

Process for the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization

Report by the Director-General

1. The process for the election of the Director-General is governed by the Constitution of the World Health Organization, the relevant rules of procedure of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board, as well as several resolutions and decisions of both these organs. Nevertheless, relevant resolutions and decisions relating to the election process leave some points open. These details concern, in particular: the dates of and detailed arrangements for the candidates' forums; travel support to candidates attending the interviews at the session of the Board at which the nomination will take place; the status of internal candidates; and electoral campaign activities at sessions of the regional committees.

Candidates' forums

2. In accordance with Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and resolution WHA66.18 (2013), as amended by decision WHA73(27) (2020), two candidates' forums will be convened by the Secretariat as stand-alone events to enable the candidates for the post of Director-General to make themselves and their vision known to Member States on an equal basis. Both forums are non-decision-making platforms open to all Member States and Associate Members, and are broadcast on the WHO website.¹

Dates of the candidates' forums

3. The first candidates' forum shall be held not later than two months before the opening of the session of the Board at which the nomination will take place. The second candidates' forum shall be held not later than two months before the opening of the Health Assembly at which the appointment of the Director-General will take place.²

¹ Decision WHA73(27), Annex 2.

² Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, as amended through decision EB147(12) (2020); and decision WHA73(27), Annex 2.

4. The Health Assembly decided that the Secretariat will convene the candidates' forums at the request of the Board, and that the Board will decide the dates of the forums at its session preceding the session at which the nomination will take place. The Health Assembly further decided that the candidates' forums shall last no more than three days, and that the Officers of the Board will decide the exact duration of the forums, depending on the number of candidates.³ However, the candidates' forums shall not be convened in the event that only one person has been proposed for the post of Director-General.⁴

5. Accordingly:

(a) Should the Board agree with the proposal contained in document EB159/13 to convene the 160th session of the Executive Board on Monday, 25 January to Tuesday 2 February 2027, the first candidates' forum shall be held no later than 24 November 2026. It is therefore proposed to convene the first candidates' forum starting on 18 November 2026.

(b) Should the Board agree with the proposal contained in document EB159/13 to convene the Eightieth session of the World Health Assembly from Tuesday, 18 May to Wednesday 26 May 2027, the second candidates' forum shall be held no later than 17 March 2027. It is therefore proposed to convene the second candidates' forum on 15 March 2027.

Interview modalities at the candidates' forums

6. The Health Assembly decided that the first candidates' forum will consist of interviews with the candidates. Each candidate will make a presentation of up to 10 minutes, to be followed by a question-and-answer session, amounting to an overall duration of each interview of 60 minutes. The order of the interviews will be determined by lot. With respect to the second candidates' forum, the Health Assembly decided that it will consist of a more interactive panel discussion between the candidates and Member States and Associate Members attending the forum. The Health Assembly also decided that further detailed arrangements for the interviews may be decided either by the Board at its session preceding the event, or by the Member States and Associate Members attending the forum upon the proposal of the Chair of the Board.⁵

7. Proposed detailed arrangements covering residual aspects in relation to the conduct of the interviews at the first candidates' forum are set out in the Annex to this report for the Board's consideration. They follow closely the detailed arrangements used for the first candidates' forum that took place during the election of the Director-General in 2020–2021.

8. Proposed detailed arrangements for the second candidates' forum will be presented to the Executive Board at its 160th session.

Travel support to candidates

9. With respect to the candidates' participation in the candidates' forums, the Health Assembly decided that financial travel support, consisting of an economy-class airline ticket and a per diem

³ Decision WHA73(27), Annex 2.

⁴ Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, as amended through decision EB147(12).

⁵ Decision WHA73(27), Annex 2.

for the time necessary for the interview, shall be provided to all candidates participating in the candidates' forums.⁶

10. Based on WHO's travel policy, the same level of travel support will also be provided, upon request, to candidates who will attend the interviews at the 160th session of the Board, at which the nomination will take place.

Support for nominated candidates between the Executive Board session and the Health Assembly at which the appointment takes place

11. In order to enable all candidates nominated by the Executive Board for the post of Director-General to have access to appropriate information to support their candidacy on an equal basis, the Secretariat will make available to all candidates any information that may be provided in response to a request in the context of the election by any one of the candidates.

Prospective candidates

12. Given that the official announcement of candidates for the post of Director-General will take place after the closure of the last regional committee session before the session of the Executive Board at which the nomination will take place (that is, on or after 29 October 2026), and in order to promote transparency and equality of opportunity for all persons who are or may become candidates, persons who have been or may be proposed as candidates may be acknowledged as prospective candidates prior to the aforementioned official announcement of candidates. Prospective candidates will be acknowledged on the WHO website. This is in line with the arrangements in place for the election of the Director-General in 2017.

13. Acknowledgement of a person as a prospective candidate will take place at the request of a Member State. In addition, if any internal candidates are not already acknowledged as prospective candidates, they will also be acknowledged as prospective candidates as soon as possible following the opening of proposals.

Electoral campaign activities at regional committee sessions

14. Prospective candidate(s) will be invited to attend regional committee sessions and will be provided with seating to observe the proceedings. They should not attend regional committee sessions in any other capacity and, in particular, they should not attend as a member of the Secretariat or as part of a Member State or Observer delegation.

15. The following guidance should be observed regarding campaigning in connection with regional committee sessions:

- (a) campaigning should not take place as part of the regional committees' official programmes and, in particular, prospective candidate(s) and Member States will not be given speaking time during official meetings to promote a candidacy. In addition, prospective candidate(s) will not officially present their candidatures to any of the regional committees;

⁶ Decision WHA74(21) (2021), paragraph 3.

- (b) prospective candidate(s) and Member States may organize and hold campaign events in the margins of regional committee sessions. These may consist of meetings organized by, or in support of, individual prospective candidates, or of meetings organized by Member States or groups of Member States to hear from several prospective candidates. Such events should take place during breaks in the official programme, or before or after official meetings of the regional committees;
- (c) the Secretariat will not organize any events for prospective candidates in the margins of regional committee meetings. Depending on the availability of the venue of the regional committee session, the relevant Regional Office may provide, on an equal basis, office space or any other facilities to prospective candidate(s); and
- (d) in order to ensure equal treatment and fairness, to the extent that opportunities are provided for campaign activities, these opportunities must be open to all prospective candidates on a similar basis.

Internal candidates

16. In accordance with Staff Rule 650.2 and paragraph IV.4 of the Code of Conduct for the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization,⁷ the Director-General intends to place internal candidates on special leave to ensure a clear separation between their campaign activities and WHO's functions.

17. Leave will be applied from the date of acknowledgement of an internal candidate as a prospective candidate. Internal candidates will be requested to first exhaust their accrued annual leave starting from the date of their acknowledgement as a prospective candidate. Once the accrued annual leave is exhausted, internal candidates will be placed on special leave with half pay until the closure of the 160th session of the Executive Board in 2027. If nominated by the Board, internal candidates will then be placed on special leave with full pay after the closure of the Board's session and until the closure of the Eightieth World Health Assembly in 2027.

Action by the Executive Board

18. The Board is invited to note the report and to consider the following draft decision:

The Executive Board, having considered the report on the process for the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization,⁸ decided that:

- (1) in the event that more than one candidate is proposed for the post of Director-General, the first candidates' forum shall be held starting on 18 November 2026 for a duration that shall be decided by the Officers of the Board, depending on the number of candidates, and the second candidates' forum shall be held on 15 March 2027;
- (2) the interviews of candidates at the first candidates' forum shall be conducted in accordance with the detailed arrangements set out in the Annex to this decision.

⁷ Resolution WHA66.18, Annex 1, as amended by decision WHA73(27), Annex 2.

⁸ Document EB159/10.

Annex

Detailed arrangements for conducting interviews at the first candidates' forum

Seating arrangements

1. Participants from Member States and Associate Members will be invited to take seats in the room according to their respective regional membership.

Presentation by candidates

2. The presentation by each candidate shall not exceed 10 minutes.

Selection of questions

3. Each Member State and Associate Member present at the candidates' forum will be given colour-coded tokens, one for each candidate to be interviewed, bearing the Member's name. Member States and Associate Members present will be invited to indicate if they wish to ask a question by placing their token(s) in one of six receptacles (one for each). Once all tokens have been collected by the Secretariat, the Chair will pull one token from each receptacle, following the order of regions that he or she has previously determined by lot. After six questions, one from each region, have been asked, the contents of the six receptacles will be merged into one and the selection of those invited to ask questions will continue, one-by-one, on a fully random basis until the time available for each candidate has been exhausted.

Questions and answers

4. Member States and Associate Members will have up to one minute to ask one question only. Multiple-part questions will not be permitted. Candidates will have up to three minutes to respond to each question. Each interview will conclude after 60 minutes have elapsed, even if there are still questions pending. A candidate will, however, be permitted to complete his or her answer to the question being addressed when the 60 minutes elapse. Should there still be time available when the questions have been exhausted, the candidate may, if he or she wishes, make additional remarks within the remaining time.

Timekeeping

5. It is expected that a traffic light system or other electronic timekeeping system will be used to help all participants to keep within the time limits during both parts of the interview.