

Nomination and appointment of Regional Directors

Review of the process for the election of Regional Directors

Consultation document

BACKGROUND

1. At its 154th session in January 2024, the Executive Board discussed document EB154/38, which provided an overview of the existing framework related to the election of Regional Directors, and presented options for possible measures to enhance transparency, accountability and integrity in the nomination process.
2. In decision EB154(14), the Board requested the Director-General to hold informal consultations with Member States, with a view to preparing a consultation document on such measures, for the consideration of the regional committees in 2024. Following consideration by the regional committees, and as requested by the Board, the Director-General will submit a document summarizing the outcome of those consultations, including options for consideration, as appropriate, to the Executive Board at its 157th session in May/June 2025.
3. The Secretariat held an informal consultation with Member States on 19 April 2024, to gather additional Member State guidance on the measures promoting transparency, accountability and integrity on which the consultation document should focus. This document reviews the measures on which Member States expressed openness to further consideration at the regional committees. The outcomes of the regional committee discussions will be the basis for a document to be prepared by the Secretariat for consideration by the Board in May/June 2025.
4. As the regional committees consider the options herein, it is important to underscore that the regions retain autonomy over how they chose to select their nominee for the position of Regional Director. The role of the Executive Board derives from the Constitution of the World Health Organization and involves a degree of procedural oversight. On this basis, it may propose measures to ensure minimum standards and to enhance transparency, accountability and integrity in the nomination process. However, it will be for the regions themselves to decide whether to adopt such measures in the light of their own distinct situation and context. Indeed, in order to take effect any recommendations would need to be adopted by the regional committee and implemented through changes in its rules of procedure or other governance documents.
5. It is also important to note that nothing discussed herein will affect the processes currently under way with respect to nominations for the Regional Director post in the African and European regions.

POSSIBLE MEASURES TO ENHANCE THE TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE NOMINATION PROCESS

6. Based on the discussion at the 154th session of the Board and the subsequent informal consultation with Member States, regional committees are invited to provide guidance on the measures below to enhance transparency, accountability and integrity in the Regional Director election process.¹ See also the table annexed to this document containing a summary of possible measures and impact.

A. Elaboration of more specific standard minimum criteria for the post of Regional Director

7. All six regional committees have adopted criteria for the assessment of candidates for nomination for Regional Director.² These criteria focus mainly on management, leadership experience, sensitivity to cultural, social and political differences, commitment to WHO and physical condition. Consideration could be given to elaboration of the criteria to set minimum requirements in these areas and/or educational qualifications.³ For example, to be considered for appointment by WHO to a staff position at director level and above (D1/D2), an applicant must have:

- (i) 15 years of relevant work experience and includes experience at the international level – international experience is mandatory and means relevant experience gained outside the applicant's home country; and
- (ii) an advanced (Master's) level university degree that must be relevant to the position in question. Only degrees from accredited institutions in the World Higher Education Database (WHED) will be considered.

8. As the successful Regional Director candidate ultimately encumbers a senior WHO staff position, inclusion of such criteria would provide some consistency across the Organization. If Member States wished, this could also become part of the establishment of post descriptions for the position of Regional Director. Moreover, the existing criteria could be subject to additional elaboration, providing further

¹ Based on the feedback at the 154th session of the Board and the informal consultation with Member States on 19 April 2024, the following possible measures were not included in this document: (1) proposals to broaden the range of actors who may propose candidatures for Regional Director or direct application by individuals; (2) the engagement of a professional recruitment firm; (3) lifting of geographical limitations with respect to candidates; (4) changes to the term of office (extension to seven years with no possibility of renewal); and (5) additional guidance on campaign travel.

² The criteria for assessing candidates were adopted through the following resolutions: (1) Regional Committee for Africa resolution AFR/RC48/R7 (1998) (https://apps.who.int/gb/gr/pdf_files/mscp/AFR_RC48-R7.pdf); (2) Regional Committee for the Americas resolution CD47.R4 (2006) (<https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/361/CD47.r4-e.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>); (3) Regional Committee for South-East Asia resolution SEA/RC65/R1 (Annex C) (https://apps.who.int/gb/gr/pdf_files/mscp/SEA-RC65-R1.pdf); (4) Regional Committee for Europe resolution EUR/RC40/R3 (1990) (and subsequently affirmed through resolution EUR/RC47/R5 (1997)) (<https://who-sandbox.squiz.cloud/en/about-us/regional-director/election-process/election-of-regional-director-2014/nomination-process-for-who-regional-director-for-europe/resolution-eurrc40r3> and https://who-sandbox.squiz.cloud/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/245032/EUR-RC47-R5-Eng.pdf); (5) Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean decision no. 3, document EM/RC59/13 (2012) (https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC_Decisions_2012_14696_EN.pdf?ua=1); and (6) Regional Committee for the Western Pacific resolution WPR/RC50.R8 (1999) (https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/359398/WPR_RC050_Res08_1999_en.pdf).

³ Only the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Africa address educational qualifications; Rule 52(2) requires that proposed candidates possess a “medical background.”

guidance for assessing candidates. In addition, reference could be made to the WHO values charter, reflecting the values to which the WHO workforce is committed.

9. Establishing a more specific set of minimum criteria would support the transparency, accountability and integrity of the election process by seeking to ensure that candidates met an agreed threshold to carry out the functions of Regional Director.

B. Formalization of live candidates' forums

10. At the time the regional committees discuss this consultation document, all regional committees will have had experience of a live candidates' forum. While only the rules of the European Region and the Region of the Americas provide for such forums, in 2023 the Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions held ad hoc live candidates' forums prior to the nominations of Regional Directors at the regional committees. In anticipation of the nomination of a new Regional Director at the 74th session of the Regional Committee for Africa, the African region will hold an ad hoc live candidates' forum in July.

11. Consideration may be given to formalizing the holding of live candidates' forums prior to the regional committee nomination of the Regional Director, provided there is more than one candidate.¹ To date, the live forums have consisted of time-limited oral presentations by candidates, followed by a question-and-answer period of a set length at a meeting prior to the regional committee session at which the nomination takes place. Each region has decided whether the candidates should participate virtually or be physically present at the regional office for the forum. As a minimum, the forums are attended and/or broadcast on the website of the regional office concerned, but in most cases have been live-streamed to the public.

12. To establish such forums as a regular part of the nomination process, regional committees – other than those for Europe and the Americas – would need to amend their rules of procedure, as well as adopt modalities for the forums. The modalities could be modelled on the current ones. Alternatively, such forums could follow a different format, for example, a panel discussion whereby all candidates would address the same questions. The latter would provide for a degree of differentiation with the interview of candidates that takes place at a meeting of either an evaluation group or the regional committee.

13. Should regional committees adopt the practice of holding live candidates' forums, consideration could be given to these forums replacing the password-protected web forums foreseen in most of the codes of conduct. Recent experience shows relatively low levels of activity by the Member States and candidates in the web forums,² while the human resource and technology costs of implementing and supporting them are relatively high.

14. The establishment of live candidates' forums which are broadcast to the public would support the transparency, accountability and integrity of the election process by providing an opportunity for not only Member States, but also the public and other interested parties to hear directly from candidates on the views and goals that each candidate would bring to the position of Regional Director.

¹ In the case of the European Region, a live forum is held even where there is only one candidate (Rule 47.8 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe). In accordance with Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, candidates' forums for the election of the Director-General only take place if there is more than one candidate. Member States may wish to consider this latter precedent.

² For example, during the web forums held for the 2023 Regional Director elections, there were 58 posts for the Eastern-Mediterranean Region, 53 posts for the South-East Asia Region and 20 posts for the Western Pacific Region.

C. Broadcasting interviews at regional committees

15. Under their respective rules of procedure, most regional committees provide for an interview of Regional Director candidates to take place in a private meeting of the regional committee immediately before the secret ballot for nomination.¹ In the interest of transparency and accountability, where interviews of candidates are held at the regional committee meeting, consideration could be given to amending the rules of procedure to permit the broadcasting of those interviews through a live-stream on the regional office website.

D. Code of conduct amendments

16. Five of the six regional committees have adopted codes of conduct for the nomination of Regional Directors.² Most of the regional committees have called upon Member States to implement the code of conduct, to make it widely known and easily accessible and to bring it to the attention of candidates, and have requested the Regional Director to support implementation and impress upon the Secretariat the importance of complying with the obligations laid out in the Staff Regulations and Rules with regard to the conduct to be observed during the nomination process.

17. Nonetheless, regional committees could consider revisions to their codes of conduct to advance transparency, accountability and integrity in the nomination process. For example:

- *Expanded coverage*: Introduction of provisions on sexual misconduct and other abusive conduct and a disclosure of interests by candidates, including with respect to tobacco and tobacco products and arms.
- *Due diligence*: Provision for reference checks, including ClearCheck and criminal records checks, and due diligence review of qualifications and employment history.
- *Strengthened disclosure of campaign activities*: Requesting nominating Member States to disclose grants or aid funding for candidates during the prior two years and calling on non-nominating Member States to disclose such funding. The Secretariat could provide a template disclosure form to Member States, as it currently provides to candidates.
- *Increased formality*: Requesting undertakings from candidates and nominating Member States regarding strict compliance with the relevant code of conduct.

18. Consideration could also be given to establishing an oversight mechanism to which allegations of breaches of the code of conduct could be reported. Oversight could, for example, be undertaken by an evaluation group (see below) that would receive allegations regarding any breaches of the code of conduct for evaluation and make recommendations on the appropriate steps to be taken, if any, such as bringing a verified breach to the attention of the regional committee or officers thereof. Such a mechanism would, however, likely carry a financial cost, and require the provision of investigative

¹ The European Region and the Region of the Americas provide for candidates to be interviewed in advance of the regional committee meeting, by the Regional Evaluation Group and at a meeting of the Regional Committee for the Americas held in the margins of the Executive Committee, respectively.

² The Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization/Regional Office for the Americas has not expressly adopted a code of conduct for the nomination of the Director/Regional Director. The nomination guidelines state, however, that candidates should have “sensitivity to and respect for the cultural, social, political, and economic diversity within and among the countries in the Region” (see PAHO/WHO Regional Office for the Americas, Nominating Guidelines, Article I).

services; there could also be difficulties in resolving any allegations within the time frame of the election process. In any event, a mechanism will be needed to address any conflicts of interest or in respect of any candidates who do not pass due diligence checks successfully; this could take the form of reference to the regional committee for decision before drawing up a short list; or it could be considered for delegation to an evaluation group or oversight mechanism.

E. Evaluation group

19. In the interest of facilitating robust assessment of candidates' suitability and qualifications and in line with decision WHA65(9) (2012) urging a process for the assessment of candidates' qualifications, consideration could be given to the establishment of evaluation groups for each region. Such groups would support the accountability and integrity of the nomination process through a focused and rigorous assessment of candidate qualifications.

20. The Regional Evaluation Group established by the European Region is one model for such a group,¹ but it is not the only approach. Member States may wish to consider the optimal composition of such a group to support the process, as well as the range of tasks the group could usefully undertake.

- **Composition:** The group could be composed exclusively of representatives of Member States or include a mix of Member State representatives and independent experts. It could be limited to persons from the region or could also include representatives of the Executive Board from the region. The evaluation group could seek support from the WHO Secretariat, including the Department of Human Resources and Talent Management and the Office of the Legal Counsel. In addition, even if composed of exclusively of Member States, it could consult with outside experts, if circumstances so required.
- **Methodology:** The group could evaluate the candidates against the criteria set by the regional committee. It could do so through assessment of the information and documents submitted through a standard form for curriculum vitae and through interview of the candidates.
- **Role:** The evaluation group could have an advisory role, providing a non-binding evaluation of candidates for consideration by the regional committee. Alternatively, it could take on the role of establishing a shortlist, with only the shortlisted candidates going forward for consideration by the governing bodies. Possible additional tasks for the evaluation group could include:
 - overseeing implementation of the code of conduct if such an oversight role is agreed (see above); and
 - verifying qualifications of the candidates, and considering declarations of interest of the candidates, with assistance from the Secretariat.

¹ Under Rules 47.1 and 47.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, a Regional Evaluation Group is appointed by the Regional Committee at its session preceding the one at which a person is due to be nominated as Regional Director. The Regional Evaluation Group is composed of six representatives of Regional Committee Members and is tasked with the function of making a preliminary – and non-binding – evaluation of candidates for nomination in the light of the criteria specified by the Regional Committee and to perform related functions.

F. Election process

21. Under the current election process, in most cases, the regional committees establish a shortlist of candidates and hold one or more secret ballots to select a single nominee. The Board then considers that nominee on a yes/no basis. Consideration may be given to whether, in the interest of accountability and the integrity of the nomination process, a regional committee should have the option to reopen the period for submitting proposals, should the regional committee assess that the field of candidates is not sufficiently strong (or representative). Alternatively, this task could be delegated to the evaluation group, or be triggered automatically in the event that a minimum number of candidates are not proposed within the deadline.

ACTION BY THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

22. The Regional Committee is invited to note the report and to provide guidance on the questions set out below.

- (1) Should more specific criteria and/or post descriptions be developed for the post of Regional Director? If so, are there particular aspects the Regional Committee believes should be enhanced? Should criteria used by WHO for director level positions be considered?
- (2) Should live candidates' forums that are broadcast publicly be adopted as a standard step in the nomination process; and should interviews of candidates that take place at the regional committees be broadcast publicly?
- (3) Would it benefit the nomination process to amend the codes of conduct? If so, what aspects should be considered for amendment, for example:
 - expansion of coverage to include provisions on sexual misconduct and other abusive conduct and disclosures of interest?
 - provide for due diligence, including reference checks?
 - strengthened campaign activity disclosures?
 - more formal candidate undertakings?
- (4) Should the Regional Committee establish an evaluation group? If so:
 - Should the evaluation group be composed solely of Member States of the region or should it also include independent experts? Should one or more representatives of the Executive Board from the region participate in the evaluation group?
 - Should the evaluation group evaluate the candidates against the Regional Committee's criteria?
 - Should the evaluation group provide a nonbinding evaluation of all candidates to the Regional Committee or should it create a shortlist? Should it verify the qualifications of candidates, evaluate declarations of interest and/or have a role in oversight of the implementation of the code of conduct?
- (5) Should the Regional Committee (or evaluation group) be authorized to re-open the period for submitting proposed candidacies? If so, on what grounds?

ANNEX

Possible measures to enhance the transparency, accountability and integrity of the nomination process

Measure	Implementation considerations	Transparency	Accountability	Integrity
Elaboration of more specific standard minimum criteria for post of Regional Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt detailed assessment criteria • Create post description • Clarify any educational requirements • Refer to WHO values charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear public statement of elements to be considered in assessing candidates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures agreed threshold criteria for Regional Director positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds credibility through development and application of predictable criteria
Formalization of public live candidates' forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt forum • Modalities: virtual/ hybrid; candidates answer identical questions or those directed to them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcast publicly to allow all interested to hear interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates public understanding of candidates' visions for the region and plans to implement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for Member States to test campaign claims
Broadcasting interviews at regional committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change rules, as necessary, to permit broadcast of candidate interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcast, at minimum, on regional committee website, accessible publicly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits common understanding of candidates' visions for region and plans to implement 	
Code of conduct amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise codes of conduct: • Expand to include provisions on sexual misconduct and other abusive conduct and disclosure of interests, including tobacco/tobacco products, arms • Include due diligence, such as reference checks • Strengthen disclosure of campaign activities with Member State disclosure of grants and aid to candidates • Increase formality with candidate compliance undertakings • Consider oversight mechanism or process for alleged breaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of standards to be upheld in election process available publicly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes common standards for behaviour of candidates and Member State support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds credibility for through setting standards applicable with respect to all candidates and the support provided by Member States

Measure	Implementation considerations	Transparency	Accountability	Integrity
Evaluation group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create evaluation groups • Composition: Member States or Member States and independent experts, Board representative(s) from region? • Methodology: Evaluation against criteria? • Possible roles: Advisory, establish short list, oversight of code of conduct, verify qualifications, review declarations of interest 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes rigorous objective [and even handed] review of candidates' qualifications by group dedicated to process; could also take responsibility for verification of qualifications and/or oversight of issues related to the code of conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds credibility for process through establishment of group dedicated to solely to nomination process, including rigorous review of candidates' qualifications; could also promote trust in process through qualification verification and oversight of code of conduct declarations
Election process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorize regional committee or evaluation group to re-open window for candidate submission if it assesses that the field of candidates not sufficiently strong or representative • Alternatively, establish automatic re-opening if a minimum number of candidates is not met 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforces commitment to ensuring qualified candidates able to perform the role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds credibility by ensuring regional committee has a genuine choice • Promotes diversity