

Report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board

1. The fortieth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee was held in Geneva from 22 to 24 May 2024 and was chaired by Mr Feng Yong (China).¹ The Chair recalled that members of the Committee had recently met in an informal virtual meeting in preparation for the Committee's new approach involving more in-depth and inclusive discussions.

2. In his opening remarks, the Director-General outlined advances made in the Organization's journey of transformation, and the challenges facing the Organization. He stressed the way forward to put progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals back on track, in particular through the draft fourteenth general programme of work, 2025–2028, building on the strong foundation laid by the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025. In order to implement this strategy, he emphasized that WHO must be financed sustainably, with a workforce fit for purpose. Following the approval of the full plan by the Executive Board in January 2024,² the investment round would be launched the following week.

3. The Committee adopted its agenda³ with the deletion of items 3.6 (Special arrangements for settlement of arrears); 3.7 (Assessment of new Members and Associate Members); 4.2, first bullet point (Proposals for WHO to host formal partnerships); 4.5 (Amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules); and 4.6 (Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules), and agreed its programme and method of work.

Agenda item 2. Matters for information or action by the Committee

2.1 Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee: annual report (Document EBPBAC40/2)

4. The Chair of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee presented that Committee's report, which covered its forty-third meeting, held in March 2024.

5. The Committee welcomed the report and thanked the Advisory Committee for its work and its constructive collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the External Auditor and the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System. Further, it echoed the Advisory Committee's appreciation regarding the unqualified audit opinion on the WHO Financial Statements for the year

¹ The list of participants is available in document EBPBAC40/DIV./1.

² See decision EB154(1).

³ Document EBPBAC40/1.

ending on 31 December 2023. The Committee was likewise pleased to note progress made in the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

6. Based on the conclusions contained in the report by the Advisory Committee, the Committee invited the Secretariat to continue strengthening the relevant frameworks and processes in the area of evaluation. In addition, the Committee appreciated the increase in staffing for investigative functions, which was important given the growing number of cases.

7. The Committee expressed strong support for the Advisory Committee's recommendation to establish the ethics function as a fully independent, standalone office.

8. The Secretariat expressed its appreciation for the Advisory Committee's advice and recommendations, which it endorsed. In reply to a question by the Committee in regard to the Business Management System, the Secretariat reassured Member States that a risk management approach was in place, with steps taken to ensure strong management oversight and governance of the programme. It further confirmed that the roll-out of the System would be conditional on the availability for deployment of a minimum set of pre-agreed functionalities.

9. Finally, the Committee thanked outgoing Advisory Committee member Mr Bert Keuppens for his services and welcomed incoming member Ms Asey Galadari.

The Committee noted the report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should consult with relevant stakeholders to set practical and achievable timelines for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

2.2 Progress towards achieving the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (Document EBPBAC40/3)

10. The Secretariat presented an overview of progress towards achieving the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), noting that WHO had achieved 81.25% compliance with the performance indicators in 2023, with ratings of "meets" or "exceeds" requirements up from 63% in 2022, and above the United Nations average.

11. The Committee commended the Secretariat for having met or exceeded the requirements of almost all the performance indicators in 2023 and encouraged it to maintain its current ratings and protect the progress made. It applauded the mainstreaming of gender equality in the draft fourteenth general programme of work, 2025–2028 and expressed renewed support for relevant training at all levels of the Organization. Support was also expressed for the new roadmap of the WHO Secretariat for advancing gender equality, human rights and health equity for country impact.

12. Looking ahead, the Committee urged the Secretariat to prioritize progress in meeting the requirements for the remaining performance indicators, and to continue to monitor staff compliance and give due consideration to feedback from WHO offices; to expand its efforts to support WHO's affiliate workforce, notably with regard to parental leave; to work to achieve gender parity at senior management level at all three levels of the Organization; and to ensure implementation of the Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct.

13. Replying to the Committee's comments and questions, the Secretariat pointed out that the gender, rights and equity department functioned as a technical catalyst, providing expertise and using a collaborative approach to support the work of WHO in terms of gender equality, rights and equity. The internal roadmap to advance gender equality, human rights and health equity for country impact, launched in December 2023, reflected WHO's commitment in that regard at all three levels of the Organization.

14. The department was responsible for reporting on UN-SWAP and to that end worked with the rest of the Organization, organizing clinics to review progress and/or implementation and ultimately to validate the results obtained for each indicator. The department reviewed all the data and UN-Women conducted a further verification of reports. A number of challenges remained in terms of reporting, notably submission deadlines.

15. Regarding the remaining performance indicators, the application of the new gender marker system would enable reporting of financial contributions for the biennium 2024–2025 in 2026. Efforts were ongoing to achieve gender parity across the Organization. The WHO Representative selection process works through an assessment centre, and the Secretariat made it a priority to give consideration to women candidates assessed by the centre so as to increase the pool of women candidates. It was anticipated that the newly established capacity development plan would lead to a significant improvement by 2025.

The Committee noted the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

- (a) set more ambitious targets and shorter implementation timelines for achieving gender parity, especially at higher grades/decision-making positions and in regional and country offices;**
- (b) strengthen effective implementation of the new Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct and the handling of reports of such misconduct and associated retaliation;**
- (c) continue monitoring WHO staff perspectives on diversity, inclusion, wage equality and parental leave, especially outside WHO headquarters and including for WHO's affiliate and temporary staff;**
- (d) allocate financial and human resources to support both implementation of the gender equality, human rights and health equity roadmap, and enhanced capacity development of all staff for the implementation of gender equality approaches, including gender and rights mainstreaming and related actions, across all WHO programmes;**
- (e) prioritize achieving the three unmet UN-SWAP indicators;**
- (f) ensure consistency in the adoption and application of new policies across all regional and country offices;**
- (g) step up efforts to disaggregate data by sex, age and other inequality dimensions.**

2.3 Compliance, risk management and ethics: annual report (Document EBPBAC40/4)

16. The Secretariat outlined the recent work undertaken, including: the revision of the Code of Ethics and the development of the new WHO policy on preventing and addressing retaliation; the formulation of new guidance on outside activities and on declarations of interest; the drafting of the new Enterprise Risk Management Strategy and the Risk Appetite Framework; and the conducting of a series of activities to demystify the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors and strengthen its implementation.

17. While welcoming the report and expressing appreciation for the Secretariat's efforts to build a strong culture of risk management, the Committee called for work to continue on raising awareness of the Risk Management Strategy and incorporating its provisions into the work of WHO. In that respect, the Committee also underscored the importance of strengthening the Risk Appetite Framework.

18. Pursuant to the report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee, the Committee expressed strong support for restructuring the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics and for making the ethics function a fully independent standalone office, reporting directly to the Director-General. The Secretariat clarified that this matter would be further considered during the forthcoming meeting of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee. With regard to the recommendation for the use of a robust case-management system, the Committee indicated that such a system needed to be capable of guaranteeing confidentiality while operating effectively across all the relevant functions.

19. The Secretariat assured the Committee that following the recent publication of the Organization's Principal Risks, work was under way to develop the corresponding risk appetite statements in alignment with the draft fourteenth general programme of work, 2025–2028. Efforts were also ongoing to fully embed the Risk Management Strategy in the work of the Organization.

The Committee noted the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should present a plan to restructure the ethics function at a future meeting of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee before the end of 2024, taking into account the existing recommendation by the Advisory Committee to establish a fully independent and standalone ethics office.

2.4 Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (Document EBPBAC40/5)

20. The Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit introduced the work of the Unit and commended the Secretariat's rates of acceptance and implementation, which were well above the average for the United Nations system. The Secretariat noted the four subjects of the Joint Inspection Unit reports on United Nations system organizations to be considered by the Committee, including recommendations directed to the governing bodies for their consideration, regarding: addressing racism and racial discrimination; internal pre-tribunal stage appeal mechanisms; accountability frameworks; and mental health and well-being policies and practices.

21. The Committee welcomed the report and the Secretariat's efforts and commitment to implement the various recommendations, in particular recognizing WHO's leadership in establishing a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion unit, and in providing best practices on mental health policies and practice and for internal pre-tribunal stage mechanisms that were inspirational for the entire United Nations system.

22. The Committee encouraged the Secretariat to review its accountability framework using the Joint Inspection Unit's reference accountability framework maturity model, integrating existing separate WHO frameworks, such as that for preventing sexual misconduct, and to provide an update on progress in 2025. It also encouraged development of a clear definition of the conditions for extending time limits in the processes related to internal pre-tribunal stage appeal mechanisms. It appreciated the Secretariat's collaboration with the Joint Inspection Unit and encouraged continued regular collaboration between the Joint Inspection Unit and the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee.

23. The Secretariat pointed out that through its efforts it had implemented 90% of all Joint Inspection Unit recommendations to date. It reiterated its commitment to address racism and racial discrimination, and to improve the internal justice system. The Secretariat also assured the Committee that it recognized the importance of rolling out mental health policies and practices, including finalizing policies and a training manual for managers in respect of mental health. It observed that the Organization participates in the standard United Nations system-wide cost-sharing mechanism for the support of the Joint Inspection Unit.

The Committee noted the report; it further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should continue to pay close attention to the recommendations in the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit, with full implementation as appropriate.

Agenda item 4. Matters for review by, and/or recommendation to the Executive Board

4.1 Evaluation: annual report (Document EB155/4)

24. The Evaluation Office introduced its annual report, including the findings and recommendations of the comparative study of WHO evaluation functions and coverage across entities of the United Nations system comparable to WHO in size or structure.

25. The Committee welcomed the report, recognizing the key role of the evaluation function in ensuring accountability for results, learning and results-based management.

26. Noting the progress made on the Organization-wide evaluation workplan for 2024–2025, the Committee commended the comprehensive approach adopted over the period to evaluations conducted in partnership with regional offices and to evaluations of the Secretariat's contributions in individual countries aimed at enhancing organizational learning.

27. The Committee expressed support for the steps taken to increase the coverage of evaluations across the Secretariat, noting the importance of strengthening the evaluation function and keeping pace with the standards for evaluation among comparable agencies within the United Nations system.

28. In the context of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee's recommendation regarding the preparation of an action plan for updating key areas of the evaluation policy,¹ the Committee encouraged the Secretariat to continue to seek ways to share lessons learned and make further improvements to the evaluation function.

¹ See document EBPBAC40/2.

29. The Secretariat expressed its commitment to support the updating of the evaluation policy and the strengthening of the evaluation function, noting that a survey would be launched across the three levels of the Organization to identify where evaluation-related activities already occur in other offices, and to identify areas for stronger alignment and improvement. Action was already being taken to build capacity and review the evaluation planning process across the Organization and to develop a costed workplan to ensure adequate resource allocation for the evaluation function across all levels of the Organization.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board should note the report and adopt the draft decision contained therein. It further proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

- (a) increase evaluation coverage, including for decentralized evaluations, by developing explicit coverage norms in key areas;**
- (b) explore and pursue funding options for the provision of adequate human and financial resources for evaluations at WHO headquarters and regional offices, including through the use of voluntary contributions;**
- (c) strengthen evaluation capacity across the WHO regions.**

4.2 Hosted partnerships

- **Report on hosted partnerships** (Document EB155/5)
- **Review of hosted partnerships** (Document EB155/6)

30. The Committee expressed appreciation for the report and the review. It noted the need for, and the added value and commitment of, the four hosted partnerships and observed that the practice of hosting partnerships boosted governance and efficiency and helped WHO to attain its objectives.

31. The Committee underscored the need both to optimize an operational framework for engagement with hosted partnerships and to conduct regular reviews of their contribution to the relevant WHO objectives, such as universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

32. The Secretariat assured the Committee of the good collaboration that existed with partnerships in global health. The report presented to the Executive Board on an annual basis was applying the operational framework for periodic reviews introduced in 2014.¹ In addition to hosted partnerships, WHO managed many networks and participated in external partnerships to further its work. All represented enhanced collaboration, added value, synergies and reduced transaction costs.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board should note the reports contained in documents EB155/5 and EB155/6.

¹ See document EBPBAC19/8.

4.3 Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations (Document EB155/INF./1)

33. A statement was delivered on behalf of the staff associations of WHO, IARC, PAHO and UNAIDS that highlighted the main areas of concern for the workforce: safeguarding well-being and the mental health of staff members; mobility; the classification of duty stations and remuneration; staff health insurance; contractual conditions and career development opportunities; and the internal justice system.

34. The Committee thanked the representative of the staff associations for her statement and expressed its appreciation of the staff associations' work. It commended all members of the workforce for their work. It also praised the readiness of the management of WHO to work with the staff associations to address the issues raised.

35. The Committee noted the concerns raised about: the need to provide better working conditions and support for the mental health of staff members, including access to counselling; improving the current mobility policy, applying lessons learned from the voluntary phase; the erosion of purchasing power in some duty stations, calling for a reduction in out-of-pocket health expenditure and a concomitant strengthening of the Staff Health Insurance scheme; poor contractual security; the need to optimize conditions throughout the Organization to improve the lives of staff; the lack of career development for highly specialized staff; the establishment of Ombudsperson positions in all regions; and the provision of staff counsellors in D and E duty stations.

36. In response to comments and questions, the Secretariat emphasized that WHO's transformation agenda was addressing many of the issues raised and that sustainable financing was crucial to supporting the various initiatives to resolve them.

37. The Director-General, reiterating that the staff members were WHO's most important asset, stressed that the Secretariat was closely attentive to the mental health of its workforce and was putting in place measures to prevent and address any problems. The mobility policy would be implemented fairly and would take into account staff members' circumstances. It would not have a negative impact on the technical work of the Organization and would evolve in the light of experience, as well as by drawing on lessons learned from other agencies that have long-standing mobility policies. He emphasized the importance of mobility so that WHO's workforce could serve the health needs of humanity, wherever such needs arose in the world. The Secretariat also noted the role of mobility for bringing the expertise of those with field experience into the normative functions at headquarters. The Director-General confirmed that discussions had started with the International Civil Service Commission on the fluctuations in salaries that some local staff faced.

38. In relation to the local salary issue, the Secretariat also highlighted that Member States' help would be required to ensure that this matter is addressed in other fora, for example, the United Nations General Assembly.

39. The Committee encouraged the Secretariat to continue to engage regularly with the staff associations; invited the Secretariat to learn from the experiences of other international organizations and governmental entities and to take into account the demographics of WHO's workforce; asked the Secretariat to consult with the relevant entities in the United Nations system to rethink the methodology for remuneration of local staff; and urged the Secretariat to consider establishing an Ombudsperson position in all regions and a staff counsellor position in D and E duty stations.

4.4 Engagement with non-State actors

- **Non-State actors in official relations with WHO** (Documents EB155/7, EB155/7 Add.1 and EB155/7 Add.2)

40. The Chair explained that in decision EB154(12) (2024), the Executive Board had requested the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee to conduct further discussions regarding the proposal to admit the two entities – Rare Diseases International and the Center for Reproductive Rights, Inc – and to provide a recommendation to the Executive Board at its 155th session.

41. The Chair further indicated that he had conducted, with the support of the Secretariat, a series of consultations with each regional group and had held bilateral discussions with relevant delegations over the past few weeks, with the aim of reaching a consensus on the matter. He added that he had worked closely with the Secretariat to explore a constructive approach. He subsequently shared with Committee members a “Chair’s proposal” with the aim of facilitating consensus.

42. The Committee acknowledged the considerable work by the Member States and the Secretariat and reiterated the important role that non-State actors play in promoting public health. It recalled the report of its thirty-ninth meeting,¹ and noted the importance of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors in regulating WHO’s engagements in that domain. However, divergent views remained regarding the proposed decision to admit the two entities into official relations, therefore no recommendation had been made.

The Committee reiterated its trust in the Secretariat that the eligibility criteria, due diligence and related processes were met. The Committee noted the Secretariat’s conclusion that both entities had met the criteria; however, it concluded that due to divergent views, the Committee did not make a recommendation regarding the decision to admit into official relations with WHO the following non-State actors: Rare Diseases International and The Center for Reproductive Rights, Inc.

Agenda item 5. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting

43. The Committee adopted its report.

= = =

¹ Document EB154/4.