



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE BOARD
113th Session
Provisional agenda item 6.1

EB113/18
4 December 2003

Human resources

Recruitment strategy integrating gender and geographical balance

Report by the Secretariat

BACKGROUND

1. This note has been prepared in response to resolution WHA56.17 which requested the Director-General to redouble efforts to achieve parity in gender distribution among professional staff, to raise the proportion of women at senior level, and to submit an action plan for recruitment integrating gender and geographical balance. The analysis of, and changes in, staff recruitment proposed in this report are expected to assist WHO in responding to resolution WHA56.17 during the period 2004 to 2005. In resolution WHA56.35, the Health Assembly requested the Director-General to give preference to candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented countries, particularly developing countries, and approved an updated formula for determining desirable ranges for Member States with regard to the appointment of international staff to WHO's Secretariat.

2. WHO Staff Regulations, Article IV, Appointment and Promotion, 4.2 states that:

The paramount consideration in the appointment, transfer or promotion of the staff shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting and maintaining the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

The Organization must strive to achieve the target of wide geographical representation without compromising on the quality of the staff selected. Therefore, to be successful, it must improve its capacity to identify and draw on a broad range of potential sources of candidates. There needs to be a more sustained and widespread search for potential staff in order to ensure that managers recruiting staff are presented with a more diverse set of applicants.

3. The action plan outlined below is placed in the context of an overall recruitment strategy that integrates gender and geographical balance. This strategy is in line with the requests of the Health Assembly and the continuing reform of human resources management in WHO, and is based on best practice in international organizations. The keystone is an accountable senior leadership committed to diversity and leading by example. The objective of the strategy is to improve the effectiveness of recruitment policy in order to broaden the representative nature of WHO's workforce. A diverse workforce is able better to understand and respond to the operational requirements of Member States.

Implementation of the strategy will also enhance the standing of WHO as the “employer of choice” in international public health.

4. To be successful, a recruitment strategy should reflect the Organization’s goals and be responsive to changing priorities. There has to be a clear link between it and the Organization’s strategic planning to ensure that staffing requirements are taken into account at all stages of the planning cycle.

5. The Organization has consistently made efforts to broaden the diversity of its workforce. Currently, it is working towards meeting the three targets set by the Health Assembly:

(a) 60% of all appointments over the next two years in the professional and higher graded categories (irrespective of their source of funding) of nationals of unrepresented and underrepresented countries, in particular developing countries, on the basis of the formula set out in resolution WHA56.35;

(b) 50% of appointments of women to professional and higher category posts as per resolution WHA56.17;

(c) raising the proportion of women at senior level as per resolution WHA56.17.

The status of these three targets is:

(a) 33.7% of recruitments were from unrepresented and underrepresented countries during 2002. As of 1 September 2003, there were 44 unrepresented (23% of total) and 11 underrepresented countries (6%);

(b) from 1999 to 30 September 2003, 38.4% of appointees were women;

(c) as of 30 September 2003, women accounted for 20% of staff at grades P6 and above.

6. Within these global statistics there are major variations between WHO’s regions and within headquarters. This unevenness suggests that the opportunities to diversify the workforce open to some locations and programmes are greater than to others. The challenge is to create a sustained Organization-wide momentum that will assist programme managers in achieving the targets.

PLAN OF ACTION TO IMPLEMENT THE RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

7. To meet the targets set by the Health Assembly, WHO has elaborated a comprehensive action plan that reflects a coherent diversity-management policy. The different components of the plan are described below.

8. **Forecasting human resources needs.** The strategic and operational planning stages of the programme-budget cycle will provide an opportunity to optimize the planning of human resources and facilitate the global consolidation of data from regions and within headquarters. When completed, the human-resources forecast will identify broad staffing priorities over a possible four-year period, encompass preliminary succession planning and identify likely new areas requiring support. It will be supplemented by a detailed two-year plan that can build on more clearly defined goals and expected levels of financing.

9. A first step will be to build on foreseen retirements and estimated voluntary turnover. A major opportunity is presented by the number of retirements projected to December 2007. During this period about one in five professional posts will fall vacant.¹ In the case of retirements, posts can be reassigned to the areas of highest priority and post descriptions can be revised in advance to meet expected requirements in terms of functions exercised and knowledge, skills and competencies required.

10. An automated human-resources planning tool, based on a pilot project conducted at headquarters, will be developed. This will help programmes to identify the number and type of staff they will need in the coming years. A comparison can be made with current resources to see where there are gaps and what action is required to fill them.

11. **Reaching out.** With increasing access to the Internet, use of WHO's web site has grown significantly in recent years. This is demonstrated by the fact that in the nine months since the electronic recruitment system was launched in December 2002,² applications were received from nationals of 185 out of a total of 194 Member States and Associate Members.³ WHO's e-recruitment system is thus a tool with considerable potential. As well as permitting on-line application, it already enables candidates to review opportunities in WHO and ensures improved communication with applicants. It also allows WHO to screen candidates thoroughly and to target sources of applicants through careful selection of suitable institutions. The e-recruitment system will be installed in all regional offices by March 2004.

12. Nonetheless, WHO needs to extend its reach of possible applicants. At present, it depends essentially on the range of candidates who respond to opportunities announced on the web site and through Vacancy Notices circulated to Member States. However, details of vacancies need to be disseminated as widely and effectively as possible. Use of electronic mail for dispatch of Vacancy Notices has been found to be quick, efficient and cost effective. Technical programmes and WHO Representatives and Country Liaison Officers are encouraged to identify likely sources of talent such as institutions and associations to which links can be sent, enabling them rapidly and easily to view WHO's Vacancy Notices. This option will also be offered as a first step to WHO collaborating centres by the end of 2003.

13. The e-recruitment system is being further developed to provide a roster of candidates and an inventory of the skills of serving staff. Prototypes of these functions should be available by early 2004 and in full operation by the middle of the year. They will allow searches for scarce skills and competencies in order to identify more thoroughly candidates for short-term and emergency needs. The rostering facility, in particular, will ultimately permit more cost-effective candidate searches in unrepresented and underrepresented countries and by gender; in 2002 only 30% of applications for posts were from women.

14. Promotional literature is being prepared setting out the employment opportunities available in WHO, the knowledge, skills and competency profiles required, and the ways in which people can inform themselves of current openings. WHO staff will be encouraged to make promotional material available at meetings and conferences and to act as "talent scouts". During the first half of 2004, the Organization will redesign the Vacancy Notices used to announce jobs in conjunction with the

¹ See document A56/38, Table 10.

² See document A56/40, section III.

³ Those countries from which no application has been received to date are Antigua and Barbuda, Burundi, Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Qatar, Samoa, Timor-Leste and Tokelau.

introduction throughout the United Nations system of a new Master Standard for determining the grade level of professional posts. The revised standard necessitates describing jobs in a different format, using revised criteria.

15. Work is under way to streamline and simplify the recruitment process emphasizing speed and responsiveness. Improved planning and earlier identification of needs will bring significant benefits. The process for establishing and revising post descriptions has been re-engineered and automated. As part of the administrative efficiency programme, tighter deadlines are being set for selection.

16. Recruitment missions, focused on priority countries, can be a valuable way of raising awareness of WHO, expanding the network of institutional contacts and identifying potential candidates for WHO employment. In conjunction with Member States, it is expected that a number of missions can be fielded in 2004 to 2005. Missions call for a significant investment of financial and staff resources. They must therefore be used sparingly and only where it is evident that they will produce worthwhile results.

17. Vacancy Notices need wider diffusion at national level. Member States should use every means available to them to make vacancies in WHO widely and speedily known internally. National authorities are likely to be in the best position to know which institutions and associations might provide persons of potential interest to WHO. Member States can play an important role in supplementing the Organization's candidate prospection.

18. **Investing for the future.** Improved planning will allow staff at all levels within WHO to become aware of future needs. With the new emphasis on professional development and competency building through the Performance Management and Development System, more learning opportunities will be available to staff to enable them to compete for higher graded posts, thereby helping to redress gender and geographical imbalance. Practices, such as offering local staff the opportunity to be selected for professional-level assignments for limited periods, in operation in one region, could be replicated more widely. The development of a rotation and mobility programme will also provide opportunities for professional growth and broaden career prospects while satisfying programmatic requirements, particularly at country level.

19. Expanding relationships with selected educational institutions has proved one of the most fruitful ways of attracting talent by focusing on certain categories of postgraduate student. This has been a particularly effective means of increasing the diversity of the workforce in other parts of the United Nations system. WHO is developing its contacts with leading schools of public health in order to target potential applicants from developing countries, particularly women. Such persons would be encouraged to apply for internships or assignments as Associate Professional Officer, and to participate in the new Health Leadership Scheme, as initial steps towards longer-term possibilities in WHO. A review of the Associate Professional Officer, internship and other similar schemes is under way to see how they can be refined and more closely integrated into a comprehensive Young Professionals Programme for WHO.

20. **Strengthening the organizational context for diversity.** As part of the reform of human resources management, new measures will be designed and tested in pilot projects in order to provide a work environment that is more responsive to work-life pressures. These measures will include work arrangements that are more in line with the demands of daily life outside the office and are already in place in the United Nations and in other international agencies. They are intended particularly to facilitate the recruitment and retention of women. Efforts will be maintained to reduce the gender gap in staffing within the broader context of diversity management. WHO's Gender Task Force brings

together senior-level managers from the regions and headquarters in order to provide guidance on the incorporation of gender considerations in the mainstream of the Organization's work.

21. **Monitoring and accountability.** Annual monitoring reports on the achievement of diversity targets throughout the Organization will be posted on WHO's Intranet, and outstanding performance will be recognized through awards given by the Director-General. Guidelines for human resources officers will be issued in order to standardize procedures. Lastly, with the introduction of the WHO competency framework in 2004-2005 as part of the reform of human resources management, all staff will be required to demonstrate diversity-sensitive behaviours as a core competency.

22. Given that approximately one-third of all recruitment to fixed-term positions is from staff on temporary appointments, gender and geographical considerations will be taken into account in recruitment of temporary staff and monitored. As is currently the case for fixed-term opportunities, any recommendation at headquarters for the selection of a national from an overrepresented Member State for a temporary contract of more than six months will require special approval as of 1 January 2004.

23. Managers should perceive the targets for which they will be held accountable as integral to the organizational culture and their method of work. Workshops are being organized to develop awareness and understanding of the need for a diverse workforce. Training in interviewing skills for staff involved in selection panels will be offered, which will emphasize interviewing to elicit information on behaviours demonstrated during a candidate's career to date.

24. **Evaluation.** Implementation of the recruitment strategy and action plan will be monitored periodically and evaluated against set goals and indicators. A set of standardized management reports will be drawn up to monitor diversity of the workforce based on various criteria (such as recruitment, promotions, performance management reviews, mobility and rotation, staff development, turnover, and spouse employment). The action plan will be adapted as required, including any additional support that may be needed to overcome constraints to achieving targets at headquarters and in regional offices. Results will be communicated by the Director-General to the Executive Board and Health Assembly.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

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

= = =