

164th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 24-28 June 2019

Provisional Agenda Item 6.3

CE164/29

7 June 2019

Original: Spanish

STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION

1. The Staff Association thanks the Members of the Executive Committee for the opportunity to make this statement and for their interest in knowing the state of working conditions and relations between the staff and management of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (the Bureau).
 2. The Staff Association wishes to reaffirm and manifest the commitment of staff, and of the Association in particular, to the vision, mission, and values of the Organization. The values of equity, excellence, solidarity, respect, and integrity guide the staff's actions and they inspire the new generations that are part of the workforce of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). For this reason, the Association celebrates the establishment of Plus@PAHO, an event at which new staff are introduced to and learn about the Organization, and which can benefit new hires under all types of contracts.
 3. By way of introduction, it should be emphasized that working relations between the Association and Executive Management of the Bureau are based on cooperation, searching for consensus, and mutual respect. The Staff Association is an internal agent of change, based on volunteer service. It takes advantage of every opportunity for dialogue with Executive Management (EXM) and other levels of management, seeking to formulate proposals and advocating for the implementation of policies aligned with PAHO's agenda for technical cooperation. In this regard, it strives to adapt and evolve in human resources management and administration.
 4. The Association's priority is the management of human talent working in the Organization, since staff members are essential for ensuring the performance of the Bureau's key functions. **Talent management** is a process that aims for two tactical results: one is to incorporate new members into the workforce and facilitate their development; the other is to simultaneously develop and retain existing human resources. Talent management should include gender equity. As we have pointed out on previous occasions, this is not simply a number: it is an approach and a way of acting. In this regard, it is imperative that women in PAHO have the same work opportunities as their male colleagues. True representativeness occurs when it is possible to support initiatives without
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undermining the status of women and diversity. The gender variable is included in the information presented by the Department of Human Resources Management, but this is only useful in measuring parity. Some of the Bureau's entities and cost centers are more sensitive to this issue, but these efforts are by individual managers, not at the corporate level.

5. The best demonstration of corporate effort is when goals, indicators, and mechanisms are established to facilitate or capture gender equity and diversity. It is necessary to advance in this respect. The Staff Association believes that there is an opportunity for this within the framework of the personnel strategy for the next quinquennium. A pending task is to provide training on "unconscious bias" for all managers, supervisors, and others responsible for arranging selection processes, so that the issue of gender and diversity is considered.

6. In the preparation of this report, the PAHO/WHO Staff Association engaged in a broad consultation process. In April 2019 the meeting of the Staff Association Council brought together elected delegates from the different country offices and centers (a total of 30 duty stations) for wide-ranging discussion of the challenges facing staff with regard to working conditions and their contributions to the Organization.

7. This document presents the priorities of PAHO/WHO staff members on the following issues: a) a work environment that promotes trust and the creativity; b) efforts to prevent abuse of authority and harassment, including sexual harassment; and c) flexible work options and their impact on excellence and the independence of the Organization.

Work environment

8. In 2018, the Staff Association conducted a survey of all associated staff members in order to measure their level of motivation. Additionally, in 2019, PAHO also carried out a survey of all staff with a view to determining their level of commitment and the factors that may affect or facilitate commitment.

9. The Staff Association survey was administered online (SurveyMonkey®). It included closed and open-ended questions and was answered by a total of 232 associated staff members (55% response rate). In summary, these were the main findings:

- a) Of the respondents, 36.6% were men, 62.5% women, and 0.8% "others". The average number of years working in PAHO was 13.3 +/- 6.6 (standard deviation), ranging from two months to 37 years; 50.4% of respondents were at headquarters and 46.9% were at country offices.
- b) In terms of general level of satisfaction, 19.1% of respondents said they were not at all satisfied or only somewhat satisfied, while 44.8% were very satisfied or extremely satisfied; 35.6% of respondents were moderately satisfied.

- c) The respondents reported the following as the most demotivating aspects: a) lack of information from the Bureau on subjects affecting staff (43%); b) lack of participation in decisions affecting their work (37%); and c) lack of career opportunities in the Organization (51%).
- d) Different levels of satisfaction were not observed in relation to the number of years working in PAHO, gender, or type of post. The only factor significantly related to satisfaction was the location of the duty station, with higher levels of satisfaction in the country offices.

10. With regard to **positive aspects**, respondents mentioned that they were motivated by symbolic aspects associated with the mission and vision of the Organization, and by factors related to their work, such as its impact on the quality of life of the beneficiary population. These aspects had very significant weight as sources of well-being. This indicates that staff value their work and feel strongly identified with the Organization, its work, and its values. This is positive for any organization and can be an asset in the implementation of any kind of change in structure or operations.

11. The **negative aspects** mentioned by staff members are related to the structure of the Organization and to its daily management; an element common to both these dimensions is a lack of transparency and an absence of decision-making criteria. This is demotivating because it produces situations of inequality between staff members in terms of working conditions and opportunities for promotion and career advancement within the Organization. In general, it has to do with how individuals in the same circumstances are treated.

12. The set of **suggestions for improvement** is coherent with perceived negative and demotivating aspects that were identified. Staff members have a reflexive and nuanced vision of the problems in the Organization and they have offered some solutions. The compiled information shows that PAHO staff have concrete ideas about the problems and the possible lines of action to improve them. Together with a strong commitment to the values and mission of the Organization, and the importance of the symbolic rewards of their work, this is an important resource for implementing change. In short, staff members are motivated and they feel comfortable in the Organization, but they also have a detailed diagnosis of the problems they are facing and have suggested possible actions to correct them.

13. These results are very important and can guide the effort of the Staff Association in its dialogue with EXM. The Director should also be recognized and congratulated for her efforts in launching a survey that digs deeply into how staff members feel about the Organization. The 2019 survey has also been revealing and provides relevant input for measuring the level of engagement of the different entities.

14. The greatest effort now is to structure a plan to build and develop a corporate response to the situation and not leave the initiative in the hands of the different management levels and representative offices, since individual responses cannot produce

corporate results, but can increase the differences in human resources management. The Pan American Sanitary Bureau, highly decentralized in the operational aspects of technical cooperation, should have guidelines and should channel efforts towards a common goal.

15. In this regard, the Department of Human Resources Management has an important role to play in structuring this plan (with input from the different entities), especially within the framework of PAHO's personnel strategy and with regard to capacity in human resources management, taking into account the complexity of the contractual conditions involved and expectations regarding retention, growth, and career. The Pan American Sanitary Bureau is a specialized agency that offers limited opportunities for professional career development, since it is an expert institution. From that standpoint, it is important to reward and recognize good performance, innovation, integrity and, especially, leadership in our respective fields of technical specialization. But it is also important to always manage expectations in accordance with the real opportunities for professional growth.

16. In this regard, although the Bureau is not a career-oriented institution (which is understandable given its mission and external conditions), it needs an environment that promotes creativity and staff motivation. **No effort to prevent the abuse of authority is too great.** Abuse of authority takes many forms and one of them is workplace harassment, which can sometimes include sexual harassment. This brings us to the second subject in this report.

Abuse of authority, in the form of workplace harassment and sexual harassment

17. We recognize the Director's efforts to promote a respectful work environment. In her dialogues with staff, she has insisted that it is necessary to confront situations of disrespect, which in most cases is not easy. The most significant impact will come when organizational culture shifts toward zero tolerance for abuse.

18. The respectful workplace initiative that the Association promoted has been institutionalized through the Office of the Ombudsman and by the Director herself. Building and maintaining a respectful workplace requires the commitment of everyone in the Bureau and must be sustained by the managers of each entity. Over time it has been possible to improve the framework of the conflict management system, which considers different angles—through policies, rules, trainings, and campaigns—to strengthen desired behaviors and demotivate unproductive behaviors.

19. It is important to emphasize the progress made in separating investigative functions from the functions of the Ethics Office. With this separation, the Ethics Office is able to focus its efforts the prevention and promotion of desirable behaviors (professional and personal), while the Investigations Office (according to the terms of reference published in the recruitment process for this function) focuses on the investigation of allegations of bad behavior, including reprisals, harassment, fraud, and any form of corruption on the part of individuals working for or with PAHO.

20. For the Staff Association, workplace harassment and sexual harassment, in particular, should be systematically addressed and dealt with. An example of this is the implementation, by the Ethics Office, of a compulsory course, designed by the United Nations, on prevention of harassment, sexual harassment, and abuse of authority, and a video entitled “To Serve With Pride: Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse”. This course is mandatory for all staff. Another effort involves training activities on sexual harassment and how to report it. The Staff Association has also designed and launched educational videos on “inappropriate workplace behaviors”. Within the framework of the Integrated Conflict Management System (ICMS) there have been discussions concerning the need for the Investigations Office to update the investigations protocol and the harassment policy.

21. These efforts are essential for a respectful work environment and conflict management. While a respectful work environment may be understood to mean simply being courteous, it actually means taking other human beings into consideration and recognizing them in their entirety. Arbitrary decision-making, inconsistent enforcement of rules, indifference, and lack of empathy in the administration of processes and of human resources are among the factors that foster polarization, abuse of authority, and harassment. This has serious results, namely, deterioration of the work environment and the Bureau’s reputation.

22. We must not remain indifferent to the consequences of workplace harassment and its effects on the Organization, both internally (on individuals and the work environment) and externally (on institutional reputation, for example). It is vital to recruit someone to assume the functions of Ombudsman in order to promote the respectful work environment and complete one of the pillars of the conflict management system.

23. In a context of maintaining high levels of staff commitment to the Organization and efforts to learn how to manage conflict and report arbitrary behaviors, it is important to consider the different types of contracts. This is the third point of this presentation.

Different types of contracts and work, and their impact on excellence and the independence of the Organization

24. The Staff Association, through its representatives, promoted the design of a human resources strategy to accompany the implementation of the current Strategic Plan. This was a long process that required the participation of several levels of the Bureau, and its implementation was somewhat haphazard, which can be explained by the fact that this was a new experience and all entities were on a learning curve.

25. Reports have been received from the Department of Human Resources Management on the state of the different issues addressed in the strategy. Recently, the Association was invited to take part in a committee to implement this human resources strategy, whose scope will soon be known. We will contribute with professionalism, commitment, and enthusiasm.

26. Taking into account the external, financial, and internal conditions of the Organization, which are described in depth in the proposed Strategic Plan 2020-2025, the current human resources strategy should be updated and clearly understood by all implementors of the plan within the Bureau.

27. One of the aspects of the strategy is hiring. The proliferation of short-term contracts is troubling, and there is a lack of quality control to guarantee the integrity of the selection process and ensure that these contracts are linked with the products and outcomes defined in the Strategic Plan. As a result, it is possible that expectations to continue working are being raised when this is not feasible. This could put the Bureau in situations of labor responsibility.

28. The human resources strategy must clearly indicate the responsibility of the hiring entities (especially when hiring is decentralized), in order to avoid a never-ending series of short-term contracts for long-term functions. Another aspect of responsibility is functional: it is not logical, coherent, or correct to hire temporary staff to perform operations in the Pan American Sanitary Bureau Management Information System (PMIS), just because professionals feel (or receive instructions) that they should not get involved with an administrative tool. There appears to be passive resistance to change and an intention to continue applying managerial models from the 20th century, when professionals each had their own secretarial group. This situation has to be seriously addressed in order to increase the efficiency of technical cooperation and the Bureau's services.

29. The potential impact in terms of rising costs of technical cooperation is detrimental to the added value of the Bureau's products and services, not to mention the direct effects on the work environment. In addition, widespread contracting of services without any criteria can affect the Bureau's independence in critical matters that require institutional positioning for technical cooperation or management functions.

30. Another type of contract that should not be promoted is the hiring of retirees for the Organization's regular functions, including managerial functions. It is truly alarming that the Bureau cannot take a qualitative step toward using modern practices and methods to recruit managers. Furthermore, there is no accountability for these hires in the event of abuse of authority, harassment, or mistreatment of staff members.

31. In short, the Staff Association is optimistic that the committee was created to accompany the implementation of the human resources strategy, which should be reviewed in light of the approval of the new strategic plan for the next quinquennium. The Staff Association will be giving priority to the following aspects of the strategy:

a) **Human resources planning:** Strategic forecasting and planning for the recruitment and retention of talent should not happen at the beginning of each biennium: it should be reviewed and updated systematically.

- b) **Recruitment:** Short-term contracts, for example for short-term professionals (STPs), should be integrated into Stellis (the corporate recruitment software). To all effects, STPs are considered staff members and internal candidates, so it is fair to hire them using a tool and processes that have proven to be quite efficient and effective. Part of the process of integrating new personnel, under all types of contracts, involves identification with the values of the Organization, mainly through onboarding sessions, training in different skills, such as use of PMIS, the provision of tools and guidelines on how to identify workplace or sexual harassment and how to act if it occurs, and offering continuous support so that they can be productive members of the Organization.
- c) **Developing leadership:** This should focus on objectives that improve the quality of leadership skills and attitudes. It is an opportunity to adopt an approach based on gender equity and diversity. Some leadership development activities began last year with an initial group of 30 individuals made up of personnel with different levels of supervisory responsibility. A new group has now been identified, but only at the P5 level and higher.
- d) **Substantially improving the recognition program:** Recognition should not be given only every two years. Rather, semiannual recognition mechanisms should be created and implemented to motivate people and teams whose behavior and actions contribute to the success of the Organization.
- e) **Developing competencies:** Considering that the Organization has adopted the competency map of the World Health Organization (WHO), it is important that all staff members, especially those with management responsibilities at the P3 level and above, are familiar with the behaviors, characteristics, skills, and personality traits that distinguish employees who are most likely to be effective.
- f) **Retention:** Criteria should be established and a systematic effort should be made not only to retain outstanding talent in the Bureau, but also to create and promote a positive work environment and a high-retention culture, with criteria that create opportunities for women and with an integrated approach to gender and diversity.

32. The staff members of PAHO/WHO are grateful for the ongoing efforts of our volunteers to represent staff in the different forums and work committees, such as the selection committees. Thanks, too, to EXM for its openness to dialogue and a productive exchange of ideas.

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