

# 21 Staffing issues

This page carries a single integrated comment on Items 21.1-21.3 of the EB148 agenda.

## 21.1 Statement of Staff Associations

Document [EB148/INF./1](#)

[Previous presentations by the Staff Associations to the EB](#)

## 21.2 Report of the Ombudsman

Documents [EB148/INF./2](#) and [EB148/INF./3](#)

[Previous reports from the Ombudsman to the Board](#)

See also the advice of [PBAC33 in EB148/5](#) (18/1) on staffing issues.

Controversy over report on early Italian response: As this matter has been referred to the Ombudsman it is worth reviewing the posts from Health Policy Watch:

- [World Health Organization's Censorship Of Report On Italy's Pandemic Response Sets Dangerous International Precedent – Critics Say](#) (Nicoletta Dentico & Elaine Ruth Fletcher, 15/12/2020)
- [WHO Playbook For Responses To Media Queries On Suppressed Italian COVID-19 Report – Raises More Questions than Answers](#) (Elaine Ruth Fletcher & Nicoletta Dentico, 15/12/2020)

## 21.3 Human resources: update

Document [EB148/44](#)

The Secretariat advises:

The Director-General will provide an update ([EB148/44](#)) on the implementation of the Organization-wide [human resources strategy](#) and its three pillars (attracting talent, retaining talent and an enabling working environment), together with an analysis of workforce data. In response to requests made at recent meetings of the governing bodies, and in the context of its consideration of human resources matters, the Board will also receive information on progress towards achieving the relevant aspects of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

[Previous annual HR reports to the Board](#)

## PHM Comment (integrated comment on staffing issues)

The COVID-19 crisis has put unprecedented stress on staff members at all levels of the Organization. In EB 148 /INF./2 the Ombudsman reports that "... the emotional toll resulting from trying to perform in these conditions has been dire ... many, such as temporary staff and consultants, also feared about their future careers, because of the precarious nature of their contracts ... several tasks were cancelled or made irrelevant as a result of the pandemic ...". While many staff members are overworked, others have little or nothing to do.

While the Ombudsman is no doubt correct in attributing these stresses in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a deeper structural problem which has plagued the Organization for years. Staff on short-term contracts (over 20% of all WHO staff) are particularly vulnerable. Most of these are supported by specified (earmarked) voluntary funding, making them vulnerable to job loss and in the present context, limiting the flexibility of the Organization to re-assign them to critical pandemic-related tasks. While the Representative of the WHO staff associations (EB 148 /INF./2) notes that "... plans to improve the use of existing contractual arrangements, in particular regarding temporary appointments ..." are underway, it is unlikely that that significant progress can be made until the WHO's dependence on voluntary specified contributions and reliance on private sector financing can be addressed (also see People's Health Movement, Medact, Third World Network et al. "Money Talks at the World Health Organization." In Global Health Watch 5. Zed Books. London. 2017.)

To address this complex issue, the People's Health Movement recommends that:

- Member states must reverse the trend towards voluntary specified contributions and reliance on private sector financing.
- Payment of assessed contributions must be in full and on time.
- The maximum of allowed voluntary specified contributions per donor must be established at 50 per cent (of the total contribution by the donor).
- There should be agreement on a multi-year strategy to move towards a 50/50 ratio for voluntary flexible and voluntary specified contributions.
- A threshold of assessed or voluntary flexible contributions must be set for eligibility to make voluntary specified contributions (VCS). For member states, no VCs should be allowed unless fully paid up on assessed contributions. For non-state partners, no VCs to be allowed unless an equal voluntary flexible contribution is made.
- Contributions from non-state 'partners' must be accompanied with signed agreements that guarantee commitment to UN standards, in particular to not engage in other programmes and funding that undermine the achievement of the WHO and UN mandates, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Violations would result in expulsion from partnerships and forfeiture of contributions, and non-eligibility for contractual and procurement options.

- The Framework for Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA) must be refined to distinguish between non-state partners in general and dominant donors. The latter need to comply with a distinct agreement as befits their size and influence.

## Notes of discussion