

## **Human resources: annual report**

### **Report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly**

1. The Secretariat introduced the annual report on human resources<sup>1</sup> and explained that attracting and retaining talent and creating an enabling working environment remained the keystones of the WHO human resources strategy, especially at a time when the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) had had a severe impact on the workplace, and a number of measures, including teleworking, had been introduced under special conditions.
2. The mental health and well-being of staff was a subject of special attention and many steps had been taken to protect staff from any adverse effects of distance working. The importance of building and maintaining a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment was highlighted, as well as the key principles of diversity, equity inclusion and dignity that are being promoted through the establishment of 2021 as the Year of the WHO Workforce.
3. The Committee welcomed the thorough report, and appreciated the efforts taken by the Secretariat to safeguard the mental health of staff, build diversity and tackle abusive conduct. It expressed its appreciation to all WHO staff members for their dedication during the COVID-19 pandemic, and supported the principle that staff well-being underpinned the Organization's goals.
4. Additionally, the Committee commended WHO's adoption of a new policy on preventing and addressing abusive conduct, effective 1 March 2021. The policy covered discrimination, abuse of authority, and harassment, including sexual harassment and applied to all members of the workforce. In that regard, it was noted that the Secretariat was presently taking action to implement the policy across the Organization, and the Committee requested a briefing to receive an update on the status of implementation of the new policy.
5. The Committee commended the upward trends for gender balance and geographic representation listed in the report, but was concerned that recruitment at country level had declined during the same period as the transformation agenda could not be implemented in countries without the necessary skills sets being present on the ground. It noted that further efforts were required to achieve balanced geographical representation, and that the list of unrepresented or underrepresented Member States remained long. In respect of a further question on whether the inclusion of staff from the Regional Office for the Americas in the calculation of geographical representation would result in a more balanced situation, the Secretariat offered to provide more information.

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<sup>1</sup> Document A74/25.

6. The Committee further noted with regret that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in a decrease in the number of interns and advised the Secretariat to find innovative ways of reversing that reduction. At the same time, the Committee expressed its appreciation for the introduction of a stipend for interns. With regards to the internship programme, the Secretariat highlighted that distance work for interns had not been deemed a satisfactory solution as it reduced their exposure to the international environment, and that once travel restrictions were lessened, attention would be given to reviving the intern programme with interns present on-site to the extent possible.

7. The Committee requested further steps to be made with regard to improving geographical representation.

8. As to gender parity, the Committee, while noting an overall improvement, expressed its concerns with regard to the gender imbalance among the WHO Representatives and requested the Secretariat to take corrective measures.

## **RECOMMENDATION TO THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY AND PROPOSALS**

9. The Committee, on behalf of the Executive Board, recommended that the Health Assembly should note the report contained in document A74/25, and proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

- (a) continue to make all efforts to improve geographical representation;
- (b) continue working towards gender parity at all levels of the Organization;
- (c) continue supporting staff well-being, above all during the period of the current pandemic;
- (d) keep Member States informed of and seek their views, as appropriate, on the development of the diversity and inclusion strategy for the WHO workforce, with that strategy being guided by the principles agreed within the United Nations common system.

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