

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

1. The thirty-third meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee was held in Geneva from 13 to 15 January 2021 and chaired by Professor Faical Ben Salah (Tunisia).¹ The Committee adopted its agenda² with the deletion of item 3.5, Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules, as there were no proposed amendments, and agreed its programme of work.

2. In his opening remarks, the Director-General stated that, just as the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) had changed the world in many ways, it would also change WHO. The pandemic had demonstrated that the world needed a strong WHO, and the work of the Committee was vital for building a stronger Organization. In its two meetings in 2020, the Committee had made almost 120 specific recommendations on matters including management, resource mobilization and allocation, accountability, recruitment, technology and gender equality, and the Secretariat had consequently established an internal mechanism to advance and monitor the implementation of these recommendations, with a view to providing a progress update through the relevant agenda items of meetings of the Committee and other governing bodies. Work was already in progress on more than 80% of those recommendations.

3. The Director-General noted that, in order to avoid pre-empting the report of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, a flexible draft Proposed programme budget had been prepared for the next biennium, with four strategic themes, namely: strengthening national capacities for emergency preparedness and response; building resilience through stronger primary health care, as the foundation of both health security and universal health coverage; advancing WHO's leadership in science and data; and responding to the urgent need to accelerate progress towards the triple billion targets and the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. As pointed out by Member States, ensuring predictable funding remained a major challenge for the Organization. The Director-General noted that, although not new, the discussion had taken on new significance in the light of the pandemic. A working group had been proposed to define the principles for identifying what should be funded; to develop options for how much funding was needed; and to consider how those priorities should be funded. If the Executive Board agreed to the proposal, the working group would be expected to provide a progress report to the Health Assembly in May 2021. The conclusions of the working group would then inform the revisions to the programme budget for 2022–2023, to be submitted to the Health Assembly in May 2022.

¹ The list of participants is available in document EBPBAC33/DIV./1.

² Document EBPBAC33/1.

5. The Director-General reported that the independent commission established in the wake of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the response to Ebola virus disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was in the process of hiring an external company with experience in those matters to support the commission's work. In the meantime, a WHO policy on preventing and addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence was being finalized.

Agenda item 2 Matters for information or action by the Committee

2.1 Report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee (Document EBPBAC33/2)

6. The Chair of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee presented the report and commended the Organization's preparation of its staff for remote teleworking. He also gave positive feedback on the Advisory Committee's review of the Regional Office for Europe and the Country Office in Turkey, and in particular praised the attention attributed to assurance activities, as well as the proactive approach applied to implementing sustainable solutions.

7. The Programme, Budget and Administration Committee expressed its appreciation for the work of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee, particularly in the areas of cybersecurity and fraud prevention, and its focus on the mental health of the Organization's staff members, noting the challenges of working remotely over a long period and the possibility of fatigue and mental health issues among staff.

8. In that regard, the Secretariat informed the Committee of the short-term mental health support plan to assist staff members. The plan included stress management tools as well as other tools available to staff through communication materials. The Secretariat noted that 2021 had been designated as an "Organization-wide Year of the Respectful Workplace", with the involvement of the staff associations, with the aim of putting extra emphasis on staff as they coped with new working conditions.

9. With regard to sexual exploitation and abuse, the Secretariat informed the Committee of the establishment of the commission set up to investigate those issues, and the hiring of an external company to conduct fact-finding regarding allegations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This process will inform preventive measures that will be applied globally. A preliminary progress report is expected from the commission at the end of January 2021, with subsequent updates in March and in May.

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) continue to monitor staff well-being and address the fatigue and mental health issues of staff, including when working remotely over a long period;**
- (b) work towards full and timely implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee;**
- (c) provide further updates on previous recommendations of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and their implementation;**

- (d) continue strengthening essential functions such as internal controls, investigation and cybersecurity, including by acting as quickly as possible to hire the internal oversight services personnel needed in order to address the Organization's backlog of investigation cases;
- (e) strengthen cooperation with other United Nations system agencies, funds and programmes during the upgrade of the Organization's enterprise resource planning system, capitalizing on their experience; and
- (f) continue working towards implementing the Organization's policy of zero tolerance to fraud with regard to procurement, especially in emergency situations.

Agenda item 3. Matters for review by, and/or recommendation to, the Executive Board

3.1. Proposed programme budget 2022–2023 (Documents EB148/25 and EB148/25 Add.1)

10. The Secretariat introduced the draft Proposed programme budget 2022–2023, emphasizing that it presented an opportunity to take advantage of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, a two-stage approach had been taken, to allow the draft Proposed programme budget to be adopted at the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly in May 2021 and then reviewed at the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly in 2022 in the light of the conclusions of the report of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, to be presented in May 2021, and other relevant reviews. The document proposed a total budget increase of 5%, including a 19% increase for the base segment and the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, the end-date of which would move from 2023 to 2025, as progress had been hampered by the pandemic.

11. The draft Proposed programme budget 2022–2023 had been prepared on the basis of a results-based budgeting approach; only after its formal approval by the Health Assembly, could the Secretariat proceed with and operationalize the budget.

12. The Committee heard a proposal that, in the interest of achieving greater transparency and a better understanding of budgetary trends, more specific information should be provided in the form of a brief introduction or an annex reflecting a comparative analysis of previous, current and proposed costs of key items of expenditure (such as staff costs, consultants, experts, contractual services and travel) as well as a staffing table for the biennium of the Proposed programme budget, indicating the number of posts planned to be reduced, established or reclassified. The presentation would also benefit from the provision of information on expected efficiencies in terms of real savings and working processes and areas where efforts in that regard might be undertaken. The matter might benefit from further discussion in a working group on sustainable financing.

13. The Committee supported the targeting of investments and the four strategic focus areas of the draft Proposed programme budget. At the same time, some Member States expressed concern at the size of the increase in the base segment. How could that increase be sustainably funded, given that the proposed increase would further amplify WHO's reliance on voluntary contributions? The Committee called for more detailed information to be provided about what the additional proposed investments would entail, including through an information session for Member States. Considerable emphasis was placed on the need for WHO to strengthen its enabling functions. On the proposed increase in the base segment of the Proposed programme budget, the Committee requested a breakdown to show how the increased budget would be allocated per WHO region and the proportion of the increase that would be allocated to countries.

14. The Committee welcomed the information contained in the report on progress towards achieving the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) and requested that the annual letter to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) be shared with Member States as per the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System.

15. The Secretariat, responding to the queries raised, noted the Committee's call for more information on prospective funding for the biennium 2022–2023. The Secretariat would provide the information in a timely manner; it would convene consultations with the Member States in the run-up to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly and would update its proposed budget accordingly. The Secretariat also agreed to organize an information session about the implications of the two-year extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. Regarding WHO's enabling functions, the proportion of the budget spent on those had decreased over recent years and the Secretariat noted the Committee's desire to revisit the issue.

16. With regard to polio transition, the Secretariat indicated that budget estimates had been based on projections made several years earlier that had assumed global eradication of poliomyelitis by 2022. However, the disease had not yet been eradicated in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and there had been outbreaks due to vaccine-derived polioviruses in other areas. Related budget forecasts would be reviewed in the first quarter of 2021, and the Secretariat would provide updates upon request. In the meantime, the transition of polio assets remained a high priority for the Organization, and all relevant information would be regularly provided to the governing bodies. The Secretariat was also updating its approach to research on, and detection of, zoonotic viruses, and that work would be finalized in the coming months.

17. The Director-General referred to questions that had been raised in respect of the WHO Foundation and the WHO Academy, two major innovations introduced by WHO transformation. The WHO Foundation, as an independent grant-making entity, represented one of the ways in which the Organization's funding could be diversified. It was a legal entity that did not absorb WHO resources; rather, it contributed to them. Its initial plan was to raise US\$ 1 billion within three years. Around 70% of funds raised would go to WHO and the rest would be distributed among other global health actors. The WHO Academy was planned to be self-financing in the medium term. The Academy would ensure optimal organization and delivery of WHO's training activities. It would also ensure certification of the skills taught and would provide training and capacity-building for both Member States and staff.

18. The Committee noted that output 4.3.2 (Effective and efficient management and development of human resources to attract, recruit and retain talent for successful programme delivery) should reflect that WHO, as part of the United Nations system, is guided by the decisions and recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly governing conditions of service and staff remuneration.

• **Sustainable financing** (Document EB148/26)

19. The Secretariat presented the document on sustainable financing, which outlined the challenges faced by the Organization with a funding model that does not allow the Organization to respond to the changing public health environment and that has left a number of technical areas chronically underfunded. The Committee noted the continuing problems of over-reliance on a relatively small number of large donors and the difficulty in attracting staff with the right skills. The Secretariat also presented the contents of a white paper supplementing the document on sustainable financing and proposing the establishment of a Member State working group to address the funding challenges faced by the Organization.

20. The Committee expressed support for a sustainable financing approach that first identified the critical functions of the Organization, costed them, and then identified the appropriate sources of funding. It expressed appreciation for the proposal to establish a working group on sustainable financing composed of Member States, while underlining the importance of widening the debate in respect of the working group's terms of reference.

21. The Committee suggested that work should also focus on the root causes of the issues highlighted, with consideration given to innovative sources of funding. The Secretariat clarified that the aim was to provide a first progress report at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board note the reports contained in documents EB148/25, EB148/25 Add.1 and EB148/26; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) continue its efforts to address the recurring funding issues of the Organization, including by providing sufficient resources for the enabling functions, especially since the proportion of the budget spent on those functions has decreased over recent years, so as to ensure, inter alia, that budget increases are aligned with realistic resource mobilization efforts from identifiable sources;**
- (b) pursue the two-phase approach to preparing the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023, the budget increase and the extension of the date for achievement of the triple billion targets of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work to 2025;**
- (c) consider how cost estimates for additional Secretariat proposals may be taken forward in the future, in keeping with the good practice used for Member State resolutions;**
- (d) provide additional information on the implications of the extension of period of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work;**
- (e) maintain the Proposed programme budget's strategic focus on the four key action areas: rethinking preparedness and readiness and bolster response capacities to health emergencies; accelerating progress towards the achievement of targets of the Sustainable Development Goals; building resilience through strengthening health systems; and advancing WHO's leadership in science and data;**
- (f) continue to mainstream polio transition, and provide more information in that respect;**
- (g) ensure that the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023 maintains a focus on countries;**
- (h) continue to report on progress in the implementation of UN-SWAP recommendations on a yearly basis; and**
- (i) formally present a proposal for the establishment of a working group on sustainable financing to the Executive Board at its 148th session.¹**

¹ The proposal was subsequently revised and issued as document EB148/26 Add.1.

The Committee further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's preparation of the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023, that the Secretariat submit, as background information to the Proposed programme budget, preliminary estimates by outputs, broken down by staffing and activity costs, for information purposes. The Committee requested that the Secretariat improve further the format of the presentation of financial information, taking into account the views expressed.

3.2. Update on the financing and implementation of the Programme budget 2020–2021 (Document EB148/27)

22. The Secretariat provided the Committee with an update on the financing and implementation of the Programme budget 2020–2021 as at 31 December 2020, noting that final figures for 2020–2021 would be submitted to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly in May 2021. In particular, the financing for the current biennium appeared to be strong and in line with the previous biennium (2018–2019). In addition, with respect to the quality of the funds received and projected, figures showed an increase in the amount of core voluntary contributions and thematic funds, which are more flexible or earmarked at a very high level. At the same time, discrepancies still existed across strategic priorities, outcomes and major offices, and the Organization remained overly reliant on a limited number of donors. In that regard, the Secretariat undertook to pursue further a more equitable and timely allocation of resources across strategic priorities, outcomes and major offices and the diversification of the donor base.

23. Despite the large emergency component of the work undertaken by the Organization during 2020, the implementation figure of the base segment remained high and comparable to that of the biennium 2018–2019.

24. The Committee welcomed the report and the updated figures, which showed the strong overall financing and implementation status of the Programme budget 2020–2021. It expressed concern, however, at the Organization's persisting dependence on a relatively small number of donors.

25. The Committee noted that the biggest implementation challenges had been at the country level, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. It urged the Secretariat to take corrective measures in that respect as well as steps to maintain the strong implementation of planned activities under the Programme budget 2020–2021.

26. The Secretariat confirmed that action was already being taken to address the implementation challenges experienced at the country level, including the revision of normative guidelines in the light of the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the launch of a programme designed to boost disrupted essential public health programmes in disease-specific areas, immunization and sexual and reproductive health. Headquarters staff had assigned to some 20 countries to support that effort following the COVID-19 pandemic.

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) continue working towards improving the allocation of resources across the three levels of the Organization to reflect the stated need to reinforce county offices in delivering on the triple billion targets; and

(b) identify and incorporate lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic in the formulation of the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023.

3.3 Scale of assessments for 2022–2023 (Document EB148/28)

27. The Secretariat presented the report on scale of assessments for 2022–2023, noting that it contained two proposed scales based on the total number of Member States in the Organization at the time of the adoption of the draft resolution.

28. The Committee expressed concern at the limited amount of time available to consider the report and the need to consult further on the implications of the proposed scales and Member States' assessments.

29. In addressing the concerns of the Committee, the Secretariat indicated that the adoption of the scale of assessment does not affect the total amount of assessed contributions, as that is established by the appropriations resolution for the programme budget. It further clarified that there was an option to defer the discussion and consideration of the draft resolution to the thirty-fourth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee in May 2021, by which time there would probably be certainty regarding the number of Member States subject to assessed contributions and which of the two proposed scales was applicable.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board defer consideration of this item, including the draft resolution on the scale of assessments for 2022–2023, to the thirty-fourth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, so that the Committee could make a recommendation for adoption of the draft resolution by the Seventy-fourth Health Assembly in 2021.

3.4 Status of collection of assessed contributions, including Member States in arrears in the payment of their contributions to an extent that would justify invoking Article 7 of the Constitution (Document EB148/29)

30. The Secretariat presented the report on status of collection of assessed contributions.

31. Given the fact that a decision on the matter was not due until May 2021 and that payments could still be made before that, the Chair proposed that consideration of the item be deferred to the thirty-fourth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee with a view to providing an update to Member States on the situation and agreed recommendations to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly in May 2021.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board defer consideration of the item, including the draft resolution concerning Member States in arrears in the payment of their contributions to an extent that would justify invoking Article 7 of the Constitution, to the thirty-fourth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee so that the Committee could provide an update on the situation and a recommendation to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly in May.

3.6 Update on the Infrastructure Fund (Documents EB148/30 and EB148/31)

• Update on information management and technology (Document EB148/30)

32. The Secretariat presented the update on information management and technology, noting that a number of key actions had been taken to implement the Organization's cybersecurity programme in the face of increasing and complex cyberattacks, namely: strengthening the funding for the Cybersecurity Roadmap, increasing the size of the cybersecurity team, establishing a managed and integrated security operations centre, improving enforcement of user authentication, continuously monitoring the Organization's IT assets, introducing a system to prevent email impersonation of WHO to the public, and retiring legacy IT applications.

33. The Committee commended the Organization's swift response to cyberattacks. It encouraged the Secretariat to further invest in cybersecurity and welcomed the establishment of a dedicated cybersecurity team.

34. The Secretariat reiterated that it would continue to work closely with other United Nations organizations and partners, including the United Nations International Computing Centre, as well as the private sector, in order to exchange lessons learned and share the latest cybersecurity information and alerts. In addition, it thanked Member States for the help they provided in preventing and opposing cyberattacks in the preceding few months.

• Geneva buildings renovation strategy (Document EB148/31)

35. The Secretariat presented the report on the Geneva buildings renovation strategy, informing the Committee that the construction of the new building had been completed on budget in November 2020, and that the renovation of the main building would commence in April 2021.

36. In response to the Committee's questions regarding the status of the existing L1, L2 and M buildings, the Secretariat confirmed that the current strategy remained in force and that any changes in the strategy would be presented to the relevant governing bodies as per standard practice.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board note the reports contained in documents EB148/30 and EB148/31.

3.7 WHO transformation (Document EB148/32)

37. The Committee received a report on the WHO transformation process, building on the report submitted to the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in May 2019¹ and reflecting comments provided at the meetings of the WHO regional committees. The Committee noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had reinforced the importance of WHO's transformation agenda and its goal of ensuring that WHO was fit for purpose to fulfil its mandate.

38. The Committee further noted that a more comprehensive report on WHO's transformation agenda had been published on the WHO website and shared with Member States in December 2020, describing efforts to make the Organization more agile in responding to the needs of Member States and their populations, including those countries where WHO does not have a physical presence. The Secretariat was encouraged to accelerate implementation of the transformation to the extent possible.

39. Committee members reiterated their support for the transformation agenda, emphasizing that country needs were at the core of the Organization's work and that WHO transformation at the three levels of the Organization was a cornerstone of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, and noting that this depended on the Organization having a reliable, and reliably resourced, presence in countries. The Committee specifically noted its appreciation for the work on digital health.

40. The Committee acknowledged the growing expectations of WHO and stressed that transformation priorities would need to be updated in the wake of the pandemic in order to ensure a fit-for-purpose, appropriately capacitated and financed country support function and country presence such that WHO would be able to respond with agility to changing country and partner needs and demands.

41. The Committee welcomed changes reflecting the transformation process, as shown for instance in the new emergency preparedness division, strengthened communications function, the new Office of the Chief Scientist, and in partnerships and resource mobilization.

42. It was pointed out that a fit-for-purpose country presence clearly depended on successful implementation of wider, three-level transformation initiatives, particularly in the areas of human resources, planning, resource mobilization and financing and resource allocation, and with the roll-out of technical, administrative and external relations processes.

43. The Committee expressed the value of having further detail on the transformation process, in order to facilitate the assessment of country achievement, and pointed out that further details would alert Member States to budget implications.

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) take steps to overcome gaps in implementation of the transformation strategy in view of the frequent mismatch between available resources at country level and the needs of Member States and partners;

¹ Document A72/48.

- (b) as the transformation process is taking place in the context of wider United Nations reform, continue to coordinate and engage with other United Nations system entities, especially at country level;
- (c) ensure that there is broad and consistent staff engagement in the transformation process;
- (d) continually measure progress and communicate information to Member States; and
- (e) take into account the findings and recommendations from the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response and from the external evaluation of transformation in the prioritized plan for the continuing implementation of transformation.

3.8 Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

(Document EB148/INF./1)

3.9 Report of the Ombudsman (Documents EB148/INF./2 and EB148/INF./3)

3.10 Human resources: update (Document EB148/44)

3.11 Amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules (Documents EB148/45 and EB148/45 Add.1)

3.12 Report of the International Civil Service Commission (Document EB148/46)¹

44. The Committee discussed as a group the five subitems listed above.

45. The representative of the WHO staff associations said that staff had shown greater dedication and commitment than ever before in continuing to deliver the Organization's mandate during a global pandemic. He stressed that the restructuring under transformation must align processes across all WHO regional and country offices and ensure job security. It was essential that the Secretariat put in place measures to protect the mental health of staff, which could be adversely affected by working conditions during the pandemic. He reiterated the staff associations' request that the WHO policy on preventing and addressing abusive conduct, and its implementation plan, be launched. In that regard, the Secretariat clarified that, following consultations with staff associations and a Member State information session, the WHO policy would be published in early 2021. The Secretariat further emphasized its availability for additional information sessions as required.

46. The Ombudsman presented his report, highlighting the effect of the pandemic on working conditions and the impact it could have on staff well-being and mental health. He recognized that measures had been put in place to support staff, though further efforts were indicated. He noted that the current global calls for racial equality and an end to discrimination echoed the ongoing dialogue on that subject within WHO. He applauded the measures taken to tackle discrimination within the Organization and encouraged management to continue working towards tackling issues such as racism.

47. The Secretariat presented the human resources update, the amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, and gave a brief overview of the report of the International Civil Service Commission. In particular, it was explained that task forces had been put in place to deal with important issues arising from the COVID-19 situation and its impact on the workforce, such as presence on campus, flexible working arrangements, contractual modalities and mental health of the workforce. The Director-General had declared 2021 the "Organization-wide Year of the Respectful Workplace" and had encouraged

¹ Document EB148/46 was not be issued; the Secretariat provided a verbal update in respect of this sub-item.

continued strong engagement between management and staff. The Secretariat described the challenges of the financing situation on workforce planning and management, and highlighted key human resource initiatives currently in progress.

48. In answering questions by Committee members, the Secretariat clarified that the resolutions submitted to the Committee introduced amendments to the Staff Rules and Regulations that brought them into line with the recommendations of the International Civil Service Commission and with practice across the United Nations common system.

49. Lastly, the Secretariat provided a summary of the International Civil Service Commission's report and its recommendations on the base/floor salary scale; children's and secondary dependants' allowances; danger pay; level E hardship stations and the contractual framework.

50. The Committee appreciated the work that had been done towards achieving gender parity and diversity, pointing to the positive use of social media as an outreach tool to attract more staff from developing countries. It applauded the Director-General's efforts to improve the gender balance, particularly in senior level positions across all levels of the Organization, but expressed concern regarding the decrease in the percentage of women heads of country offices from 39.3% in July 2019 to 37.9% in July 2020. In that regard, the Secretariat highlighted that the human resources update demonstrated progress over a three-year period and that fluctuations in statistics during that period were possible. In particular, while the percentage of women heads of country offices had indeed fallen slightly between 2019 and 2020, the percentage in 2020 was nevertheless an increase on that of 2017.

51. The Committee stressed that the issue of improving geographical representation among WHO staff should be considered first and foremost through the dimension of Member States' geographical representation and not that of WHO regions. The regions-based method used in the human resources update could serve as an additional source of information.

52. The Committee also welcomed the approach to geographical mobility as outlined in the report and asked for it to be applied in the interest of the Organization, and that cost implications be highlighted. The Committee requested further clarification concerning the increased use of staff employed on short-term contracts and of non-staff employees, and asked whether recourse to such employment was a result of WHO's unstable financing.

53. The Committee noted that action currently undertaken in order to give assistance to country offices was compromised by an insufficient amount of sustainable financing for building capacities in countries in the area of human resources.

54. The Committee welcomed the action taken to support the mental health of staff, and the work undertaken to counter harassment and abuse of authority at work, referring particularly to two WHO policies, namely, that on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and that on preventing and addressing abusive conduct and its implementation plan. The Committee also reminded the Secretariat of the multiple requests made by the governing bodies in recent years on having more comprehensive updates on the policy development and resources for the enabling functions to prevent and address harassment and abusive conduct towards staff and beneficiaries and reiterated its wish to be better informed about policy development in this matter.

55. The Committee thanked the Ombudsman for the work done. It wished to know what the effect of the pandemic had been on the number of cases brought to the attention of the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman informed the Committee that while the number of cases brought to his Office at

headquarters had remained stable – 329 cases in 2019 and 323 cases in 2020 – there were signs that during the pandemic staff were less able to come forward to the Ombudsman. Accordingly, his Office had proactively reached out to teams and departments in order to find out how staff were reacting to working conditions under the pandemic. Results of this initiative had been positive.

56. Taking into account that WHO is part of the United Nations common system, the Committee highlighted that in developing human resources policies the Secretariat should be guided by the principles agreed within that system. The same applied to staff diversity, which had been thoroughly discussed in the International Civil Service Commission and as a result laid down in the Commission's annual report for the year 2018 in Annex V, in which a relevant definition and specific indicators of the notion were provided. The Commission's report had been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 73/273 entitled "United Nations common system".

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board note the reports contained in documents EB148/44 and EB148/45, and that it adopt the three resolutions contained in document EB148/45. The Committee further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat:

- (a) continue working to improve geographical representation from unrepresented and underrepresented countries;**
- (b) pursue implementation of the Ombudsman's recommendations, including those from previous years;**
- (c) take steps towards the goal of gender parity at all levels of the Organization, especially among heads of country offices;**
- (d) continue putting in place measures to support staff and deal with staff mental health issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and explore alternative ways of working among other measures;**
- (e) enhance its efforts to reduce the time taken to recruit staff, particularly to posts of high responsibility;**
- (f) include statistics on trends in sick leave and overtime in future human resources reports;**
- (g) consider inter-agency mobility within the context of the global mobility policy;**
- (h) provide updates and a comprehensive overview on the functioning and resourcing of the enabling functions supporting work on preventing and addressing harassment and abusive conduct towards staff and beneficiaries;**
- (i) keep Member States informed of and seek their views on the development of the diversity and inclusion strategy for the WHO workforce, and that this strategy should be guided by the principles agreed within the United Nations common system; and**
- (j) keep Member States informed of and seek their views on the development of the policy on prevention of abusive conduct, and that this policy should be guided by the principles agreed within the United Nations common system.**

3.13 Engagement with non-State actors

- **Report on the implementation of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors** (Document EB148/39)

57. The Committee received its fifth annual report on the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors which included updates from all WHO regions, noting that a comprehensive management response document had been prepared and that the network of focal points had been reactivated in order to ensure a corporate and streamlined approach to mitigate potential risks, facilitate learning exchange and disseminate good practices and new approaches across the three levels of the Organization. Furthermore, the Committee was informed that updated communications and capacity-building tools had been prepared to support engagements at country level.

58. The Committee noted that implementation of the Framework was in line with WHO transformation and was crucial for delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals through the Thirteenth General Programme of Work.

59. The report showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in a substantial increase in requests for engagement with non-State actors, including private-sector entities, as the response to the pandemic required cross-sectoral action. It was felt that the increase in requests had the benefit of bringing new entities into the global public health space, including those involved in information and communications technology, artificial intelligence, digital applications and the financial services sector.

60. The Committee expressed appreciation for the detail in the report and welcomed a system for formalizing relations between the Organization and non-State actors such as the private sector and civil society organizations, including potential accreditation for attendance at WHO regional meetings, while at the same time protecting the integrity, reputation, transparency, neutrality and public health mandate of the Organization. In that regard, the Committee stressed the importance of a strategy at both global and regional levels for engagement with non-State actors.

- **Non-State actors in official relations with WHO** (Documents EB148/40 and EB148/40 Add.1)

61. The Committee was informed that there are currently 217 non-State actors in official relations with WHO, including nongovernmental organizations, international business associations and philanthropic foundations that have continued, sustained and systematic engagement furthering the public health mandate of the Organization.

62. The Committee noted that due diligence had been performed on all these entities, and that past and proposed plans for collaboration with 77 entities had been reviewed within the current triennial renewal period, and it was proposed to confirm the renewal of their status. A list of the 77 non-State actors was provided to the Committee.

63. Two complete applications had been received from non-State actors requesting admission into official relations and had been reviewed to ensure that the established criteria and requirements including due diligence as set out in the Framework, were achieved. The two entities – Fondation Botnar and Vital Strategies, Inc. – fulfilled the established criteria and were presented for consideration.

64. It was proposed that the review of two entities be deferred to the 150th session of the Executive Board in January 2022 in order not to compromise the existing collaboration with the non-State actors concerned. The two entities were Helen Keller International and United States Pharmacopeial Convention.

65. In respect of one further entity, Project Orbis International, Inc., it was proposed that official relations be discontinued as common activities had significantly reduced in recent years and a comprehensive plan for collaboration would be challenging to develop.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board note the reports contained in documents EB148/39 and EB148/40, and that it adopt the draft decision contained in paragraph 19 of document EB148/40. It further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat take prompt action to develop a WHO engagement strategy with non-State actors at both global and regional engagement levels, and provide resources for headquarters and regional offices, including resources for regional offices to carry out due diligence on non-State actors.

Agenda item 4. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting

66. The Committee adopted its report.

= = =