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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM PROCESS

STRATEGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

ADDENDUM

SUMMARY

In conformity with Item 2805.7 of the UNESCO Administrative Manual, the UNESCO Staff Union (STU) submits its observations on this report by the Director-General.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. The "Integrated Policy on Recruitment, Rotation and Promotion" was issued on 29 September 2003 (Administrative Circular No. 2191). The results yielded by this policy in terms of rotation have been limited and today movements of staff between duty stations amount to a maximum of 45 a year on average.

UNESCO's rotation policy was evaluated by the External Auditor in document 179 EX/31 Part I and discussed in previous sessions of the Executive Board. Rotation then became mandatory by virtue of DG/Note/08/09 issued 31 March 2008 which indicated that staff representatives were to be consulted on modalities of implementation. The overall objective of such a revision exercise was to improve the policy and the mobility rate of UNESCO's international staff.

Between September 2008 and January 2009 staff representatives from STU and AIPU participated in at least four working meetings organized by HRM, as well as in a dozen sessions of the ACPP as observers.

In distilling its position on geographical mobility, STU has consulted colleagues and staff associations in a number of United Nations agencies who have already put into place a rotation policy, or are in the process of doing so. STU has also consulted UNESCO staff by means of a questionnaire-based survey, working groups and an open debate co-organized with AIPU involving both Headquarters and field colleagues.

The results of these consultations underscore the readiness of UNESCO's staff to move, provided that a clear and predictable mobility framework is put in place. They also reveal the diverse reality of UNESCO personnel which may require different mobility options if all international staff is to be given the chance of moving.

I.2   The new strategy on geographical mobility being proposed in document 181 EX/6 is of limited scope. It improves only for certain situations (such as establishing a time limit for assignments in hardship duty stations) **but, in STU's view, does not address the real issues that have undermined rotation as a coherent policy accepted by UNESCO staff thus far**.

The decision-making mechanism on rotation remains unchanged, despite being the central element for any mobility policy. **The strategy fails to establish a transparent and equitable selection mechanism based on a fair assessment of merit and competencies required for the positions.** It does not spell out clearly any accompanying measures that would boost mobility, nor does it project any scenarios and financial costs associated therewith. Overall, the strategy underscores a negative vision of mobility whereby staff may be obliged to move because of "organizational needs", rather than making of mobility an incentive for professional growth, career development and a better way to serve the Organization's objectives.

For all the above, STU considers that the proposed strategy does not address the problems of the 2003 Rotation policy, and thus will not fulfil its objective of improving staff mobility.

II. STU's POSITION ON GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY (ROTATION)

II.1   Since the creation of the United Nations system, staff have been recruited either at Headquarters or at field offices and moved from one duty station to another, on an ad hoc basis, without any real policies in place. As a matter of principle, internationally recruited civil servants can be expected to serve and/or be stationed in any duty station. In fact, in the vast majority (with some limited exceptions) of employment contracts signed by P-level staff across the United Nations system there is often a clause stipulating that they may be asked to serve in any function a recruiting organization feels is in its best interest for the effective implementation of its objectives and programme of work.

Thus, "rotation" can be said to exist since the creation of the United Nations system. However it is only in the last few years, as part of the major reform processes that are being implemented in the United Nations and its specialized agencies, that the notion of a "rotation policy" understood as the systematic movement of staff between duty stations is being developed.

In UNESCO's case, the "Integrated Policy on Recruitment, Rotation and Promotion" mentioned above was officially adopted on 2003, as requested by Member States.

Paragraph 88 of the Policy, states that "…rotation shall be voluntary for current staff members ... However, be mandatory for all current and newly recruited staff members appointed to a rotational post after the issuance of this Administrative Circular". Paragraph 89 states the "voluntary character" of the scheme for current staff members shall be reviewed after five years of its implementation".

This review was the subject of the Director-General's Blue Note of 31 March 2008, by which it was decided that "… rotation will be applicable to all international staff in UNESCO as from 1 October 2008".

The implementation of the rotation policy in practice has been quite problematic since its adoption in 2003 – despite the fact that, on paper, the policy seems to be generally positive and beneficial to all. This is the main issue and reason for STU's observations to document 181 EX/6 and, in a larger sense, the ongoing review of rotation at UNESCO, as often mentioned by Member States.

In fact, HRM (through a 2007 review) as well as the ACPP and the External Auditor (in his report to the 179th session of the Executive Board, 179 EX/36 Part I) have all admitted these shortcomings and that something was needed to correct them. **The main challenge today as it was back in 2003, is to ensure that actual practice clearly reflects any stated policy and that it is applied in a fair, equitable, organized and focused manner**.

STU reiterates that UNESCO staff is not against the concept of geographical mobility, as the broad consultations undertaken by STU can testify. But in order for any new or revised rotation policy to be workable and beneficial for both the Organization and staff, it must effectively address previous shortcomings and provide a clear structure to mobility within UNESCO.

II.2   Definitions of rotation and geographical mobility

The 2003 policy defined rotation (para. 85) as "the movement of staff members in the professional and higher categories from one duty station to another. Such movements may be at the same level through a transfer at equal grade, or through competitive appointment to a higher-graded post".

The new "Strategy for the Implementation of Geographic Mobility" (181 EX/6) redefines rotation as the geographic mobility of P-level international staff from one duty station to another – which then excludes lateral or intersectoral transfers between posts at the same duty station. In terms of its objectives and "basic principles" it states that rotation is "driven by organizational needs", is "mandatory and applicable" to all fixed-term Ps and Ds, and should be viewed as an integral part of career development for these categories of staff.

STU agrees with the new definition suggested by HRM of rotation as geographic mobility. However, and based on comments collected from staff members in the field and at Headquarters, STU is convinced that geographical mobility cannot work without enhanced functional mobility. STU understands functional mobility as movement/transfers between posts within one duty station. Encouraging lateral or intersectoral transfers as important for rotation purposes (ensuring availability of posts) but also for career development of staff. **Thus, functional mobility within the duty station should be an integral part of the revised rotation policy.**

According to the above definitions and, based on data presented by HRM and reproduced in the External Auditor's report, in the last three biennia (2002-2007) there were 253 geographic staff movements (Headquarters to field, field to field, field to Headquarters), approximately an average of 40 to 45 per year. The vast majority of these movements have been the result of competitive processes ("classic" recruitment), which begs the question as to **whether they can be attributed to a rotation policy or rather to a series of normal recruitment exercises**.

II. 3   Basic policy principles proposed by STU:

In an effort to better address the issues and problems involved in the application of UNESCO's rotation policy, STU has developed four overarching principles that should guide any action in this area and serve as a basis not only for the formulation of a policy or strategy but, more importantly, its implementation.

> **1.   Clear purpose, effectiveness and inter-operability**

Rotation is ultimately about placing the right people in the right jobs to effectively contribute to the implementation of the Organization's mandate. It is generally agreed that rotation is not an end in itself. A serious cost-benefit analysis of UNESCO's core mandate and the modalities of its programme delivery against the hypothesis of increased rotation of its staff should be carried out before embarking on a wide-scale rotation exercise. Compatibility with other policies such as programme and budget decentralization must be clearly established.

> **2.   Transparency and neutrality**

Transparency is central for the implementation of any rotation policy or geographic mobility strategy. Only when information is available to all and when decisions are taken in a transparent and neutral manner, can the outcomes be accepted and respected. The current practice of entirely decentralizing Human Resources Management to sectors results in opaque, fragmented and compartmentalized decisions – combined with a lack of funding and planning – would jeopardize the success of even a theoretically perfect rotation policy, as is evidenced by the failure of the 2003 attempt.

The gradual disappearance of generic P-grade post descriptions and their replacement by highly specialized and mutually impenetrable profiles in narrow domains of "science", "culture", "education", etc. has made it virtually impossible for staff to move between sectors and from the central services on the basis of merit and the assessment of competencies required for the job. This limits both their mobility options and the Administration's chances of finding a suitable person for another duty station position. A "**Mobility Review Committee**" – similar to ones established in other specialized agencies – would be the first step towards a more transparent and neutral management of the rotation process.

> **3.   Fairness, equality and non-discrimination**

Decisions on geographical mobility should not discriminate against any category of staff. This implies respecting gender equality and taking into account factors related to family situation (young children, working spouses, divorced couples, children with special needs, etc.) that may require special approaches to mobility and/or factors related to the development needs and career aspirations of staff. It is noteworthy in this regard that other United Nations agencies have recently resolved to "give greater weight and more attention to the needs and preferences of staff members than previously" and to "keep the disruptions for staff, their families and partners to a minimum."[1]

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[1]   UNAIDS Mobility policy. November 2008.

4.   Voluntary within Mandatory

The principle of volunteering should be maintained even within a mandatory scheme, through a priority/waiver mechanism. There will always be staff members who, for personal or professional reasons, would not wish to move to a different duty station at a given moment in time and those who, conversely, would be willing to move. To force the first group while neglecting the wish of the second only causes general frustration and is potentially penalizing for certain categories of staff and ultimately counterproductive.

II.4   Rotation cycle

Today, many of the modalities and phases spelled out in the 2003 rotation policy are not followed. In particular items 101 to 110 have never been implemented. For example, the provisions related to an advertisement of a list of posts that are due to become vacant and to which staff members wishing to "rotate" could apply by way of a demonstration of interest has never been established (see 179 EX/36 Part I). Current practice shows that posts are more often than not advertised on an ad hoc basis and a "normal" recruitment process is typically applied, often neglecting the requirement to first advertise internally before opening a post to external applicants.

The new Strategy proposed by HRM establishes four steps that go from (1) a mandatory "statement of interest" from staff, to (2) the preparation of biennial sectoral plans approved by the Director-General, to (3) an 18-month Vacancy Bulletin listing issued by HRM, and then (4) geographical moves implying promotion follow the normal recruitment policy. The Strategy does not really spell out what happens to the moves that do not imply promotion, namely equal-grade transfers. Is it to be assumed that such moves would take place within the sectors' decision-making structure, namely the ADGs and then the Director-General?

In STU's view, there is **a gap between steps 3 and 4 of the above-described cycle**. There should be a step prioritizing geographic mobility at equal grade, on a voluntary basis. This can be made possible through re-centralizing the management of the mobility process and de-mystifying post descriptions that have recently had a tendency to become narrower and more technical.

II.5   Conditions of geographical mobility

From STU's viewpoint, two elements must be put in place as part of the geographic mobility strategy: a centralized management system and clearly defined support measures.

(i)   Management of mobility

Following a mobility planning based on UNESCO sectors staffing pattern and needs, information must be gathered in a centralized manner so that vacant posts and transfer opportunities can be advertised to all staff and not only within specific sectors. This is the only way to ensure functional and intersectoral staff mobility.

Transparent and centralized information mechanisms should be followed by a decision-making mechanism concerning mobility that ensures a competitive process based on merit and on the fair assessment of competencies required for the position being made available. **STU remains convinced that only a neutral and transparent decision-making process that effectively matches demand with offer and assigns staff to vacancies in different duty stations, will open real opportunities for mobility for all internationally recruited staff.**

Along the lines of most recent United Nations policies, STU has extensively argued on the necessity to establish a Mobility Review Committee that would enter into play once field offices/sectors have shortlisted candidates. The Committee would review and enquire whether mobility criteria have been respected. STU has made several suggestions in this respect, which unfortunately have not been retained in the new geographical mobility strategy. The working model being proposed was a multi-partite structure, where staff unions and associations would have a

consultative status and the secretariat would be provided by HRM. The proposed Mobility Review Committee would review shortlisted staff applications to vacant posts, examine waivers and requests of extension, and make recommendations to the Director-General on this matter. Equal grade transfers may be *immediately* effective after the decision of the Director-General. Promotions would be validated by PAB.

(ii)   Support measures

STU's consultations with recently rotated staff members revealed a distinct concern that UNESCO staff receives considerably less support when moving from one duty station to another than staff from other United Nations agencies.

It is symptomatic that upon close examination of the section on **New Support Measures** of document 181 EX/6, only two out of the eight "measures" refer to something useful and concrete (a one-week pre-assignment mission and granting of additional steps/lump sums). The other six are either general references to a communication strategy (including a compilation of "country-specific information") and "appropriate counselling", or negative incentives stating that career development would be contingent on field assignments.

STU believes that, if UNESCO seriously wishes its rotation policy to succeed this time, **concrete mobility support and incentive measures should be adopted**.

Unless such measures are clearly spelled out in a policy document and incorporated into Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, any statement of good intentions would be no more than wishful thinking. The current mentoring scheme is a case in point: since it depends entirely on the availability and goodwill of field office or Headquarters staff, otherwise overloaded with all their regular work and responsibilities, there is absolutely no way of guaranteeing any tangible support for the newly rotated staff.

III.   CONCLUSION

STU has put forward a number of suggestions on support measures such as: (a) ensuring competitive and reliable relocation services either by developing agreements with United Nations support centres or hiring the services of a relocation company (to take care of finding accommodation, schools, processing paperwork, providing advice on security, doctors, car retailers, etc.); (b) facilitating spouse/partner employment by negotiating work permits in all countries where duty stations are located, joining the United Nations "Double career and staff mobility" programme, etc.; and (c) in cases where a staff member's rotation entails the spouse's/partner's loss of gainful employment, provision for reasonable compensation, at least during the first year.

Throughout the process of defining the new strategy on geographical mobility, STU has offered a number of suggestions and voiced staff issues and concerns. We have shared our views and provided HRM with the results of the staff survey and working groups on rotation.

STU has strongly insisted on the importance of a centralized management of the mandatory mobility scheme. STU has also actively pushed for innovative approaches to mobility options such as post swaps for limited periods of time, United Nations detachments, short term assignments to meet the needs of a diverse UNESCO workforce while maintaining the objectives of the strategy. We have also insisted on building the strategy around the notion of "voluntary within mandatory". Unfortunately, most of our proposals have not been reflected in the new strategy on geographical mobility, thus demonstrating the Administration's unwillingness to incorporate genuine staff concerns.

When designing staff policies, it would be desirable for, the Administration to view staff members not only in terms of their posts, but also in terms of their personal concerns and aspirations –

nurturing the Organization's most valuable resource. This involves more than just a merely administrative approach to staffing – it requires a true management of human resources of the Organization.

Staff representatives are well placed to voice staff concerns and interests and contribute to designing policies that are relevant and applicable. For this reason **STU remains unconvinced of the capacity of the new strategy on geographical mobility to redress the current situation**. Too many questions about costing, about actual functioning of the decision-making mechanism, about modalities of short-term assignments and a number of other issues remain simply unanswered.