

Text of mail sent by WHO Director General to all staff

Friday 28 March, 2w025

My dear colleagues,

The world is changing at a scale and pace, unlike anything we have seen in our lifetimes. We are witnessing a period of tremendous upheaval, with profound implications for multilateralism, humanitarianism, development and global health. Dramatic cuts to official development assistance by the United States of America and others are causing massive disruption to countries, NGOs and United Nations agencies, including WHO.

Although this situation is a shock, it is not a surprise. When we began the WHO Transformation in 2017, we identified our reliance on a handful of traditional donors as a major risk, which we have been working to address ever since by developing instruments to broaden our donor base and put us on a more secure and sustainable financial footing, including the WHO Foundation, the Investment Round and the historic decision by Member States to progressively increase assessed contributions to 50% of our budget. These instruments have begun to deliver.

Even before the United States announced that it intended to withdraw from WHO, we were already facing a constrained financial situation, and had begun working on efficiency measures more than nine months ago. The United States' announcement, combined with recent reductions in official development assistance by some countries to fund increased defence spending, has made our situation much more acute.

Together, we have been responding with a multi-pronged strategy based on cost containment, resource mobilization and engagement. While we have achieved substantial cost savings, the prevailing economic and geopolitical conditions have made resource mobilization particularly difficult.

As a result, we are facing an income gap of almost US\$600 million this year alone.

At its meeting in February, the 156th session of the Executive Board reduced the proposed budget for the 2026-27 biennium from US\$5.3 billion to US\$4.9 billion. Since then, the outlook for development assistance has deteriorated, not only for WHO, but for the whole international health ecosystem. We have, therefore, proposed to Member States a further reduced budget of US\$4.2 billion – a 21% reduction from the original proposed budget.

In parallel, and in consultation with Member States, we are conducting a prioritization exercise to ensure we focus on our core functions, leverage our comparative advantage and deliver the biggest possible impact with reduced resources. This process will be completed by the end of April. Everything is on the table, including merging divisions, departments and units, and relocating functions.

I have always said, and will always believe, that WHO's best asset is its staff members, and we are continuing to try everything to protect that asset to the greatest extent possible. We have

avoided kneejerk reactions that could do more harm than good in the long term, and have taken instead a strategic approach to ensure we move forward based on the highest priorities.

Despite our best efforts, we are now at the point where we have no choice but to reduce the scale of our work and workforce. This reduction will begin at headquarters, starting with senior leadership, but will affect all levels and regions.

We cannot know the exact impact on our workforce until the prioritization exercise is complete, but please know that we are committed to managing this transition with fairness, transparency, and humanity. The Staff Association will play an active role, and we will provide support mechanisms for staff throughout this period. As we navigate these unusual and unpredictable times, we need to take care of ourselves and each other. We have resources within the Organization that offer services and support: staff counsellors, psychological support through SHI, the employee assistance programme, the Ombudsperson and the Platform on Mental Health at Work. I urge you to use these, as needed. We are also repurposing funding for staff development and learning to increase support services.

I know you have many questions and concerns. To provide more clarity, we will hold a Global Town Hall on Tuesday, 1 April. Staff can start submitting questions now via this link or the QR code below. Senior leadership will continue to provide regular updates to keep you informed.

Thank you for your dedication, resilience, and the invaluable contributions you make to WHO's mission. I understand that the uncertainty we are facing is difficult, and I want to be fully transparent about where we stand and what lies ahead.

Although we face a very challenging situation, we also see this as an opportunity to build on the changes we have already made through the Transformation, and reshape the Organization to make it more focused on its core functions, more empowered and more independent.

With respect and gratitude,

Tedros