



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-SIXTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY  
Provisional agenda item 18.1

A56/39  
16 May 2003

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## Human resources: annual report: gender balance

### Report by the Secretariat

#### BACKGROUND

1. This report responds to resolution WHA55.24 which requested the Director-General, *inter alia*, “to ensure that the principles of ... gender balance ... are respected in making appointments in the Secretariat ...”.
2. The proportion of women in professional and higher-graded posts in WHO’s established offices was first addressed in resolution WHA34.15 (1981), which called upon the Director-General to appoint more women, particularly at senior levels. By resolution WHA36.19 (1983) the Health Assembly set a target of 20% of all professional and higher-graded posts to be occupied by women. The target was subsequently raised to 30% by resolution WHA38.12 (1985), and a time-limit of September 1995 for reaching it was introduced by resolution WHA46.24 (1993). The target was reiterated in resolution WHA49.9 (1996). At that point, the proportion of women on the staff was 25%; by end 1996, it had increased to 27.1%. In 1997 the Health Assembly, by resolution WHA50.16, decided to raise the target to 50%, and added the target of 50% for new appointments of women to professional posts by 2002.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

3. Although the proportion of women on the staff of WHO has not increased at the rates foreseen, it has advanced steadily over the past decade, from 21.8% at end 1990, to 32.7% at end 2002. Similarly, although the overall rate of recruitment of women did not reach the 50% target by the deadline, it increased from 33.2% during the period 1995-1998, to 38.4% during the period 1999-2002, despite variations by region (see Annex, Table 1).
4. As has historically been the case, gender imbalance tends to increase as one moves up the professional grades. Annex, Table 2a, shows that women predominate at the professional entry level, but at the P.4 level, they account for scarcely more than one-third (34.3%) of staff, and thereafter the proportion falls away sharply: women account for 21% of the staff at senior levels (P.6 and above).
5. An analysis of promotions over the four-year period from end 1998 to end 2002 indicates similar patterns in rates of promotion. Overall, women’s promotions during that period represented under one-third of all professional promotions. Some improvement occurred in 2002, when 52.9% of all promotions to grades P.1-P.3 were women; the corresponding figure for grades P.4 and P.5 was

45%, whereas for levels P.6 and above, the figure dips to 16.1%. Across these groups, the promotion rate to P.4-P.5 represents the most noticeable improvement, from 30.2% in 1998 to 45% in 2002.

6. A more proactive approach than in the past is therefore needed in order to reach the target set by the Health Assembly. However, WHO is not the only organization of the United Nations system falling short of gender parity. Although some other organizations have higher proportions of women on their staff, WHO is close to the average of the United Nations system of 34%, and compares favourably with some specialized agencies. Furthermore, with regard to the proportion of women in management (P.5 and above), of the nine agencies surveyed in 2001, WHO was the third best, with 24.2%, behind UNICEF (34.1%) and just behind the United Nations (24.7%).

## **FUTURE MEASURES**

7. At this juncture the Organization needs not only rapidly to increase the proportion of women on its staff, but must do so in the context of improving the geographical representation of Member States. This calls for both an integrated approach and specific actions targeted at priority areas. The proactive and innovative actions being undertaken or planned in the area of recruitment are applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the recruitment of women.<sup>1</sup> Given that approximately one-third of all recruitment to established positions is from staff on temporary appointments, gender considerations are important in such appointments, as in all others.

8. Although the possibility of raising the recruitment target to, say, 60%, seems attractive, past experience suggests that globally it could not be achieved. In 2002, only some 30% of applications for all professional vacancies were from female candidates. It would therefore be more realistic to maintain the 50% target for recruitment, taking all necessary measures leading to its achievement. Taking the situation on 31 December 2002 as a starting point, and maintaining an overall rate of 50% recruitment of women, gender parity could be reached in a decade (see Annex, Table 3). Special efforts will need to be made by those offices or organizational locations that experience particular problems in terms of the recruitment of women and the proportion of women on the staff.

9. Such efforts need to be set in the broader context of human resources management, and within a coherent strategy aimed at incorporating gender equity and cultural diversity in the mainstream of planning and management of human resources. Several building blocks of this strategy, described below, are either already in place or need to be strengthened.

10. Implementation of WHO's policy on gender, in relation to both WHO's technical work and staffing of the Organization. A senior-level gender task force has been appointed to oversee implementation of the policy; during the period 2004-2005, it will act as an advocate for gender equity in staffing.

11. Development of core managerial and leadership competencies in WHO. Although this work is still in progress, respect for diversity and cultural sensitivity will be an underlying theme of, and a specific value in, WHO's competency framework, similarly to exercises undertaken in other organizations of the United Nations system. Programmes to develop managerial and leadership competency should influence behaviour with regard to both the recruitment and management of staff.

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<sup>1</sup> See document A56/40.

They will also provide the basis for a stronger framework for accountability, essential for successful management of diversity.

12. A number of other measures need to be taken, including:

- adapting best practice in diversity management to WHO's structural and staffing requirements in order to ensure that WHO attracts and retains enough qualified women, including from developing countries and countries in transition;
- creating a diversity-sensitive work environment supportive of the needs of staff through expansion of the "work-life" initiative that allows women, in particular, to achieve a better balance between professional and personal life-cycles;
- facilitating promotion of women, especially to senior positions, by affording them equal access to development and learning opportunities, with a focus on managerial and leadership competencies;
- ensuring that fair consideration is given to internal women candidates in the selection process leading to possible promotion, including to senior positions;
- enlisting programme managers, including WHO Representatives, as partners in the Organization's drive to recruit a more diverse workforce;
- encouraging Member States to assist the Director-General in efforts to improve diversity in the Secretariat, by identifying national sources of recruitment, particularly for qualified women, for inclusion in the targeted recruitment network;
- setting up accountability and monitoring mechanisms with specific targets at regional and global levels;
- assuring a greater number of women as temporary advisers, consultants, and participants in scientific and technical advisory groups, in order to increase their professional experience, and familiarity with and understanding of the Organization, thus enhancing their recruitment potential;
- analysing on an annual basis the obstacles to progress in diversifying WHO's workforce, and devising and implementing practical solutions to overcome them.

13. It is planned to implement the above measures as a matter of priority and, building on them, to finalize in the near future an integrated strategy for diversity management.

#### **ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

14. The Health Assembly is invited to consider the following draft resolution:

The Fifty-sixth World Health Assembly,

Having noted the report on gender balance;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Document A56/39.

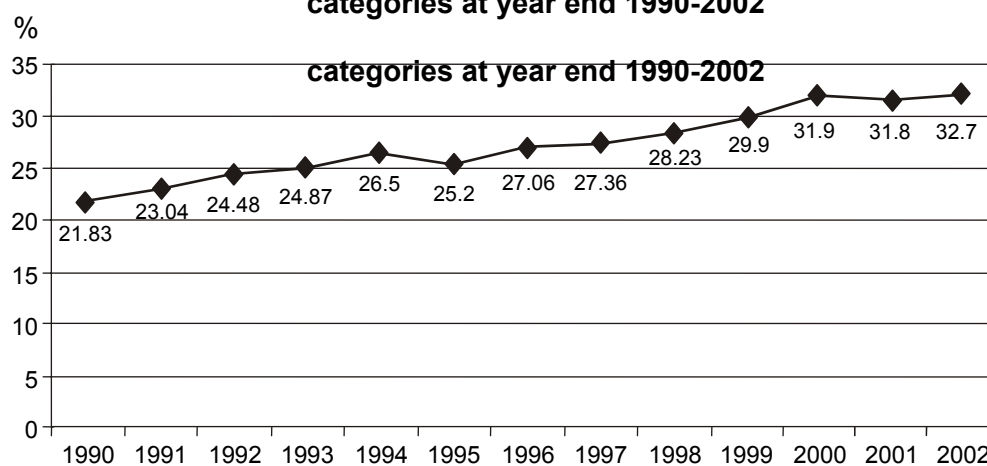
Recalling resolution WHA50.16 on employment and participation of women in the work of WHO;

Recognizing that the targets set have not been reached, and that progress across the Organization has been uneven,

1. REAFFIRMS the target of 50% for appointments of women to professional and higher-category posts;
2. REQUESTS the Director-General to redouble efforts in order to achieve the target of parity in gender distribution among professional staff within the next decade, and to raise the proportion of women at senior level.

## ANNEX

**Figure 1. Percentage of women in the professional and higher categories at year end 1990-2002**



Source: Document A56/38

WHO 03.123

**TABLE 1. APPOINTMENTS OF WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL AND HIGHER CATEGORIES 1995-1998 AND 1999-2002, BY ORGANIZATIONAL LOCATION**

Location	Appointments 1995-1998			Appointments 1999-2002		
	Total	Women	Women (%)	Total	Women	Women (%)
Headquarters	192	71	37.0	326	137	42.0
Africa	68	17	25.0	124	40	32.3
The Americas	69	27	39.1	81	30	37.0
South-East Asia	46	14	30.4	44	22	50.0
Europe	29	11	37.9	29	12	41.4
Eastern Mediterranean	31	6	19.4	53	15	28.3
Western Pacific	50	15	30.0	86	29	33.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>743</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>38.4</b>

**TABLE 2a. DISTRIBUTION OF STAFF BY ORGANIZATIONAL LOCATION,  
GRADE AND SEX AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2002**

**Professional staff**

Location	P1/P2			P3			P4			P5			P1 to P5			Percentage	
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
Headquarters	9	13	22	24	48	72	85	59	144	210	92	302	328	212	540	60.7	39.3
Africa	20	11	31	28	14	42	41	15	56	64	17	81	153	57	210	72.9	27.1
The Americas	3	12	15	5	5	10	60	30	90	9	4	13	77	51	128	60.2	39.8
South-East Asia	1	1	2	2	4	6	6	6	12	37	16	53	46	27	73	63.0	37.0
Europe	4	1	5	3	4	7	12	9	21	27	7	34	46	21	67	68.7	31.3
Eastern Mediterranean	6	4	10	3	4	7	20	5	25	29	7	36	58	20	78	74.4	25.6
Western Pacific	0	10	10	4	4	8	33	10	43	36	5	41	73	29	102	71.6	28.4
<b>Total</b>	43	52	95	69	83	152	257	134	391	412	148	560	781	417	1 198	65.2	34.8
<b>Percentage by grade</b>	45.2	54.8	100.0	45.4	54.6	100.0	65.7	34.3	100.0	73.6	26.4	100.0	65.2	34.8	100.0		

Location	P6/D1			D2			Ungraded			P6 to ungraded			Percentage	
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
Headquarters	53	19	72	35	8	43	1	2	3	89	29	118	75.4	24.6
Africa	25	6	31	1	0	1	1	0	1	27	6	33	81.8	18.2
The Americas <sup>a</sup>	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	50.0	50.0
South-East Asia	15	1	16	2	1	3	1	0	1	18	2	20	90.0	10.0
Europe	3	4	7	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	4	8	50.0	50.0
Eastern Mediterranean	14	1	15	2	0	2	1	0	1	17	1	18	94.4	5.6
Western Pacific	8	2	10	3	0	3	1	0	1	12	2	14	85.7	14.3
<b>Total</b>	119	33	152	43	9	52	6	3	9	168	45	213	78.9	21.1
<b>Percentage by grade</b>	78.3	21.7	100.0	82.7	17.3	100.0	66.7	33.3	100.0	78.9	21.1	100.0		

<sup>a</sup>As of 1 February 2003 for ungraded category only.  
M – Male, F – Female, T – Total.

**TABLE 2b. DISTRIBUTION OF STAFF BY ORGANIZATIONAL LOCATION AND SEX AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2002**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>
Headquarters	417	241	658	63.4	36.6
Africa	180	63	243	74.1	25.9
The Americas <sup>a</sup>	78	52	130	60.0	40.0
South-East Asia	64	29	93	68.8	31.2
Europe	50	25	75	66.7	33.3
Eastern Mediterranean	75	21	96	78.1	21.9
Western Pacific	85	31	116	73.3	26.7
<b>Total</b>	949	462	1 411	67.3	32.7

<sup>a</sup> As of 1 February 2003.

**TABLE 3. PROJECTED STAFF IN THE PROFESSIONAL AND HIGHER CATEGORIES AND PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN 2002-2012**

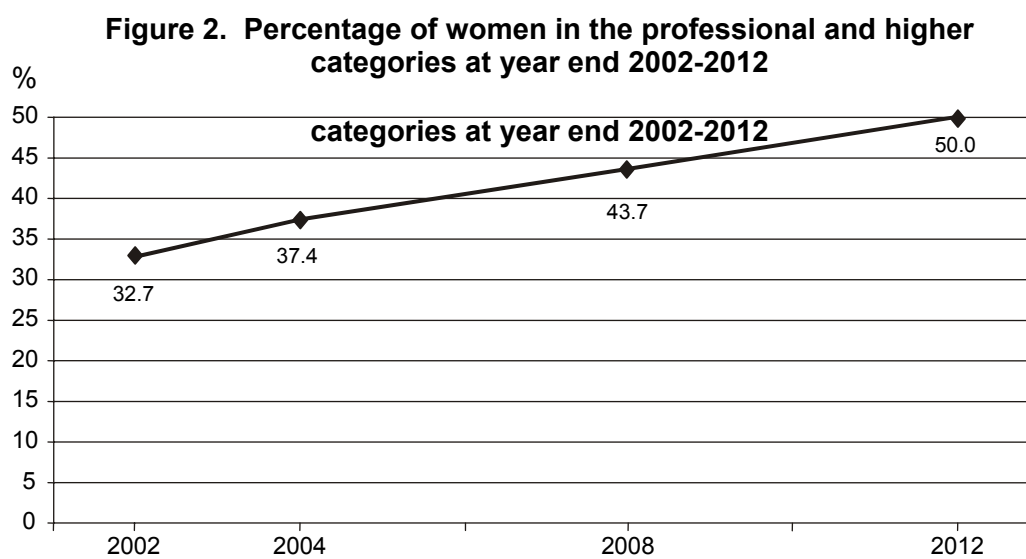
	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>
<b>Baseline 31.12.2002</b>	949	462	1 411	32.7
2003-2004 Retirement/resignation	[134]	[66]	[200]	32.7
2003-2004 Recruitment	224	225	449	50.0
<b>As at 31.12.2004</b>	1 039	621	1 660	37.4
2005-2008 Retirement/resignation	[404]	[196]	[600]	32.7
2005-2008 Recruitment	300	300	600	50.0
<b>As at 31.12.2008</b>	935	725	1 660	43.7
2009-2012 Retirement/resignation	[404]	[196]	[600]	32.7
2009-2012 Recruitment	300	300	600	50.0
<b>As at 31.12.2012</b>	831	839	1 660	50.0

Baseline: percentage of women in professional and higher categories as at 31.12.2002 (Table 2b).

#### Assumptions

1. For 2003-2004 (18 months)
  - (a) Retirement/resignation 200; recruitment 449 (some 250 vacant posts filled)
  - (b) Proportion of women's retirement/resignation same as percentage of women on staff (32.7%)
  - (c) Recruitment target: 50% women
  
2. For 2005-2008 and 2009-2012
  - (a) Retirement/resignation some 150 per year, or 600 for each four-year period
  - (b) Same as 1(b)
  - (c) Same as 1(c)
  - (d) Total number of staff remains constant at 1660.





Source: Table 3

WHO 03.124

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