
Revised Human Resources Strategy

WHO is a knowledge-based organization, and depends on a highly skilled, flexible and motivated workforce¹

Background

1. The HR strategy currently in effect, “Build ‘One WHO’: a strategy for the management of the human resources of WHO (2010-2015)”, was developed before the WHO Programme of Reform. Consequently, this strategy required revision. The main goal of the revision was to ensure that it was aligned with the Reform, particularly as HR policies and management comprise one of the five key areas of managerial reform. It has also been revised to take into account recent experience and lessons learned, and to reflect changing circumstances within the Organization.
2. WHO Reform is an unfolding story. WHO is reforming to be better equipped to address the increasingly complex health challenges of the global population in the 21st century. To do so, WHO needs to be flexible enough to respond to this evolving environment. The revised HR strategy is part of this larger story; it describes the journey the Organization has undertaken in order to fulfill the vision of “One WHO”. The HR contribution to this vision is a highly skilled, flexible, motivated workforce that fits the needs of global health work in the 21st century.

Goals and objectives

3. The goal is to have a revised HR strategy that sets a clear direction and is aligned both with current programmatic needs and fiscal reality. The strategy will also highlight the shared responsibility and accountability of its implementation among management at all levels, staff and the HR professionals in WHO.
4. The main objectives are to ensure that the revised HR strategy supports WHO’s strategic direction and priorities and responds to HR needs at all three levels of the Organization, taking into account WHO’s financing model. To achieve these objectives, WHO needs a workforce that is more flexible, more mobile, highly performing, and fully trained and ready to take on new professional challenges.

Description

5. The revised HR strategy can be imagined as a kind of woven fabric, comprised of two sets of threads. One set of threads runs lengthwise—the three pillars described below—and another set of threads runs crosswise—the four cross-cutting principles, which are woven throughout, and

¹ WHA66/4.

are an integral part of, each of the three pillars. Such a fabric requires both sets of threads for its strength; likewise, each pillar is underpinned by these principles.

6. The three main pillars of the strategy are:
 - i. Attracting talent
 - ii. Retaining talent: career management
 - iii. Enabling working environment
7. The four cross-cutting principles, which apply to all three pillars, are:
 - Gender balance
 - Diversity
 - Collaboration
 - Accountability

1. Attracting talent

8. WHO must be able to attract the right people to carry out its work and to implement its global strategy in a timely and successful manner. Staff must be committed to making an impact and confident in their ability to manage their own careers.

Recruitment and selection

9. At present, recruitment and selection processes are perceived to be overly lengthy, too complex, not harmonized across the Organization and not designed to attract the right talent.
10. Simplified and streamlined selection processes, with faster turnaround times, will be achieved through the creation of more generic and standard post descriptions and the development of standard operating procedures to harmonize practices across the Organization. The target timeline for internationally recruited professionals has been set at 15 weeks, i.e. less than four months from the posting of the vacancy notice to the selection decision². In addition, global rosters will be established for selected positions, and joint recruitment across the Organization will be implemented.
11. The commitment of the Organization to the four cross-cutting principles can be fully demonstrated in the selection processes. Gender balance and diversity should be given due consideration in the context of a fair and transparent appointment process that promotes equal opportunity for all. These principles are also important in the establishment of selection panels and as part of performance management, where managers will be able to assess their success in achieving gender balance in their areas of responsibility. Selection panels and their decision-making processes also require high levels of collaboration and reciprocal participation. One way of increasing the degree of collaboration will be to invite representatives from the Regions to join selection panels for internationally recruited staff. The HR department and the hiring managers will assess their own performance in recruitment and selection against a set of performance indicators, thereby increasing their accountability.

² By end December 2014, 65% of the selections of international professionals should meet this target.

Contractual modalities

12. The Organization requires a workforce that is matched to its programme needs at all levels, and which can be reliably funded. However, there is a mismatch between the financing that WHO receives and its ability to maintain a high performing, flexible and mobile workforce.
13. Currently, the Organization's workforce is composed of staff members and non-staff. As an essential part of WHO reform, it was recognized that WHO should use appropriate contractual arrangements, taking into account the nature of the work to be performed. In the context of WHO reform, and taking into account the financing challenges that the Organization now faces, careful consideration was given to whether the existing appointment types - continuing, fixed-term and temporary - should be maintained or revised in order to manage the Organization's workforce more effectively.
14. At its 128th session the Executive Board requested the Director-General to take measures to strengthen the criteria and introduce a new basis for the granting of continuing appointments for certain categories of serving staff members, while at the same time phasing out continuing appointments for future staff members. The challenge remains to manage existing staff who already have continuing status and who are expected to remain relevant and employable: career management is meant to address that challenge (see below).
15. As a result of the discontinuation of continuing appointments, the fixed-term appointment type becomes the main staff contract for new hires. It has been amended to allow the Organization to employ staff members on fixed-term appointments beyond the current period of five years, in order to meet programme requirements and provided that funding is available. Also, there will be a cost-effective use of the temporary appointment type.
16. In addition, within the context of WHO reform it was underlined that WHO should make a more efficient use of non-staff contracts. With the understanding that non-staff have a status that is different from that of an international civil servant, and as such different rights and obligations, the Organization will provide for different employment alternatives for clearly defined non-staff activities, which will be used consistently across WHO.

2. Retaining talent: career management

17. The World Health Assembly has called for a "*Human resources strategy that encompasses a model for strategic workforce planning and career development*".³ For WHO to remain relevant and competitive in global health, talent must not only be sought in the initial recruitment phase but must also be retained and developed, particularly those staff who have been granted a continuing appointment. This requires the development of a career management model to ensure that staff at all levels of the Organization have the skills, knowledge and experience needed to fulfil the short- and long-term ambitions of WHO, and that they are motivated to learn, grow and take up new challenges. Staff are expected to take the lead in managing their own careers, supported by the Organization.

³ A/66/4 May 2013.

18. Career management has four major components: workforce planning; performance management; career development; and mobility.
19. From an organizational viewpoint, three pressing issues require career management: (i) staff currently holding continuing appointments must remain relevant and employable to meet the staffing needs of the Organization; (ii) all staff must be fully trained and ready to take on new professional challenges; and (iii) staffing needs will be affected by a significant rate of natural attrition.
20. According to current projections, 14.3% of the total workforce is due to retire during the next five years (19.8% of the professional and higher categories). However, this number may be mitigated if serving staff members who would have normally retired at 60 or 62 are allowed to retire up to age 65 if there is a decision in the UN Common System in that direction. This being said, attrition is an issue, but it is also an opportunity to improve gender and geographical balance.

Workforce planning

21. The revised HR strategy will allow WHO to create a workforce with a mix of internal and external talent having the skills and experience necessary to carry out the Organization's evolving work. Tools to aid workforce planning are a skills inventory, staffing gaps analyses and timely succession planning. Such tools will also help to identify where gender and geographical balance need to be strengthened.
22. A skills inventory is intended to provide a realistic picture of the assets of individual staff members and to serve as a comprehensive guide to the skills and experience available across the Organization. It will serve as an effective planning tool for staffing, HR planning and career development. It is important to note that construction and maintenance of such an inventory is resource-intensive. Therefore, in the first phase of implementation of the revised strategy, different skills inventory systems will be explored to determine which model is most useful and cost-effective.
23. Another critical aspect of workforce planning is succession planning, especially in view of an anticipated high attrition rate. This work is already in progress with respect to staff who will be retiring in the next biennium. Advance information to managers will aid their decision making about whether to keep, modify or abolish the posts vacated by future retirees. It is a first step in bringing management to think ahead. However, the difficulty of making decisions about these posts has already been noted in view of WHO's financing model and the unpredictability of funding.

Performance management

24. The revised HR strategy calls for the implementation of three main initiatives: an enhanced Performance Management and Development System (ePMDS+), a policy on recognition and rewards, and mechanisms to address underperformance.
25. Performance management is a continuous dialogue between staff and managers about past performance and future development. This dialogue will foster a culture of trust, transparency, honesty, collaboration and innovation, where individuals are held to account for their

performance, recognized for their achievements and mentored to develop their potential. The cross-cutting principles of collaboration and accountability, and gender balance, in alignment with the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, are crucial to the success of this work.

26. The ePMDS+ concept, in addition to enhance the former Performance Management Development System (PMDS) which is used for performance appraisals, brings a change in culture in considering performance management as a continuous dialogue between WHO managers and their staff with the view of helping staff to contribute to the Organization at the highest level of performance. It emphasizes results-based work planning and the identification of measurable performance indicators to evaluate individual accomplishment. These performance indicators include gender and geographical balance. These are some of the performance criteria against which managers will be assessed.
27. Addressing uneven levels of performance is a challenge in all intergovernmental organizations. In addition to providing recognition and rewards for top performers, a toolbox for managers to address underperforming staff will be developed.

Career development

28. A comprehensive approach to career management and succession planning will help clarify the demands and benefits of working for WHO and the available career options and opportunities.
29. Several initiatives will be developed: an update of the WHO competency framework, the design of career paths using generic profiles and learning pathways, and a Learning and Staff Development Framework.
30. In line with one of the overarching principles of WHO reform, particular focus will be placed on improving country-level performance. At country level, there is a need to revise the profiles of WHO Country Representatives and country teams; to link grades with country contexts; and to improve outreach for recruitment.
31. Career paths will be developed by identifying the main job categories within WHO, e.g. short-term projects, specialists and professionals and future leaders; identifying critical roles and development opportunities across these categories; and mapping potential career paths from these. Staff must be engaged to take responsibility for their own careers; the Organization and managers are responsible for providing an enabling environment for staff to take up new professional challenges.
32. Career paths will be built upon learning pathways. These might include, for example, identification of development opportunities for staff through short-term rotations in other regions or other types of field work.
33. A Learning and Staff Development Framework will be elaborated with three objectives: equip staff to perform their functions at a level of excellence; support their career development; and help foster a working environment that supports a culture of respect, collaboration and excellence. The framework will have a crucial role in determining and coordinating the learning and development of staff, to achieve a multi-skilled, versatile, high-performing and mobile workforce needed to fulfil WHO's mandate.

34. New staff will undergo orientation enabling them to quickly adjust to WHO working environment and perform their roles with the full understanding of their accountability. Learning strategies will be closely linked to career paths and succession planning and be designed to meet the evolving staffing needs of the Organization. The completion of self-directed learning programmes, designed to enhance the staff member's competence, may be required for career progression, whether laterally or upwards. The training programmes will use a blended approach, including training through e-learning and online Learning Management Systems and on-the-job learning.

Mobility

35. Mobility can take several forms: geographical, functional, movement from GS/NPO staff to International Professional staff, and mobility outside WHO. Mobility is a key element of career management, as it provides opportunities for new experiences and learning in different locations. Having staff with diverse experiences and exposures can enrich both individual staff members and the Organization. It helps create a corporate identity and foster One WHO.
36. A WHO mobility framework, with clear guiding principles and specific policies for its implementation, will be developed. The underlying principle will be that every staff member is expected to be mobile, mobility being a condition of service. The main objective is to create, through a cultural shift, an environment in which mobility is embraced as an opportunity and not viewed as a punishment. The Organization needs a mind-set where both staff members already in the Organization as well as those yet to be recruited understand that mobility is part of their employment with WHO. Mobility of staff is therefore an organizational requirement as much as it is an opportunity for professional growth and career evolution.
37. The mobility framework will be based on a phased, consultative approach with staff. Mobility and rotation will be key tools in ensuring that roles are filled with the right people and in supporting development, individual growth and sharing of best practices across the Organization.
38. It is important to note that mobility carries cost implications, both for the releasing office and for the receiving one. Funding sustainability will have to be carefully considered in implementation of mobility across the Organization.

3. Enabling working environment

39. A culture of collaboration and excellence is required to create an enabling environment that will allow for successful implementation of the revised HR strategy. There are three main contributors to this enabling environment: a respectful and ethical working environment; enhanced administration of justice; and modern staff management.
40. One of WHO's strengths is its rich diversity of staff. Its multiculturalism demands a high degree of collaboration, respect for others and an absence of bias. All four cross-cutting principles of the revised HR strategy—gender balance, diversity, collaboration and accountability—are absolutely critical to sustaining the richness of the environment.
41. Administration of justice will be enhanced in two areas. One is an improved system of informal resolution of grievances; the other is reform of the formal Internal Justice System. The overall

aim of these improvements is to prevent conflict, rather than address problems after they have arisen. The principle here is that managers should tackle issues early on, preemptively, in a spirit of collaboration, rather than one of antagonism.

42. Modern staff management has several components, including enhancement of managerial competency through a new Management Development Programme; a focus on a healthy life-work balance through family-friendly policies (including flexi time and teleworking arrangements); and partnership with Staff Representatives.
43. Consultative partnerships with Staff Representatives, as spokespersons of their constituencies, are a valued aspect of the revised HR strategy and of the One WHO concept. These relationships are reciprocal and collaborative. Staff Representatives function as a sounding board and in a two-way communication convey to management issues that are important to staff and convey to staff the rationale for the Organization's policy decisions.

Enablers

44. The implementation of the revised HR strategy is a **shared responsibility** among three sets of enablers: the HR function, management and staff.

HR function

45. The successful implementation of the revised HR strategy depends on an HR function that has the capacity and capability to support management and staff to contribute to the overall success of WHO reform.
46. At present, the HR function operates at four levels of the Organization: HR Management Department (HRD) in HQ; the Global Service Centre; HQ clusters and regional level; and country office level. The HR function has as its focus the application of procedure and policy and managing risk.
47. This broad range of locations and responsibilities carries inherent challenges, chiefly the need to more precisely characterize and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each level, and to restructure HRD to support the implementation of the HR strategy. Further, all levels of the HR function throughout the Organization will need be prepared to be assessed against performance indicators—a task inextricably linked to the cross-cutting principle of accountability.

Management

48. Managers at all levels have the lead role in ensuring effective implementation of the HR strategy. A cultural shift in how managerial practices are viewed is required. Managerial and leadership capabilities need to be valued in the same way as technical capability. Those staff who are appointed to managerial positions need to be placed there because of their superior skills in management, and not only because they are experts in a technical area. Managerial talent will become a primary characteristic for the appointment of managers. Further, in order to streamline and make effective the work of managers, a “control span” principle will be implemented, which will limit the number of supervisees to eight.

49. Managers are key to attracting talent and ensuring gender balance and diversity, in particular through their participation in selection processes and in hiring candidates with the highest standards of professionalism, competence and integrity under the proper contractual modality. They are instrumental in guiding staff to perform at the highest level, in identifying staff potential, in allowing them to take advantage of career development opportunities to better meet the staffing needs of the Organization and in encouraging and facilitating staff mobility across the whole Organization. Managers are critical to fostering an enabling working environment that is respectful, welcomes diversity, offers a healthy work-life balance, abides by high ethical standards and therefore keeps staff motivated and willing to contribute to the success of the Organization.
50. Because of the emphasis the Organization places on the managerial role, it will invest in a Management Development Programme. The learning architecture of the MDP Framework has three equally important competences—managing (planning and resourcing), leading (setting direction) and shaping (innovating).

Staff

51. All staff members have a personal responsibility to participate in the implementation of the HR strategy and to share in its success. They have obligations reciprocal to those of managers.
52. Staff can encourage, mainly by example and their support of sound policies, gender balance and diversity. They can also participate in selection panels, thereby assisting in the hiring of candidates with the highest standards of professionalism, competence and integrity.
53. Staff are responsible for managing their own careers, with support from the Organization. They must remain relevant in their functions and be prepared to take on new professional challenges as the staffing needs and the financial situation of the Organization evolve, thus demonstrating their engagement in WHO reform. They are responsible for taking advantage of staff development opportunities and for embracing a flexible mind-set and the opportunities that mobility presents. Their views on healthy work-life balance and family-friendly policies are important. Staff have critical roles to play in fostering an working environment that is ethical, respectful and welcomes diversity.

Risks and Dependencies

54. The revised HR strategy carries a number of inherent risks. These include a lack of resources to support the implementation of the different HR initiatives; inadequacies of current systems and tools; lack of commitment to its implementation from all enablers; changing priorities; and the need to manage expectations.
55. The success of the revised HR strategy is completely dependent upon the combined efforts of all levels of the Organization and among all three sets of enablers. The strategy will fail if each one of these components does not take responsibility for its shared implementation.
56. Systems and tools, such as GSM, must be used and possibly adapted to support implementation. Implementation of the strategy will have to be prioritized according to available resources. The right level is needed for both staff and finances. For example, the work to develop the skills inventory requires increased staffing and financial support.

57. The work of HR in any organization is a long-term undertaking, particularly when the aim is to bring about fundamental cultural changes, especially in the areas of career management and mobility. It takes time to develop good managers and groom the skills and competencies necessary to respond to the Organization's new priorities. Further, as priorities change, so will staffing needs. Succession planning, for example, can be effective only when there is a vision of the Organization's work and needs for the next five to ten years, and the profile of staff needed for those priorities has been identified.
58. The revised HR strategy is also situated within, and constrained by, a number of governance structures—WHO Member States, WHO's own internal governance structure; its financing model; and the UN Common System. For example, in the UN Common System, on-going discussions on change in the mandatory age of retirement and reform of the compensation packages (remuneration and benefits) may have a major impact on the HR strategy. In the same way, the reform under discussion of the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal would have an effect on WHO's own internal justice system.
59. Ultimately, the initiatives proposed in the revised HR Strategy are highly dependent on a financing model that allows predictable funding and global and holistic management of WHO human resources.
60. The implementation of the revised HR strategy will be in two phases: the first phase (design and construct) will take place during 2013-2015; the second phase (implement, operate and review) will cover the period 2016-2020.

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