

## **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 presented to the Executive Board at its 146th session;<sup>1</sup> it also complements the Ombudsman's report to the current session of the Board.<sup>1</sup> The human resources update<sup>2</sup> provides additional information on action and initiatives being implemented to address some of the challenges and recommendations contained in the reports of the Ombudsman.

#### **FOLLOW-UP ON LAST YEAR'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Implementing WHO's values**

2. The Organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has put its organizational values to the test. As is shown throughout this report, the Organization has continued to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances in order to ensure that WHO's values are reflected in the best possible working conditions for staff.

3. At the same time, progress was made in further embedding WHO's values in such areas as recruitment, onboarding of new staff, training of current staff, performance management and awards/recognition of staff. Senior management continues to support these efforts and remains firmly committed to implementing the WHO Values Charter.

4. A new initiative to provide leadership coaching to senior managers was rolled out in 2020. The initiative ensures that WHO leaders are offered the support needed 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.

5. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Document EB146/INF./2.

<sup>2</sup> Document EB148/44.

## **Facilitated reassignment of staff members confronting untenable situations**

6. Management has established a mechanism for the temporary reassignment of staff out of their current positions when there is evidence of an untenable working environment. The mechanism is being rolled out in 2021 concurrently with the new WHO policy on preventing and addressing harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority, which updates and expands upon the current policy on the prevention of harassment. It will facilitate interim measures that can be taken by the Director, Department of Human Resources and Talent Management pending resolution informal or formal complaints. The mechanism will also apply to other difficult workplace situations which are not covered by the policy.

## **ADDRESSING THIS YEAR'S CHALLENGES**

### **Work-related challenges as a result of the pandemic**

7. Several measures and initiatives have been implemented to support the WHO workforce during 2020, and to address the work-related challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation has been constantly changing and evolving and therefore required a continual reassessment of the appropriate human resources measures in response. Some preliminary results on the performance of the Organization faced with new teleworking arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic were obtained from an initial staff survey.<sup>1</sup> There was overall positive feedback in relation to the question “Do you consider that your team has been managed effectively during the teleworking arrangements?”, with over 90% of respondents indicating that this was the case. A similar percentage of respondents also indicated that despite working remotely “their focus/work output expectations are adjusted and teleworking does not have any impact on deliverables”.

#### **(a) The role of managers/supervisors**

8. Senior management has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting and assisting supervisors to engage with their staff on challenges during the pandemic, and to review projected deliverables in order to manage expectations.

9. In March 2020, guidance for managers<sup>2</sup> was published to provide support with regard to the new teleworking arrangements. The guidance has helped ensure that managers: (a) are aware of the challenges of the new working environment; (b) have regular communication with their teams and maintain a collaborative approach; (c) use the new IT tools available and share good practices; (d) are clear about their expectations, and have a plan for the team and are ready to adjust it; and (e) are aware of the support available across the Organization. To support this guidance, several webinars have been held for managers and staff during this period.

10. Managers have been encouraged to exercise full flexibility regarding working schedules and assigned tasks, with adjustments for realistic outputs and expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted in mid-May by Staff Health and Welfare and Human Resources and Talent Management; over 2200 staff members from HQ duty stations provided a response.

<sup>2</sup> WHO Guidance for managers: teleworking in the context of COVID-19, 31 March 2020. A copy of the guidance is available upon request.

11. Managers have also been assisted to find solutions for staff members whose functions could not fully be performed outside the office, for example, by authorizing and organizing exceptional return to the premises for periods of time, and reassigning other tasks which could be performed from home.

**(b) Staff mental health**

12. The Organization has recognized the importance of supporting staff mental health during this period, as noted in the Ombudsman's report. The Organization has regularly encouraged staff to seek assistance, when needed, from the various psychosocial services available, including collective and individual consultations available for staff in the regions with a staff counsellor or staff psychologist.

13. A Mental Health Task Force has been established to address staff mental health. As part of its work, the task force is organizing an event with the Director-General on mental health at work, which is planned to take place in early 2021. The objective of this event is to raise awareness of mental health at work, to ensure that staff who are struggling feel heard, and that staff who have stories of recovery and coping can share these experiences with a wide audience. This event also aims at ensuring that staff are aware that mental health at work is addressed through a comprehensive multi-systems approach.

14. Further, senior management will follow the lessons learned during the implementation of flexible work arrangements related to COVID-19, in order to raise more awareness and take further action to better support staff mental health.

**(c) Flexible work arrangements**

15. Flexible work arrangements have been applied in various ways to assist the workforce in adapting to the new working environment. Senior management continues to build on these measures with a view to further develop initiatives as the situation evolves.

16. A Task Force on Flexible Working Arrangements in WHO has been established and is chaired by the Assistant Director-General for Business Operations, with representation from across the Organization. The vision is to modernize the ways in which WHO empowers its workforce across all levels, building on the best practices and lessons learned in the field of flexible working arrangements. The objective of the task force is to conceptualize a global framework, which will be the basis for anchoring the respective policies of major offices across the three levels of the Organization, recognizing the need to address varying contexts.

17. Numerous measures have also been implemented to provide flexibility in the application of staff entitlements which were particularly affected by travel limitations. In this regard, the Organization adopted the Chief Executive Board Human Resources Network Administrative Guidelines for Offices on the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak.<sup>1</sup> These Guidelines provide a common approach for United Nations common system organizations on the most important aspects of managing staff members during the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Administrative guidelines for offices on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak – Framework for the management of staff members in the World Health Organization, 7 May 2020. A copy of the guidelines is available upon request.

18. Guidance for WHO interns and their supervisors<sup>1</sup> was issued in March 2020, and a set of questions and answers was developed in July 2020 (and updated in September 2020) to address subjects related to interns and consultants. New provisions were introduced to provide compensation for absences due to illness for consultants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Progress towards greater diversity, and increased efforts to address racism**

19. Senior management has strongly committed to work towards greater diversity at WHO and to ensuring that all members of the workforce feel welcome and respected and are given equal opportunities within WHO. In furtherance of this commitment, senior management is in the final stages of stakeholder consultations on two significant instruments to be issued by the end of 2020: the WHO policy on preventing and addressing harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority, and the diversity and inclusion strategy for the WHO workforce.

20. The WHO policy on preventing and addressing harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority expands the current policy on the prevention of harassment to also cover discrimination, defined by the policy as “any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction in the workplace, on the basis of gender, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, language, or other aspects of personal status”. The new policy sets out mechanisms to support those who report or witness discrimination and to ensure the accountability of those who perpetrate it. Measures to prevent and address instances of discrimination include mandatory training for all members of the workforce<sup>2</sup>, as well as additional training for managers/supervisors on promoting a harmonious working environment and addressing possible instances of discrimination.

21. The diversity and inclusion strategy lays the foundation of the policies, processes, and action plans through which the Organization will: (i) attract and retain a diverse workforce, and (ii) create a work environment welcoming to all, where everyone feels valued and can perform at their best regardless of their age, gender identity, disability, race, caste, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or any other status. Diversity sensitive analysis and action will be integrated into all organizational practices, policies and programmes. Management will work towards improving diversity and inclusion through a number of measures, which could include setting diversity targets, adding a diversity statement in vacancy notices, granting awards for diversity and inclusion, considering diversity as a key component of major human resources initiatives such as mobility and career pathways, and using surveys and questionnaires to measure WHO’s progress in this area.

22. As set out in the action plan accompanying the diversity and inclusion strategy, the Organization has already implemented a number of measures such as the WHO Values Charter, WHO Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and mandatory training for selection panels. The action plan also identifies additional measures that management will use to achieve the Strategy’s aims, including, for example, implementing mandatory training on the WHO Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and revising exit questionnaires to include questions on WHO’s inclusive culture. Implementing the strategy will include specific outreach efforts and recruitment processes to attract diverse candidates and career development initiatives to assist diverse members of the workforce to further their careers.

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 Guidance for WHO interns and their supervisors, 12 March 2020 (updated on 23 April 2020 and on 15 May 2020. A copy of the guidance is available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> Staff members and non-staff personnel, as well as other individuals at WHO, such as contractors under an Agreement for Performance of Work (APW) and technical partners.

23. Both of these instruments set out the obligations and accountability of the Organization, its leadership, managers/supervisors and members of the workforce more broadly. As well, given the importance of monitoring and evaluation, periodic data collection and analysis will be conducted to determine the status of key performance indicators and identify trends over time. This will inform the ongoing implementation of the instruments and, to promote greater transparency, this information will be shared with staff on a regular basis, with due regard to confidentiality.

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