

Report of the Ombudsman

Ombudsman's recommendations: progress on implementation

Report by the Director-General

1. This document provides an overview of action taken by the administration in response to the recommendations made in the report of the Ombudsman,¹ presented to the Executive Board at its 144th session; it also complements the Ombudsman's report to the current session of the Board.² The human resources: update³ provides additional information on action and initiatives being implemented to address some of the challenges and recommendations contained in the reports of the Ombudsman.

2. As mentioned in Annex 1 of the Ombudsman's report of 2018, the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman reflects the Organization's commitment to promote the well-being of its employees through improved rules, policies and practices. By maintaining a close working relationship with the Office of the Ombudsman, the Organization gains greater insight into systemic issues, thereby making early corrective action possible.

FIGURES AND TRENDS

3. The administration is pleased to note that the WHO workforce is comfortable in seeking the support of the Ombudsman to discuss work-related concerns. This allows the Office of the Ombudsman to play its role in preventing conflict and in identifying underlying issues that need to be brought to the attention of the Organization. The number of staff members making use of the Ombudsman's services ("visitors"), as a percentage of the total workforce, increased from 4.2% to 4.8% in 2018. The administration is working with the Office of the Ombudsman to obtain the percentage of satisfactory outcomes following visits, with a view to encouraging more staff to seek the support provided by the service.

¹ Document EB144/INF./2 (2018).

² Document EB146/INF./2.

³ Document EB146/48.

FOLLOW-UP ON LAST YEAR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Respect and encouragement for diversity

4. In response to the Ombudsman's recommendation that the Organization "should face up to the problem [of discrimination], first by acknowledging its existence and then by being open about possible ways to address it", some action has already been taken.

5. In June 2018, the WHO Health Emergencies Programme set up a working group on diversity in the workplace. The group has reviewed best practices from United Nations agencies and other entities that can be used as guidance. It has been acting as a sounding board where opinions and concerns can be expressed, and it is proposing solutions to increase diversity. In addition to regular meetings of the group, quarterly reporting on diversity statistics has been instigated to raise awareness and to track progress. A senior officer in the Office of the Executive Director has also been assigned to support the WHO Health Emergencies Programme in meeting its diversity targets and to support the implementation of other recommendations of the working group. The Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme noted in its report¹ to the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in May 2019, that the Programme could serve as a pilot to guide the Organization in its efforts to improve diversity.

6. An internal dashboard to monitor key performance indicators is being tested at headquarters. The dashboard includes monitoring of trends in geographical diversity by divisions, as well as progress towards established targets. The internship programme regularly encourages managers to increase diversity in order to reach the target of 50% of selected interns coming from low- and middle-income countries by 2022. One of the WHO values jointly defined by staff (see below) is that of being "Collaborative colleagues and partners". By endorsing that value WHO staff commit to "recognizing and using the power of diversity to achieve more together".

Encouraging staff engagement and defining WHO core values

7. All staff have been fully engaged in WHO transformation and in particular in the initiative to jointly define and align on the corporate values of the Organization. Further to a wide and inclusive consultation process, including a "values jam" that involved more than 2700 staff members at all levels of the Organization, the WHO Values Charter was developed and launched in May 2019.² Under the Charter, WHO staff now recognize themselves as "Trusted to serve public health at all times; professionals committed to excellence in health; persons of integrity; collaborative colleagues and partners; and people caring about people". Different initiatives have been introduced to bring those values to life; for example, during staff and intern inductions, participants are invited to reflect on the values, and the values have also featured during leadership and management training in the African region. The policy on recognizing excellence has been amended to include the new award category of "Values champion", which can go to individuals and/or to teams.

¹ Document A72/6.

² WHO values charter. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/values-charter-en.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=4ed75cec_12, accessed 3 December 2019).

Need for WHO to invest in its managers

8. Career management activities, coaching, mentoring, team building and career-counselling support to staff continued to be offered at headquarters throughout 2019, both face-to-face and at distance. The Mentoring Programme, which was formally launched in December 2019, has been enhanced and its membership expanded, with currently over 200 professional and general staff members registered as mentors. Training is also being developed for mentors and mentees and will be offered as part of the Mentoring Programme, starting in January 2020. These initiatives focus on competency development, self-awareness, preparing staff to undertake higher level responsibilities or to be better equipped to face organizational change in terms of attitude and mind-set.

9. A pilot project on career paths for administrative officers¹ has been published on the Career Portal of the WHO intranet site. It provides information and guidance to staff members, to allow them to make informed career decisions and choices. New conflict management workshops have been co-developed by the Secretariat and the Office of the Ombudsman and are open to all staff. The workshops are aimed at improving working relationships and promoting a more respectful workplace.

ADDRESSING THIS YEAR'S CHALLENGES

Implementing WHO's values

10. Changes continue in the areas of recruitment, onboarding and training of staff. At the same time, induction processes, performance management and awards/recognition of staff members have been implemented with a view to having progressive impact at all levels of the Organization. There is recognition that sustainable change in this area will require continued efforts.

11. The launch of the WHO Values Charter in May 2019 clearly did not mean that behaviours would change overnight. However, senior management has strongly committed to implementing the values that the charter contains. The Director-General regularly informs staff about his open-door policy and has requested that all managers across the Organization should adopt the same policy.

12. A new programme to provide leadership coaching to senior managers is being implemented and will be rolled out in the course of 2020. The programme aims at ensuring that WHO leaders are offered the right support to address transformation challenges, as well as broader day-to-day management and leadership challenges, and successfully lead, coach and act as role models for their staff and teams to help them to achieve professional excellence. A key feature of the coaching initiative is its alignment with, and adherence to, the Director-General's vision for the Organization and the WHO transformation agenda, as it focuses on enhancing collaboration, connection and open communication among staff members.

13. Staff surveys will continue to be regularly conducted, to keep a finger on the pulse of the Organization and ensure that the necessary changes are made to keep WHO on track.

¹ For more information, see: <https://workspace.who.int/sites/mobility/careerpaths/SitePages/Welcome.aspx> (accessed 6 December 2019).

Facilitated reassignment of staff members confronting untenable situations

14. Management recognizes the importance of having policies in place to move staff out of their current positions when there is evidence of an inappropriate working environment. The report of the Ombudsman rightly notes that current policy on prevention of harassment refers to interim measures that can be taken by the Director of the Department of Human Resources Management pending completion of informal resolution or pending the resolution of a formal complaint. However, other difficult situations may occur, leading to staff requests to move which are not covered by that policy. Work has begun on developing additional policies and mechanisms to address this gap, which comprise estimating the average number of cases per year, establishing clear criteria to trigger special actions, including moves, as well as ensuring a predictable source of funding to enable swift action.

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