

Human resources: annual report

Report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board to the Seventy-ninth World Health Assembly

1. The Secretariat introduced the human resources annual report,¹ highlighting the reduction in staffing numbers since 1 January 2025, as projected until end June 2026.
2. The Committee expressed its appreciation for, and solidarity with, staff in view of the difficult situation faced in 2025. It noted with satisfaction that the Secretariat's work under the realignment process had not negatively affected gender balance among staff.
3. The Committee encouraged the Secretariat to continue paying attention to gender and geographical balance, especially at the senior level. In response, the Secretariat explained that it considered geographical representation a strategic workforce priority requiring a joint effort by both the Member States and the Secretariat. In that respect, it confirmed that the Secretariat was moving towards a more proactive and system-wide model, including actions such as targeted outreach to underrepresented countries, strengthened selection processes and nationality data visibility, and enhanced early career talent pipelines.
4. In the context of global health architecture reform, the Committee highlighted the need to retain the necessary expertise at all three levels to ensure that the Organization could continue to fulfil its mandate. In that regard, it emphasized the importance of efforts to preserve technical capacity at the country level.
5. The Committee noted with concern the increased demand for mental health services among staff, particularly in the light of heavier workloads, and encouraged the Secretariat to introduce measures in support of staff well-being. The Secretariat confirmed its commitment to continue promoting staff mental health, including through initiatives such as the increased use of artificial intelligence and digitalization to reduce the administrative burden, and the identification of the root causes of mental health issues.
6. The Committee called for the Secretariat to continue working on performance management reforms and learning development with a view to building and maintaining a fit-for-purpose workforce.

¹ Document A79/21.

7. The Secretariat informed the Committee of its plan to work on a series of human resources initiatives, including in relation to performance management reform, learning and development, contract modalities and respectful workplaces as part of the “people plan”. At the same time, it noted that increased sustainable financing was needed to support continued efforts in those areas.

8. In reply to a question, the Secretariat confirmed that initiatives such as secondments, the Junior Professional Officer and internship programmes, which had been temporarily paused during the realignment process, would be reactivated in 2026.

9. The Director-General emphasized that the principles of humanity, fairness and transparency had been followed throughout the realignment process, and he outlined the Secretariat’s efforts to put those principles into practice. He highlighted the solidarity demonstrated by staff, noting that a staff-led proposal regarding voluntary early retirement had helped to minimize forced separation. In addition, he explained that the Secretariat would continue working to review contractual modalities; in that regard, he underscored the importance of receiving more flexible funding and the increase in assessed contributions as a way of ensuring more stability and predictability. He concluded by reiterating his commitment and that of senior management to continue engaging with staff.

Recommendation to the Health Assembly

10. The Committee, on behalf of the Executive Board, recommended that the Health Assembly should note the report contained in document A79/21, and proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat’s implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

- (a) accelerate the strengthening of equitable geographical representation at all levels of the Organization, with particular attention to senior and higher graded positions;
- (b) continue advancing gender parity at all levels of the Organization, with particular attention to senior and higher graded positions, paying due attention to equitable geographical representation;
- (c) continue to strengthen human resource capacity at the country level; and
- (d) continue enhancing initiatives and support measures aimed at promoting staff mental health and well-being.
