WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Human resources: annual report

Report by the Secretariat

1.   This report presents an overview of initiatives undertaken in the management of WHO's human resources. It provides information on the progress of reform, on priorities fixed and activities performed during 2005, and on the challenges ahead. A preview of the Secretariat's staffing profile as at 30 September 2005 is being issued separately.[1]

2.   In recent years, considerable progress has been made in reforming human resources management, and this is expected to continue in the future. The changes involved are aimed at ensuring that the policies and practices in this area are in line with the Organization's operational needs and recognized standards of good practice, and that they provide support to initiatives that are having a profound impact on WHO's business models.

3.   In view of these objectives, it is intended to continue strengthening the human resources management capacity and WHO's ability to attract, develop and retain staff of the highest quality. The current reform programme is designed to support the establishment of a responsive, results-oriented institutional culture that promotes continuous learning, high performance, managerial excellence and accountability, and that rewards creativity and innovation.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

4.   Human resources development is essential if WHO is to achieve its goals and respect its strategic directions and priorities in a changing global health context. WHO's strength and influence, its effectiveness and efficiency and its capacity to respond all depend on the existence of a cadre of staff members committed to the Organization's global mission in challenging and changing circumstances and countless locations around the world; that remains the cornerstone of human resources management policies. Creating a geographically diverse and gender-balanced workforce – without compromising the excellence that is sought throughout the Organization – also continues to be a priority. The Secretariat is committed to attracting talented candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented countries, and progress is being made in increasing the proportion of women in the professional category of staff. However, an acceptable gender balance, particularly at senior level, still has not been reached.

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[1] Document EB117/21 Add.1.

5.   A further objective has been to improve the Organization's professional capacity, promoting a new culture of performance and accountability. The introduction of WHO's competency development framework has had a major influence on this more integrated human resources approach. The Secretariat has made significant progress in organizational design and planning, in recruiting and selecting staff, in facilitating staff mobility between both locations and functions, and in staff development and performance, especially in the areas of leadership and management. Conditions of service have been improved, particularly in relation to staff well-being and the provision of a supportive work environment; staff members are thus able to balance their professional and personal lives more easily.

6.   Any major cultural change requires time, particularly in an organization as diverse and complex as WHO. However, evidence of cultural change is already beginning to be seen in several ways, namely: the growing awareness shown by managers at all levels of the importance of human resources planning and succession management; the willingness of managers and other staff members to participate in training and learning and development programmes; an increased understanding of the importance of competencies and staff mobility as tools for improving operational effectiveness and increased career development opportunities; and an increased sensitivity on the part of managers and other staff members to the importance of a supportive work environment for their health and safety, together with their well-being and that of their families.

PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES DURING 2005 AND PLANS FOR 2006

7.   Priorities and activities during 2005 focused on: diversity management, organizational development, rotation and mobility, managing and developing staff, providing a supportive work environment and improving delivery of human resources services.

Diversity management

8.   During 2005, outreach efforts were continued to attract candidates – especially women – from a wide range of nationalities. The Western Pacific Region has the highest number of underrepresented countries; therefore, following an invitation from the Pasifika Medical Association to attend its Annual Conference in Tonga, a mission was undertaken to explain to the participants how to access information on employment opportunities at WHO. A wider discussion on the types of profiles needed also took place and the Conference was deemed a good opportunity to raise the visibility of WHO.

9.   Outreach activities for China – to follow up those started in 2004 – are planned for 2006. A mission has been requested by the Chinese Ministry of Health, following the positive feedback received after the first mission. The programme for 2006 will focus on WHO's role as an employer and will offer participants practical experience of all aspects of WHO's recruitment process. Those involved will learn how to apply and will be put through the different types of tests and competency-based interviews, during which they will face authentic questions used recently for staff selection purposes.

10.   Organization-wide discussions have been undertaken with programme and administrative staff in order to share ideas on best practices in diversity management, and the launch of the human resources planning tool provided an opportunity to remind managers that succession planning and recruitment activities should take account of the concept of diversity management.

11.   The associate professional officers currently employed come from 12 different countries and serve in various duty stations across WHO. Of the 30 people concerned, more than half are women. It should be noted that, over the past three years, 50% of the associate professional officers have received an employment contract with WHO following their assignment. The Department of human resources services has been developing a recruitment brochure that will be available on the WHO web site and distributed to potential recruits. The brochure will set out the type of employment available and the profiles sought.

12.   The Secretariat has issued a position paper on gender diversity that suggests that women from developing countries, including those from overrepresented countries, should be given favourable consideration.

13.   Between January and September 2005, there were 187 appointments to fixed-term professional posts, 78 of which concerned nationals of developing countries. A total of 40 appointments (21%) involved nationals from unrepresented or underrepresented countries or countries within their range of representation but below the midpoint. The remaining 147 appointments (79%) concerned nationals of countries either at or above the midpoint of their range or above the maximum of their range (see Annex).

Organizational development

14.   With effect from April 2005, WHO introduced the revised classification standard for professional and higher level posts promulgated by the International Civil Service Commission for use in the United Nations common system. This new Master Standard significantly reduces the number of factors that must be taken into consideration when establishing the grade level and the classification process has been greatly simplified as a result. Since the new system is much more accessible to all those involved in classification – supervisors, managers and staff alike – it is also expected that it will contribute to a more focused and consistent preparation of job descriptions across the Organization.

15.   The introduction of this new classification tool was supported by a series of training courses which were delivered throughout the Organization. Previously such courses had chiefly been directed at the human resources staff engaged in classification; this time, however, they were aimed at a much wider audience.

16.   In line with the conceptual and procedural simplification of classification, a new two-page job description for professional posts has been developed and introduced, replacing the previous seven-page document. Once again, this change was supported by a series of training courses held throughout the Organization for staff at all levels.

17.   In an effort to increase further the accessibility of classification processes and their use by staff, another important support mechanism has been developed. Since 1 July 2005, an online technical tool for job classification has been in operation, permitting users to prepare job descriptions and send requests for job classification. Known as ePod, it is an easy-to-use platform for drafting professional and general service post descriptions, which provides staff with generic samples that can be edited to suit the user's specific needs. The entire submission, approval and final classification process can then be tracked online. It is expected that these developments will lead to significant savings in time for all classification-related processes.

18.   Practical assistance in all matters concerning job descriptions has been provided throughout the Organization for the current strategic direction and competency review. Following the Director-

General's approval of the outline structure for each department, the Department of human resources services has assisted in the drafting, reviewing, updating and classification of several hundred job descriptions and has given managers and team leaders advice on best practice concerning competencies to be specified and on the possible structural implications of the proposed work distribution.

19.   In addition to providing assistance in job-related and post description issues, the Department participated in a number of competitive staff-placement exercises using the competencies, skills and experience previously identified for each position. On the basis of the experience gathered in supporting the strategic direction and competency review at headquarters, the Department is now ready to support any comparable exercises in the regional offices; it has already been able to provide support in the reorganization efforts carried out at the Regional Office for Africa.

Rotation and mobility

20.   The first phase of work on this subject, in the form of a voluntary scheme, has been completed. The exercise highlighted the importance of keeping staff adequately informed. This was particularly true for information concerning the potential impact on a staff member's career, the nature of the possible new job, and the living conditions at the proposed new duty station. Experience in the voluntary phase has shown that moves within programmes were the most successful as staff members benefited from the existence of strong informal networks and familiarity with many of the persons involved.

21.   WHO is supporting an interagency initiative to improve access to information on living conditions at all duty stations around the world. Launched in June 2005, this initiative is being further developed and enlarged.

22.   A global steering committee was created to provide advice on the rotation and mobility policy and to oversee its finalization. Organization-wide consultations have taken place involving extensive negotiation. Two tools are being prepared for making the rotation and mobility policy operational: the inventory of posts that will be subject to mobility; and the compendium of funded positions open to mobility that are either vacant or about to become vacant through retirement.

23.   During the biennium 2006-2007 there will be a move to a more systematic approach to rotation and mobility through phased introduction, which will initially be limited to a small number of job categories; other job categories will be added progressively as experience and understanding grow with regard to the process and the needs involved. In preparation for this, a number of initiatives have been put into motion including the following: the current strategic direction and competency review, which will enable the entire Organization to deliver programmes more effectively, with a focus on doing the right things, in the right place, and with the resources needed; the implementation of the human resources planning tool; and a greater emphasis on career counselling, for which a specialist is being recruited.

24.   As a matter or critical importance, a communication strategy on rotation and mobility will be prepared to ensure that accurate and comprehensive information is disseminated throughout the Organization. Rotation and mobility will have an effect on recruitment, retention, career development, conditions of service for staff and organizational culture. They will therefore have a major impact on the overall performance of the Organization and its staff.

Managing and developing staff

25.   Several initiatives concerning staff development and performance management have been taken in the past year. As was reported last year,[1] a new electronic performance management tool has been piloted. As well as improving the monitoring of staff development and performance management through better reporting tools, the new system includes selection of behavioural competencies from the WHO global competency model and a development plan is mandatory.

26.   In addition, nearly 400 senior managers have used a tool designed to provide comprehensive feedback from their staff, peers and supervisors. The exercise, which involved more than 3000 respondents, is a continuation of a programme to equip managers with better skills for giving constructive feedback on individual performance. The programme is intended to improve the performance of technical activities.

27.   The Global Leadership Programme has moved into its second phase. Following the initial feedback exercise, all participants now have individual development plans. The first global workshops have been held and a global online survey of staff has been commissioned to provide an evaluation of the Programme. Staff across the Organization were asked to respond in English, French or Spanish; about 25% of staff replied – an excellent result. The questions were designed to provide insights into the following: staff perceptions of management and leadership in a complex and changing environment; staff perceptions of leadership in relation to WHO's mission, strategy and planning; views on the working atmosphere in WHO; staff perceptions on communication, collaboration and coordination across and between various parts of the Organization; perceptions of opportunities for learning and development; and issues related to work performance. The survey will be repeated in about 18 months' time in order to determine the impact that the Programme may have had on staff perceptions of management and leadership.

28.   The results of the survey indicate that the Global Leadership Programme is achieving results. There is a high level of pride and satisfaction linked to working in WHO, the relationships between staff and their immediate supervisors are good; staff are reassuringly certain about the nature of their role in the Organization and about the competencies they need in order to fulfil their role effectively. The findings of the survey reinforce what has already been found in the aggregate results of the initial comprehensive feedback exercise and the views of participants themselves on their own development needs. The decision to invest in building the effective behaviours into the WHO global competency model through the Global Leadership Programme has been justified. There is a need to focus attention on the day-to-day management of staff, namely, giving performance feedback, dealing with conflicts, developing staff and leading change. With this in mind, immediate supervisors are being given credit for their efforts to manage better, for example, improving their use of communication. Staff management has been found to be the weakest area of leadership performance across WHO. Senior managers need to demonstrate stronger skills in the "people" aspects of management and, in particular, to close the gap between their words and their deeds, which the survey has revealed to be a major source of concern among staff. The Programme continues to be very well received and its positive impact on the Organization exceeds expectations.

29.   This second phase of the Global Leadership Programme should be completed by mid-2006. As participants complete the skills workshops and additional individual training, they will move into the third phase, which involves working together in small groups, with the support of a skilled facilitator,

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[1] Document EB115/25.

in order to acquire the necessary skills for improving managerial and leadership performance in daily work. It is hoped that a new groups of senior managers will begin the Programme in 2006.

30. The Global Leadership Programme is the flagship of the work programme of the global learning committee, which has chosen management and leadership development as one of six priority areas for staff training for the next biennium. The committee has been advising on the distribution of funds for staff development and learning since January 2004; it has also been responsible for conducting the first global review of staff development and learning activities across the Organization. The outcomes of this review have not yet been fully analysed; however, several areas for improvement have been identified, including staff development at the country level, the use of new technologies to bring development opportunities to staff where they work, communication between staff and supervisors to identify and organize opportunities for development in order to improve work performance and the evaluation of learning activities.

31. For each of the priority areas for learning listed above, target audiences, comprising key groups of staff, have been identified as part of the revised and enhanced strategic framework for learning; this will ensure that the approach to learning is more systematic, and that resources can be used to fill gaps in current learning programmes. A series of agreed indicators will be used to guide these efforts, thus ensuring that results can be measured at the individual, programme and organizational levels.

Providing a supportive work environment

32. In October 2004, the Director-General approved the establishment of a committee to promote a healthy and safe workplace, with a mandate to make recommendations on improving the working environment at headquarters, provide advice to regional and country offices, monitor action to eliminate health hazards, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of all staff. Some regional offices have established their own committees and are considering what can be done to improve their working environments within the context of local conditions.

33. In 2005, the committee monitored action taking place on, inter alia, the activity-based workplace, HIV/AIDS in the workplace, and sports and fitness facilities at headquarters. It also supported a staff survey on smoking, a weight-loss programme for staff, and a seminar on identifying the symptoms of depression. The committee also promoted the improvement of facilities for breast-feeding mothers and the provision of ergonomic furniture for all staff.

34. As part of the strategy on staff rotation and mobility, the impact of mobility on staff and families is being reviewed. In this connection, two initiatives have been launched: one to facilitate the employment of expatriate spouses, and the other to increase understanding of the impact of mobility on family well-being. As a member of the United Nations Development Group's initiative for a joint policy on employment of expatriate spouses, WHO has participated in the work on the policy and is currently focusing on its planning and implementation. WHO is also participating in an interorganizational study, exploring the relationship of staff mobility to family well-being.

35. As a socially responsible employer, the Organization is expanding its response to HIV/AIDS in the workplace. As of 1 January 2005, the scope of the staff health insurance system has been broadened to provide coverage for all pre-existing conditions, including HIV/AIDS, for all temporary staff from the first day of their appointment; for their dependants, this coverage now starts after three months. Importantly, it also consists of the launch of the United Nations Learning Strategy on HIV/AIDS to increase staff competence in this area. A curriculum for an orientation session based on a United Nations common system survey has been developed and staff are being trained on various

features of the WHO policy on HIV/AIDS in the workplace, including making the work environment more tolerant and compassionate.

36.   The focus on staff well-being and work-life and family-friendly policies will continue throughout 2006. The Secretariat's efforts are aimed at applying best practices for both the setting and implementation of standards, as well as bringing the Organization's policies and practices into greater alignment with those of other organizations in the common system. Accordingly, an in-depth review is being made of policies and procedures, including those for maternity, paternity and adoption leave, family and home leave, and education grant travel.

Improving delivery of human resources services

37.   Work on simplifying and streamlining the rules, policies and procedures of the Organization has continued throughout 2005. The first phase has now come to a close with the recent launch of the human resources e-Guide. Major projects lie ahead, however, in the form of initiatives to improve human resources management, in particular the review of contractual arrangements and conditions of service of staff, designed to enable them to respond better to evolving organizational needs and to reflect developments in the United Nations common system. The e-Guide is a user-friendly, searchable web site that gathers together in one source information previously found in various locations (e.g. Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, WHO Manual and Information Notes) and provides links to relevant documents and forms, administrative workflow charts and procedures, frequently asked questions and internal and external web sites. The e-Guide encourages greater transparency and accountability in the management and administration of staff as it makes information on human resources management rules, policies, procedures and practices available to all staff worldwide. It also allows for rapid updating to take account of new policies, which allows human resources practitioners, managers and staff, ease of access and provides them with the most accurate and relevant information possible.

38.   It is expected that the additional efficiency provided by electronic transmission of information will enable rules, policies and procedures to be applied more consistently. In addition to continuing to develop, simplify and streamline policies and procedures in the e-Guide, it is planned to develop tools to enable staff members to complete administrative forms on screen. As part of the Organization's commitment to improving communication, a working group has been established to develop a "WHO e-Manual", which is planned to incorporate the e-Guide.

39.   In order to ensure that human resources management is understood and practised in a consistent manner throughout the Organization, a one-week workshop was held with the participation of human resources officers. The objective was to consider current and future challenges with the benefit of pooled knowledge, expertise and experience. The discussions were fruitful and helped participants to refine their ideas on how to continue human resources management reform in WHO. The following areas were identified as having a major current and future importance: contract reform, simplification and streamlining of benefits and entitlements, staff mobility and rotation, human resources planning and career development, performance management and continuing professional development.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

40.   Considerable progress has been achieved in furthering human resources management reform in the Organization, and activities will continue to consolidate and strengthen human resources policies and procedures. Emphasis will be placed on using the human resources function as a strategic tool for

driving organizational change and creating the institutional culture envisaged by these reforms. Strategies, priorities and initiatives, policies and related programmes are based on the fundamental principles of responsibility and accountability, transparency, equity and fairness, and efficiency and effectiveness; this will continue to be the practice in the future.

41.   The Organization will be increasingly decentralized and more authority (and therefore accountability) will be delegated to managers. This devolution of responsibility should be facilitated with technological support and business models that permit a new conception of the workplace and the workforce and that enable the potential of common services and outsourcing to be further realized.

42.   Although the global, normative role of the Organization will be further enhanced, there is at the same time a move to sharpen the focus on country-level activities and emergency operations. This will require a more mobile workforce, which will be expected to be increasingly operations- and field-based. In turn, conditions of service will need to be in a constant process of improvement, becoming more responsive and enabling staff better to manage the demands of their professional and personal lives. These changes are challenges that have a direct impact on the workforce and require strong leadership capable of embodying the vision, values and priorities of the Organization and of setting an example to follow.

43.   At a time when the United Nations common system is facing criticism and when organizations are experiencing major changes, it is important that all WHO staff members should be required to renew their commitment to the values, competencies and ethical framework of the Organization. This should encourage a culture of motivation, commitment and results, shifting away from a culture of entitlement, control and risk aversion. Managers and leaders will be expected to play a pivotal role in this transformation and must lead by example.

44.   A talented, multi-skilled, versatile and geographically mobile workforce will be needed in order to achieve these objectives. To this end, recruitment systems need to be improved to make them targeted, pro-active and more rapid, while ensuring the necessary quality control. At the same time, investment in existing talent must be increased by providing professional development opportunities and where necessary, certification of the skills acquired through training. Enhanced professional development activities should ensure employability both within and beyond the Organization. Particular attention should be given to the needs of leaders and managers with regard to staff development in order to encourage motivation among the personnel throughout the Organization. To support these initiatives, performance management tools should be enhanced to ensure greater accountability and improved results at all levels.

45.   Strong involvement of staff representatives is essential in order to achieve positive and effective staff relations based on mutual respect and shared principles of consultation and communication and flexibility.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

46.   The Executive Board is invited to take note of the report.

ANNEX
APPOINTMENTS TO PROFESSIONAL POSTS SUBJECT TO GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION
(1 JANUARY TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2005)[a]

	A	Developing countries	B1	Developing countries	B2	Developing countries	C	Developing countries	Total	M	F
Regional offices											
Africa	0		5	2	12	11	18	14	35	24	11
The Americas	0		5	3	3	2	4	3	12	8	4
South-East Asia	1		2	2	5	2	7	5	15	7	8
Europe	1		3		7	2	12	2	23	11	12
Eastern Mediterranean	0		1	1	1		4		6	3	3
Western Pacific	3	1	0		6	1	1		10	7	3
Regional subtotal	5	1	16	8	34	18	46	24	101	60	41
Headquarters											
Office of the Director-General	0		0		2	0	2	0	4	2	2
Communicable diseases	2		1	1	5		5	3	13	10	3
External relations and governing bodies	0		0		0		2	2	2	2	0
Evidence and information for policy	2	1	1		3	3	7	4	13	6	7
Family and community health	0		2	2	5		3	2	10	5	5
General management	3		2	1	1		3		9	6	3
HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria	0		0		6	1	10	2	16	6	10
Health technology and pharmaceuticals	1				1	1	1		3	0	3
Noncommunicable diseases and mental health	1		1	1	4	1	3	1	9	5	4
Sustainable development and healthy environments	3		0		3	1	1		7	3	4
Headquarters subtotal	12	1	7	5	30	7	37	14	86	45	41
WHO total	17	2	23	13	64	25	83	38	187	105	82

M = male, F = female

Recruitment priority lists are valid as at 30 September 2005

A = unrepresented and underrepresented countries

B1 = countries within their range but below midpoint

B2 = countries at or above midpoint of range, including those at the maximum of their range

C = countries above the maximum of their range

[a] Excludes selection of staff previously geographically counted