

Statement on WHO Staff Association – item 7.1

Mr. Chair,

our delegation extends our heartfelt thanks for the comprehensive statement produced by the WHO Staff Associations and appreciates the collective efforts in addressing staff concerns and promoting well-being at the workplace. However, we must stress that continued efforts are needed to address the gap in certain areas which will be mentioned in our statement online.

We appreciate the secretary's effort and pilot which is recently ongoing. On the other hand, we urge the Secretariat to amend the mobility policy promptly and, if necessary, submit revisions to the relevant HR rules at the upcoming PBAC meeting. This is essential to ensure that this tool can be used for WRs representing the organization and acting as its diplomats. Therefore, their mobility must be facilitated not only between country offices but also between regions. Additionally, it should be possible to place WRs in other positions if needed. In this regard, we request the submission of a proposal for the next meeting and a discussion at PBAC before that. This should include the amendment for implementation and a proposal on how P5-level staff can have career growth opportunities and potential training to the level of WR. This is crucial for the sustainability of filling these positions, supporting countries, and having continuous delivery on countries' sites.

Slovakia would welcome some meaningful improvements and mitigate risks effectively. The following areas are proposed for focused enhancement identified by our delegation:

1. Mental Health and Well-being:

- **Advancement:** Establish a dedicated and adequately resourced team to support workforce mental health and well-being. Increase financial allocations to align with the United Nations Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy, emphasizing innovative, evidence-based interventions.
- **Risks:** Failure to address mental health could lead to burnout, reduced productivity, and higher staff turnover, particularly in challenging duty stations.

2. Staff Mobility:

- **Advancement:** Develop a holistic mobility framework that ensures staff rights and well-being, prioritizes those in hardship postings, and considers modern demographics like dual-career households. Implement concrete plans to address commitments to staff with special needs.
- **Risks:** Inadequate support for mobility may increase anxiety, disrupt technical and normative work, and incur high direct and indirect costs, undermining the stability and effectiveness of WHO operations.

3. Classification of Duty Stations and Remuneration:

- **Advancement:** Advocate for transparent International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) methodologies and an appeal mechanism for duty station classifications. Ensure staff compensation is competitive and reflects purchasing power parity, especially in economically volatile regions.
- **Risks:** Rigid salary structures and non-transparency could detract top talent and exacerbate financial disparities, diminishing WHO's operational integrity and effectiveness.

4. **Contractual Conditions and Career Development Opportunities:**

- **Advancement:** Regularize contracts to improve job security and equitable treatment across all staff categories. Ensure the transition process from temporary to permanent roles is clear, minimizing disruptions and anxiety.
- **Risks:** Persistent temporary contracts can harm staff morale and mental health, deter long-term planning, and disrupt continuity in operations.

5. **Internal Justice System:**

- **Advancement:** Enhance the internal justice system for greater transparency, empathy, and efficiency. Increase staff training on system processes and establish the WHO Office of Staff Legal Assistance for comprehensive regional support.
- **Risks:** Delays and uncertainty in resolving grievances can erode trust, negatively affecting both victims and accused staff, leading to a toxic work environment.

6. **Staff Health Insurance:**

- **Advancement:** Utilize surplus funds to ameliorate out-of-pocket expenses, harmonize health insurance coverages, and expand benefits inclusively and sustainably. Foster initiatives to network healthcare providers globally.
- **Risks:** Rising healthcare costs without adequate insurance support can lead to delayed medical care, particularly for lower-income staff, affecting overall workforce health and productivity.

By addressing these key areas through an empathetic, transparent, and proactive approach, Slovakia aims to strengthen governance frameworks, mitigate risks, and foster a supportive and effective workforce that can continue to advance WHO's global health mission.

We have compared WHO with other UN Organization in this matter and we have identified some ways forward:

1. **Staff Well-being and Mental Health:**

Similar to WHO, other UN organizations pay significant attention to the well-being and mental health of their staff. For example, UNICEF also has mental health programs that emphasize prevention, protection, and support for mental health.

Improvement Suggestion: WHO could increase funding for mental health plans and hire more mental health professionals in high-stress duty stations (D and E duty stations).

2. **Staff Mobility:**

Staff mobility and rotation are common themes within UN organizations. For instance, FAO and UNDP have specific rules to facilitate the transfer of staff between duty stations.

Improvement Suggestion: WHO could implement flexible mobility frameworks that address the specific needs of technical experts and address the challenges of dual-career households with targeted support measures.

3. **Duty Station Classification and Compensation:**

Issues with the classification of duty stations and compensation are also discussed in other UN organizations, often with criticism towards the ICSC.

Improvement Suggestion: WHO could collaborate with other UN agencies to create a more transparent and fair method of classifying duty stations and improve the appeal process against ICSC decisions.

4. Staff Insurance Coverage:

High health insurance costs are an issue throughout the UN system. Organizations like UNDP also struggle with ensuring healthcare accessibility for their staff.

Improvement Suggestion: WHO could use existing surpluses in the health insurance fund to improve coverage and reduce out-of-pocket expenses for staff.

5. Internal Justice System:

Access to justice and the resolution of staff grievances are widespread concerns affecting organizations like UNICEF and UNDP.

Improvement Suggestion: WHO should expedite the establishment of an office for legal assistance for staff and increase transparency in the grievance resolution process.

6. Contract Terms and Career Development Opportunities:

Addressing issues related to long-term temporary contracts and limited career opportunities is relevant for other UN organizations as well.

Improvement Suggestion: WHO should enhance the transparency and predictability of the process for converting temporary contracts to permanent ones and increase efforts in career planning and professional development.

Slovakia urges the Organization to conduct deep comparing and learning from the approaches of other UN organizations, WHO can address challenges and reshape its work environment to be fairer and more supportive for all staff.

Thank you, Mr Chair