

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

Follow-up to decision WHA69(8) (2016), operative paragraph 10

Report by the Director-General

1. In 2016, the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly adopted decision WHA69(8) on agreed recommendations of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting on Governance Reform that had met in March and April 2016. Operative paragraph 10 requested “the Director-General to improve transparency of the process for the selection of Assistant Directors-General, including through timely advertisement of the Assistant Director-General positions in all official languages”.
2. In January 2023, the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance¹ proposed a recommendation (T5) to “improve transparency in the creation and filling of senior-level positions at WHO, with periodic reporting to Member States”. The Task Group also requested the Secretariat “to prepare a report on the achievement of the request to the Director-General in decision WHA69(8), operative paragraph 10”.
3. In accordance with the practices of the United Nations common system,^{2,3} WHO's senior leadership level comprises ungraded positions with the titles of Deputy Director-General, Assistant Directors-General, Executive Director and (elected) Regional Directors. Positions in the career staffing structure of the Organization include directors, at grades D1 and D2, and professionals, at grades ranging from P1 to P6, which are filled through competitive selection procedures.

¹ Document EB152/33, Appendix.

² See the International Civil Service Commission's website (<https://icsc.un.org/Home/CommonSystem>, accessed 29 November 2023).

³ See United Nations Careers website for information on “senior appointments” (<https://careers.un.org/job-level?language=en>, accessed 30 November 2023).

4. As defined in WHO's Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, ungraded positions are appointed for a period not to exceed five years and are not eligible for continuing appointments. As such the contracts for each are coterminous with that of the Director-General. This is also the practice across other specialized agencies of the United Nations¹ and differentiates ungraded positions from all other professional positions up to and including D2 which are competitively recruited and abide by the same set of WHO's Staff Regulations and Staff Rules.

5. Member States have recognized that the Director-General must be empowered to manage the Organization and make organizational and administrative decisions, such as the filling of senior leadership vacancies in an equitable, transparent and timely manner.² Instrumental to the approach of WHO's Directors-General (particularly at the commencement of a new Director-General's term) to, and the use of the existing methods in headquarters over the past 20 years for,³ recruiting and selection for ungraded positions has been (a) the need to enable simultaneous, faster recruitment of a large number of senior staff members at one time, particularly when the time lag between the election by the Health Assembly and the start of the new Director-General's term is short (typically two months) and (b) ensuring progress towards achieving targets for gender parity and geographical representation. A particular achievement of the present Director-General has been the increase in the percentage of women holding ungraded positions to parity for the first time in WHO's history (between 47% and 56%, as compared to historic averages of between 30% and 40%).

6. For future recruitment and selection of Deputy Director(s)-General and Assistant Directors-General, the Secretariat plans to provide advance notice to Member States through a note verbale to promote outreach for qualified candidates. In line with WHO's Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, the coterminous nature of ungraded positions and common practice across the United Nations' specialized agencies, different selection procedures are used for ungraded positions than for professional positions and reflect the Director-General's need to create rapidly his or her leadership team. Separately, in cases of large restructuring (that may occur at the beginning of a Director-General's term), revised headquarters organigrams will be communicated in a timely manner on the WHO website^{4,5} and as relevant through the routine development cycle for programme budgets.

7. The Secretariat transparently and routinely reports on workforce data and trends through multiple means and channels, including human resource updates and annual reports respectively to the Executive Board at its January session and to the Health Assembly summarizing several trends and issues.⁶ The latter reports are available on the Human resources section of the Member States Portal page of the WHO website.⁵ In addition, extensive reports on workforce data are issued biannually and available on

¹ For example, FAO, ILO, UNESCO and WIPO.

² Document EB152/33.

³ There was one exception with the competitive recruitment of the Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme, as specified in document A69/30 and which reflected recommendations from the Ebola Interim Assessment Panel and other high-level panels and commissions.

⁴ See also the Task Group's recommendation A1 in document EB152/33, Appendix and adopted by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly in decision WHA76(18) (2023), and action 23 of the Secretariat's implementation plan on reform, as contained in document A76/31, Annex 2.

⁵ For the latest version of the Headquarters organigram, see website (https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/who-hq-organigramme.pdf?sfvrsn=6039f0e7_35, accessed 29 November 2023).

⁶ Accessible on the respective WHO governance webpages and on the Member States Portal website under the section on Human resources (<https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal>, accessed 29 November 2023).

the same Human resources section,¹ containing granular information for all positions (inclusive of ungraded posts), broken down for instance by grade, job category, targets for gender parity and geographical representation, types of contract, location, mobility, internships and costs. Detailed workforce data are also available in real time (refreshed monthly) through the Programme budget portal section of the Member States Portal webpage.² The latter includes the possibility to filter by major office, appointment types, contract types, job categories, grades (including ungraded positions) and gender.

8. Finally, the Secretariat will provide announcements to Member States about the Director-General's selection of ungraded positions through the official communication channels for Member States.

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¹ For more information, see the section on the Member States Portal page of the WHO website on Workforce data: human resources update (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/workforce-data>, accessed 29 November 2023).

² For more information, see the "Budget and financing overviews" part of the Programme budget portal section of the Member States Portal page of the WHO website (<https://open.who.int/2022-23/home>, accessed 29 November 2023).