
Accountability overview

1. At its thirty-second meeting in October 2020, the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board noted a report that provided a high-level overview of WHO's organizational accountability.¹
2. The present report provides an update on progress made since then in advancing institutional accountability. It highlights actions taken to strengthen a set of key WHO business integrity functions² and efforts made to ensure a coherent and holistic approach to organizational accountability.
3. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on all aspects of WHO's work across all three levels of the Organization, including its business integrity functions. The pandemic has highlighted the critical need to have a robust and flexible accountability framework that maximizes country impact, ensures efficiency, enables and safeguards staff members, advances organizational learning, manages risks, promotes compliance and upholds WHO's core values. The challenges posed by the pandemic have also created opportunities to review WHO policies, practices, and administrative rules and procedures, including those related to business integrity functions, and to identify innovative, harmonized solutions. Through lessons learned, the aim is to strengthen a WHO accountability framework that enables business continuity in times of crises and to prepare WHO for potential future shocks.

FOCUS ON KEY WHO BUSINESS INTEGRITY FUNCTIONS

4. **Evaluation.** WHO's evaluation policy (2018), a framework for strengthening evaluation and organizational learning in WHO,³ informs the work of the Evaluation Office and the independent corporate and decentralized evaluations conducted. The Evaluation Office continues to implement the framework, which has six key action areas: establishing an enabling environment and governance; evaluation capacity and resources; evaluation workplan, scope and modalities; evaluation recommendations and management response; organizational learning; and communicating evaluation work.

¹ Document EBPAC32/3; see also document EB147/2.

² The business integrity functions referred to in this report are: Evaluation; Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics; Internal Oversight; and the Office of the Ombudsman. These functions operate in conjunction with WHO's business operations, including human resources. In addition, the Office of the Legal Counsel provides a complementary and advisory function supporting business integrity.

³ A framework for strengthening evaluation and organizational learning in WHO. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018 (http://who.int/about/who_reform/documents/framework-strengthening-evaluation-organizational-learning.pdf, accessed 12 April 2021).

5. The Secretariat is committed to maintaining a strong culture of evaluation in which recommendations from evaluations are implemented with continuous learning and improvement in mind and lessons learned used in policy and decision-making. As regards evaluation recommendations and management response and organizational learning, the findings and recommendations of completed corporate and decentralized evaluations are continuously being tracked¹ in order to improve performance and inform key decision-making and planning processes. In recognition of the importance of these areas, a Senior Adviser for Organizational Learning was appointed in July 2020 to ensure follow-up on implementation of recommendations and strengthen organizational learning.

6. Beyond its main workplan focusing on the evaluation of WHO's work, the Evaluation Office also partners with evaluation counterparts in other entities, participating in joint evaluations in areas of shared substantive and strategic interest. In addition to contributing to both accountability and strategic learning across the United Nations system, these evaluations also represent an example of how WHO seeks to meet its organizational commitments in a cost-efficient, whole-of-system manner wherever opportunities present themselves.

7. **Risk management and compliance.** In order to reach WHO's ambitious targets set out in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, an enhanced risk management approach is being developed. As part of this approach, the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics, and WHO's regional network of compliance and risk management focal points, seized the opportunity offered by the COVID-19 pandemic to undertake several capacity-building and awareness-raising activities, with a view to further enhancing a culture of risk management within the Organization.

8. As a result of the pandemic and the activities and initiatives implemented in response to it, WHO is facing many risks that may significantly impact on its strategy, reputation or financing landscape. Moreover, WHO's expanding role in delivering complex health emergency services makes it essential for staff members to be quick in decision-making at all levels. This has increased the urgency for the Organization to define a comprehensive risk appetite framework, building on lessons learned over the past few years. The definition of a comprehensive risk appetite framework should allow staff members at all levels of the Organization to understand the boundaries within which they are expected to operate, thus allowing fast decision-making and informed risk taking. Risk appetite is a key element in the risk management architecture and will need to be redefined with active senior management agreement and support. Groundwork in support of the revision of the risk appetite framework has started, with discussions involving senior management at regional and headquarters level and a review of WHO's risk universe (taxonomy) and related governance.

9. The Secretariat is currently reviewing its global compliance architecture to ensure that lessons learned are captured effectively, good practices are applied globally and gaps are remedied in a timely fashion. This review is expected to inform WHO's global compliance strategy and risk appetite framework with a view to ensuring that the diverse compliance-related risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic are addressed effectively and consistently across WHO, for the successful achievement of objectives at country level.

10. **Ethics.** WHO has reinforced its prevention of and action on abusive conduct through its policy to prevent and address abusive conduct, covering harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination and abuse of authority. Finalized jointly by the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics and the

¹ A report on corporate and decentralized evaluations: findings, recommendations, actions and learning, May 2021. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. It will be available in English only from the webpages of the WHO Evaluation Office (<https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/evaluation>).

Department of Human Resources and Talent Management, it expands on the draft policy on sexual harassment developed in 2019, with inputs from technical departments specializing in related areas, the Secretariat functions to prevent and address conflict across the Organization, and the WHO staff associations.

11. The Secretariat remains fully committed to a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and established an Independent Commission to review allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the response to the tenth Ebola outbreak..

12. WHO actively participated at senior level in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee mission report to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a view to strengthening the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse network in the country, establishing a system-wide strategy for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and supporting the network by recruiting a Coordinator in Goma.

13. Strengthening the capacity of the Ethics function in WHO remains a top priority of the Organization, in line with decision EB148(4) (2021) on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The Secretariat is fully committed to implementing this decision.

14. **The Office of Internal Oversight Services.** The Office of Internal Oversight Services provides independent and objective assurance and advisory services, designed to add value to and improve the Organization's operations as a trusted business partner. Using a systematic and disciplined approach, it helps the Organization to accomplish its objectives by evaluating and improving the effectiveness of processes for risk management, internal control and governance through its assessments of WHO country offices, technical units at headquarters and regional offices, and cross-cutting areas of shared concern. This integrated approach to assurance is designed to build trust with donors and stakeholders by reporting areas of highest-residual risks, and informing those in authority, while adding value to improve operational effectiveness and inspire a high-performing culture. In this context, as part of its agile workplan for 2020, focusing on risks related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office enhanced its use of data analytics and performed three advisory assignments (on teleworking practices at headquarters, pro bono (in-kind) contributions to the COVID-19 response, and *Administrative Guidelines for Offices on the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak – Framework for the management of staff members in the World Health Organization*), to help management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

15. The main findings from the Office of Internal Oversight Services from 2020 suggest that more focused cross-cutting efforts are required to enhance internal controls in systemic recurring issues, particularly in country offices based in challenging operating environments. Further strengthening of the operational support provided by headquarters and regional offices to country operations, with a particular focus on emergencies, is of priority, if sustainable progress is to be achieved.

16. In the context of the investigation of allegations of suspected misconduct, the Office of Internal Oversight Services has assessed its current practices, procedures and structure of the investigation function against best-in-class benchmarks, and developed an approach to implement the proposed best-in-class structure. The Office is revising its policies and procedures and strengthening resources to improve the timeliness of processing cases and justice for those involved. The Office established an action plan and transition strategy with options for further consideration. At the time of preparing the present report, this plan had been approved and work was under way to implement the programme of strengthening the investigation function in order to provide additional resources commensurate with the effort required to process the recurring volume of cases, and a separate temporary surge capacity to address the backlog of older cases, with the objective of ideally doing so within the next 12 months.

17. **Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services.** The Ombudsman is the primary pillar for informal resolution in WHO. The main role of the Office is to assist staff members in dealing with work-related concerns through informal means, thereby preventing conflict and providing alternative means for resolving issues. In addition, the Ombudsman: monitors trends in support of early detection of potentially significant issues and provides feedback to senior management; supports preventive action; and fosters a workplace culture that upholds WHO's fundamental values, most notably a respectful workplace environment.

18. Improving efforts to expand the use of informal resolution across WHO has been a priority for the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services. To that end, the Office has sought:

- (a) to engage with staff members, either individually, through their teams and/or departments, or in the context of induction programmes to remind them of the importance of addressing dysfunctional issues or the general working environment at the appropriate level, including with the assistance of the Ombudsman, before the problem festers;
- (b) to consult and coordinate regularly with other support services such as: Human Resources and Talent Management; Staff Health and Wellbeing; Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics; and the WHO Staff Associations, with a view to addressing issues of concern and sharing information;
- (c) to provide feedback to senior management on trends and systemic issues as part of its regular work; and
- (d) to strengthen cooperation with regional ombudsmen in order to ensure equal access to informal resolution of issues, and the application of similar professional standards across WHO, thereby reinforcing the network of WHO ombudsmen.

19. As set out in the latest report of the Ombudsman to the Executive Board,¹ the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways of working of the Organization, bringing new challenges in efforts to ensure an enabling and respectful working environment. The Office of Ombudsman and Mediation Services has sought to address those challenges by:

- (a) reaching out to staff members more proactively through webinars and presentations to teams and departments aimed at assessing current issues and discussing possible options to address them;
- (b) working in close association with other support services, particularly Staff Health and Wellbeing, to address potential problems early on, with special emphasis on addressing the impact of the current situation on the mental health of staff members;
- (c) relaying issues of concern to management, outlining the importance of an open and trustful communication during this difficult period; and
- (d) investing greater efforts to interact with the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services' regional counterparts, most notably on systemic issues identified across the board as a result of the pandemic.

¹ Document EB148/INF./2.

REALIZING THE ACCOUNTABILITY 2.0 VISION

20. As noted in the accountability overview submitted to the thirty-second meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board,¹ WHO commissioned an external and independent assessment of its business integrity functions to make recommendations on how these functions could best interact to maximize overall impact and efficiency. In its report to the thirty-third meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board, the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee of WHO expressed support for such a structured review as a logical continuation of work undertaken through the WHO transformation agenda.²

21. The findings of the external assessment are being considered by the Secretariat to identify opportunities for better harmonization of processes and collaboration across WHO's business integrity functions. Furthermore, in-depth reviews of all these functions, including through best-in-class studies, have been completed or are being initiated. Regular meetings of the WHO Accountability Functions Directors are systematically undertaking an in-depth review of thematic and cross-cutting issues and following up on the recommendations of completed and ongoing reviews. Specific attention has also been given to operationalization of the new *WHO Preventing and addressing abusive conduct – Policy and procedures concerning harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority*.

22. Several initiatives under the WHO transformation agenda are also addressing wider (system-level) enablers needed to support the realization of an enhanced accountability model and culture in WHO. Examples are given below.

(a) In line with the transformation objective of ensuring that WHO is fully focused and aligned to deliver measurable impact, work is under way to inculcate an enhanced culture of accountability for results. This is reflected in the compacts established with the WHO leadership team, the new delegations of authority, and in the objectives of all staff members linked directly to the Programme budget outputs (via the Performance Management and Development System).

(b) Enhancements to WHO's performance management process are helping to reinforce the values and culture needed to ensure a safe and enabling environment for WHO's workforce. This, coupled with the scaling up of leadership and management training, is capacitating WHO line managers with the knowledge and practices needed to support their staff members in ways that align with these values.

(c) New tools and platforms rolled out to facilitate ways of working, such as the e-workflow and eSignature platforms, are simplifying and expediting many of WHO's key business and administrative processes. They are also providing increased transparency and traceability on internal controls in approval processes.

(d) Staff-inspired initiatives promoted under the transformation agenda, such as the "Walk the Talk" event and respectful workplace initiatives, are helping to operationalize the WHO Values Charter and create a more collaborative and respectful working environment.

¹ Document EBPBAC32/3.

² Document EBPBAC33/2.

(e) The newly established unit on diversity, equity and inclusion is addressing a range of topics that lead to discrimination and exclusion (such as gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, level of education and age) and is working to ensure that members of WHO's workforce feel welcome, a sense of belonging and that they are being treated with respect.

23. All the challenges highlighted in the accountability overview submitted to the Committee at its thirty-second meeting¹ remain relevant today and need to be tackled if the bold Accountability 2.0 vision is to be achieved. Key issues to be addressed include:

(a) embedding a harmonized approach to risk management, compliance and assurance across the three levels of the Organization to achieve sustainable improvements in areas of recurring systemic challenges;

(b) the integration of effective internal controls in the design of optimized business processes as part of the new enterprise resource planning project;

(c) the continued strengthening of the evaluation function across the three levels of the Organization, to be informed by a best-in-class study and by a framework for decentralized evaluations currently being developed;

(d) creating an open and transparent institutional culture where colleagues feel free to voice their concerns, address dysfunctional issues or engage in problem-solving efforts without fear of retaliation;

(e) better alignment of efforts and practices towards informal resolution across the Organization; and

(f) the design and implementation of best-in-class models for administrative field support services for emergency operations.

24. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed global public health forever, which in turn is providing an opportunity for driving change in WHO's ways of working. WHO's business integrity functions are adapting to this new reality, to ensure that the Organization is fit for purpose. Now is the time to leverage these changes to build best-in-class standards and approaches for WHO's organizational accountability across the three levels of the Organization.

ACTION BY THE PROGRAMME, BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

25. The Committee is invited to note the report.

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¹ Document EBPBAC32/3.