

HR AGENDA FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

FOR THE WHO WORKFORCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This HR Agenda for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the WHO Workforce stems from the commitment made by the Director-General on 6 March 2019, when he stated that, “[...] we will develop a diversity and inclusion strategy with clear targets to which we will hold ourselves accountable.”¹

It is also the result of the implementation of one of the recommendations made by the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (IOAC) in its special report to the Director-General of May 2019²: “For the long-term, a comprehensive diversity policy for improved gender, race and geographical balance should be developed and put in place, also ensuring non-discrimination on the basis of disability, religion and sexual orientation and identity, and based on best practice in other global institutions.”

This HR Agenda is also based on WHO Values Charter³ adopted in 2019 which emphasizes our commitment to diversity, respect and fair treatment:

Our Values, our DNA

WHO, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system, adheres to the UN values of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity.

This HR Agenda is the initial version established by the Organization to lay down and implement key HR elements regarding the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the WHO workforce pending the outcome of the “Listen, Learn, Act together” initiative.

1.2 Leveraging Difference to Foster Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity is enshrined in the founding principles of the United Nations and upheld by its charter that promises “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.”

In WHO, that diversity could be integral to cultivating an organizational culture and climate in which people feel empowered, engaged, and respected, where all people in the organization feel they belong. It could fuel innovation that comes from the collective intelligence of diverse perspectives being heard, valued, and leveraged. And that diversity could enhance our ability to attract and retain the very best talent from all over the world to aid us in executing on our mission. A great deal of research reinforces these potential benefits.

However, to realize these benefits, WHO must do more than bring together people of diverse identities and perspectives to the organization. We must foster structures, processes, and mindsets that support people to connect, communicate openly, and work together respectfully and productively. Diversity is most valuable when different knowledge, perspectives and information is both sought out and applied so that the workforce can deliver on the WHO mission most effectively.

¹ Transforming for impact, 6 March 2019, <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/transforming-for-impact>.

² IOAC special report, pages 4 to 6, https://www.who.int/about/who_reform/emergency-capacities/oversight-committee/ioac-special-report.pdf?ua=1.

³ <https://intranet.who.int/sites/transformation/culture/values/>.

As we work to transform WHO into an organization that more powerfully embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, we will be guided by the Leveraging Difference⁴ approach. Leveraging Difference highlights three important elements for charting our change.

First, it emphasizes the opportunity that diversity offers. It does not ignore intractable and historic problems—indeed identifying those problems is a fundamental step. Rather, it supports action that reframes what have been viewed only as problems, instead discovering opportunities and promoting novel solutions that are practical and sustainable.

Second, it spreads the responsibility and accountability for leveraging difference throughout the organization, with the understanding that diversity, equity, and inclusion is not just the work of HR but is the work of all leaders and staff. It is relevant to everything we do.

Finally, it encourages the organization to focus on the differences that matter the most as we develop our capacity to be a fully inclusive, equitable and respectful workplace and organization. That means the differences we prioritize will emerge from organization-wide and/or United Nations-wide agreements, our organizational values, and the unique contexts from our regions and offices.

WHO must leverage the diversity of perspectives and knowledge available in its workforce. In line with WHO's existing commitment to inclusion, diversity, and gender parity,⁵ the Director-General, in the context of WHO new operating model, committed to investing in a diverse workforce:

*“Our commitment to diversity is not ticking a box, it is about improving the quality and impact of what we do, by drawing on the richness of experience we all bring. The diversity of our workforce is not just an incredible asset that we must utilize more fully, it’s essential to achieving our mission. [...] we will develop a diversity and inclusion strategy with clear targets to which we will hold ourselves accountable.”*⁶

One such investment in furthering diversity, equity, and inclusion at WHO is in the recent commissioning of the Listen Learn & Act Together Project, which is now well underway. LLAT is based on the Leveraging Difference model and involves staff at all three levels and in all regions and major offices.

The next phase of the project, Phase 2: Learn, will engage staff in helping to discover what key actions and areas of focus will support real change that can be felt day to day in the workplace in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion. This effort will include topics that will align with many of the HR actions and initiatives already underway, and those to be begun shortly by HR, as shown in the attached Action Plan and that are described here. Many of these HR actions and initiatives are supported as important by the staff feedback received in the Phase 1: Listen Let's Talk Survey and that was reported recently (Let's Talk: What You Said link here to report).

⁴ Davidson, Martin N. & Heather Wishik “The Leveraging Difference Capability” in Davidson, M. N. *The End of Diversity as We Know It: Why Diversity Efforts Fail and How Leveraging Difference Can Succeed*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2011, pp 73-95.

⁵ GPW13: Strengthen critical systems and processes to optimize organizational performance, page 52.

⁶ Transforming for impact, 6 March 2019, <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/transforming-for-impact>.

2. PURPOSE

Diversity is one of four cross-cutting principles of WHO HR strategy, together with gender balance, collaboration and accountability. Diversity is enshrined in the three pillars of the HR strategy: attracting talent, retaining talent and enabling work environment.

The purpose of the this HR Agenda is to lay the foundation of the procedures, processes and action plans which aim: (i) to attract and retain a diverse workforce, and (ii) to create a work environment welcoming to all, where everyone feels valued and can perform at their best regardless of their gender, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, language or any other aspect of personal status.

WHO's comparative advantage is its diverse workforce. As an intergovernmental organization whose role is to provide global public goods that help to ensure health for all people within and across national boundaries,⁷ we can only be successful if we reflect and understand our Member States and partners, and if we bring different experiences, viewpoints and ways of approaching issues to the table. This is how we can offer innovative and implementable solutions to Member States' public health challenges.

While WHO staff is already geographically diverse, with 166 nationalities,⁸ we can do better in ensuring a broader definition of diversity, that certain groups are not underrepresented and that our workplace culture is one that welcomes and leverages the diverse backgrounds of our workforce.

At the same time, it is not enough to only attract candidates who are as diverse as possible. All members of the workforce also need to feel welcome and respected, to feel a sense of belonging, to feel they have a voice, and to be given equal access to opportunities within WHO.

Inclusion in the workplace means fostering the structure, culture and mindset that create a feeling in employees that they 'fit' – in other words, that they are valued and able to contribute to their fullest. Inclusion is also about ensuring that diversity of knowledge, perspectives and information is sought and applied in the way we solve tasks and make decisions.

Equity in the workplace means providing equal access to opportunities, providing equal consideration and value of different perspectives, and ensuring fairness of treatment according to the respective needs and circumstances of the members of the workforce.

Ultimately, with this HR Agenda we aim:

- To have an optimally-diversified workforce to achieve the goals of WHO;
- To create an inclusive workplace culture in all our work locations,
- To have the creativity and innovation that comes from the constructive confrontation of diverse ideas, perspectives and approaches, which is at the heart of the scientific method;
- To have a flexible and agile organization that responds to the diverse needs of the workforce as they move through their life course and careers in WHO; and,
- To create a work environment that reflects the Organization's value of diversity, equity and inclusion in all its policies, procedures and practices.

⁷ GPW13: WHO's vision and mission, page 3.

⁸ Nearly 160 nationalities in the Professional and Higher categories; data of June 2021.

3. SCOPE OF APPLICATION

This HR Agenda applies to all WHO staff members, regardless of the type or duration of appointment, as well as individuals working with WHO on non-staff contracts (e.g. consultants, special service agreements or APWs), including interns and UN volunteers.

4. PRINCIPLES

4.1 Accountability for diversity, respect and inclusion

In accordance with WHO Values Charter and the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, everyone in WHO irrespective of their contract, position or grade, is required to adhere to WHO core values of diversity, inclusion and respect.

4.1.1 Staff members' accountability

Staff members' accountability towards respect for diversity and inclusion is reflected in the PMDS, which includes staff members' self-assessments and assessments by their supervisors on how well they demonstrated the Mandatory WHO Competency "*Respecting and Promoting Individual and Cultural Differences*." Under that competency, the staff member is expected to:

- *Demonstrate ability to work constructively with people with different backgrounds and orientations;*
- *Respect differences and ensure that all can contribute;*
- *Relate well to diversity in others and capitalize on such diversity;*
- *Treat all people with dignity and respect;*
- *Relate well to people with different cultures, gender, orientations, backgrounds and/or positions;*
- *Examine own behaviour to avoid stereotypical responses; and,*
- *Consider issues from the perspective of others and value their diversity.⁹*

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of each WHO staff member to ensure both in their professional duties and in their corporate functions, e.g. staff representatives, members of selection panels or members of HR-related committees, such as the Global Board of Appeal, the Global Advisory Committee, the Global Mobility Board and the Standing Committee for reclassification, that equity in the workplace is granted to all regardless of gender, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, language or any other aspect of personal status.

Finally, WHO staff members, non-staff personnel and individuals working at WHO must not engage in discrimination.¹⁰ Any person found to have engaged in discrimination will be subject to proportionate disciplinary measures, administrative measures, or other action consistent with the terms of his or her legal relationship with WHO, in accordance with the WHO policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct.

⁹ Enhanced WHO Global Competency Model, page 2, http://intranet.who.int/homes/pml/documents/enhanced%20who%20global%20competency%20model_february%202015%20new.pdf.

¹⁰ Defined as "any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction in the workplace, on the basis of gender, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, language or other aspects of personal status."

4.1.2 Supervisors/managers' accountability

In addition to demonstrating adherence to WHO core values of diversity, inclusion and respect and to the Mandatory Competency "*Respecting and Promoting Individual and Cultural Differences*," all staff members with supervisory/managerial responsibilities must:

- Act as role models by maintaining a high standard of personal conduct, treat all colleagues with courtesy and respect and promote a harmonious work environment that is free from discrimination and other types of abusive conduct;¹¹
- Take appropriate managerial action to address any concerns about the behaviour of staff members under their supervision that may be constitute discrimination or other types of abusive conduct;
- Ensure that everyone in their teams feels included and valued and can perform at their best regardless of gender, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, language or any other aspect of personal status;
- Ensure that their managerial decisions, e.g. hiring, reassigning, evaluating performance, and extending contracts, are free from discrimination; and,
- Take appropriate measures to meet the diversity targets set by WHO leadership.

4.1.3 WHO leadership's accountability

Developing a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion at WHO is a continuous process of improvement that is led by and has the full support of the Director-General and senior management at WHO.

The Director-General and senior management share the same responsibilities as managers and supervisors, including acting as role models by maintaining a high standard of personal conduct, treating all colleagues with courtesy and respecting and promoting a harmonious work environment that is free from discrimination. They are additionally responsible for the overall implementation of this HR Agenda by regularly receiving data and analyses on WHO's progress on diversity, equity and inclusion and taking action based on that information. Moreover, the meeting of certain targets will be reflected in the annual Accountability Compacts of the Executive Directors and Assistant Directors-General. Finally, senior management will regularly update the Executive Board on the progress made under the HR Agenda.

4.1.4. Organizational accountability

Under the overall leadership of the Director-General and the Regional Directors, the Organization is responsible for:

- Promoting the values of inclusiveness and respect for diversity;
- Developing policies, processes and training that support the above core values;
- Enhancing diversity in all its facets within WHO's workforce;
- Encouraging active engagement with the workforce; and,
- Implementing the policies and mechanisms that ensure that everyone who works at WHO is treated with respect and is not subject to discrimination.
- Supporting the "Listen, Learn, Act together" initiative

¹¹ Abuse of authority, discrimination, and harassment, including sexual harassment, are collectively referred to as "abusive conduct".

4.2 Gender and diversity mainstreaming

Across the Organization, gender and diversity sensitive analysis and action will be integrated into all organizational practices, policies and programmes.

Concretely, mainstreaming means considering gender and diversity in everything that we do, including policy development, manuals and guidelines, capacity building and training, as well as in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of all WHO programmes. Mainstreaming also means integrating diversity, equity and inclusion strategies and targets into recruitment, performance management, and leadership assessment. It is about creating a mindset in which we are open to adapting our planning, work and evaluation so that we can fully take into account gender and diversity elements.

5. GENERAL MEASURES TO IMPROVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Pending the recommendations resulting from the “Listen, Learn, Act together” initiative, the measures below illustrate the Organization’s commitment to the improvement of diversity, equity and inclusion of WHO workforce.

5.1 Diversity targets and objectives

Targets and objectives will be set to improve the specific diversity dimensions that the Organization wants to promote based on its demographics. Approaches and methods designed to meet the targets and objectives will be specified in relevant policies and the targets may be further broken down by major offices, divisions, departments, or teams, as need be.

Diversity targets and objectives will be an indicator of managerial accountability. They will be reflected in the annual Accountability Compacts of the Executive Directors and Assistant Directors-General.¹² Likewise, staff members with supervisory/managerial responsibilities will be assessed in their annual PMDS on their contribution to the Organization’s diversity targets and objectives.

5.2 Diversity statement in vacancy notices

WHO’s job website and vacancy notices will make clear that WHO welcomes applications from qualified candidates without discriminating on any basis.

5.3 Awards for diversity, equity and inclusion

Building on the Policy on Recognizing Excellence at WHO,¹³ when granting Performance awards on a yearly basis based on criteria which include Gender and Diversity, the Director-General and the Regional Directors will recognize exceptional contributions to WHO’s gender and diversity, equity and inclusion.

¹² ADGs/ExDs have diversity targets reflected in their Accountability Compacts: “(i) Ensuring gender balance; (ii) equitable geographic representation and diversity, and (iii) regular and timely performance appraisal are fundamental human resources management. WHO has a target of 1/3 of Directors at HQ level being nationals of developing countries. Since 2017, WHO has set a target of an annual increase of 1.5% in female staff members at the P4 level and above over 5 years; as well as achieving gender parity in the professional and higher categories. Going forward, targets will be agreed for all 3 areas for the divisions. These KPIs will be tracked through a PowerBI BOS dashboard.”

¹³ Information note 09/2019.

5.4 Career pathways for WHO staff

WHO will further elaborate and establish career pathways across the organization, with an associated competency-based learning and development programme. The implementation of career pathways will need to include measures for career development that are aligned with this HR Agenda.

5.5 WHO managed mobility scheme

WHO managed mobility scheme will be designed in such a way that it ensures diversity of international professional staff members in major offices and that “*Regional office staffing should represent a more diverse and equitable representation of Member States within the region*” as recommended by the IOAC in its special report to the Director-General of May 2019.¹⁴

On the other hand, the managed mobility scheme will ensure that placement decisions are made taking into account the staff members’ concerns in relation to their personal situations or the personal situation of their dependents. In particular, the Organization is fully committed to avoiding any of its staff members being put at risk as a result of discrimination in the countries of assignment. Therefore, the staff member’s disability, their dependent’s disability, and, if requested, their sexual orientation, partner status, gender identity or expression, or other personal characteristic that may be subject to discrimination in the location of potential assignment will be taken into account in making placement decisions in appropriate duty stations.

5.6 Staff engagement surveys and exit questionnaires

Staff engagement surveys and exit questionnaires¹⁵ will include questions allowing staff to evaluate WHO’s application of this HR Agenda in all its dimensions.

The results of the staff engagement surveys and exit questionnaires will be analyzed by HRT and Regional HR Managers, and analyses on trends about diversity, equity and inclusion within WHO and changes needed to existing policies and practices will be provided to senior management.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Action plan

Diversity is multi-faceted, and in implementing this HR Agenda, an initial Action plan has been developed for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion pending the outcome of the “Listen, Learn, Act together” initiative, and will initially focus on improving diversity, equity and inclusion in the following areas:

- Gender equality,
- Gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation,
- Geographical representation,
- Persons with disability,¹⁶
- Age and education diversity, and
- Racial equity and anti-racism

¹⁴ IOAC special report, pages 4 to 6 https://www.who.int/about/who_reform/emergency-capacities/oversight-committee/ioac-special-report.pdf?ua=1.

¹⁵ Information Note: 30/2015: Launch of the On-boarding and Exit Questionnaires.

¹⁶ Please also see the WHO Policy on Disability and its accompanying Action Plan.

The Action Plan will build on actions towards diversity, equity and inclusion that have already been taken, including the current targets to be met, and will provide for new measures that can be implemented pending the outcome of the “Listen, Learn, Act together” initiative. Such measures will be implemented with due regard for intersectionality, which recognizes the interconnected nature of aspects of personal status (e.g., gender, disability, race, etc.) and how they interact to affect each individual’s experiences. Therefore, when taking a measure aimed at improving diversity, equity and inclusion in one area, consideration of other areas may also be required.

6.2 Monitoring and evaluation

HRT for HQ and at the global level and DAFs at the regional level will be responsible for:

- Regularly monitoring the implementation of this HR Agenda;
- Supporting the “Listen, Learn, Act together” initiative and engaging with the stakeholders concerned to discuss their needs, concerns and proposed solutions and to jointly evaluate the outcomes of the measures taken to improve diversity, equity and inclusion;
- Engaging with hiring managers and staff representatives on the means and challenges to implement this HR Agenda;
- Compiling data necessary to confirm whether the diversity targets are met and to measure trends and changes over time;
- Contributing to internal reporting and UN system-wide reporting, with due regard for confidentiality.

WHO’s senior management is responsible for the overall implementation of this HR Agenda and will regularly update the Executive Board on the progress made.

The Evaluation Office will evaluate this HR Agenda implementation three years after its promulgation.

7. ENTRY INTO FORCE

This HR Agenda will enter into force upon its publication in the WHO e-manual. It will be reviewed in light of the recommendations resulting from the “Listen, Learn, Act together” initiative.