

Matters emanating from the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance

Secretariat implementation plan on reform

Report by the Director-General

1. The Secretariat's implementation plan for reform was presented to the 152nd session of the Executive Board in document EB152/34 and endorsed by the Board in decision EB152(16) (2023). Previous progress reports on the implementation plan had been considered by the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth sessions of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee,¹ by the Executive Board at its 152nd session in January 2023² and by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly in May 2023.³
2. The reform actions stipulated in the implementation plan fall within the remit of the Secretariat and aim to further enhance its performance and strengthen its budgetary, programmatic, finance and governance processes, and its accountability. These actions, and their deliverables, complement and mutually reinforce the 11 recommendations and 27 sub-actions contained in the report of the Agile Member States Task Group on strengthening WHO's budgetary, programmatic and financing governance,⁴ which fall under the joint responsibility of the Member States and the Secretariat. Progress on Secretariat actions in support of specific Task Group recommendations, as outlined in decision EB152(15) (2023), are contained in the report in document EB154/33 and the three additional documents, EB154/33 Add.1, EB154/33 Add.2 and EB154/33 Add.3. The Secretariat has also prepared a further related document, EB154/34 Add.1, containing an update on decision WHA69(8) paragraph (10) (2016), linked to part of recommendation T5 of the Task Group.
3. When implementing reform actions, the Secretariat carefully considers how to maximize synergies with other existing workstreams to strengthen its systems, including those originally contained in the transformation initiative and the Action for Results Group⁵ (ARG) country impact action plan. The implementation plan also builds on, and complements, WHO governing body resolutions and decisions and recommendations submitted to the Secretariat, as well as lessons learned and gap analyses

¹ Documents EB152/4 and EB153/2.

² Document EB152/34; see also the summary records of the Executive Board at its 152nd session, fourteenth meeting.

³ Document A76/31.

⁴ Document EB152/33.

⁵ See document EB152/2, paragraph 59.

contained in numerous evaluations, audits and external assessments (for further details, see document EB152/34, paragraphs 9 to 13). It is worth noting that the various actions and recommendations contained in the implementation plan, and those issued by the Task Group, are not equal in terms of their respective anticipated impact nor do they require the same level of effort and time to complete. They vary also in the extent to which they depend on other related business operations systems to ensure effectiveness.

4. The implementation plan also contains 13 actions directly related to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PRSEAH), focusing on accountability, policies, investigation capacity, training, dedicated human resources, victim- and survivor-centred support and culture change. The Secretariat is ensuring alignment and consistency between the implementation plan and the three-year strategy on preventing and responding to sexual misconduct, 2023 to 2025,¹ as well as with that strategy's annual monitoring and evaluation frameworks,² the WHO management response plan that ended in December 2022,³ and with other governing body recommendations made to the Secretariat with regard to preventing and responding to sexual misconduct.

5. As the Secretariat implements its actions, it is maintaining a major focus on ensuring that delivery is timely, efficient and sustainable. It has also reviewed key risks to success associated with managing increased and sometimes competing requests without additional resources (human and financial) and those linked to managing unanticipated events. The main drivers associated with these risks include: no specific allocation of funds to carry out the implementation plan, and an unprecedented increase in governing body negotiations, intergovernmental body meetings, and Member States consultations and information briefings.

6. To address these issues, the Secretariat has developed various mitigation strategies, including: conducting periodic outreach to Member States so that their perspective can be applied in prioritizing actions and recommendations relating to the implementation plan, together with consideration of other Member States' recommendations and mandates submitted to the Secretariat; prioritizing and ensuring that all internal reform efforts are aligned, coherent, efficient and that they reinforce one another (for example, work on the implementation plan, support to work of the Task Group, transformation efforts, work on preventing and responding to sexual misconduct, the work of the ARG, and ongoing major systems developments, such as the Business Management System project); identifying additional Secretariat resource needs and drafting a financing plan to be submitted to the governing bodies.

7. In order to facilitate prioritization and internal alignment, the Secretariat conducted a cross-walk analysis of the actions and recommendations contained in the implementation plan, those issued by the Task Group and those that feature in the transformation initiative and the ARG action plan, containing 96, 38, 40 and 95 separate actions, respectively. This analysis has improved the Secretariat's ability to coordinate its implementation, leveraging Organization-wide systemic efforts, based on convergence and complementarity, thus ensuring efficiency in enhancing improvements to key systems. The resulting

¹ Preventing and responding to sexual misconduct: WHO's three-year strategy 2023–2025. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240069039>, accessed 11 April 2023).

² Preventing and responding to sexual misconduct: WHO's three-year strategy 2023–2025: Monitoring and evaluation framework: Year-1 implementation plan. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/366298/WHO-DGO-PRS-2023.3-eng.pdf>, accessed 11 April 2023).

³ WHO Implementation Plan. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/WHO-Implementation-Plan>, accessed 11 April 2023).

impact reflects the sum of all of these efforts rather than being limited to those from individual implementation activities, thereby strengthening the Organization's systems across key pillars:

- (a) accountability functions and systems, including audit, evaluation, risk management and investigation/oversight;
- (b) country-level impact, alignment across the three levels of the Organization and strengthening of offices in countries, territories and areas;
- (c) financing, including cost recovery and financial management;
- (d) governance, including reform of governing bodies roles and processes, documentation and costing of resolutions and decisions;
- (e) human resources, including its management, improved recruitment processes, enhancing diversity, staff performance management, roll-out of the mobility policy, and dissemination of organigram updates;
- (f) programme budget, including budget development, enhanced transparency of information and consultative processes, prioritization, resource allocation, efficiencies and results reporting;
- (g) resource mobilization, including means of implementation, investment cases, and assessing feasibility of the investment round; and
- (h) business processes, such as the Business Management System, procurement, communications, research, data and innovation systems; and, partnerships, including involvement in the United Nations reform process and action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

8. As part of an informal priority-setting process, the Secretariat sent out a survey to Member States in March–April 2023, with a view to prioritizing the open actions in the implementation plan. This measure, to be repeated periodically, was designed to ensure clarity and support realistic planning for implementation. The Secretariat will identify and submit an estimate of its resource needs, particularly for enabling and accountability functions, to the fortieth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and the 155th session of the Executive Board in May 2024.

Updates to the Secretariat implementation plan

9. Member States have access to a dedicated dashboard on the Member States Portal on the WHO website for monitoring the implementation plan and the transparent communication of progress.¹ Similarly, progress relating to recommendations by the Task Group and the governing bodies to the Secretariat can be monitored via a second dashboard available on the portal.

10. Since document EB152/34 was issued, progress has been steady. Between January and November 2023, the number of implemented actions progressively increased from 38 in January 2023 to 42 in March 2023. Since March of this year, the Secretariat has implemented an additional 25 actions. The total currently stands at 67, representing an implementation rate of 70%. Meanwhile, the number of actions “in progress” or “due to begin” decreased from 59 in January 2023 to 54 in March 2023, and

¹ See [https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal/tracking-secretariat-implementation-plan-\(sip\)-actions](https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal/tracking-secretariat-implementation-plan-(sip)-actions) (accessed 23 November 2023).

currently stands at 29. In addition, one action has been reclassified from “implemented” to “in progress”, to accurately reflect its status (finalizing terms of reference for the ethics function).

11. The highlights of implemented actions are described below.

(a) **Programme budget:** establishment of a revised, enhanced, more transparent, consultative process for the development and presentation of the programme budget. This includes strengthened priority-setting across the Organization and enhanced alignment with the general programme of work, as well as the development and launch of several digital platforms that accompany the Proposed programme budget 2024–2025.¹ The information provided includes detailed data on the prioritization of outputs, by country; the costing of outputs; explanations on how the assessed contributions are allocated (and key performance indicators to measure the impact of the increase in assessed contributions), how results-based management is implemented within WHO and how the programme budget is costed. The Secretariat has also developed principles to guide the allocation of the increased assessed contributions and the submission of reports on efficiencies to the governing bodies.

(b) **Transparency:** significant efforts to enhance transparency, information sharing and progress tracking. The dedicated Member State portal on the WHO website includes eight dashboards/platforms, covering the key areas of work featured in the implementation plan and Task Group recommendations. These include the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 (including the triple billion dashboard), the programme budget (its development and implementation), results reporting, financing, resource mobilization, human resources, procurement, and tracking dashboards for the implementation plan and broader recommendations. Other efforts to promote transparency have included the dissemination, via the WHO website,² of updated organigrams for WHO headquarters.

(c) **PRSEAH:** measures to strengthen systems for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment/sexual misconduct; the 11 implemented actions are reflected in the WHO management response plan and the subsequent three-year strategy 2023–2025 (see paragraph 5 above) and efforts to scale up investigative capacity.³

(d) **Financing:** amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules, the first in a decade and based on a review of best practice across the United Nations system,⁴ have been finalized and adopted by the Health Assembly.

(e) **Accountability:** measures to strengthen accountability systems and the Office of Independent Oversight Services and its investigative capacity, and a new policy has been implemented to limit the terms of the Head of Oversight and Head of Ethics functions, in line with the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System and United Nations agency best practice; The Secretariat’s risk management strategy, including a new risk appetite statement, was completed, approved by the Global Policy Group, and presented to the

¹ See <https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal> (accessed 23 November 2023).

² See https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/who-hq-organigramme.pdf?sfvrsn=6039f0e7_35, (accessed 24 November 2023).

³ See documents EB154/30, A76/39, EBPBAC38/3 and EB152/31 for further progress updates.

⁴ See resolution WHA76.9 (2023) and documents A76/20 and A76/45.

thirty-eighth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee;¹ and, a follow-up is being carried out on the evaluation of the Results-Based Management Framework (2023) and the internal performance audit on results reporting, that includes revising the results framework as part of developing the draft fourteenth general programme of work.

(f) **Resource mobilization:** measures to strengthen resource mobilization processes and develop a suitable approach for the investment round.

(g) **Country-level impact:** progress on actions to improve impact at the country level, including with regard to the selection and placement of heads of country offices and revised delegations of authority to country offices.

(h) **Governance:** enhancing support for governance, including further elaboration of methods for costing of resolutions and reviewing governance best practices across the United Nations system leading to an options paper for Member States.²

12. The full implementation of some of the 29 actions “in progress”, particularly those associated with Task Group recommendations, including eight actions relating to governance, depends on the actions/decisions of Member States. The action pertaining to culture change to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment will inherently take longer to complete. Other actions, such as the creation of an investment case, depend on the completion of related processes, such as the draft fourteenth general programme of work.

13. Moving forward, as it is a “living document”, the Secretariat regularly updates the implementation plan to reflect the progress made and in the light of emerging needs and action areas, as well as resolutions and decisions of the governing bodies. It is proposed that the Secretariat will submit an annual report to the Executive Board and, when necessary, the Health Assembly, through the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, so that Member States can continue to monitor the progress of the implementation plan.

14. All of the Secretariat’s efforts aim to ensure that WHO is fit-for-purpose, in order to meet existing and future challenges. Recognizing that the reform process is a journey, the Secretariat is demonstrating its commitment to ongoing improvements and efforts to enhance organizational learning by documenting and using lessons learned from performance and system improvements.

15. The Secretariat’s work on the implementation plan and Task Group recommendations, coupled with other ongoing reforms and system development efforts, are enhancing the Organization’s accountability, transparency, effectiveness, internal control system and safeguards for WHO staff and beneficiaries, scaling up country-level impact and ability to respond to Member States’ priorities and deliver on results. The progress made to date has helped to strengthen budgetary, programmatic, finance and governance processes.

¹ Document EBPBAC38/5.

² Document EB154/33 Add.1.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

16. The Executive Board is invited to note the report; it is further invited to provide guidance in respect of the questions set out below.

- With regard to the implementation of the Secretariat implementation plan on reform, what strategies should be employed to mitigate risks associated with limited human and financial resources?
- What additional solutions could be proposed to address the challenges identified?

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