

Human resources: annual report

Review of the system for the nomination, selection and training of WHO country representatives

Report by the Director-General

1. In January 2015, the Executive Board, at its Special Session on the Ebola Emergency, adopted resolution EBSS3.R1, in which, inter alia, it requested the Director-General to review (i) the system for nominating, selecting, training and reviewing the performance of WHO country representatives and (ii) the improvement plan for such staff, with a view to enhancing expertise in each of the three core areas of WHO's mandate – normative work, technical support to countries, and emergency and outbreak response.
2. In response, the Director-General, in consultation with the Global Policy Group, requested a review to be carried out of the assessment and performance evaluation procedures for WHO country representatives (hereinafter to be referred to as Heads of WHO Country Offices in countries, territories and areas). The review was conducted by the Department of Country Cooperation and Collaboration with the United Nations System and the Department of Human Resources Management, in consultation with regional and country offices and an external consultant from the assessment centre.
3. The report presents steps undertaken by the Director-General to address weaknesses in the three areas identified in the review.

Assessment process for Heads of WHO Country Offices

4. The Secretariat has undertaken a number of initiatives to strengthen the assessment process.
 - (a) The standardized job description has been updated to reflect the three key functions outlined by the Board at its Special Session on the Ebola Emergency. A public health background has been made an essential, as opposed to a desirable, requirement for prospective Heads of WHO Country Offices.
 - (b) A written test designed in collaboration with the relevant technical units has been made more rigorous in order to assess candidates' understanding of public health, emergency and outbreak response, and collaboration with the United Nations system and other partners at country level. The written test has been made eliminatory.

(c) In order to assess competencies in normative work, technical support to countries and emergency and outbreak response, the assessment centre has been updated on the basis of 11 technical, managerial and behavioural criteria within four major elements:

- (i) acting as a public health authority representing WHO;
- (ii) negotiation and diplomacy for managing complex and multi-dimensional agendas;
- (iii) resilience during emergencies; and
- (iv) managerial and leadership capabilities;

(d) Each candidate is evaluated on the basis of his or her performance in those four major elements.

(e) A total of eight internal and external senior assessors now evaluate each candidate.

5. The modified assessment centre became operational in February 2015 and received positive feedback from both candidates and assessors. Based on WHO's experience and feedback to the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, the latter is considering adopting a similar approach in its own new assessment centre starting in 2016.

6. The Director-General, in consultation with the Global Policy Group, has asked for a knowledge-building tool to be developed in the form of a briefing package of basic information for staff aspiring to be Heads of WHO Country Offices. The package is being developed as an e-learning tool. In addition, the Secretariat is exploring more comprehensive ways of preparing potential candidates, an approach that has been embraced within the United Nations Resident Coordinator system.

7. The appointment of Heads of WHO Country Offices outside the roster can now occur only in exceptional circumstances, such as an emergency. As at October 2015, 15 new Heads of WHO Country Offices had been appointed; with the exception of one person who went to a country affected by Ebola virus disease, all were selected from the roster.

Performance evaluation of Heads of WHO Country Offices

8. A number of efforts have been made in headquarters and regional offices to improve accountability at country level.

(a) The Director-General will be the second-level supervisor of Heads of WHO Country Offices. In order to harmonize the performance appraisal process for Heads of WHO Country Offices across regions, the Director-General has asked for a standardized set of objectives to be drawn up based on the recently approved job description, for an anticipated launch in 2016.

(b) Management dashboards with key performance indicators for internal control, compliance and risk assessment have been rolled out in country offices.

(c) Accountability for results was discussed in detail at the Eighth Global Meeting of Heads of WHO Country Offices with the Director-General and Regional Directors. A number of proposals to further strengthen the accountability of Heads of WHO Country Offices have been agreed, including sanctions in case of non-compliance with ethical standards.

Training and development opportunities for Heads of WHO Country Offices

9. Headquarters and regional offices have devised several tools and have further developed processes to adequately prepare newly-appointed Heads of WHO Country Offices to effectively fulfil their mandate.

(a) A one-week global induction course has been elaborated; and regional orientations have been updated to reflect both WHO's revised job description and core mandate for newly-appointed Heads of WHO Country Offices.

(b) A handbook for the induction of Heads of WHO Country Offices has been further expanded to include a wider variety of public health topics, including emergencies, in addition to strategic, technical and managerial processes of the Organization.

(c) A mandatory 10-week online course in health diplomacy was revised in 2015 to provide Heads of WHO Country Offices with the knowledge and skills for managing complex agendas, such as emergencies, as well as multidimensional aspects of global and national health diplomacy, and to build capacities in coordinating partners and fostering coherence between health and foreign policy.

(d) Given the emphasis placed on the need for Heads of WHO Country Offices to partner with other actors at country level, since 2015, newly appointed Heads of WHO Country Offices have participated in the United Nations Country Team leadership programme. The programme focuses on leadership development for country representatives and also underscores the crucial need to work collaboratively and in partnership at country level.

(e) A global project to improve the communications skills of Heads of WHO Country Offices through personalized coaching was initiated in 2015. Currently, 40 Heads of WHO Country Offices are enrolled in the coaching programme, which will be implemented in all country offices by 2017.

(f) Emergency outbreak response was a major issue discussed at the Eighth Global Meeting of Heads of WHO Country Offices, where WHO's emergency reform was debated and the views of Heads of WHO Country Offices were gathered and passed to the WHO Advisory Group on the Ebola Virus Disease Response. Once the emergency reform framework has been finalized, a briefing package will be prepared and delivered specifically to Heads of WHO Country Offices and country teams.

(g) A training package on the health implications of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, designed to increase understanding of the goals at national level and of the role of WHO in supporting their implementation, will be prepared by early 2016. The package will be a self-explanatory integrated toolkit designed for WHO country teams to support national officials in planning and delivering the health-related goals.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

10. The Board is invited to note the report.

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