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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 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: 2403158E

General comments

1. STU takes note of document 220 EX/5.IV.A containing updates on progress achieved on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027 and the revised roadmap for its implementation. STU invites Member States to take into consideration, in addition to the comments provided in this document, STU's detailed comments already submitted to their attention at the 42nd session of the General Conference in document 42 C/49 Add.2, and at the 219th session of the Executive Board, in document 219 EX/5.III.A Add.2.

2. STU welcomes the submission of the revised roadmap for the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027 and recognizes the Administration's efforts to involve the Staff Associations in the revision process. At the same time, STU notes that some of its proposals have not been taken into account in the version submitted in Annex I of document 220 EX/5.IV.A. Such proposals are reiterated below:

- Aim 1, Key Objective 1, Action 6: STU requested that staff associations be included in the onboarding process. Despite reassurances of DIR/HRM, such element is not reflected in the revised roadmap.
- Aim 2, Key Objective 1, Action 4: STU proposed the establishment of three talent pools, including one for internal candidates. The revised roadmap mentions only two, with no specific reference to internal candidates.
- Aim 4, Key Objective 2, Actions 3 and 4: STU requested the addition of an element to foresee that managers be evaluated not only in line with their programme-related performance, but also based on their HR-related performance. An evaluation framework should be created for this purpose with relevant indicators.
- Aim 4, Key Objective 3, Action 10: STU requested the addition of an indicator measuring the impact and effectiveness of the Mobility Policy with respect to programme implementation. Moving staff just to comply with mobility, risking a negative impact on programme implementation, seems a short-sighted approach to mobility and does not serve the interests of the Organization, or motivate involved staff. On the contrary, participating staff wait months without a clear indication on their future assignments. In this regard, STU notes as during the last exercise, the number of staff moved equals the number of volunteers (29). STU believes an improved alignment between mobility and programme needs would help attaining the objectives of the HR Strategy.

3. STU notes that the roadmap does not detail financial aspects at action level, including how much funding is needed to implement a single action, how much funding is in fact available for that action, and consequently what is the funding gap. Without this key information, no Resources Mobilization Strategy can be prepared, as the indicators and, mainly, the targets depend on the resources available. In this regard, STU requests that this information be added to the workplan as soon as possible.

- The addition of indicators, baselines and targets is a welcome step. STU has already provided constructive comments to HRM. At the same time, we believe that further analysis should be done to ensure coherence between Action, Indicators, Baselines and Targets, but a more in-depth analysis would be needed.
- On a general note, and without pre-empting STU detailed analysis of the progress made so far, STU believes that there should be much more emphasis on the following aspects:
 - Staff mental health and well-being,

- Career development and support to internal candidates in the recruitment process, including adequate feedback mechanism,
- Substantial changes to the recruitment process, aligning with best practices in the UN system and beyond, to increase efficiency, effectiveness and transparency, including a revision of the Appointment Review Board, to ensure that the HR managerial aspects are properly checked during recruitment process, especially for posts that entail HR managerial duties (P4 and above).

AIM 1: Attract & retain talent & expertise

Workforce planning

4. STU welcomes the establishment of a dedicated unit responsible for the coordination of workforce planning processes in the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM), as well as the development of workforce planning guidelines for the Sectors and field offices in the context of preparations for the Draft 43 C/5 Programme and Budget. STU agrees that improving workforce planning will also provide the foundation for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to other HR processes, such as succession planning, talent outreach, HR partnerships, mobility, learning and career development. On this item, STU requests to be involved in the discussions, also because the exercise includes optimal workforce composition, in terms of staff and affiliate personnel. STU highlights once more the need for an in-depth examination of the impact of a shift from staff contractual modalities to affiliate personnel ones, which in the medium/long term impacts the very meaning of belonging to the international civil service in such a changing context.

5. At the same time, STU stresses that such planning is overdue and should have been put in place in parallel with the field network reform. In several instances, STU brought to the attention of the Administration the HR implications of such an extensive reform of the field network: revision of job descriptions, staff movements, revision of grades and geographical scopes. Sadly, this advice was not taken into account and over the past two years, STU has received complaints from several colleagues, who, as of today, are unclear about their new tasks and geographical scope of their work, that stem from the reform of the field network.

6. Following the 2023 field reform, it has now become urgent that certain field functions are further clarified. Currently, staff in different field offices may be doing the same job but at different levels (thus with different remuneration); staff with regional responsibilities are located in sub-regional offices without the appropriate reporting lines; national programme officers (NPO) or lower-level international staff (P-2) may be covering a larger number of countries than higher-level colleagues (P-3, P-4), etc.

Recruitment and outreach

7. Based on the feedback received from colleagues seeking advice and support, and on what was observed in the ARB panels, STU has the impression that some of the recommendations of the Internal Oversight Service Audit of UNESCO's Recruitment Process (document 212 EX/35) have not been fully implemented. Issues with transparency in recruitment time, inadequate composition of interview panels, and general lack of application of recruitment rules and regulations are reported on a continuous basis to STU. Based on the above, STU requests the Administration to establish a working group, with the inclusion of the Staff Associations, to take stock of such findings with the final objective of a revision of the recruitment process. The functioning of the current checks and balances system, including delegation of authority and the Appointment Review Board (ARB), should also be the object of an in-depth evaluation, including its impact on the process and final recruitment decisions.

8. In the meantime, STU advocates for the use of assessment centres for the recruitment of managerial positions in the Organization, from P4 and above. STU strongly believes that managers

have a key role in guiding, motivating, and supporting the teams they supervise. Too often in UNESCO, managers are hired based on a 45-minute competency-based interview, at times combined with a written test. Based on the important number of colleagues that reach out to STU because they are suffering from poor managerial practices, it is clear that the Organization should start addressing the issue during the recruitment phase, rather than fixing it at a later stage through training programmes. The use of assessment centres will allow for assessing HR skills, such as conflict resolution, and the ability to manage multicultural teams with empathy and fairness, as well as soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

9. STU welcomes the initiative to establish a roster of YPPs for future recruitment, and the flexibility of using such a roster beyond YPP recruitment. At the same time, STU suggests extending such an approach also to internal candidates. This will make the recruitment process quicker and provide internal candidates with possibilities of career advancement.

Performance management

10. In the same vein, concerning performance management, STU has been calling for a strengthened culture of accountability for managers. Beyond training workshops and coaching for managers, it is important to give UNESCO's personnel the possibility to assess the performance of supervisors in people management, in order to improve the overall performance and accountability culture of the Organization. We note this issue is considered under "career development" rather than in "performance management", where it belongs. STU would also like to underline the need to identify tools and ways for supervisors to manage underperformance and conflicts on the one hand, but also to recognize performance beyond expectations on the other.

11. Indeed, STU welcomes the high compliance rates of staff and supervisors but questions the relevance of a system that seems to serve mostly to highlight good performance and not to improve that which could be improved. The introduction of a performance improvement plan is still often perceived as a punishment by the colleagues concerned, who see it as proof of their supervisor's hostility towards them. In this respect, HRM has an important role to play in establishing a better dialogue between managers and their staff.

AIM 2: Promote inclusion & diversity by achieving in particular an equitable geographical distribution & gender balance

Geographical distribution and gender balance

12. STU takes note of the latest information regarding gender parity, which confirms once more that UNESCO's glass ceiling for women has been located at the P-4 level for several years, with no significant progress in this regard. There is still a low percentage of women who make it to P-5 and above levels, although this varies depending on the sector. The data provided by HRM does not allow for assessing if women breaking the glass ceiling and reaching P-5 and above levels are women climbing the ladder within the Organization or if it is mainly new recruits. A more in-depth analysis of career paths of female staff would be needed to assess the real upward mobility patterns for women in the Organization.

13. All in all, the 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 not only in principle but also in practice during recruitment and mobility processes.

14. STU welcomes the commitment of the Organization to fostering diversity and inclusion and is ready to work with the newly created Disability Inclusion and Accessibility Officer and Internal Working Group mandated to primarily review and update the Policy of the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. STU expresses its willingness to contribute to the elaboration of reasonable accommodation guidelines.

Employee engagement

15. STU has a fact-based approach to its interactions with the administration. We do believe that reliable data and baselines are essential to inform effective policies. As such, we welcome any initiative that aims to map specific aspects of staff engagement with the Organization over time. In this vein, we appreciate the initiative of a periodic Employee Engagement. At the same time, we believe that the Organization should emphasize more the health and well-being aspects, following the examples of other international organizations which have periodic well-being surveys.

Internship programme

16. STU welcomes the initiative of the Administration to revise the Internship Policy, which foresees a monthly stipend to partially cover living expenses. Under the existing policy, which does not foresee any remuneration, and in light of the high cost of living in Paris, the vast majority of interns in HQs are French and/or European. At the same time, STU is extremely concerned by the unnecessary lengthy process for the publishing of the policy. STU revised the policy in October 2023 and, as of today, the policy has not yet been published.

AIM 3: Adapt for the future

Flexible and family-friendly organizations

17. STU welcomes the initiative of the Administration to revise the current parental leave policy and the breastfeeding policy. As for the Internship Policy commented above, STU regrets to observe that the publishing of these policies is extremely delayed and urges the Administration to process with no delay its publishing.

18. With respect to the Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA), STU strongly believes that this is a cornerstone of a flexible and family-friendly organization. However, we regret to observe that UNESCO is the only organization of the United Nations System that does not foresee teleworking outside of the duty station (see the [JIU report “Flexible Working Arrangements in United Nations system organizations”](#)). We also observe an uneven application of the FWA within and across duty stations.

19. In general terms, UNESCO is still far from being a flexible and family-friendly Organization, particularly in Field duty stations. The introduction and/or strengthening of Flexible Working Arrangements, in line with the 2023 JIU report, may bring relief to families going through challenging situations. Temporary telework outside of the duty station and other flexible working modalities will need to be further explored to better respond to evolving needs of UNESCO families. We invite the Organization to align, as much as possible, with the recommendations of this JIU report.

AIM 4. Attain better results and impacts

Staff well-being

20. STU notes with appreciation that HRM is planning to mobilize human and financial resources to develop UNESCO’s Mental Health and Well-being Action Plan, as this is now a crucial issue of our Organization and of our times. The latest UN-Wide Health Survey showed that 43% of respondents in UNESCO considered that stress had a direct impact on their health. The work of the Occupational Health Service will be key to continue monitoring the health of UNESCO’s workforce. It is crucial that when the work environment is negatively affecting mental health this is properly detected at early stages, so as to identify the source of toxicity and avoid further health damage.

21. STU invites the Administration to improve the focus on preventive medicine, by scheduling periodic health monitoring checks with staff members, a good habit that is often lost when colleagues change duty stations frequently. Moreover, STU requests the launching of periodic well-being

surveys, in order to establish a baseline to work on and to use as a monitoring tool on the effectiveness of the well-being strategy.

22. Finally, STU recommends the administration to adopt and implement the [United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy for 2024 and beyond](#).

Career development

23. STU takes note of the results of the third managed geographical mobility exercise, which was completed in 2024, but regrets that, once again, the numbers of colleagues who actually moved (29) is very low. This figure should be contrasted with the number of colleagues having reached their SDAs (128) to see that the mobility exercise had a very modest result: only 23% of colleagues having reached their SDAs were able to move. This figure is probably even lower if data was disaggregated by voluntary and mandatory mobility. Figures on the results of voluntary mobility would be needed in order to assess this modality vis-à-vis “mandatory” mobility. STU believes that the mobility exercise in the future should further promote voluntary mobility.

24. The introduction of mobility to higher-level positions has been a step in the right direction, particularly taking into account the absence of a career development scheme in the Organization (apart from external competitive recruitment). However, while celebrating the promotion of eight colleagues resulting from mobility, this figure is still too low.

25. It is therefore urgent that the mobility exercise is reviewed with the Sectors, many of which preferred to advertise their vacancies for external recruitment instead of proposing them for mobility. ADGs should therefore be further held accountable for the results of mobility exercises. STU stands ready to support the Administration in improving the mobility exercise, so as to meet the expectations of staff while serving the needs of the Organization. The next mobility cycle should offer career development opportunities to a more significant number, further promote voluntary mobility, and ensure that the standard durations of field assignments are indeed respected.