

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

1. The thirty-sixth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee was held in Geneva from 18 to 20 May 2022 under the chairmanship of the Hon. Nickolas Steele (Grenada).^{1,2} The Committee adopted its agenda³ with the deletion of the following items: 3.6, Special arrangements for settlement of arrears; 3.7, Assessment of new Members and Associate Members; under item 4.2, the first bullet point on Proposals for WHO to host formal partnerships; and item 4.5, Amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules.

2. In his opening remarks, the Director-General said that WHO continued to focus on building sustainable and predictable funding to become a more agile, results-focused Organization, including through the proposed revision to the Programme budget 2022–2023 and WHO's financing structure. The WHO programme budget web portal continued to be regularly updated in support of those efforts, making up-to-date information on budgetary efficiency and results readily available.

3. Given the negative impact of the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on global public health, the Secretariat extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 to 2025 would accelerate progress towards the achievement of the triple billion targets and ensuring health for all. A new WHO investment case, *A healthy return*,⁴ had also been produced in order to provide a clear and sustainable way forward on financing the Organization over the next 10 years.

4. In respect of human resources, the Secretariat had adopted a number of measures to improve recruitment processes, achieve gender parity, establish flexible working arrangements, and strengthen performance management evaluation at all levels.

5. The Director-General reported that steps had been taken to monitor the progress made in respect of the WHO Management Response Plan to the report of the Independent Commission to investigate the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the response to the tenth Ebola outbreak, with 87% of the plan having been implemented or in progress to date. The Organization remained committed to transparency and had developed a new dashboard on investigations into sexual misconduct, which was accessible via the WHO website.⁵ A dedicated

¹ As both the Chair and the Vice-Chair were unable to attend, Dr George Mitchell (Grenada) officiated in their stead.

² The list of participants is available in document EBPBAC36/DIV./1.

³ Document EBPBAC36/1 Rev.1.

⁴ A healthy return: investment case for a sustainably financed WHO. Geneva : World Health Organization ; 2022 (<https://www.who.int/about/funding/invest-in-who/investment-case-2.0>, accessed 21 May 2022).

⁵ Dashboard on investigations into sexual misconduct [website]. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2022 (<https://www.who.int/initiatives/preventing-and-responding-to-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment/seah-dashboard>, accessed 21 May 2022).

investigation team, composed mainly of women, had been established to manage the investigation of all forms of alleged misconduct, with a new 120-day benchmark set for investigations into allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Senior experts on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment had also been deployed to all regional offices and dedicated focal points appointed in all country offices. A review of WHO's leadership culture had similarly been conducted to ensure zero tolerance to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment across the three levels of the Organization.

Agenda item 2 Matters for information or action by the Committee

2.1 Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee: annual report (Document EBPBAC36/2)

6. The Chair of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee provided an overview of his Committee's report.

7. The Committee welcomed the report of the Advisory Committee and expressed support for the recommendations contained therein, in particular those concerning the need for creating incentives to improve the implementation of audit, evaluation and other recommendations. In that regard, it further noted with satisfaction the action taken by the Secretariat to establish a consolidated digital platform to track and report on the implementation of recommendations made to WHO from multiple sources, including those issued by audit, evaluation and governing bodies.

8. The Committee fully supported the recommendation to invest in data analytics, including the suggestion to develop a set of specific case studies at country and regional levels to illustrate the value of such investments in driving decision-making. It further welcomed the outcome of the benchmark analysis on the cost of enabling functions, the progress made on WHO transformation, and the efforts undertaken to implement anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures, as described in the report.

9. Noting the late submission of the report, the Committee invited the Advisory Committee to consider the impact of meeting schedules on the timeliness and submission of that Committee's documents, and as a general matter requested the Secretariat to submit all reports to Member States as per the schedule mandated in order to enable their meaningful discussion. It also called for the Advisory Committee to consider assessing the current separation of investigative functions relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and abusive conduct from other investigations, in the light of best practices of other United Nations organizations.

10. In response to questions raised about the risk appetite framework, the Chair of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee highlighted the importance of the Secretariat working closely with all external and internal stakeholders, including Member States, to refine the provisions of that framework.

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 should continue its work to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

The Committee requested the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee to continue monitoring the results of investigations of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as the recently created process for reviewing and investigating such cases.

2.2 Accountability overview (Documents EBPBAC36/3 and EBPBAC36/4)

11. The Secretariat introduced two reports: on progress in advancing institutional accountability, and on progress towards achieving the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

12. The Committee welcomed the reports and recognized the efforts made by WHO to strengthen its accountability functions. It noted that those functions were a measure of the Organization's commitment to the highest ethical standards and values and of its determination to prevent the perpetuation of business risks. It took particular note of and welcomed the establishment of a new department for the prevention and response to sexual misconduct; of a specialist investigative unit to manage all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment; and of a new policy directive on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

13. The Committee also strongly supported development by the Secretariat of a consolidated digital recommendation management and tracking platform, to bring together recommendations from multiple sources and to document and track WHO's management responses and their implementation. It acknowledged that such a tool would greatly enhance the transparency of the Organization's governance.

14. Regarding progress towards achieving the UN-SWAP indicators, the Committee welcomed the steps taken to adhere to UN-SWAP, as measured against the 17 performance indicators contained in the Action Plan. It also welcomed the information that WHO was developing an organization-wide policy on gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the Committee remained concerned at the lack of gender parity in the higher staff categories, while noting that gender parity at P4 level and above had improved by 4% under the current Director-General. It was likewise concerned at the information given in the report that WHO was falling behind the average level within the United Nations system – especially as regards other large, specialized agencies – in enhancing gender parity and women's empowerment. It noted that there were shortfalls in the resources required to fully implement the UN-SWAP. The Committee asked the Secretariat to produce a specific plan to accelerate progress in this matter, for its consideration at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the reports contained in documents EBPBAC36/3 and EBPBAC36/4; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

(a) continue to develop the Organization-wide policy on gender equality and women's empowerment, in order to improve performance on UN-SWAP implementation at all three levels of the Organization;

(b) keep the Committee informed regarding the establishment of a digital platform to coordinate efforts across all accountability functions, better track recommendations and progress made in their implementation, identify challenges and solutions, and promote greater transparency regarding the implementation of management responses;

(c) continue to reinforce the essential efforts and steps being taken to install a culture of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment;

(d) align with United Nations system best practices to accelerate progress on the UN-SWAP indicators and produce a specific plan in that regard;

(e) ensure appropriate resources for the Organization's work on gender, equity and human rights to allow it to fulfil its mandate; and

(f) continue reporting on WHO's UN-SWAP performance to the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee on a regular basis.

2.3 Compliance, risk management and ethics: annual report (Document EBPBAC36/5)

15. The Secretariat presented an update on the actions taken in 2021 and early 2022 to strengthen its approaches to compliance, risk management and ethics across the Organization.

16. The Committee welcomed the work being done to strengthen compliance, risk management and ethics as essential functions. It expressed appreciation for the embedding of risk management as an integrated approach and shared the Secretariat's view that the Organization's risk profile had evolved significantly and would continue to do so. It would welcome the Secretariat's views on the changes required as a result, and the possible involvement of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee. It further noted that risks needed to be managed across the three levels of the Organization. Guidelines, tools and training were essential for that purpose, requiring the broad involvement of all three levels of WHO. It suggested that the revised terms of reference of the WHO Global Risk Management Committee should be shared with Member States.

17. The Committee requested further information on the "procure to pay" process used to pilot an approach in which the key controls to manage known risks were defined for each line of assurance and for all actors across the three levels of the Organization for strengthened organizational accountability.

18. In response to questions from the Committee, the Secretariat said that the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics aligned its work with the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit, which it viewed as providing guidance for improving processes. It confirmed that the Office forwarded all the reports received relating to sexual abuse to the WHO Office of Internal Oversight Services; it did not close any reports itself. The Secretariat also confirmed that the Committee would be informed once the mandatory ethics training was released. Compliance rates would also be shared.

19. On the matter of compliance, the Secretariat explained that the recently revised policy on prevention, detection and response considered types of practices related to corruption that potentially affect decision-making in health programmes, including practices tied to money laundering and financing terrorism, in line with the latest international best practices and United Nations guidance.

20. The Secretariat said that the terms of reference of the WHO Global Risk Management Committee had been updated to ensure that all regional offices were represented and to set the tone in terms of the importance of embedding risk management in all WHO's work at the three levels.

21. The Deputy Director-General added that the WHO risk management strategy would be finalized during the second half of 2022. The aim was to integrate risk management into every aspect of the Organization's work and to ensure cross-fertilization between risk management and other strategies. To that end, the WHO Global Risk Management Committee was working on a global risk register, a risk appetite framework that incorporated a grading system, and risk mitigation strategies, in line with the recommendation of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee that risk management be institutionalized internally. She confirmed that the Global Risk Management Committee's revised terms of reference would be shared with Member States.

The Committee noted the report.

2.4 Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (Document EBPBAC36/6)

22. The Committee received a report on WHO's response to reports of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations, including details on the rates of acceptance and implementation by the Organization of recommendations by the Unit. The report showed that between 2017 and 2021, WHO's acceptance of the Joint Inspection Unit's recommendations stood at 86% and its implementation of those accepted recommendations was 62%.

23. The Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit introduced the document and noted that the Committee and the Secretariat were models for the United Nations system in effectively deliberating and responding to findings and recommendations in Joint Inspection Unit reports. He commended WHO's steady improvement in rates of implementation in recent years and recognized the continued outstanding cooperation the Joint Inspection Unit received from WHO's staff and focal points. He noted that Joint Inspection Unit reports from 2020 and 2021 included the impact of COVID-19 on effectiveness and efficiency of operations of United Nations entities for the respective report topic, that ongoing and new Joint Inspection Unit reviews covered topics of high relevance, importance and priority for the United Nations system, such as mental health and well-being, flexible working arrangements, accountability frameworks and staff health insurance programmes.

24. The Committee welcomed the inclusion of the Joint Inspection Unit's recommendations in the recently launched WHO consolidated recommendation tracking platform, which was designed to facilitate the timely follow-up and tracking of implementation status, and which also contained links to the recommendations issued by other accountability functions and the WHO governing bodies.

25. While noting the progress made to implement the Joint Inspection Unit recommendations, the Committee requested further information on the status of implementation of recommendations contained in reports on multilingualism, blockchain applications, cybersecurity, and mainstreaming environmental sustainability.

26. The Committee welcomed the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee's efforts to devise a process for managing allegations and investigations of misconduct by executive heads, in line with the recommendations contained in two Joint Inspection Unit reports, the 2020 report on the investigation function¹ and the 2018 report on whistleblower policies and practices.²

27. The Secretariat, in response to questions raised, assured the Committee that numerous actions had been taken to advance multilingualism within the Organization, in the official languages; and, in particular with regard to risk communication on COVID-19 and online courses for health emergencies, in many additional languages. In terms of the official United Nations languages, the previous biennium had seen significant increases in multilingual information provision and publishing, and in the use of interpretation and translation services. Investment was also being made in the use of technology to support multilingualism, for example for machine translation. With regard to the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit regarding the designation of a person to be the coordinator for multilingualism, the Secretariat undertook to give this further consideration and report back to the next meeting of the Committee.

¹ Document JIU/REP/2020/1.

² Document JIU/REP/2018/4.

28. The Secretariat also assured the Committee that action had been taken to explore possibilities for the use of blockchain in health care applications, including within digital health; to put in place concrete cybersecurity measures and include additional funds in the Programme budget 2022–2023 for cybersecurity, and developing a business case;¹ and to mainstream environmental sustainability through the formulation of a blueprint to make WHO carbon neutral by 2030, and through specific actions across the business operations of WHO.

29. The Secretariat confirmed that consideration was being given to the specific recommendations contained in the 2020 Joint Inspection Unit report on the investigation function and the 2010 Joint Inspection Unit report on the ethics function throughout the United Nations system,² regarding the establishment of term limits for the heads of Internal Oversight Services and Compliance and Risk Management and Ethics, as part of the Secretariat's ongoing development of its new investigation policy and efforts to strengthen the ethics function.

The Committee noted the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should continue to pay close attention to the implementation of recommendations contained in Joint Inspection Unit reports.

Agenda item 4. Matters for review by, and/or recommendation to the Executive Board

4.1 Evaluation: annual report (Document EB151/4)

30. The Secretariat introduced the annual report on evaluation.

31. The Committee commended the work of the Evaluation Office and highlighted the usefulness and comprehensiveness of the annual report, explaining how evaluations have an impact on policy as well as decision-making to achieve strategic objectives. The evaluation reports produced by the Evaluation Office provided valuable insights, including for example on the mainstreaming of gender equity and human rights within the Secretariat, and the Organization's reliance on consultants and use of agreements for performance of work. The Committee welcomed the strengthening of decentralized evaluation capacity in regional offices and encouraged all country offices to use evaluation reports and meta-analyses to strengthen programme implementation and performance and to enhance impact at country level.

32. The Committee expressed satisfaction at the focus on organizational learning and at the consolidated digital platform used to track recommendations from multiple sources, their management responses and implementation status. It further welcomed the WHO Evaluation Office's website and its newsletter providing timely updates on evaluations and their management responses.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board should note the report.

¹ See document A75/6.

² Document JIU/REP/2010/3.

4.2 Hosted partnerships

- **Report on hosted partnerships** (Document EB151/5)
- **Review of hosted partnerships** (Document EB151/6)

33. The Committee considered two reports, which contained an update on and a review of hosted partnerships, respectively. Such partnerships played a key role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, advancing universal health coverage and addressing critical health needs, including equitable access to maternal and child health and the generation of evidence to inform policies. The partnership with Unitaaid had provided a strong return on investment, particularly in terms of the impact of the COVID-19 response and access to diagnosis and treatment for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in low-income countries.

34. The Committee emphasized that WHO had to be forward-looking when it came to critical global health issues and welcomed broad participation by all stakeholders.

35. In reply to a query, the Secretariat responded that hosted partnerships were simply one way by which WHO engaged with partners; for example, the Secretariat would continue to identify the most suitable means of promoting work on digital health and pandemic management.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board should note the reports contained in documents EB151/5 and EB151/6.

4.3 Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules (Document EB151/8)

36. Following an introduction of the report by the Secretariat, the Committee acknowledged that the extension of the temporary suspension of Financial Rule XII, 112.1, in part, was needed to allow for the completion of ongoing work and to ensure that WHO's investigative processes related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment were fit-for-purpose. However, it requested assurance that a further request for extension would not be made.

37. The Secretariat confirmed that the extension request would not be repeated, although structural and procedural changes might prove necessary following receipt of the report of the audit of the investigative functions.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board should note the report and adopt the draft decision contained in document EB151/8.

4.4 Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations (Document EB151/INF./1)

38. The representative of the staff associations, speaking on behalf of the staff associations of WHO, IARC, AMRO, PAHO and UNAIDS, delivered a statement highlighting the seven key areas and issues of concern: staff health and wellbeing; diversity, equity and inclusion; respectful working environment; racism and racial discrimination; prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; internal justice system; and contractual conditions of work. She stressed that the Organization's workforce had been resolute in its determination to deliver the programme of work, despite the pressure imposed by the global pandemic, and recognized the significant efforts made by senior management and

by the Director-General to make lasting progress in the areas of concern for staff. The staff association was fully committed to continuing that constructive dialogue.

39. The Committee thanked the representative of the staff associations and welcomed the commitment by the Director-General to promote a healthy relationship and dialogue with staff. The staff associations' clear indications on diversity, equity and inclusion, and on the issue of racism and racial discrimination were timely, as improvements were always possible. Given the great importance of mental health and psychosocial well-being, the Committee was concerned that access by staff to support for mental health remained an issue and queried whether tele-counselling could be a way forward. The Committee welcomed the adoption of the new policy on preventing and addressing abusive conduct and asked to be kept informed on the results of investigations into abusive conduct. It also requested the staff associations to provide feedback on the implementation of the United Nations disability inclusion strategy.

40. The Secretariat informed the Committee that progress was being made on the policy on flexible working arrangements, building on the experience garnered over the period of the pandemic. The aim was to maintain optimum outputs, but also to attain a better work-life balance. All efforts would be made to ensure that the training on preventing and responding to abusive conduct was fully completed by all members of the workforce. The mobility policy was yet to be implemented, but the staff associations had been involved throughout the earlier policy review and the simulation exercise. The issue of staff mental health and psychosocial well-being was of great importance, and tele-counselling was already being used to help extend support to staff across all regions.

41. The Director-General reaffirmed his commitment to working closely with the staff associations on shared objectives through his monthly meeting with the staff associations. His "Thursday open hour," when all staff members had the possibility of discussing problems with him, was another channel of contact and dialogue. The aim was to work together to produce a virtuous circle: what was beneficial for the staff benefited the Organization, and what was beneficial for the Organization benefitted all staff.

Agenda item 5. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting

42. The Committee adopted its report.

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