

Human Resources for Health leadership and management: Overview - World Health Organization (WHO)

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Executive Summary

This document addresses the global shortage of qualified leaders and managers in Human Resources for Health (HRH) by presenting a structured curricula package developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The author's central argument is that a critical mass of competent HRH leaders and managers must be formally developed to strengthen health systems through structured education. The package comprises three prototype curricula — a one-year master's course, a one-month course, and an executive short course — each targeting different levels of learners. Key domains of study include policy and planning, management, communication, information and communication technology, data management and analysis, and research. The document serves as an overview and accompaniment to the full curricula package, outlining rationale, learning objectives, scope, teaching methods, institutional requirements, assessment frameworks, and course evaluation approaches. The implied conclusion is that standardized, competency-based HRH leadership education, grounded in a health labour market framework, is a viable mechanism for addressing systemic weaknesses in health workforce governance globally.

Key Insights

1. WHO identifies HRH leadership and management as a distinct and underserved professional domain requiring formal, structured educational pathways.
2. The curricula package applies a health labour market framework as its conceptual anchor, situating HRH leadership within broader economic and systemic dynamics of health workforce supply and demand.
3. Three differentiated course formats — master's, short course, and executive short course — are designed to serve different institutional and career contexts, suggesting a tiered approach to competency building in HRH.

Practical Takeaways

- Institutions developing or updating HRH-related programmes can reference the WHO prototype curricula package as a structural template, covering domains from policy and planning to data management and research.
- Commercial use of the curricula package requires explicit permissions from WHO, distinct from the standard non-commercial Creative Commons license applied to free-of-charge programmes.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The document carries institutional authority as a WHO publication, provides a comprehensive multi-format educational structure, and addresses a recognized global gap in HRH leadership capacity. It clearly delineates scope, learning objectives, and institutional requirements, making it operationally useful for curriculum designers. **Limitations:** As a curriculum overview rather than a research study, it presents no empirical evidence of effectiveness, learner outcomes, or impact on health systems. The document is prescriptive and descriptive in nature, with no comparative analysis of alternative HRH education models. **Bias:** As a WHO-produced framework, it reflects the organization's institutional priorities and may not account for regional variation in health labour market conditions, resource constraints, or existing national curricula. The absence of cited external research limits its evidential grounding.

Organizational Practice

The WHO has developed a prototype curricula package comprising three structured courses — a one-year master's programme, a one-month course, and an executive short course — to formalize leadership and management competencies in Human Resources for Health. The package includes case studies, a facilitator guide, and an HRH glossary, and is intended for adoption or adaptation by academic and training institutions globally.

Strategic Implications

The WHO's investment in formalizing HRH leadership education signals a recognition that health system performance is constrained not only by workforce numbers but by the quality of governance and management capacity within the health labour market. The tiered course structure reflects an awareness that HRH leadership development operates across multiple career stages and institutional contexts. Broader adoption of this framework by national health ministries and universities could influence how HRH management is professionalised and credentialed internationally.

Validation Status: passed
