

Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response

Report by the Director-General

1. The Director-General has the honour to transmit to the Executive Board, at its 150th session, the proposal submitted by the Government of Austria to establish a Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response (see Annex).

2. It is noted that committees of the Executive Board, including standing committees (referred to in the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board as “committees of limited membership”), are governed by Rules 18 and 19 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

3. The Board is invited to note the report and to consider the draft decision and proposed terms of reference of the Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response contained in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively.

ANNEX

WHITE PAPER: STRENGTHENING THE WHO EXECUTIVE BOARD THROUGH A STANDING COMMITTEE ON PANDEMIC AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

I. Background and Introduction

The WHO Executive Board, comprised of 34 WHO Member States, is a critical part of the organization's governance and decision-making process.

Drawing on lessons learned, including from the COVID-19 response, this white paper presents for consideration information on the potential establishment of a new Executive Board Committee: the *Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response (SCPPR)* with a view to strengthen the Executive Board's effectiveness and responsiveness.

The establishment of this new Executive Board Committee could improve WHO's operations, and the role of its Member States therein, in the most critical moments in global health responses, including by:

- Strengthening the role of Member States in guiding the Director-General;
- Narrowing the gap between WHO's scientific advice (given by the Secretariat and Expert Committees) and actual policies in Member States; and
- Overcoming the structural shortcomings that have manifested themselves during the current pandemic.

The remainder of this white paper provides additional details on the above proposal. Appendix 1 provides a draft Executive Board decision to establish the SCPPR; draft Terms of Reference are included in Appendix 2.

II. Purpose and scope of the SCPPR

It is proposed that the SCPPR would review, provide guidance, and, as appropriate, make recommendations to the Executive Board regarding ongoing work concerning policy proposals on pandemic and emergency preparedness and response. It would also provide guidance to the Executive Board and/or Health Assembly, as appropriate, on policy and related matters upon the declaration of a public health emergency of international concern. Furthermore, upon request, the SCPPR may provide guidance to the Director-General to consider with respect to temporary recommendations in the event of a public health emergency of international concern.

As a committee of the Executive Board, the SCPPR would report to the Executive Board or to the World Health Assembly, as appropriate.

III. Structure and membership of the SCPPR

It is proposed to establish the SCPPR with a membership limited to a subset of Executive Board members participating.¹

As detailed in the draft Executive Board decision to establish the SCPPR provided in Appendix 1, it is proposed that the SCPPR be composed of two members from each of the six WHO regions (12 members in total),² in addition to one of the Executive Board Vice-Chairs who would chair the SCPPR, acting *ex officio*.

IV. Working modalities of the SCPPR

Bearing in mind the subject matter under discussion, it is proposed that the SCPPR would have the ability, should it so decide, to meet in closed session,³ and that it will conduct its activities on the basis of consensus.

V. Meetings of the SCPPR

It is proposed that Meetings of the SCPPR be convened on a regular basis, and when required on an emergency basis.

- *Regular SCPPR meetings*

The SCPPR will meet at least twice annually on a regular basis, for general work and planning on pandemic and emergency preparedness and response. As is the case with the Programme, Budget, and Administration Committee (PBAC), these meetings will be before the sessions of the Executive Board, to enable the SCPPR to report to the Board and to the WHA, as appropriate, on pandemic and emergency preparedness and response.

- *Emergency SCPPR meetings*

In the event of the declaration of a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) following a recommendation by an Emergency Committee, under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR), the SCPPR would immediately meet, within 24 hours of the declaration, to seek information from the WHO Secretariat, and pursuant to its terms of reference and delegated authority from the Executive Board, as appropriate, make recommendations to the Health Assembly on policy and related matters regarding the event, provide guidance to the Executive Board and provide advice, upon request, to the Director-General to consider with respect to temporary recommendations in the event of a public health emergency of international concern.

¹ The Executive Board Rules of Procedure (specifically, rules 18 and 19) expressly contemplate and provide that the Executive Board may establish committees as it deems necessary for the study of, and reporting on, any items on its agenda. Executive Board committees may be either (a) Committees composed of Executive Board members (“committees of limited membership”) or (b) committees open to all interested Member States (“open-ended committees”). Under this proposed approach, the SCPR would be a “committee of limited membership”.

² For note, this is the same arrangement as for the PBAC.

³ As reflected in the draft Executive Board decision in Appendix 1, this would require an amendment to the Executive Board Rules of Procedure (Rules 3 and 18).

Appendix 1

DRAFT DECISION ON A STANDING COMMITTEE ON PANDEMIC AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE (WITH DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE)

I. Background

Through the draft decision presented below, the Executive Board at its 150th session, in January 2022, would establish a Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response (the SCPPR).

Through this same draft decision, the Board would:

- Adopt the SCPPR's Terms of Reference (which would be annexed to the Executive Board decision);
- Appoint the initial cohort of SCPPR members and set the dates of the first SCPPR meeting;¹ and
- Request the WHO Secretariat to report on the implementation of this decision to a future session of the Board in order to have the opportunity to consider any necessary adjustments to the SCPPR terms of reference.

II. Draft decision (with draft Terms of Reference)

The Executive Board,

Decided:

[...]

- (1) in accordance with Rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, to establish a standing committee of limited membership, to be called the Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response, which will operate in accordance with the terms of reference set out in the Annex to this decision;
- (2) to amend the first sentence of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board as follows, additions appearing in bold character and strikeouts in underscore:

“All Member States not represented on the Board and Associate Members may designate a representative who shall have the right to participate without vote in the deliberations of

¹ Alternatively, these matters could be addressed by the Board at its 151st session in May 2022. (This latter option would align with the practice whereby the Board appoints new members of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee (PBAC), and sets the dates of the PBAC meetings, at its May session). The draft decision reflects these options.

meetings of the Board and of committees of limited membership (**pursuant to as defined in Rule 18**) established by it.”

(3) to amend the second sentence of Rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board as follows, additions appearing in bold character:

“All Member States and Associate Members shall have the right to attend such committees in accordance with Rule 3 **unless the Chair of the committee decides otherwise, the reason for which must be presented to the next session of the Executive Board.**”

(4) that, notwithstanding Rule 19 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, the Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response will conduct its business on the basis of consensus, as provided in the terms of reference set out in the Annex;

(5) to appoint as members of the Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response:

[... (Member State), ...(Member State), ...];

(6) that the Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response shall hold its first meeting from [...] to [...];

(7) to request the Director-General to report on the implementation of this decision to the Executive Board at its [...] session and to make recommendations on any necessary adjustments to the terms of reference of the Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response.

Appendix 2

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PANDEMIC AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Composition and attendance

1. The Standing Committee on Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness and Response (“the Standing Committee”) will be composed of a Chair, who shall be selected from among the Vice-Chairs of the Executive Board and serve on an ex officio basis, as well as by twelve members, two from each region, appointed from among the members of the Executive Board.
2. Members of the Standing Committee will serve for two years or until expiry of their membership on the Board, if sooner. The Chair will serve for a one-year term, or two sessions of the Standing Committee, in the first instance (with a possibility of extending for a further year if they are still members of the Board). With the exception of the Chair, if any Member of the Standing Committee is unable to attend one or more meetings of the Standing Committee, her or his alternate in the Board designated in accordance with Article 24 of the Constitution, or as the case may be, her or his successor as a Member of the Board, may participate in the work of the Standing Committee in her or his place.
3. All Member States and Associate Members will have the right to participate without vote in the deliberations of meetings of the Standing Committee in accordance with Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board. The Chair may, if circumstances so require, decide to limit attendance at the Standing Committee meetings, or parts thereof, to members of the Standing Committee and essential Secretariat staff.

Functions

4. The Standing Committee shall:
 - (a) Review, provide guidance and, as appropriate, make recommendations to the Executive Board on ongoing work regarding policy proposals on pandemic and emergency preparedness and response;
 - (b) Consider information provided by the Director-General about events that have been declared as a public health emergency of international concern pursuant to the International Health Regulations (2005), provide guidance to the Executive Board and, acting on behalf of the Executive Board, make recommendations to the Health Assembly on policy and related matters regarding the event and, upon request, provide advice to the Director-General to consider with respect to temporary recommendations in the event of a public health emergency of international concern.

Conduct of business

5. The Standing Committee shall meet at least twice annually, either in person or virtually. The Board may decide to convene extraordinary meetings of the Standing Committee in order to deal with urgent matters that fall within the terms of reference of the Standing Committee and that need to be considered between regular meetings of the Standing Committee. The Director-General shall convene

an extraordinary meeting of the Standing Committee within 24 hour from a declaration of a public health emergency of international concern pursuant to the International Health Regulations (2005) in order for the Standing Committee to consider information provided by the Director-General about events that have been declared as a public health emergency of international concern pursuant to the International Health Regulations (2005) and, as appropriate, provide guidance to the Executive Board, make recommendations to the Health Assembly on policy and related matters regarding the event and, upon request, provide advice to the Director-General to consider with respect to temporary recommendations in the event of a public health emergency of international concern.

6. The Standing Committee shall conduct its business on the basis of consensus. In the event of inability to reach consensus, the difference in views shall be reported to the Board or to the Health Assembly, as appropriate.

7. A majority of the members of the Standing Committee will constitute a quorum.

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