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## **TRANSFORMATION OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE INCLUDING ORGANIZATION AND WORKPLACE CULTURE CHANGE**

### **1. Introduction**

The WHO Transformation initiative focuses on creating a modern World Health Organization (WHO) that works seamlessly to make a measurable difference in people's health at the country level. This global initiative is intended to unleash the full potential of the Organization. In line with this objective, the WHO Western Pacific Region has begun reshaping its organizational and workplace culture. The process aims to ensure a workplace characterized by respect for all, where everyone is supported to do their best work, thus enhancing the ability of WHO to serve people and support Member States in the Region in delivering "health for all".

### **2. Strengthening the impact of WHO in the Western Pacific**

#### *At the country level*

The WHO Director-General established the Action for Results Group (ARG), comprising WHO country representatives from all six regions, to identify concrete steps that would ensure the Organization is impactful and relevant in every country and area through the formulation of a plan of action to realize the recommendations of the 11th Global Management Meeting. A key ARG initiative has been the establishment of a Core Predictable Country Presence (CPCP) in all WHO country offices. The CPCP includes the essential and predictably funded positions that every WHO country office should have to facilitate impact. Accordingly, in the first half of 2023, the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific identified the key CPCP positions that are required – but currently do not exist – in each country office. These positions are being included in the operational planning for 2024–2025, with recruitment slated to begin later this year. Another ARG-led initiative is intended to strengthen the delegation of authority (DoA) from the Director-General and regional directors to WHO representatives/heads of country offices. In May 2023, the Regional Office for the Western Pacific became the first to launch this initiative. It has provided heads of country offices with the decision-making power they need to be more agile and responsive to Member State needs and priorities. To support the heads of country offices who will now have increased authority, three multi-country hubs

are being established to augment country-level capacities in human resources management, finance, compliance and risk management.

At the same time the Regional Office for the Western Pacific has been responding to the outcomes of the culture-change discussions that began in 2022. Staff across the Region identified the process of strategic and operational planning in the Regional Office as an area in need of simplification and improvement. The results of a three-month analysis of the process of strategic and operational planning, which involved more than 130 staff members and ended in early September 2023, identified “pain points” and recommended specific changes. The findings were immediately used to shape the current approach to the 2024–2025 operational planning process, with a clear focus on country impact. During this operational planning cycle, this redesign of the process of operational planning in the Region is being embedded in the Organization with the first facilitated dialogue between country offices and the Regional Office. These dialogues are being led by country offices and aim to ensure that the three levels of the Organization are working in sync to meet the needs of Member States by prioritizing country office-led operational planning.

### ***In the Regional Office***

In the Regional Office, a DoA from the Acting Regional Director to technical directors took effect in July 2023. The DoA further simplifies internal procedures and transfers responsibilities and ownership to teams to enable greater efficiencies. The DoA covers a range of authorities from fundraising, issuing contracts and hiring staff to the organization of meetings and the publication of the Regional Office’s technical products, ultimately empowering technical directors with the authority needed to respond effectively to country needs.

In addition, a regular meeting of technical coordinators has been reinvigorated to provide a platform for technical discussions and leadership. As part of the process redesign, a critical gap was identified in the empowerment of the senior technical staff. As a response to this, the Technical Coordinators Meeting was re-established to ensure an open communication channel. This forum is led by the technical staff and is being used to reinvigorate cross-divisional collaboration, strengthen technical support to countries, ensure alignment with WHO headquarters, and encourage creative and innovative solutions as part of the Organization’s work in support of Member States.

The work the Regional Office has undertaken in relation to organizational change is being actively shared with headquarters and other regional offices. The sharing of experiences is strengthening the organizational culture of learning. In addition, headquarters colleagues are working with the Simplification Team and Regional Office “business owners” to develop new ways of working. They are supporting the simplification of Regional Office processes and improved alignment with global

practices through engagement in internal workshops on human resource processes and the design of the “one planning approach” at the country level.

### **3. Building a respectful workplace based on WHO values**

The effort to build a respectful workplace within the Regional Office for the Western Pacific and the Region’s country offices is aligned with WHO global initiatives to ensure that the Organization is serving Member States with the highest standards of conduct and zero tolerance towards abusive conduct, sexual misconduct, fraud and corruption. Globally, WHO has been engaged in the process of updating and revising several policy documents with the aim of building a fairer, safer and more respectful Organization. A range of key components make up a larger WHO policy package relating to matters of conduct. These include:

- Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct
- Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct
- Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct
- Policy on Prevention, Detection and Response to Fraud and Corruption
- The Preventing and Addressing Retaliation Policy
- The WHO Oath to Loyalty
- The [WHO Code of Ethics](#), which encompasses integrity, accountability, independence, impartiality, professional conduct and, finally, respect for dignity, worth, equality, diversity and privacy of all
- [WHO values charter](#), which includes these values:
  - Trusted to serve public health at all times
  - Professionals committed to excellence in health
  - Persons of integrity
  - Collaborative colleagues and partners
  - People caring about people.

The Western Pacific Region has worked to provide clear and simple guidance to ensure the workforce is well versed in the Organization’s zero-tolerance policies and able to follow the highest standards of conduct. Regular updates and town hall meetings serve as vital mechanisms to keep the workforce informed and engaged in this collective journey towards a more respectful, supportive and accountable workplace culture. The Regional Office for the Western Pacific is dedicated to open and transparent communication regarding progress, challenges and lessons learnt around a respectful workplace and transformation more broadly.

Activities that focus on building a respectful workplace are aligned to the policies described in more detail below.

### ***Human resource initiatives***

The Human Resources Management unit at the Regional Office has embedded the principles of a respectful workplace within multiple areas of work in order to build a respectful workplace based on WHO values.

- **Recruitment and diversity**

In line with the WHO's Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion area of work, WHO in the Western Pacific Region has focused on enhancing the recruitment process to ensure the selection of the right candidates. This approach involves the implementation of competency-based interviews, presentations and panel assessments, while strictly adhering to policy compliance. The overarching goal is not only to recruit talented individuals but also to foster diversity and inclusion across all areas of the Organization.

While progress has been made in improving diversity, work will continue on improving the gender balance among technical directors and other leaders within the Organization. Men continue to occupy a greater proportion of leadership roles, which the Organization is actively working to address in order to ensure more diverse and equitable leadership across the Region.

- **Team diversity and safety**

WHO in the Western Pacific Region recognizes the importance of cognitive diversity and psychological safety within divisions and teams. Initiatives such as team retreats and surveys have been introduced to encourage idea sharing and to create an environment in which every team member feels valued. Likewise, town hall meetings serve as a platform to impart knowledge and ensure transparent communication across the Organization.

- **Updates and communication on WHO's Policy**

Led by the Regional Human Resources Manager, the Human Resources unit conducts regular one-hour sessions as forums to engage with the workforce and provide updates on policies. Quarterly meetings with consultants, national professional officers and general service staff are held to address concerns, provide policy updates and resolve issues, fostering a collaborative and informed work environment.

### ***Staff well-being***

Acknowledging the critical role of employee well-being and mental health, WHO in the Western Pacific Region has made investments in this area. A staff counsellor has been recruited, and services from third-party vendor called In Touch Community Services have been leveraged to support staff well-being. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are plans for expanding and enhancing these services to cater to evolving needs.

### ***Return to office and flexible working arrangements***

In response to changing work dynamics, WHO in the Western Pacific Region has reviewed office spaces and implemented a Flexible Working Arrangements Policy. While encouraging staff to return to the office, the Organization maintains flexibility to accommodate diverse work preferences and circumstances.

### ***Performance-based system***

A performance-based system has been implemented, achieving a remarkable 92% compliance rate. This system links individual rewards to organizational performance outcomes, recognizing the efforts of both individual staff members and teams through global and regional awards.

### ***Egalitarian organization***

The Region's Human Resources Management unit is actively promoting a functional job review, implementing workforce planning strategies, and fostering a "flat" and egalitarian structure. Improved communication channels, including internal newsletters, are being emphasized to create a workplace that embodies the principles of equality and transparency.

### ***Staff training and development***

Understanding that professional development is key to improving organizational culture, the Staff Development and Learning team within the Human Resources unit has undertaken significant efforts in training and development to enhance leadership, technical and management skills. Coaching support has been extended across the Organization, emphasizing the importance of continuous professional growth.

A series of initiatives has been developed to strengthen career and professional development for general service staff and national professional officers. The Local Staff Learning Programme has been created to develop the capacity of locally engaged staff through upskilling, rigorous training courses, coaching and mentoring opportunities. In collaboration with the United Nations System Staff

College, capacity-building will also be supported through the roll-out of an e-learning initiative for emerging leaders. This programme will support the Region's locally engaged staff with supervisory functions in refining leadership and management abilities.

### ***Training initiatives and future plans***

Investments in staff development will continue with various programmes and courses, including mentorship, coaching and leadership training. Future plans involve the creation of a Regional Learning Committee, cascading resources to country offices, mid-level management training, a mentorship programme, the expansion of a coaching culture and courses on psychological safety.

## **4. Strengthening and expanding existing systems for reporting and responding to complaints about harassment, bullying or abusive conduct, and for creating safe and respectful work environments free from sexual misconduct**

Increased efforts have been taken to familiarize the workforce with the WHO policy of zero tolerance for abusive behaviour, including sexual misconduct, through awareness sessions, country missions, one-on-one consultations, town hall meetings and information documents. Colleagues throughout the Organization, including those from the Human Resources Management Policy and Administration of Justice unit and the Global Board of Appeal, visited the Regional Office for the Western Pacific to further support these policies. Colleagues in the Regional Office and country offices are now more aware of the avenues available to protect them from such behaviour and to report abuses – a key step to strengthen trust in the systems and reshaping the Region's workplace culture to one that is a source of pride for everyone. WHO in the Region is committed to open and transparent communication to raise awareness of these policies and mechanisms, and to update the workforce on progress made within various activities of the global Transformation initiative. Acknowledging that awareness and change require open two-way communication, various open-door discussions and team meetings have been held to review this work, as well as focus discussions with various groups of staff members, Intranet stories, monthly town hall meetings and regular email updates from the Regional Director and other key stakeholders.

### **4.1 Regional Ombudsperson**

In the first 12 months of operation, the Regional Ombuds programme has raised its profile as a viable and trustworthy source of informal conflict and grievance resolution. During this time, 141 cases were handled, the majority of which involved issue resolution between a supervisor and staff member. Other common issues raised were conflicts between peers and concerns regarding entitlements and contracts, as well as issues of burnout and work–life balance. In addition to individual issues, systemic

issues were identified, and advice was provided to senior management in the Regional Office and country offices.

Eleven visits were made by the Regional Ombudsperson to country offices, during which individual consultations were provided as requested and training programmes initiated, such as building strong teams and dealing with work–life balance, and advice was provided to management about improving the well-being of teams. These visits are considered essential as they create a personal connection with country office staff.

A key priority for the next 12 months will be the development of a programme regarding building psychologically safe teams, with an aim to enhance a culture within the Western Pacific Region in which staff members are encouraged to speak up. A training-of-trainers model will be utilized, with a focus on supporting team leaders to build psychological safety within their teams.

#### **4.2 Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PRSEAH)**

##### **Commitment to creating safe and respectful work environments free from sexual misconduct**

WHO, as an institution, has a zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct and inaction against sexual misconduct, as well as on retaliation against those who express a concern or complaint. While aligning fully with this policy over the past year, WHO in the Western Pacific Region has put in place a rights-based, human-centric approach to the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PRSEAH). The Organization believes that every colleague has an unquestionable right to work in a space that is safe, inclusive, respectful and entirely free from any form of sexual misconduct, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or type of work contract. WHO champions the empowerment of individuals to speak out against misconduct, with an empowered and conscientious workforce serving as the most formidable defence against sexual misconduct. This focused approach underscores WHO's dedication to fostering a workplace environment that upholds the highest standards of respect, safety and integrity for every member of every team.

To achieve these goals, the Region has followed the global lead by implementing *Preventing and responding to sexual misconduct: WHO's three-year strategy 2023–2025* and has taken Region-specific initiatives aimed at fostering collective ownership and responsibility.

##### **Support to global endeavours**

In the past 12 months, the PRSEAH Management Officer has undertaken visits to Cambodia, Fiji, Malaysia and the Philippines, with visits to Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic planned for the last quarter of 2023. China and Papua New Guinea country visits are scheduled for

January 2024. The Region has provided remote support to 16 country offices for PRSEAH awareness sessions or to conduct risk assessments. By 15 November 2023, all country offices should have completed risk assessments and developed a country action plan in line with the global PRSEAH strategy.

Led by country representatives and focal points, WHO country offices in Cambodia, China, Fiji, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Viet Nam have held or will hold one- to three-day off-site retreats dedicated to PRSEAH discussions this year and in January 2024. At these retreats, colleagues discuss in depth the diverse types of sexual misconduct, cultural nuances associated with sexual misconduct, and organizational support for prevention and response. The most valuable aspects of these discussions have been the ways in which colleagues have felt safe to express themselves and their concerns, and to collectively identify preventive measures. The discussions have also created an informal safety network which has enabled colleagues to voice concerns on sexual misconduct openly and to rely on peer-to-peer support structures.

WHO in the Western Pacific Region worked with WHO headquarters to develop guidance (see below) and a town hall meeting was held with the participation of the Director for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct in January 2023.

The PRSEAH Management Officer and country office focal points have provided safe spaces for one-on-one conversations around sexual misconduct and workplace abuse. There has been a marginal increase in the number of cases that called for a formal investigation by the Organization. The Region expects this number to rise as more colleagues become aware of and become confident in reporting concerns, and as the reporting processes become more transparent.

### **Western Pacific Region-led initiatives**

#### **a. WHO in the Western Pacific Region: the vision for PRSEAH in 2030**

In line with its commitment to ensure the sustainability of the PRSEAH initiative and to provide consistency in the Organization's work, WHO in the Western Pacific Region is engaged in an effort to determine what it wants to achieve by 2030 through the PRSEAH initiative and developing a regional action plan towards that end, as well as implementing the WHO three-year global strategy. To achieve a truly empowered workforce, all colleagues are involved in developing the regional action plan. Thus, instead of subject experts drafting the action plan, the Region is co-creating the plan with colleagues from across the Region.



The Region initiated a visioning exercise in which colleagues said what the ideal Organization should look like in 2030 – when effective action has been taken to prevent sexual misconduct. Country offices and the Regional Office held seven in-person and remote workshops with 149 colleagues and launched an online portal, through which an additional 117 participants across the Region shared their thoughts.

Participants were asked to envision and describe WHO in 2030. The 276 colleagues who have participated so far offered this shared vision for PRSEAH:

“By 2030, in WHO in the Western Pacific Region, we, the workforce, envision a work environment where every colleague is embraced in a culture of care, love and safety. We commit to nurturing an environment where each of us feels protected and supported, irrespective of our contract types, ensuring our voices are heard, respected and valued. In this environment, we celebrate diversity, empower one another, and contribute to a culture of respect, inclusivity and open communication. Together, we stand against all forms of sexual misconduct, in an atmosphere of trust, openness and accountability. In this safe space, perpetrators have no place, and each of us forms part of a safety net, forging a brighter future for WHO and those we serve. This is our commitment in the Western Pacific Region, and we will be a global example in our commitment to zero tolerance.”

**b. PRSEAH through Art Initiative**

The Region has adopted diverse ways to discuss the sensitive issues related to sexual misconduct, one of which was through art. The Regional Office held a pilot workshop where colleagues engaged on PRSEAH through paintings. Colleagues were asked to creatively envision what changes they would like to see in a WHO that was free from sexual misconduct. Twenty-five colleagues from the Regional Office participated in the workshop, and the four paintings that were produced will now be utilized in WHO PRSEAH events as visual symbols of the individual and collective commitment to PRSEAH.

**c. PRSEAH initiative on the travel-and-learn programme**

The Region has initiated a travel-and-learn programme so that PRSEAH focal points travel with the PRSEAH Management Officer to conduct joint country missions. During these missions, the focal points have conducted awareness sessions, risk assessment workshops and shared cross-country experiences. Five PRSEAH focal points in the Region participated in missions to learn, build capacity and share experiences by the end of 2023. Countries hosting focal points were Fiji, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia and Viet Nam. Countries sending out focal points included China, Fiji, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

## **Developing information documents on responding to an incident of sexual misconduct and prevention**

### *Responding to an incident*

The Organization understands that colleagues may need support to respond appropriately and immediately to sexual misconduct in a trauma-informed manner. The Western Pacific Region, with support from WHO headquarters, developed several guidance pathways to refer colleagues in the event of an incident. This guidance outlined the Region's response, in line with globally developed policies, to an incident that occurred at a WHO event or on WHO premises. It also provided information to WHO heads of offices on what they should do if an incident is reported to them in order to ensure that victims/survivors have access to services and reporting mechanisms and are safe from further harm. The regional guidelines also guide focal points on their response to sexual misconduct. The aim of developing this guidance is to ensure a consistent and human-centred approach to WHO work, while steadfastly supporting victims/survivors in a trauma-informed manner and ensuring due process to protect the rights of alleged perpetrators.

### *Receiving support*

Victims/survivors of sexual misconduct need to have information available that is safely accessible in a timely manner. The Region has created a list of first responders – this includes PRSEAH focal points, managers and other colleagues – who have been trained in referring victims/survivors in a trauma-informed manner to services and reporting mechanisms. This list will be available on the Intranet, as are details on those who hold United Nations PEP kits, intended for use by HIV-negative people in case of accidental exposure to HIV, and other services, so that victims/survivors have the choice as to whom they approach, ensuring they can access services directly, without going through a WHO colleague.

### *Helping colleagues build culturally appropriate toolkits to react to sexual harassment*

While it is the Organization's responsibility to protect an individual from sexual harassment in the workplace, it is understood that sometimes colleagues may need to respond to an incident as it occurs. One of the most frequent requests from colleagues related to PRSEAH is to have access to a toolkit they can use to prevent or respond to sexual harassment. The Regional Office has held eight focus group discussions to understand the needs of colleagues. A Region-specific, culturally respectful training programme has also been developed with the assistance of external consultants. The training will take place in November 2023 and February 2024, alongside a town hall meeting to ensure that all participants are encouraged to attend. WHO in the Region is committed to providing its workforce with

the tools necessary to empower them to create an organizational culture in which colleagues are comfortable to call out inappropriate behaviour.

*Engagement with United Nations country teams on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*

WHO country offices have begun liaising with United Nations counterparts to draft and/or implement Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) country action plans in Cambodia, China, Fiji, Samoa and Viet Nam, including joint actions to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in communities. WHO country offices have taken part in joint risk assessments with United Nations country teams (UNCTs), supporting UNCTs to identify support services and referral pathways for victims/survivors in Cambodia and Viet Nam. WHO offices in Pacific island countries and areas have begun training implementing partners on United Nations sexual exploitation and abuse policies, as well as the obligations of partners. WHO country offices have participated or will participate in UNCT-organized PSEA training in China, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Viet Nam. WHO supports the costs of a PSEA Coordinator in the WHO Representative Office for the Philippines as part of the UNCT approach. In October, WHO will co-host a meeting on PSEA with United Nations resident coordinators in the Western Pacific Region, with the participation of WHO headquarters.

*PRSEAH focal point network*

The PRSEAH focal point network consists of 34 colleagues (male, female and LGBTQIA+) who are on the front lines of PRSEAH initiatives. They range across international staff, national professional officers, administrative associates, short-term consultants and other non-staff contract holders in order to demonstrate the diversity of the WHO workforce and to ensure that no voice goes unheard. These colleagues have built their capacities over the past year to host PRSEAH workshops and awareness sessions and provide advice to country office colleagues. To build the capacity of focal points, the Organization has undertaken two initiatives in the Region: the PRSEAH focal point travel-and-learn programme (see above); and the PRSEAH focal point workshop (see below).

**Future directions**

- (1) To ensure sustainability of efforts, WHO will hire four colleagues in staff positions to be based in selected country offices and the Regional Office.
- (2) Understanding that focal points are PRSEAH frontliners, the Regional Office will work in collaboration with global colleagues to host a five-day workshop in November 2023 for

30 PRSEAH focal points to build capacities to prevent sexual misconduct and respond in a trauma-sensitive manner.

- (3) The Regional Office and country offices will support global initiatives, including conducting yearly risk assessment exercises to strengthen prevention initiatives and update mitigation plans. The Regional Office is committed to ensuring the necessary resources are available for country offices to implement PRSEAH activities. The risk assessment exercise and the focal point network will also be extended to departments in the Regional Office.
- (4) WHO in the Western Pacific Region will continue its signature programmes – the PRSEAH focal point travel-and-learn programme and the PRSEAH through Art Initiative – and extend its programme to other activities, undertaken with various interest groups in the Region. The aim is to create a diverse group of PRSEAH “ambassadors” – colleagues who are personally committed to work towards creating safe, respectful and inclusive environments free from sexual misconduct.
- (5) The Region, with support from WHO headquarters, will look towards mainstreaming PRSEAH. This will be a priority in the regional action plan to be developed in January 2024.

#### **4.3 Workplace culture**

To support efforts to improve the Region’s workplace culture – focusing on strengthening inclusion and respect for diversity, and on engaging workforce members across the Region in building a participatory approach to workplace culture change – a range of initiatives has been implemented.

All country offices and Regional Office divisions have implemented a Values in Action module that was used as a basis for discussions about how to align everyday behaviours and actions in the workplace with WHO values, as well as the personal values staff members all bring to their work. Building on this, the Workplace Culture Secretariat visited four country offices and all Regional Office divisions, where they conducted various workplace culture activities. These activities included listening sessions, team-building exercises, communication workshops, discussions centred on values in action and strategic planning for organizational culture action plans.

The strengthening of coordination and the relationship between regional and global initiatives have been a focus of work in this area, with numerous regional stakeholders assuming key positions within, or actively participating in, affinity groups; the diversity, equity and inclusion initiative; and UN-GLOBE, an advocacy platform dedicated to promoting equality and non-discrimination of LGBTQIA+ personnel within the United Nations system and its peacekeeping operations. These

collective actions signify a commendable commitment to fostering an inclusive, respectful and diversified workplace culture throughout the Region.

### **Workplace Culture Task Team**

Aware that reshaping workplace culture is a continuous process and will be a long journey, a Workplace Culture Task Team has been working to support efforts to improve the Region's workplace culture. The Team consists of a diverse and representative group of 20 workforce members from across the Region, supported by external consultants and a dedicated Secretariat staff, to strengthen a culture of inclusion and respect for diversity. To do this, the Team has identified focus areas and priority activities, including values in action, team building and work-life balance. Within these areas, the Team has supported the roll-out of Values in Action dialogues, webinars and resources across the Region to support the workforce in building a stronger workplace culture. In recognition of this work towards a consistent display of respectful qualities and behaviours and for positively contributing to the enhancement of a respectful workplace, the Workplace Culture Task Team was presented with the Region's 2022 Respectful Workplace Advocate Award.

### **Building capacity and supporting career development**

Following the roll-out and evaluation of a series of senior management capacity-building activities designed to strengthen their ability to lead in the creation of a more respectful and inclusive workplace culture, the programme has been expanded to include staff members with supervisory duties. Sessions have focused on values in action, cultural competency, deep listening and holding conversations about difficult topics, as well as leading workplace culture change. These capacity-building sessions aim to complement the training and development programmes offered by the Region's Human Resources Management unit to ensure that all workforce categories can engage with these activities.

### **Future directions**

WHO will continue the initiatives outlined above, adjusting them over time to reflect lessons learnt, as well as tailoring them for the specific contexts within each of the Region's divisions and country offices. In line with the Organization's commitment to listening and responding to the workforce, monitoring, evaluation and learning activities will allow WHO in the Western Pacific Region to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the activities and allow for adjustments for new focus areas and priority actions.

Capacity-building for middle management will continue until the end of 2023, with future activity and further expansion informed by an evaluation from the participants. The Local Staff Learning Programme will see activities commence at the end of 2023, with activities continuing into 2024.

### **Listening and responding to the workforce**

To assess the impact of efforts to build a more respectful, supportive and accountable workplace culture, several monitoring, evaluation and learning strategies have been implemented. These include workforce surveys, qualitative evaluation strategies, additional focus group discussions and methods to discover stories of change within the Organization.

An organizational culture survey conducted in November 2022 presents a nuanced perspective on workforce experiences regarding workplace culture, mirroring the mixed findings from an earlier survey. Respondents perceived positive changes across nearly all domains when compared to a similar survey conducted in February 2022. There were improvements in exposure to harassment or abusive conduct, with fewer individuals reporting witnessing or experiencing such issues. There was also an increase in confidence regarding knowledge of reporting procedures, speaking up, and management responses to reports of harassment or abuse. Respondents exhibited high levels of confidence in the WHO Western Pacific Region's commitment to organizational culture change and the three initiated change processes.

However, concerning findings persist, particularly the unacceptably high prevalence of harassment or abusive conduct reported, despite the WHO zero-tolerance policy. While some improvements were noted, only modest progress has been made since February 2022. Confidence in senior management's handling of bullying, abuse and harassment increased but still falls short of desired levels. Similarly, confidence in the approach of WHO in the Western Pacific Region to internal processes and systems for reporting and responding to misconduct remains inadequate.

Overall, there is a positive outlook among staff members regarding the Region's commitment to building a culture of respect. In parallel, focus group discussions held in early 2023 revealed a consensus that some progress has been made, particularly in raising awareness of workplace culture issues and senior management's commitment to action. However, participants expressed frustration over the slow pace of change, particularly in simplifying and improving work processes that led to inefficiencies, increased workloads and stress.

As a result of these activities, further work was requested by the Acting Regional Director to understand the more negative experiences seen within specific workforce categories and offices. In line

with this request, listening sessions were held, with the primary purpose of exploring and understanding the reasons for the greater workplace dissatisfaction in the Regional Office compared to country office counterparts, and to generate recommendations on how to improve workplace culture. The findings focused on challenges people have experienced and sometimes still face. Colleagues spoke about the urgent need for concerted efforts to build a respectful workplace, while also conveying a profound sense of pride. Overall, they expressed a deep commitment to the Organization, its values and its mandate.

In conclusion, the latest findings suggest some positive developments; however, they underscore the substantial work required to continue strengthening the Region's organizational and workplace culture. In line with the commitment to continuing to listen and respond to the workforce, a series of recommendations were developed and adopted to further advance efforts in strengthening workplace culture.

### **Learning from the workforce**

For the workplace culture and organizational change process, WHO in the Western Pacific Region is implementing the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology to complement other monitoring, evaluation and learning activities, including those that provide quantitative evidence of progress made and areas of concern.

The MSC is a participatory qualitative method that provides evidence of outcomes and impact by telling the stories of the most significant changes that occurred due to initiatives. In all, 218 initial stories of change were identified in the story collection phase, covering 25 domains of change. Following structured consultation and screening, three main areas of change were identified: (1) empowerment, including a speak-up culture; (2) work-life balance; and (3) capacity-building. Further interviews within these domains resulted in reports that underlie lessons learnt as well as areas of positive change within the workplace culture journey in the Western Pacific Region. Repetition of this process, as well as continued workforce surveys and focus group discussions, form the basis of the Workplace Culture Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning programme cycle.

### **Monitoring, evaluating and learning**

In tandem with these efforts, a comprehensive measurement, evaluation and learning programme has been instituted to ensure the process is data driven, as well as to gauge progress and ascertain workforce perceptions regarding ongoing initiatives to enhance workplace culture. This programme not only serves as a vital instrument for tracking improvements but also provides valuable insights and recommendations that guide further refinements in this transformative journey.

## **5. Redesigning internal processes at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific**

As a result of ongoing discussions with staff members about decreasing their workload, a review of the Regional Office's internal processes was conducted. Some key conclusions and recommendations centred around the following issues:

- finding a better balance between compliance and impact culture;
- ensuring strategic and technical rigour in the core work and accountability in the approval chain;
- avoiding parallel systems and shadow processes; and
- balancing the role of technical and non-technical and administrative staff.

In order to increase the efficiency and impact of WHO in the Western Pacific Region, three processes were prioritized for simplification: (1) human resources processes for the recruitment of staff and consultants; (2) programme management with a focus on strategic and operational planning; and (3) publications. An external consultancy firm was selected to work with the Regional Office Simplification Team to identify the pain points and propose comprehensive process redesigns. Over a 12-week period, 131 staff members took part in this ambitious project, helping to reshape key processes. The recommendations were presented to senior management and staff in early September 2023 and, as a result, a Change Management Group (CMG) has been established, consisting of directors, WHO representatives, and both professional and general services staff. The CMG is a senior decision-making forum that:

- is empowered to ensure the recommendations from the simplification process and all other Transformation-related activities remain aligned and on track;
- honours the commitments made to staff to ensure that changes take place in a timely manner;
- delivers on the accountability and the highest level of transparency committed to Member States, donors and partners;
- develops and manages the governance structure for transformation and change management in the Regional Office to drive impact in countries; and
- provides strategic and operational advice to the Acting Regional Director on issues related to transformation and change management.

Since mid-September 2023, the recommendations from the simplification project have led to the development of a human resources implementation plan and changes to the current approach to operational planning for 2024–2025, to be achieved through a series of workshops with constructive dialogue across the three levels of the Organization. To ensure momentum is maintained, the CMG is



overseeing a 100-day implementation drive that will fast-track key changes. A CMG is being established in the Office of the Regional Director to ensure that all the changes outlined above will be implemented based on agreed commitments and workplans.

## **6. Conclusions and next steps**

This information document provides an overview of the ongoing progress of cultivating a transformative workplace culture within WHO in the Western Pacific Region. Organizational culture change is complex and takes time, and WHO remains committed to implementing initiatives and structures that will foster and perpetuate positive change. The focus continues to be on building an empowering and respectful workplace culture, through which WHO will have a greater impact in supporting the people, communities and Member States the Organization serves across the Western Pacific Region.