

5.9 Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations and report of the ombudsmen

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In focus

Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations - [EB142/INF./1](#).

Report of the Ombudsman [EB142/INF./2](#)

Background

The annual statements by the Staff Associations and the report of the Ombudsman both provide useful windows into the mood of staff and the HR function within the Organisation.

Some of the highlights in the statement from the staff associations ([EB142/INF./1](#)) include:

- morale affected by “unprecedented number of changes to staff rules” and job insecurity “due to ineffective resource mobilization or erratic restructuring”;
- encouraged by statements from new DG and the prospects of ‘transformation’;
- acknowledgement of internal justice reforms as ‘successful’; and
- a number of specific (and sensible) proposals for HR policy reform (from para 9-18)
 - 9. Create more core P1 and P2 positions. End the over-reliance on junior professional officers, consultants and interns for so-called entry-level work in the international professional category.
 - 10. Develop clear career pathways for colleagues working in the general service category. This should include routes of progression from general service to international professional or national professional officer. This would open up the opportunities for development and growth in staff’s contributions to WHO.
 - 11. Pay interns and fellows a stipend, so that WHO can attract a diverse and highly qualified group of young professionals from around the world, particularly from low-income countries. Demonstrate to the world that WHO supports international labour standards. Access to internship should be based on merit, not on ability to pay.

- 12. Modernize parental leave: four months for all staff members who become parents, plus an additional two months for the staff member who gives birth to the child. This would be a bold contribution to the United Nations Secretary-General's gender equality agenda and would inspire others.
- 13. Rapidly establish a global network of health care facilities that recognize WHO staff health insurance, offering preferred prices for health services and direct-billing arrangements. Reinforce quality and solidarity by ending the two-tier policy that exists for staff in some countries, a policy that currently creates unfair, discriminatory financial burdens simply because of the duty station location or health status of the staff member.
- 14. Invest in a staff health and well-being programme and campaign, designed to respond to the findings of the staff health risk survey, with a strong focus on mental health and supporting colleagues serving in difficult field environments.
- 15. Promote mobility as mutually beneficial for staff and the Organization. There should be a focus on professional growth, family-friendly environments, and ensuring the framework advances gender equality and women's leadership across offices.
- 16. Create more short-term exchange and growth opportunities through filling posts during parental leave and sick leave with current WHO staff (i.e. "backfilling"), fostering cohesion across WHO and broadening the skills and perspectives of staff. Fund all backfilling and exchanges through a central mechanism thus streamlining implementation.
- 17. Communicate internally more effectively, maintaining a positive dialogue, sharing successes and experiences, influencing and inspiring others. Build a global network of internal communication experts throughout all major offices. Remove the antiquation of our current internal communications system and invest in robust tools, including a globally connected intranet network, knowledge management hubs and collaboration software.
- 18. Building on the successful internal justice reform, demand more accountability from the Organization for those who work in its care. Serve the vulnerable. Enable the Organization to live up to its values by taking swift and specific action against those who choose to undermine it through the bullying and harassment of others. This should be done while removing the full burden of responsibility from those most directly affected: those who are at their weakest.

Highlights from the report of the Ombudsman ([EB142/INF./2](#)) include:

- description of the role of the Ombudsman and how it operates at WHO;
- increasing numbers of staff using the ombudsman service, commonly relating to 'evaluative relationships' between supervisors and supervisees;
- need for WHO to invest in its managers to improve communication, team climate and morale, particularly in country offices;
- WHO to express its core values, notably respect, in its practices and culture; concern regarding apparent prevalence of abusive behaviour and harassment
- WHO's duty of care towards staff: counselling, career development, recognition;

- equal access to informal resolution regarding work-related issues.

See also [PHM comment](#) on Agenda Item 8 (Human Resources: Update) at PBAC27.

See [Tracker Links](#) to previous staff associations' statements.

PHM comment

The staff associations' proposals for HR policy reform (paras 9-18 of [EB142/INF./1](#), above) and the Ombudsman's suggestions ([EB142/INF./2](#) and summarised above) all appear to be very sensible.