represented countries, resulting in a 31% increase in applicants from these countries. However, STU would like to stress that the relevance of this statement is highly dependent on the number of additional applications we have received in 2023 compared to 2022. For STU, the most relevant statistics concern the proportion of these applicants who were ultimately selected and hired. In this regard, STU is happy to note that 48% of external appointments to geographical posts in 2022-2023 were from non- and under-represented Member States, resulting in a decrease in the number of

under-represented countries from 65 to 50 over the course of the last biennium. At the same time, this underlines once more the necessity to invest in career development for internal staff.

6. STU notes with interest that the existing induction sessions have been complemented by an *“inclusive integration initiative to understand the needs of newly recruited staff”*, a rather vague statement from which it is difficult to understand what the expected outcomes would be in terms of the impact of these activities on the degree of retention of newly recruited talent or on the quality of their integration into UNESCO staff.

7. While HRM’s work seems to be *“focused on increasing outreach activities to attract a large and diverse pool of qualified candidates, facilitating workforce planning with sectors, enhancing induction and on-boarding experience for new hires, and promoting a culture of accountability and performance”*, STU wishes to emphasize once again that the expectations placed on the current workforce remain disproportionate, with more than half of staff employed on temporary or even insecure contracts. Staffing and HR planning are a good thing, but they do not in themselves guarantee that talents will not only be retained, but also put in a position to express themselves to the best of their ability. **Career development** remains an issue for all, particularly locally recruited staff, who are often denied this opportunity despite increasing responsibilities and expectations. Too many temporary contract holders, who have been working with UNESCO for many years, are waiting in vain for their situation to be regularized.

8. In this connection, STU appreciates the efforts spent to design and develop a **Performance Management Curriculum** *“for supervisors to guide, support, and enhance their skills to bring consistency in applying performance management within the Organization”*, and that a similar curriculum was made available to all staff as well. While reaching some 500 participants in 2023 is certainly a positive result which we believe has contributed to the deployment at all levels of a genuine human resources management culture, STU still considers that a key to success lies in **recruitment processes** which pay more attention to candidates’ human resources managerial skills for all recruitment at grade P-4 and above. The STU invites the Sectors and the Administration, HRM in particular, to better verify these skills and abilities during all recruitment and to align the recruitment processes with best practices within the United Nations and other international organizations.

9. **Appointments Review Boards** (ARBs) are an essential tool for guaranteeing the objectivity and transparency of recruitment processes, and STU has already expressed its concerns about the operation of ARBs on several occasions. How can an ARB fulfil its function if, after finding irregularities, it can only give an opinion, which is often ignored, even when the basic rules on fair consideration of internal candidates, geographical representation or gender balance are not respected? In the recent past, STU has brought to the attention of the Administration a significant number of systemic dysfunctions that relate to confidentiality, limited access to essential files, lack of communication of final decisions and lack of transparency on the overall impact of ARB recommendations. Since the ARBs were introduced in 2017 on a trial basis, and in light of the numerous issues which emerged in the first six years of implementation, STU requests the Administration to launch an evaluation of the ARB mechanism before the 220th session of the Executive Board.

10. **Performance appraisal** continues to be a process that is easily manipulated or used in a superficial way, to cover up the shortcomings of some managers as well as to undermine some colleagues whom we would like to keep away from certain posts or even from the Organization itself. Responsible supervisors should be held to account for poor performance management, as it has a direct impact on UNESCO’s ability to attract and retain talent and, more generally, on the working environment and our ability to deliver the programme.

11. **Geographical mobility** is another key instrument for career development and, given that the Human Resources Strategy foresees, among the actions planned under Key Objective 2, to *“Further improve the Geographical Mobility; Programme vis-à-vis candidate experience/feedback (2023/2024)”*, STU asks the Administration to establish a working group to review and update the

Geographical Mobility Policy before the 220th session of the Executive Board, in the light of the findings of our many interactions with staff affected by the current mobility exercise (2023-2024).

AIM 2: PROMOTE INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY BY ACHIEVING IN PARTICULAR GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND GENDER BALANCE

12. STU has actively contributed to the review of the **new Internship Policy** taking into account the JIU recommendations (JIU/REP/2018/1) and the practices of other United Nations organizations and is pleased to note that the new internship policy will apply from July 2024, allowing for a transition to indemnity-based internships, which STU itself will be happy to implement.

AIM 3: ADAPT FOR THE FUTURE

13. STU is closely and actively involved in the review of the **new Parental Leave policy** under preparation and wishes to encourage the Administration to make any possible efforts to avoid any further delay in its launching and implementation as we are entering the second year since its approval by the General Assembly. We strongly believe that this new policy will make a significant contribution to improving well-being and work-life balance and will help UNESCO to ensure greater equity and gender equality.

14. STU notes with regret that the Organization still lags behind other United Nations agencies with respect to **Flexible Working Arrangements**. The latest report from the Joint Inspection Unit on “**Flexible working arrangements in United Nations system organizations**” ([JIU/REP/2023/6](#)), indicates how the Organization has among the most restrictive policies with respect to number of working days per week of telework (2 days only). Even more concerning is the fact that, according to JIU, “Except for UNESCO, all the participating organizations allow teleworking outside the duty station”. The situation does not improve when it comes to compressed work schedule: the JIU report lists at least 17 organizations that foresee this mechanism, which, as of today, and despite requests by staff associations, is not recognized by UNESCO. This is an astonishing difference, also taking into account that UNESCO staff works much more than the working hours set in the Staff Rule 101.3, with a staggering 68% of staff that work more than what their contract foresees. In light of the above, STU requests the Administration to establish, before the 220th session of the Executive Board, a task force, with the inclusion of the staff associations, to revise the FWA policy, in order to align UNESCO with the best practices of the United Nations system and with the recommendations of the JIU report JIU/REP/2023/6.

AIM 4: ATTAIN BETTER RESULTS AND IMPACT

15. STU has also played an active part in all meetings of the Board of Management of the Medical Benefits Fund (MBF), which led to an upward **revision of benefit reimbursement rates** and the introduction of new categories of reimbursable benefits relating to preventative measures, cancer screening or sexual and reproductive health (see Administrative Circular IC/HR/234 published on January 1, 2024).

16. However, STU notes with concern that, according to the JIU report on “**Review of mental health and well-being policies and practices in United Nations system organizations**” ([JIU/REP/2023/4](#)), UNESCO does not have a Policy or strategic statement defining the approach to mental health and well-being (Annex V of the report), nor a **mental health** action plan for the workplace (or equivalent). While STU acknowledges that the UNESCO HR Strategy 2023-2027 mentions mental health, our experience as a staff association leads us to stress that the Organization still has a long way to go to bring UNESCO in line with best practices in this area. With this in mind, STU requests the Administration to establish, before the 220th session of the Executive Board, a working group to examine the issue of mental health in the workplace, in order to ensure, in the medium term, full compliance with the recommendations of JIU/REP/2023/4 and full alignment with the *United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy for 2024 and beyond*, as well as with the *WHO/International Labour Organization (ILO) guidance note on mental health at work*. The

STU also requests the Administration to provide the result of the scorecard from the UN System Strategy for Mental Health and Wellbeing 2024 and Beyond.

17. STU notes with concern that the issue of **work-life balance** is given little or no attention. A good work-life balance promotes staff well-being. It can also contribute to achieving major organizational goals: stimulating employment and autonomy (especially among women); promoting child and youth development; and fostering gender equality. With rapid technological progress, the boundaries between work and private life are becoming blurred and the demands on workers have never been higher. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for employees to reconcile the conflicting demands of work and private life. The dramatic increase in women's participation in the labour market has often resulted in a "double burden" for women, i.e. paid and unpaid work. The [Declaration of Philadelphia](#) concerning the aims and objectives of the International Labour Organisation recognizes that "*all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity*" (Source: ILO).