

# **Evaluation of the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization**

## **Use of optical scanners and a web forum**

### **Report by the Secretariat**

1. The Executive Board at its 146th session in February 2020 requested the Director-General, *inter alia*, to research and evaluate, in advance of the 147th session of the Executive Board, options for counting votes by means of an optical scanner; and to further investigate commercially available off-the-shelf cloud solutions, meeting the need for an enhanced and more interactive web forum.<sup>1</sup> This report provides information on the current state of these activities.

#### **A. Counting votes by means of an optical scanner**

2. On the basis of preliminary investigations, voting machines able to read votes cast on ballot papers and immediately tabulate the votes are deemed to be a possible solution. Such machines are used in a number of countries to register and count votes at polling stations. These machines provide a voting experience very similar to that of a paper-based voting system. Voters make their choices on machine-readable ballot papers and feed them through the scanner of the machine, which reads the ballot papers and deposits them in a box. The voter is provided with immediate feedback indicating that the vote was registered correctly. At the end of the voting process, the machine provides a visual report and/or printout of the results. The ballot papers can also be counted manually, if necessary, for auditing purposes.

3. The use of these machines could be incorporated, with minimal changes, into the current process of electing the Director-General. The main differences would be the replacement of existing ballot papers with machine-readable ones, replacement of ballot boxes with voting machines and changes to the process of counting and tabulation. The tellers would be able to immediately read the results from voting machines instead of having to manually count the votes. It is expected that this would reduce the time it takes for the counting and tabulation of votes in each round from about one hour to about 20 minutes.

4. The distribution of ballot papers, collection of ballot papers and counting of the votes are the three most time-intensive stages of paper-based voting in WHO's governing bodies. Effective measures to save time during the distribution and collection of ballot papers were incorporated during the election

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<sup>1</sup> See decision EB146(22); see also the summary records of the Executive Board at its 146th session, fourteenth meeting, section 6, and fifteenth meeting, section 1.

of the Director-General in 2017. Thus, the impact of time savings during the counting of less than 200 ballot papers on the length of the overall process would not be very significant.

5. The use of voting machines for scanning ballot papers would come with additional costs and risks. The increase in cost would include the purchase and maintenance of voting machines to replace the six ballot boxes for the voting process during the Health Assembly (plus spare machines for use in the event of a malfunction) and the purchase of machine-readable ballot papers. The increased risks would be related to reliability and accuracy of the vote count, which can vary, depending on the error margin of the equipment.

6. Given the above, a more detailed study into this option, including a cost-benefit analysis, is necessary. Due to the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the study did not take place. It is planned to be executed through a request for proposal, to solicit bids for the supply of voting machines with optical scanners. The findings of the detailed study, covering both the cost-benefit analysis as well as a technical evaluation, will be made available to Member States at the 149th session of the Executive Board in May 2021.

## **B. Web forum**

7. The Organization has recently selected and acquired a cloud-based technology platform for contributor and partner engagement management. The platform will be used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of engagement processes between the Secretariat and stakeholders, including donors, WHO collaborating centres and the WHO governing bodies. The community engagement module of the platform has been identified as an option that provides an enhanced and more interactive web forum for the process of electing the Director-General.

8. The forum feature of the community engagement module of the platform may be used with some additional configurations to handle the processes of the web forum (for example, question-and-answer sessions, moderation and translation). It provides a friendlier user interface, which can be used to overcome some of the technical limitations of the bespoke web forum that was used during the election in 2017. The Secretariat will initiate the implementation of the forum on the platform and arrange a series of presentations and demonstrations for Member States during the first half of 2021.

## **ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

9. The Board is invited to note the report and provide guidance, in particular on the continued evaluation of the use of voting machines with optical scanners for the election of the Director-General.

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