

Human resources: annual report

Report by the Director-General

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on WHO workforce trends and activities as at 31 December 2025. It focuses on the three pillars of the human resources strategy – attracting talent, retaining talent and fostering an enabling work environment – and summarizes key trends while adhering to word limits.¹ Given the profound impact of the ongoing prioritization and realignment exercise, a dedicated addendum² has been prepared to provide an update on progress as at 13 March 2026. Workforce data previously included in the report on human resources are now available on the Member States Portal,³ ensuring streamlined access to essential figures and insights.

Trends in the workforce

2. As at 31 December 2025, WHO had 8569 staff members⁴ in all, a 9.4% decrease compared to 31 December 2024 (9463). Staff members were based in 138 countries, distributed as follows: headquarters (24.80%, a reduction of 2.79% compared to December 2024); African Region (27.81%); Eastern Mediterranean Region (15.99%); European Region (10.42%); South-East Asia Region (8.54%); Western Pacific Region (8.47%); Global Shared Services (3.33%); and special programmes (0.64%) (see workforce data, Table 1 and Fig. 1). After the reporting cut-off date, the workforce decreased further as the contracts of some staff members ended on 31 December 2025. Projected staff reductions as at 30 June 2026 are to be found in document A79/21 Add.1.

¹ See documents EB136/6, para. 9, and EB154/33 Add.1, para. 22.

² Document A79/21 Add.1.

³ See [WHO workforce data](#) (updated data to be available as of 1 May 2026).

⁴ The figures include staff in special programmes and collaborative arrangements hosted by WHO and exclude staff working with IARC and entities of the United Nations system that are administered by WHO, and staff working with PAHO (see [PAHO document SPBA20/10](#)).

3. The other major workforce component, WHO affiliates (formerly non-staff), decreased significantly. Between December 2024 and December 2025, the number of agreements for performance of work fell by 31.8%, from 2154 (371 full-time equivalents) to 1469 (244 full-time equivalents), representing a 34.2% decrease in full-time equivalents.
4. The number of consultants fell by 22%, from 5317 (1717 full-time equivalents) in December 2024 to 4148 (1280 full-time equivalents) in December 2025, representing a 25.5% drop in full-time equivalents. Special services agreements decreased by 21.4%, from 5494 in December 2024 to 4320 in December 2025 (see workforce data, Table 20).
5. The distribution of staff at all levels of the Organization changed as follows between December 2024 and December 2025: headquarters decreased from 28.2% to 25.5%, Global Shared Services increased from 3.1% to 3.3%, regional offices increased from 24.0% to 24.8% and country offices increased from 44.7% to 46.4% (see workforce data, Fig. 2).
6. Between 1 January and 31 December 2025, staff costs amounted to US\$ 1228 million and increased as a percentage of total expenditure, to 36.0% of US\$ 3429 million from 34.0% of US\$ 3762 million in 2024. During the same period, staff costs fell in absolute terms by 5%, from US\$ 1.29 billion to US\$ 1.23 billion.
7. Regarding geographical representation, 43.1% of countries were within the desirable range, 23.4% were overrepresented, 23.9% were unrepresented and 9.6% were underrepresented (see workforce data, Tables 4, 5 and 6 and Figs. 4 and 5).
8. Between 2017 and 2025, the percentage of low- and middle-income countries having staff in long-term professional roles increased from 47.7% to 54.7%. A rise was also recorded between December 2024 and December 2025 (52.9% to 54.7%). The percentage of directors from low- and middle-income countries has increased by 18.4% since 2017, with a 3.4% increase between December 2024 and December 2025, demonstrating progress in diversity among senior leadership. The rise was greater at headquarters, with a 20.4% increase since 2017, including a 4.1% increase between December 2024 and December 2025, reflecting a strong commitment to diversity (see workforce data, Figs. 5 and 6).
9. Gender parity has been achieved among the Organization's 8569 staff members (49.7% female, 50.3% male) (see workforce data, Tables 3a and 3b and Fig. 3a).
10. Between December 2024 and December 2025, female representation in the Professional and higher categories rose from 47.9% to 48.5%. The grades with the most significant percentage point increases were P3 (+0.7), P4 (+0.8), and P6 and D1 (+3), while the largest gaps in gender parity were at D2 (24.5% female), and P6 and D1 (37.3%) (see workforce data, Tables 3c and 3e and Figs. 3b and 3d). Two recruitment measures introduced in 2023 to boost female representation will remain in place until gender parity is reached for grades where women are currently underrepresented.
11. Over the past four years, the percentage of female applicants increased from 31.4 to 32.1, in part thanks to temporary recruitment measures, the inclusion of diversity statements in vacancy notices and public underscoring of gender parity efforts. The progress made reflects WHO's commitment to achieving a better gender balance in recruitment (see workforce data, Table 11a).
12. As at 31 December 2025, 33.9% of heads of country offices were women (December 2024: 31.7%) (see workforce data, Fig. 3c).

Global internship programme

13. Owing to the financial crisis, the global internship programme has been paused since the end of January 2025. The number of interns therefore decreased as contracts expired.

14. The percentage of interns from low- and middle-income countries fell from 63.1% on 31 December 2024 to 55.6% as at 31 December 2025. The target set in resolution WHA71.13 (2018) of at least 50% of interns from low- and middle-income countries continued to be exceeded. The Secretariat will reopen the internship programme in the second quarter of 2026.

Performance management

15. Performance management enhancement initiatives were paused in 2025 as part of the prioritization and realignment process; they will be reviewed in 2026, in line with the recommendations of the assessment of WHO's performance management system. It is anticipated that a performance management module will be launched as part of the new business management system to replace the existing tool as part of the second wave of implementation of the human resources business management system.

Staff learning

16. In 2025, staff learning and career development initiatives engaged over 10 000 participants across all major offices in workshops, inter-agency webinars and individualized coaching. These services, delivered by qualified internal coaches and career counsellors, were tailored to support staff affected by organizational reprioritization and facilitate their access to external recruitment platforms.

17. Global learning initiatives provide access to a wide range of internal and external training in areas such as management, finance, risk, digital skills and workplace culture, complemented by language training and career transition support. The iLearn platform serves over 28 000 users, offering more than 37 000 courses and mandatory training on topics including ethics, security and prevention of misconduct, with completion rates ranging from 87% to 97%.

18. In 2025, the platform recorded over 292 000 video views, with strong engagement in leadership, artificial intelligence, project management, mindfulness and communication. The workforce transition programme engaged over 5300 staff, generating more than 17 000 learning records and 9500 completions, and trained 7451 staff on the new business management system.

19. The WHO Academy has incorporated staff learning into its strategy for 2024–2026. During the Staff Development & Learning Roundtable held in February 2026, and together with regional focal points and the Department of Human Resources and Talent Management, new strategic learning priorities were established for 2026 and 2027 based on the results of the Learning and Development Needs assessment conducted during the third quarter of 2025.

20. Since the launch of the global induction programme "Get to know WHO" (a digital onboarding experience complementing headquarters and regional inductions) in May 2025, approximately 264 staff members have accessed the programme in iLearn.

21. In 2025, 1273 staff participated in the Effective Communication and Global Language Programme, which covers all six United Nations languages, German and Portuguese. Demand was particularly high for English communication and writing courses.

Mobility

22. The ongoing financial crisis has had a direct impact on WHO staff mobility frameworks, particularly the Global Geographical Mobility Policy. The 2025 mobility exercise could not proceed as planned owing to organizational restructuring and resource constraints. Staff members continued to be moved, however, notably through the global reassignment process, which is used to identify viable placement opportunities for eligible staff whose positions are abolished during prioritization and realignment, and the normal channels of reassignment, both within and across regions, including relocation of positions as part of the restructuring process.

23. While the Global Geographical Mobility Policy is paused, WHO continues to uphold mobility principles in practice, prioritizing internal talent retention, filling essential roles at country level and ensuring continuity of operations. The Organization is also reviewing how and when to re-launch the mobility initiative once the financial situation stabilizes.

Internal justice

24. Key accountability functions continue strengthening informal resolution of abusive conduct-related cases by benchmarking best practices in international organizations. Based on this, a proposal is being developed to ensure that complaints are addressed more promptly and fairly by the appropriate stakeholder, fostering a respectful and safe working environment.

25. The Secretariat continues to monitor the process of internal justice system reform launched in 2016. The process has led to notable improvements, including a stronger emphasis on informal resolution and the use of administrative reviews to promote transparency and fairness to resolve disputes. The demand for administrative reviews has increased sharply in the wake of the prioritization and realignment process, with more than 250 requests in 2025 and 2026 to date compared to an average of 60 requests annually in previous years; however, the percentage of administrative review decisions being appealed to the Global Board of Appeal has dropped significantly. To address the surge, measures have been taken to increase the capacity of the administrative review team and to promote efficiencies in the administrative review process.

26. As part of its ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability in matters of misconduct, the Secretariat maintains the Compendium of misconduct matters, which is available on the Member States Portal⁵ and on the Accountability page of the WHO website in the section “Misconduct”.⁶ The Compendium contains anonymized summaries of all cases covered by the information notes on misconduct matters issued from December 2011 onwards and is updated quarterly.

Contractual modalities

27. The reform of contractual modalities was put on hold in 2025, and the Department of Human Resources and Talent Management is currently assessing its capacity to resume work on it as one of its policy priorities for the 2026–2027 biennium.

⁵ See [Member States Portal](#) (accessed 9 April 2026).

⁶ See [Misconduct](#) (accessed 9 April 2026).

Human Resources Global Operations

28. In 2025, the Human Resources Global Operations team processed 235 000 transactions and resolved 5100 incidents. It also expanded its role to support the Organization's realignment and restructuring. Service-level agreement compliance improved to 96.45%, compared to 90% in 2024.

29. To further enhance staff experience, the team produced infographics and audiovisual aids to illustrate staff entitlements and launched artificial intelligence tools to expedite the processing of rental advances/subsidies and education grants. These innovations reduced turnaround times considerably.

Respectful Workplace Programme

30. In 2025, the Respectful Workplace Programme provided essential support during a period of significant organizational change, strengthening a respectful, values-driven and psychologically safe work environment across the three levels of the Organization, including IARC and UNAIDS. From the Respectful, Safe and Healthy Work Environment platform, the Programme delivered tailored sessions, provided practical tools and coordinated cross-functional support, ensuring that staff affected by restructuring received meaningful assistance in the form of dialogue, targeted resources and collaboration with teams covering transition support and workplace culture. The platform serves to facilitate cross-functional collaboration, integrating contributions from departments and major offices to provide a coherent and comprehensive support framework.

31. A major milestone was the launch of the workforce transition support hub in April 2025.

Workplace well-being

32. In 2025, the Department of Operational Support, Security Management and Health and Well-being Services continued promoting occupational health and safety amid limited resources and organizational transition. It focused on providing targeted psychosocial support at the individual, team and organizational levels, addressing emerging psychosocial risks and supporting functional and managerial roles. In addition to its regular activities, the Department experienced increased demand related to the transition, including more complex sick leave cases, and supported the WHO Health Emergencies Programme with assistance to ensure access to care during staff relocations. The first internal mental health at work e-learning programme (nine modules) has been finalized and will soon be available on iLearn. Protocols for managing high-risk cases and contacting staff on sick or parental leave were developed in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources and Talent Management. The Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System has also underlined the value of making sick leave statistics available to decision-makers and relevant stakeholders in the context of staff health management, highlighting the relevance of such information for informed decision-making.

Action by the World Health Assembly

33. The Assembly is invited to note the report and provide guidance in respect of the following question.

- Which areas described in the report should the Secretariat focus on as priorities?