

## **Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations**

1. The staff associations of WHO, UNAIDS and IARC are pleased to make this statement to the Executive Board on behalf of over 9000 staff members. This report highlights staff perspectives on issues of critical importance for our Organization. A verbal statement to the Executive Board will be delivered during its 146th session to complement this report.

2. We, the staff associations, appreciate the efforts made by the Director-General and the senior management to nurture a healthy staff–management relationship. The Director-General’s commitment to meeting regularly with staff representatives and engaging actively with us demonstrates his willingness to find solutions that benefit the Organization and its employees, immediately as well as in the medium and long terms.

3. Our joint efforts on flexible working and teleworking are testament to this alignment and collaboration: the WHO Headquarters Staff Association drew the attention of the Director-General and senior management to research and evidence demonstrating the positive impact of teleworking on performance and innovation. We are pleased that the administration has responded positively to the request to review the existing teleworking policy and agreed to add an extra day to the three days of teleworking per month already permitted, and to extend the policy to all general service staff. The administration has also pledged to review, renew and modernize the policy, which would enrich the working experience of staff to the benefit the Organization. We also appreciate the administration’s decision to recognize the length of service of staff who had been with the Organization for 10 years or more by 1 September 2019 by rewarding them with a day of compensatory leave.

4. It is in this spirit of collaboration between staff representatives and the administration that we would like to highlight four issues of staff concern, which our constituents believe need to be addressed holistically: global geographical mobility, harassment (including sexual harassment), WHO transformation and the International Civil Service Commission.

### **GLOBAL GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY**

5. On global geographical mobility, the Director-General is clear that staff will be moved responsibly to ensure that WHO successfully fulfils, by 2023, the commitments undertaken in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. The WHO Headquarters Staff Association has been discussing this matter continuously with the Director-General and senior management, as well as with the other staff associations.

6. A mobility taskforce was set up to review the existing mobility policy, with the aim of finding ways to incorporate the best practices of other United Nations entities with regard to the geographical mobility of their staff. Staff representatives from WHO headquarters and from some of the regions actively participated in work of the taskforce. We consistently pointed out that even though WHO is on

the right track towards a comprehensive and implementable policy, many issues still need to be addressed:

- (a) A unified system of position descriptions and classifications should be instituted across all major offices by introducing an inventory of skill sets per function and grade level to ensure equal pay for work of equal value across the Organization.
- (b) Support mechanisms should be put in place prior to the first wave of mandatory mobility.
- (c) A range of incentives should be provided for staff to move and a clear timeline should be set.
- (d) Steps should be taken to ensure that the mobility policy is sensitive to issues such as gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity and disability in all professional categories, including by:
  - implementing the approved 2018 Global Staff/Management Council<sup>1</sup> recommendations on geographic mobility;
  - consulting with the Gender, Equity and Human Rights Department and the Health Workforce Department (and, if necessary, with external experts) to obtain their specific recommendations, not only on matters relating to senior professional positions;
  - ensuring that the criteria for geographical mobility management (including considerations for personal waivers and deferrals) are broadly transparent and well understood, and that special cases are handled in a transparent and systematic manner; and
  - providing data, for review by the Director-General (and staff associations), on: the number of staff (disaggregated by grade, region, and hardship duty station) eligible for mobility, the number of staff who will be overdue for mobility at the policy's planned implementation date, and indicative numbers of "complex" cases (recognized partners, families, separated or divorced staff members with children, and staff or members of their families with complex health needs).
- (e) Transparent and sustainable human resources plans for professional positions in headquarters and all regions should be developed in consultation with the staff associations.
- (f) Appropriate information management systems should be developed, which can capture the relevant information about staff needs (such as family status, disability status, previous experience with duty station changes) and the relevant information on the way in which duty stations can accommodate those needs.

7. Following the Director-General's review and approval of the above recommendations, the staff associations call on Human Resource Management (tasked with revising the mobility policy) to ensure that it incorporates these in the revised version of the policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Staff/Management Council recommendations are those agreed to by WHO management and all WHO staff associations, and signed off by the Director-General.

8. Further, we strongly recommend that the revised mobility policy should be discussed at the next meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council. It is imperative that the mobility taskforce's work on the geographical mobility implementation plan (including the timetable for implementation) is discussed so that the Council can develop recommendations to the Director-General and the Global Policy Group.

## **HARASSMENT (INCLUDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT)**

9. The policy for the prevention of harassment currently being applied in WHO dates back to 2010. Over the past two years, staff representatives and the administration have discussed how to strengthen the policy to prevent all forms of harassment more effectively, and to take prompt action when harassment may have taken place. The administration is currently working on a revised policy on sexual harassment and sexual violence which is in line with the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination model policy on sexual harassment. At the time of writing, the draft policy and procedures on Preventing and addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence has just been shared with the Staff Associations for comments.

10. While this is excellent, it is not enough. Addressing all forms of harassment must be of the utmost priority for the Organization, and every effort must be made to ensure that staff work in a supportive and enabling environment and are able to dedicate all their energy to achieving the vision of a world in which everyone can live healthy and productive lives. We are concerned by the length of time it has taken to revise the policy. We are also concerned that the draft revised policy focuses exclusively on sexual harassment and we have therefore called on the administration to ensure that the policy also addresses other forms of harassment. We hope to report on further progress in this area in our verbal statement to the Executive Board.

## **WHO TRANSFORMATION**

11. Staff are looking forward to transparent processes across the Organization as well as clear communication and consultations that engage us and keep us informed about the transformation agenda.

12. Through their participation in several transformation-related taskforces, staff representatives have brought two issues to the Director-General's attention: the lack of transparent criteria for matching skills to department work functions; and the fact that human and financial resources are not sufficient to monitor and evaluate work at department level. Regarding the lack of transparency, we would request that the Director-General approve proposed organigrams that reflect consensus and afford equal opportunities to qualified staff who may wish to apply for higher positions. Other issues are: ensuring the correct placement of bona fide staff in leadership roles; minimizing the chances of legal challenges internally and externally; and enhancing job security of all staff including those with temporary appointments. We also hope for business continuity and fair redistribution of employees across the new organigrams.

13. We call on the Executive Board to ensure that WHO has sufficient financial and human resources to enable staff to adequately and transparently monitor and evaluate the transformation work done so far. Staff also want certainty that they will be able to monitor subsequent stages of the transformation to ensure that our Organization is able to deliver on its mandate and meet the triple billion target.

## GOING FORWARD

14. We look forward to continuing to build and enrich our already constructive relationship with the administration, in particular in the context of the Global Staff/Management Council. In addition to the matters outlined above we will discuss other key issues of concern for staff, including:

- Staff Health Insurance. This is an area of importance to all staff, not only those at WHO headquarters. It is also an area where we have seen much improvement over the years thanks to positive staff-management engagement. We hope to build on those developments to ensure that the principle of universal health coverage is applied to all WHO, UNAIDS and IARC staff, dependents and retirees, irrespective of their grade or duty station.
- Joint work with the administration to ensure the implementation of a mental health policy across the Organization in line with the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy, which was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General in October 2018. We thank the Director-General for his commitment to this important topic and stand ready to work with him to support our Organization in fulfilling its duty of care.

## INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

15. Staff of all categories are of the view that the International Civil Service Commission needs to reform; the decision of the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO on the pay cut issue clearly demonstrates this. We therefore call on Member States to request a reform of the Commission through a review of its methodologies for setting United Nations staff salaries and benefits. This will go a long way towards fostering staff confidence in the Commission's recommendations and minimizing the number of legal challenges based on United Nations staff remuneration. We would also like to request that the Executive Board consider tasking the International Civil Service Commission with ensuring some measure of equality in the salaries of general service staff globally, and reducing the differences in salaries between international professional and general service staff where the currency of the host country is unstable and subject to fluctuations and deflation.

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