

Report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board

1. The thirty-second meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee was held in Geneva from 21 to 23 October 2020 under the chairmanship of Dr Faical Ben Salah (Tunisia).¹ The Committee adopted its agenda² with the deletion of the following items: 3.5, Special arrangements for settlement of arrears; 3.6, Assessment of new Members and Associate Members; 3.7, Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules; 5.3, Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules; and 5.5, Amendments to Staff Regulations and Staff Rules.

2. The Director-General presented an update on the response of the Organization to the allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. An independent commission had been established to swiftly establish the facts, support survivors, and ensure that such acts had stopped and that the perpetrators were brought to account. It would also recommend ways to prevent such acts from taking place in the future. The Regional Director for Africa added her support to the process. The Director-General also provided a brief overview of the Organization's financial situation and its efforts to continue the transformation process in the face of the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

3. Recalling its thirty-first meeting in January 2020, the Committee agreed to continue the practice of adopting a concise report with clear recommendations for each item on its agenda. The Committee requested that, in future, reports provided to the Committee include specific information on the Secretariat's follow-up activities in respect of recommendations made by the Committee at its previous meeting. For the thirty-third meeting of the Committee scheduled for January 2021, reporting should include information on the recommendations of both the thirty-second and thirty-first meetings.

Agenda item 2 Matters for information or action by the Committee

2.1 Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee: annual report (Document EBPBAC32/2)

4. The Chair of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee presented the report.

5. The Programme, Budget and Administration Committee welcomed the report and expressed its support for the recommendations contained therein, requesting the Secretariat to ensure that

¹ The list of participants is available in document EBPBAC32/DIV./1.

² Document EBPBAC32/1 Rev.1.

recommendations by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee would be followed up and that progress in the Secretariat's response would be reported on.

6. With regard to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, the Committee welcomed the fact that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Organization was implementing 60–80% of the original workplans, and requested regular updates on that matter.

7. The Committee took note of the appreciation expressed by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee with regard to the smooth running of Secretariat teleworking practices in line with the Organization's business continuity plan. It also commended the fact that the Organization had prepared its 2019 financial statements in a timely manner.

8. Responding to the concerns raised by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee regarding risks to cybersecurity, the Secretariat provided information on the threats faced and on its efforts to bolster security in that area.

9. The Committee also highlighted the need to mitigate risks in relation to procurement and requested that more information on that matter be provided to Member States. Among other subjects, the Committee discussed the sustainability of the Staff Health Insurance Fund, and welcomed the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee's recommendation that the Organization evaluate its COVID-19 response. The Committee also discussed the need to adequately resource the internal oversight function.

10. The Secretariat indicated that it would indeed report on the recommendations provided by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee and confirmed that the normative work of the Organization in all areas would continue despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee recommended that the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic on WHO's work.

The Committee noted the report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) implement recommendations by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee in a timely manner, paying particular attention to recommendations identified as not having been sufficiently implemented in previous years; and, as a matter of importance, continue to strengthen internal oversight functions;**
- (b) continue to strengthen risk management in field offices;**
- (c) continue to prioritize its functions, keeping in mind the needs of developing countries;**
- (d) continue to strengthen its internal controls and investigative functions;**
- (e) continue to ensure that teleworking sets a positive example for remote working;**
- (f) continue to provide regular information to the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee in support of its mandate, and to provide regular updates to Member States on this information and on the implementation of the Advisory Committee's recommendations;**

- (g) ensure regular reporting and updates in the area of procurement work;**
- (h) continue the current alignment of its programmes for delivery of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work;**
- (i) continue to promote a culture of risk management;**
- (j) continue to strengthen its internal control systems to tackle challenges in relation to transfers and grants; and**
- (k) ensure that the internal audit and investigation function has sufficient staffing to ensure that it can fulfil its mandate and address the backlog of cases.**

2.2 Accountability overview (Document EBPBAC32/3)

11. The Secretariat presented a high-level overview of WHO's approach to strengthening institutional accountability, highlighting progress to date, efforts to strengthen WHO's business integrity functions and the challenges that remained.

12. The Committee welcomed the moves to strengthen effective risk management and accountability and the statement on the risk management framework by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee, including the importance of action on direct financial cooperation, transfers and grants, and resource mobilization. It also requested updates on prevention of fraud and non-compliance, which was an essential element of risk management and compliance; ridding the health sector of corruption was crucial. It suggested that the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee assess the Secretariat's work against corruption and on procurement.

13. The Committee expressed deep concern about the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and welcomed the establishment of the Independent Commission with its distinguished co-chairs to investigate them. The Committee emphasized the importance of creating a safe environment – one in which misconduct is readily reported without fear of retaliation – in order to accelerate organizational cultural change. The Committee asked to be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

14. The Secretariat confirmed that it was using the United Nations Clear Check database to prevent re-employment within the United Nations system of former United Nations staff and related personnel who have been found to have committed sexual harassment or sexual exploitation and abuse.

15. In response to questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Organization's current programme of work and on other functions, the Secretariat indicated that despite the major impact, it was continuing to deliver on workplans. Nevertheless, the development and implementation of policies and human resources functions had been impeded.

16. It was observed that the report could benefit from the inclusion of dimensions related to linking accountabilities with responsibilities, and a more explicit reference to the recommendations of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee. The Secretariat outlined the existing tools and pathways, noting that documents such as the compact between the Director-General and senior managers were available on the WHO website.

17. In reply to a suggestion about benchmarking capacities for accountability, the Secretariat indicated that steps had already been taken to begin that process. In response to comments about informing Member States about progress in strengthening accountability, the Secretariat indicated that it was working on innovative methods of communicating that information and that joint learning would be needed. The COVID-19 pandemic had impeded rapid headway.

The Committee noted the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) ensure that work in relation to strengthening business integrity spans all levels of WHO, including the country level;**
- (b) in its further work on accountability, focus more clearly on linkages to responsibilities and delegations of authority, and on strong systems to link responsibility and accountability;**
- (c) ensure the strengthening of systems that prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and consult with Advisory Committee members in this process, which should include the effective implementation in a timely manner of relevant policies and procedures to ensure a strong culture of zero tolerance for all staff and non-staff on these issues and a human-centred response that supports victims and holds perpetrators accountable;**
- (d) maintain the ongoing dialogue with Member States in order to enhance institutional accountability and business integrity, with a view to establishing best-in class approaches that are aligned to the level of ambition; and**
- (e) continue to promote a strong culture of accountability, including by implementing best practice policies and procedures that support robust tracking, monitoring, efficiency and transparency for all core business integrity operations, and by strengthening the relevant dimensions of WHO's accountability and internal control frameworks.**

2.3 Compliance, risk management and ethics: annual report (Document EBPBAC32/4)

18. The Secretariat introduced the Director-General's annual report on compliance, risk management and ethics.

19. The Committee noted the continuing work to respond to and advise on a large number of ethical concerns based on WHO's robust ethical framework and mechanisms.

20. The Committee further noted that a risk-aware, but not risk-averse, culture is a key element for WHO. Global training, which is focused not only on tools and procedures but also on making risk awareness a fundamental aspect of the culture in WHO, is essential. The Committee also noted that the principal risks are being published on the WHO website, and that a working group is developing the new fraud prevention policy in a holistic manner. Committee members requested the elaboration of a corporate risk appetite statement and the further inclusion of risk management in business operations.

21. The Committee suggested that statistics on ethical concerns be included in future reports. With regards to sexual misconduct, the introduction of mandatory staff training on exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment was welcomed, as were the changes to employment and non-staff contracts aimed at

strengthening responsibility. The Committee noted progress made on the policy on abusive conduct, covering all forms of harassment in addition to sexual harassment, and looked forward to the final policy. The consultative process for developing the policy was appreciated.

22. The Secretariat welcomed the recommendation that more statistics be used in future reports on this topic. Regarding the statistics provided for integrity hotline reports, the Secretariat stressed that the integrity hotline was not an investigative reporting line but rather a channel for all, staff and public alike, to raise concerns of any nature relating to WHO. The integrity hotline, administered by an external provider, was well accepted and widely used.

The Committee noted the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) include additional statistics in future reports on this area of work;**
- (b) ensure that the Committee has the opportunity to review the new policy on sexual harassment and sexual abuse before implementation; and prioritize the updating of other related ethics policies; and**
- (c) step up progress on further integration of risk management with operations and compliance tools at all levels of WHO in order to better address risks of fraud and to develop a risk-appetite statement for the Organization.**

2.4 Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (Document EBPBAC32/5)

23. The Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) introduced the document, commending WHO's commitment to accountability and oversight, and the cooperation between the JIU and WHO. She highlighted the need for WHO's governing bodies to deliberate, decide and act on relevant JIU recommendations and noted that while WHO's acceptance of JIU recommendations from 2016 to 2019 was above the average across the United Nations system, implementation was lower.

24. The Committee welcomed the report and noted the progress made in implementing many of the recommendations. It obtained additional information from the Secretariat on some JIU reports from 2018 to 2019, notably those on: enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system, review of audit and oversight committees in the United Nations system, the review of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness in administrative support services by enhancing inter-agency cooperation, and review of change management in the United Nations system. The Committee proposed that in its annual report on JIU reporting, the Secretariat add further detail to the section devoted to progress made in implementation of recommendations made in previous JIU reports.

25. With respect to the JIU audit and oversight services report, the Secretariat informed the Committee that the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee would consider revisions to its terms of reference at its next meeting in November 2020 prior to their submission for consideration by the Executive Board at its 148th session in January 2021. The Secretariat agreed to enhance reporting of implementation of progress for past JIU recommendations and noted that WHO annually posts a document on the Organization's Evaluation web page with implementation updates for all JIU reviews issued in the past five years.

The Committee noted the report.

Agenda item 4 Matter to be considered by the Seventy-third World Health Assembly, and for review by, and/or recommendation to the Executive Board

4.1 Evaluation of the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization (Documents A73/20 Add.1 and EB147/4 Add.1)

26. The Committee considered reports concerning the evaluation of the process for the election of the Director-General, and was addressed by the Chair of the informal consultations on the evaluation of the election of the Director-General.

27. Proposals for adjustments to the election process had already been considered by the Executive Board at its 146th session in February 2020, and one issue, regarding the length of the period of campaign, had been referred to informal consultations for further consideration.¹

28. The Committee discussed the issue and agreed with the outcome of the informal consultations, namely, that the start of the campaign should not be brought forward. Rather, the announcement of the names of candidates should be delayed by a short period, until after the last regional committee meeting of the year concerned, in order to ensure an equitable approach for all regional committee meetings, provided that the announcement should in any event take place no later than 10 weeks prior to the next session of the Executive Board.

29. The Committee also agreed with the view expressed by the informal consultations that prospective candidates could be invited to attend regional committee meetings but not to address those meetings, and that the code of conduct for the election of the Director-General should be amended to require candidates to disclose the source of all funding for campaign activities.

30. The Committee further agreed that a second candidates' forum should be held in the form of an interactive panel discussion between candidates and Member States.

The Committee, on behalf of the Executive Board, recommended that the Health Assembly adopt the draft decision contained in document A73/20 Add.1.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board adopt the draft decision contained in document EB147/4 Add.1.

Agenda item 5 Matters for review by, and/or recommendation to the Executive Board

5.1 Evaluation: annual report (Document EB147/5)

31. The Committee welcomed the report and the evaluations presented therein, highlighting the importance of the evaluations of WHO's work with collaborating centres and of WHO's normative functions at country level. The Committee supported the suggestion by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee that an evaluation of WHO's response to COVID-19 be conducted, but indicated that such an evaluation should not duplicate other evaluations on that topic, highlighting areas

¹ See the summary records of the Executive Board at its 146th session, fourteenth meeting, section 6, and fifteenth meeting, section 1.

to be considered in any future evaluation. The Secretariat confirmed that it planned to await the outcome of the ongoing work of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response and any guidance on additional evaluative work required, before proceeding with an evaluation in 2021. In the meantime, the Evaluation Office was already engaged with other bodies considering evaluation of the broader COVID-19 response, including the United Nations Evaluation Group and the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, with a view to adding value to those evaluations.

32. The Committee requested that the Secretariat fully implement the accepted recommendations from previous evaluations. The Secretariat indicated that reporting on the response to recommendations was currently published on the Evaluation Office webpage, and that a senior staff member had been appointed to work on organizational learning, which would ensure follow-up on implementation of recommendations. In response to a suggestion from the Committee, the Secretariat agreed to work on improving the layout of the Evaluation Office webpage to make it more user-friendly.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board note the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) include an evaluation of the WHO response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the evaluation workplan for 2021, while ensuring that this does not duplicate ongoing efforts in that regard;**
- (b) ensure timely implementation of all accepted recommendations of evaluations; and**
- (c) ensure additional support and investment for the development of more regional expertise in monitoring and evaluation.**

5.2 Hosted partnerships:

- Report on hosted partnerships (Document EB147/6)**
- Review of hosted partnerships (Document EB147/7)**

33. The Committee commended the work of the hosted partnerships and recognized the value of reports on their work, which should continue to be provided. The Committee noted the significant contribution of hosted partnerships to WHO's technical work, to WHO's global health agenda, including the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, and to improving health outcomes. The Committee also commended the role of such partnerships in the development of global strategies in their respective areas.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board note the reports contained in documents EB147/6 and EB147/7.

5.4 Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations (Document EB147/INF./1)

34. The Committee acknowledged the work, dedication and efforts of all WHO's staff during the exceptional period that had followed the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it welcomed the efforts made with respect to new work modalities, which should be expanded into the regions and country offices as applicable. The Committee asked to be kept informed about the outcomes of the

working group on flexible working arrangements, including teleworking and the associated contractual modalities, and suggested that the alignment of the transformation process be reviewed with regard to the move to teleworking.

35. The Committee expressed concern about the mental health and well-being of staff, and their continuing support and care during and after the crisis; it suggested that future human resources reports include information on measures to support mental health and resilience. It further suggested that the Secretariat develop a multi-year human resources strategy, aligned with the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, which would include staff surveys.

36. The Committee again welcomed the Organization’s response to sexual harassment and sexual abuse and looked forward to the finalization and implementation of its internal policy without delay. It also stressed the importance of the Secretariat’s continued efforts to ensure an internal justice system that is efficient, effective and trusted by staff.

37. The Committee expressed continued support for WHO’s geographical mobility programme and urged that implementation of geographical mobility should be fair, ethical and considerate of family and individual circumstances. It drew attention to the fact that staff health insurance cards were not recognized in some locations.

The Committee proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat’s implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) continue to keep the Member States abreast of the outcomes of its new working methods;**
- (b) continue to ensure that staff feedback is obtained through the necessary surveys on WHO’s operations, such as those in the area of transformation;**
- (c) continue to update Member States on timelines and implementation of geographical mobility;**
- (d) continue to support the mental health, resilience and well-being of staff; and**
- (e) continue to improve Staff Health Insurance services, as appropriate, particularly for country-based staff.**

Agenda item 6 Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting

38. The Committee adopted its report.

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