

Human resources: annual report

Seventh report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board to the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly

1. The sixteenth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee was held in Geneva from 16 to 18 May 2012 under the chairmanship of Dr M.A.O. Saíde (Mozambique).¹
2. The Committee expressed concern that the document had only been made available on the day before the opening of the meeting. Accordingly, members had not had the opportunity to fully review the contents. The expanded format was, however, welcomed. The new section on non-staff contracts, provided in response to requests made by the Executive Board at its 130th session, which had been responsible for some of the delay in the finalization of the document, would form a baseline for valuable trend analysis in the future.
3. The Committee highlighted the importance of strategic and operational human resources management. Members recommended that WHO enhance its efforts in this regard, particularly in relation to more systematic succession planning. It was noted that the increase in number of retirements foreseen over the next 10 years provided a significant opportunity for the Organization. Every effort must be made to ensure the continued recruitment of highly qualified staff. A Committee member noted that only 0.7% of positions in the professional and higher categories required a nursing specialty. Diversity, over- and under-representation, in terms of both sex and geographical balance, were seen to be high priorities for WHO in the recruitment and deployment of staff. The Committee asked that geographical diversity at headquarters be improved. The Committee also emphasized that the Organization must place renewed stress on the recruitment of women especially at P.5 level and above where progress had been relatively slow to date. There were significant differences in the achievement of gender parity across WHO major offices. In reply to this concern, the Regional Directors for the American, European and Eastern Mediterranean Regions stated their personal commitment to reach gender parity in their regions.
4. The Committee stressed that human resources must be at the heart of all aspects of the reform agenda within WHO. In response to questions, it was clarified that WHO has initiated a review of appointment policies, including mechanisms for the reassignment and separation of staff. Proposals were expected to be made, following extensive internal consultation, to the Executive Board in 2013.

¹ For the list of participants, see document A65/44, Annex.

5. The Committee appreciated the innovations in relation to data on the non-staff elements in the workforce. This allowed a better understanding of the role played by that particular group. Regional differences in the use of contract types were explored and clarification provided by Regional Directors. On this issue, and more generally, the Committee noted difficulties in integrating data from the Region of the Americas.

6. The Committee stated that the Organization must continue to improve its support to staff in the development of their skills and competencies. The Committee noted that the Organization continued to explore new technologies and tools to deliver targeted training. The current initiative on the eLearning platform was recognized.

7. The Committee underlined the importance of mobility as a tool to build capacity and ensure knowledge sharing and transfer across the Organization. Mobility, while not being cost neutral, supported enhanced programme delivery and development of staff expertise.

8. The Committee asked that in future reports, the Secretariat should disaggregate the information on longer-term contracts to distinguish between staff holding fixed-term and continuing appointments. A Member State requested information to be provided in future on the criteria for conversion of appointments from fixed-term to continuing.

9. In its discussions, the Committee emphasized that the quality, rather than the quantity of staff, was crucial. In this regard, there was a need for a robust performance management system. The Committee looked forward to further information on achievements in that area over the coming years.

10. The Committee asked for clarification on the fact that, despite the reduction in the number of staff, the overall staffing costs had remained at 50% of expenditure over the past decade. The Secretariat explained that this was due, in large part, to the significant decline in the value of WHO's currency of account, the US dollar.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

11. The Committee recommended, on behalf of the Executive Board, that the Health Assembly note the report.

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