

Human resources: annual report

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

1. The Secretariat introduced the annual report on human resources¹ and explained that numerous initiatives had been taken to uphold the three pillars of the human resources strategy: attracting talent, retaining talent and fostering an enabling working environment. The focus remained on building and maintaining a safe and respectful workplace as well as promoting the key principles of diversity, equity and inclusion.
2. To recognize the efforts of staff during the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the Year of the WHO Workforce had been extended to 2022. The mental health and well-being of staff remained an area of special attention and many steps had been taken to protect staff during the extended period of teleworking and to tailor the Organization's approach to flexible working in the light of the global changes in working patterns.
3. The Committee welcomed the report and expressed appreciation for the efforts taken by the Secretariat to attract talent and build diversity, equity and inclusion across the Organization. It welcomed the new policy on abusive conduct and urged the Secretariat to ensure full compliance with mandatory training on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.
4. In reply to concerns expressed by the Committee on the introduction of more flexible working arrangements, the Secretariat clarified that this would build on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and the nature of the work would drive the manner of applying that flexibility.
5. The Committee recognized the dedicated work of WHO staff members during the COVID-19 pandemic and supported the principle that staff well-being underpinned the Organization's goals. The Secretariat confirmed that securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity is the paramount consideration in selection and recruitment processes.
6. The Committee commended the progress made to increase gender parity and geographical representation across the three levels of the Organization. However, it remained concerned that certain high-profile leadership positions remained vacant, such as the WHO Representative post in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, the Secretariat informed the Committee that a candidate for the WHO Representative post in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been identified and final clearance for filling the position should be received from the national authorities shortly.
7. The Secretariat further informed the Committee that a process had been developed to incorporate the United Nations survey on racism into WHO's work to combat discrimination within the workplace; additional updates on that matter would be provided at subsequent governing bodies meetings. Finally,

¹ Document A75/31.

the Secretariat confirmed that the global staff mobility simulation exercise had been concluded and recommendations from that exercise would be presented to senior management for further guidance and endorsement.

8. The Committee noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in the internship programme being halted and requested further information as to when it would restart. The Secretariat explained that the internship programme would resume later in 2022 where conditions permitted, and particular attention would be paid to ensuring that interns were present on site.

9. On the proposed housing allowance for the Director-General as described in the Annex to the report, some Member States stated that more time was needed to consider the proposal, and that they would also welcome additional information from the Secretariat, bearing in mind the late release of the documentation. At the same time, it was recognized that the Director-General required adequate housing in the high cost duty station of Geneva, particularly from a security perspective as raised by the Secretariat.

10. The Director-General highlighted the progress made to achieve gender parity and geographical representation at the senior leadership level and confirmed that action would continue to ensure the same progress across all categories of staff. He also highlighted the launch of the WHO young professionals programme, which would provide access to work opportunities within the Organization for young competent people from around the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

11. The Committee, on behalf of the Executive Board, recommended that the Health Assembly should note the report, and proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

- (a) continue making every effort to improve geographical representation;
- (b) continue working towards gender parity at all levels of the Organization;
- (c) work towards ensuring full compliance in mandatory training on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and other forms of abusive conduct;
- (d) work towards filling vacant WHO Representative positions;
- (e) further invest in psychosocial support for staff, especially at the country level;
- (f) continue efforts to promote the employment of persons with disabilities; and
- (g) consider the results of the United Nations survey on racism for implementation of appropriate measures within WHO, while fully respecting Article 35 of the WHO Constitution.

12. The Committee recommended that the proposed application of a housing allowance for the Director-General presented in the Annex to document A75/31, and that the corresponding amendment proposed to the draft contract of the Director-General, contained in document A75/5, should be deferred for consideration by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board at its

152nd session and the thirty-seventh meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board.

13. Pending a decision by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly, the Committee further recommended that the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly should grant an interim allowance of US\$ 5000 per month for the Director-General given the exceptional circumstances.

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