

Matters emanating from the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance

Report by the Director-General

1. The Director-General has the honour to transmit to the Executive Board at its 154th session the report of the former co-facilitators of the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance (Annex), which has been prepared in line with decision EB153(1) (2023).

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

2. The Executive Board is invited to note the report and to consider the draft decision proposed by the former co-facilitators (Appendix).

ANNEX

REPORT BY THE FORMER CO-FACILITATORS OF THE AGILE MEMBER STATES TASK GROUP ON STRENGTHENING WHO'S BUDGETARY, PROGRAMMATIC AND FINANCING GOVERNANCE**BACKGROUND**

1. The Agile Member States Task Group (Task Group) on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance completed its mandate with the adoption of its recommendations by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly in decision WHA76(18) in May 2023. Prior to this in January 2023, in decision EB152(15), the Executive Board had decided to give effect to those recommendations of the Task Group whose actions were proposed ahead of their consideration by the Health Assembly. Actions covered in decision EB152(15) operative paragraphs 1(a)–(h) are reported on by the Secretariat in documents EB154/33, EB154/33 Add.1, EB154/33 Add.2 and EB154/33 Add.3, which are submitted for the consideration of this Board. Actions covered in operative paragraphs 2(a)–(d) resulted in proposals presented to the Executive Board at its 153rd session in May 2023 (in document EB153/4), and subsequently the adoption of decision EB153(2) on a template and recommended timeline for proposing resolutions and decisions, and decision EB153(3) on future work to reform the Executive Board and the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. In addition, since May 2023, the former co-facilitators led informal consultations on two Task Group recommendations contained in document EB152/33 (and adopted by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly in decision WHA76(18)): improving transparency in the creation and filling of senior level positions at WHO (T5) and improving results-based budgeting and planning (T6). With regard to recommendation T5,¹ the Secretariat was requested to prepare a report on the follow-up to decision WHA69(8), operative paragraph (10). The latter is submitted by the Secretariat as document EB154/34 Add.1. Closely related to the work of the Task Group is the Secretariat Implementation Plan on reform, for which a progress report by the Secretariat is submitted for consideration as document EB154/32.

2. At its 153rd session, the Executive Board decided to request the former co-facilitators of the Task Group, Mr José Acacio of Australia and Ms Philomena Simelane of Eswatini, to continue leading the work with Member States as outlined in decisions EB153(1) and EB153(3).

3. In decision EB153(1), the former co-facilitators were requested to hold informal consultations with Member States on the process of handling and investigating potential allegations against WHO Directors-General, building on the revised proposal and flowchart contained in Annex A of document EBPBAC38/2 and to report on the outcome of those consultations to the Executive Board at its 154th session through the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee at its thirty-ninth meeting. The outcome of those consultations is presented in document EB154/35.

4. Through decision EB153(3) on future work to reform the Executive Board and the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, the Board noted the need for informal consultations with Member States to finalize proposals presented in decisions EB152(15) paragraph 2(a) and EB153(3) paragraphs 1 and 2 and requested the former co-facilitators to continue informal consultations and

¹ See document EB152/33, Appendix, page 11.

provide a report to the Executive Board at its 154th session through the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee at its thirty-ninth meeting.

5. The present document responds to the request in decision EB153(3) and presents the outcomes of the consultations that the former co-facilitators held with Member States between August and December 2023. The former co-facilitators held four consultations with Member States, on 25 August, 29 September, 21 November and 1 December 2023. In addition, feedback was received through written submissions in September, October and November 2023. The former co-facilitators also held targeted discussions with interested Member States to promote understanding on key issues. During this period, the Mission of the Kingdom of Eswatini informed that the term for Ms Philomena Simelane as health attaché had come to an end in Geneva, and she was replaced in her capacity as former co-facilitator by Ms Nolwazi Dlamini.

6. For ease of reading, the present document is divided into four main parts covering the tasks discussed during the informal consultations, including matters related to: (1) additional scrutiny of new initiatives/programmes; (2) proposal(s) on reform of the Executive Board and Programme, Budget and Administration Committee; (3) improving transparency in the creation and filling of senior-level positions at WHO; and, (4) options for strengthening Member State consultations on the prioritization of the programme budget, resource allocation and presentation of prioritization results to the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee.

ADDITIONAL SCRUTINY OF NEW INITIATIVES/PROGRAMMES

7. Two tasks remained for Member States as part of the Task Group's recommendation T1: to elaborate information relating to the process for implementing the new transparency requirement for this additional scrutiny of new initiatives/programmes; and an ongoing mechanism for tracking its implementation, both to be considered at the January 2024 governing bodies meetings. (In addition, the former co-facilitators thank the Secretariat for making available the current methodologies for costing initiatives and programmes,¹ fulfilling a separate Task Group request in recommendation T1.)

8. In Annex 1 to their May 2023 report to the Executive Board (document EB153/4), the former co-facilitators set out further details for implementing recommendation T1, to which the membership had agreed during informal consultations. These included defining the scope of initiatives or programmes that would be subject to this new measure, as well as the transparency requirements to be imposed on initiatives or programmes within scope.

9. In further consultations referred to in paragraph 5 above, **Member States supported the former co-facilitators' conclusion that, having already agreed these details for implementing this transparency measure, the details in Annex 1 to document EB153/4 were sufficient to satisfy the remaining tasks set out in recommendation T1.**

¹ Document EB154/34 Add.2.

PROPOSAL ON REFORM OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE PROGRAMME, BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

10. Recommendation T3 gave voice to Member States' appetite to make tangible improvements to the functioning of the Executive Board and the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. Recognizing the broad and diverse possibilities for such reform, **the former co-facilitators envision three specific dimensions to moving forward toward achieving concrete reforms:**

(a) **Model for ongoing inclusion in Member State-led reform.** It is clear to the former co-facilitators that Member States have continuing ambitions for short- and long-term reform of the governing bodies, to improve their capacity to make strategic decisions about the Organization as well as to effect real change to health outcomes as set out in the general programme of work. The former co-facilitators have also heard clearly the lack of capacity among the membership to establish a formal new working group to this end, and thus they propose a model of working that capitalizes on the successful elements of the Task Group and subsequent work of its co-facilitators, namely:

- to be Member State-driven, under the authority of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and Executive Board and the stewardship of their respective chairs, building upon their efforts to trial and successfully embed reforms to the governing bodies;
- to be representative and inclusive – all Member States would continue to be able to participate in and contribute to discussions;
- to enjoy the Secretariat's expert technical advice, inputs and logistic support;
- to operate without disturbing any existing ability for Member States to propose and champion specific reforms via other means should they decide to (i.e. the model would not be an exclusive channel for Member State-led reform).

The model would also be designed to recognize the limited bandwidth of Member States (the former co-facilitators and the wider membership alike) and address other difficulties encountered in the lived experience of the Task Group. With this in mind, there would continue to be a small number of Member States leading the work and associated informal discussions. The new model would increase the possible number of lead Member States beyond two, to any subset of Member States represented on the Executive Board with the interest, willingness and capacity to coordinate the work of the wider membership who present themselves to do so. This would not limit the ongoing ability for all Member States to participate in and contribute to discussions.

A draft decision is appended to the present document for the Board to consider continuing Member State-led reform under this way of working. If this decision is supported, that subset of Member States represented on the Board who present themselves to lead the wider membership would commence preparing a draft work plan to organize Member States' work.

(b) **Consideration of proposals for improving the effectiveness of the WHO governing bodies in the report by the Director-General.**¹ The former co-facilitators note that the proposals

¹ Document EB154/33 Add.1.

in the relevant report are informed by the Secretariat's review of best practice in the United Nations system; the long history of efforts to improve the functioning of WHO governing bodies by both Member States and the Secretariat; and the more recent inputs by Member States in discussions and written submissions of the Task Group and subsequent work. Consultations among Member States show a level of support for the intent behind the Secretariat's proposals, as well as potential interest in making some adjustments to the detail of the proposals set out in the report. With this in mind, the former co-facilitators have developed an alternative to the draft decision set out at paragraph 30 of that report, to be published as a separate document for consideration by the Executive Board at its 154th session.¹

(c) **Work plan for Member State-led reform to the Executive Board and Programme, Budget and Administration Committee.** Lead Member States as described in paragraph 10(a) could propose an additional work plan for potential reform beyond those proposals envisioned in paragraph 10(b) or the alternative draft decision.¹ This plan would be informed by target principles agreed by Member States, as set out in paragraphs 6 to 14 of the report of co-facilitators on reform of the Executive Board and the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board (document EB153/4, Annex 3).

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY IN THE CREATION AND FILLING OF SENIOR-LEVEL POSITIONS AT WHO

11. Task Group recommendation T5 set out two main tracks for Member States to further elaborate regarding the transparency of WHO senior-level positions: parameters for advance reporting on the creation of senior-level positions; and parameters for reporting after filling existing positions. These parameters include the seniority threshold for any transparency measures (that is, to which position classifications the measures would apply).

Advance reporting on creation of positions

12. With the benefit of Member States' deliberations on which parameters would give them sufficient insight into the creation of positions in scope, **the former co-facilitators concluded the following proposed parameters:**

- (a) provide information to Member States (not publicly), before advertising;
- (b) inform Member States in aggregated or singular/episodic formats, whichever would be most efficiently implemented by the Secretariat;
- (c) include the title of the position classification (rank), identifying the department and division where applicable;
- (d) apply the measure to ungraded positions, typically titled as Deputy Director-General, Assistant Director-General or Executive Director, in harmony with the transparency sought in decision WHA69(8) paragraph 10 and with the Task Group discussion that had initially prompted interest in such transparency.

¹ Document EB154/34 Add.4.

13. Member States' request for transparency would also recognize the different circumstances when positions are created under a broader organizational restructure, in which case reporting should focus on any net increase in the number of in-scope positions. Some Member States sought prescriptive detail on what should constitute a broader restructure. The former co-facilitators consider that this could be assessed at the time, but that such restructures would typically be made in recognizable contexts, such as a Director-General commencing a new term (especially as ungraded positions are co-terminous appointments with the Director-General's term) or identified as part of strategic organizational reforms, such as WHO Transformation. Some Member States referred to linking this measure to the programme budget and forecasting of positions therein, but the former co-facilitators assessed that this was not a view universally held by the membership.

Reporting after filling existing positions

14. Member States expressed keen interest in human resources data already available, including: human resources updates and annual reports; semi-annual workforce data reports; and data presented (and updated monthly) in the Programme budget portal.

15. Further, the former co-facilitators welcome the Secretariat's publication of document EB154/34 Add.1, responding to a request (reiterated in Task Group recommendation T5) for a report on progress made towards achieving the improved transparency sought in decision WHA69(8), operative paragraph 10. In it, for the future recruitment and selection of Deputy Directors-General and Assistant Directors-General, the Secretariat signals plans to provide advance notice to Member States through a note verbale to promote outreach for qualified candidates, as well as to announce the Director-General's selection of appointees to those positions through the official communication channels for Member States.

16. **The former co-facilitators consider that the commitments described in the progress report achieve the transparency sought in recommendation T5 for the selection of appointees to existing positions.** The intent of T5 is transparency, not to vet the Director-General's recruitment and selection decisions; though none of the former co-facilitators' conclusions remove any existing pathway for Member States to ask questions or raise concerns, including in meetings of the governing bodies.

OPTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING MEMBER STATES CONSULTATIONS ON THE PRIORITIZATION OF THE PROGRAMME BUDGET, RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND PRESENTATION OF PRIORITIZATION RESULTS TO THE PROGRAMME, BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

17. Work under recommendation T6 contains two main components, to outline existing practice and possible options for: strengthening consultations with Member States on the prioritization process and on resource allocation when preparing the draft programme budget; and presentation of the results of the prioritization exercise to the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee.

18. The Secretariat elaborated in detail the process for setting technical priorities in the design and preparations for the 2024–2025 Programme budget, including: consultations at the country level and self-review of programmatic priorities within the results framework of the general programme of work; region-specific prioritization processes that included further country and area consultation; and engagement in sessions of respective regional committees. A new section, on priority-setting, in the

programme budget document submitted to the Health Assembly¹ elaborates on the process, results and implications of that process, including budgetary and resource allocations.

19. As Member States, we have also commented on the prioritization process in meetings of the governing bodies, in the context of the programme budget. Official records (document EB152/2023/REC/2) show that Member States intervened 19 times during the 152nd session of the Executive Board to address improvements to the prioritization process, and 11 times on proposals for and/or commentary on improvements to resource allocation. The report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee at its thirty-seventh meeting (document EB152/4) referred to a consultative and participatory approach to the preparation of the programme budget, including a strengthened country prioritization process that had resulted in a greater focus on the country level.

20. Progress against action A41 of the Secretariat implementation plan on reform^{2,3} confirms the above engagement with Member States, with 186 Member States having identified their priority needs, and the availability of the results of prioritization in the dashboards of the WHO programme budget digital platform. In its comments on action A40, the Secretariat commits to continue to provide regular Member State information briefings and consultation on the programme budget, including prioritization processes.

21. In the consultations described in paragraph 5 of the present document, Member States acknowledged the significant improvements already in place to strengthen consultation with the membership on prioritization and resource allocation, and to the detail of prioritization results and their availability to Member States, including on the programme budget digital platform. The former co-facilitators heard some interest in reviewing granularity in the presentation of specific parts of the programme budget, though they concluded that this was not the collective view of the membership in addressing the request in recommendation T6.

22. **The former co-facilitators assess that the broad raft of measures already taken are sufficient to address the transparency requests raised in recommendation T6.** By virtue of the Secretariat's commitment to future consultations as well as through routine opportunities for feedback in meetings of the governing bodies, the membership will continue to have opportunities to inform further improvements beyond the requests in recommendation T6.

¹ Documents A76/4 and A76/4 Add.1.

² Document A76/31, pages 38 and 39.

³ Additional updates for these actions, both implemented, can be found on the tracking SIP dashboard on the WHO Member States portal on the WHO website at [https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal/tracking-secretariat-implementation-plan-\(sip\)-actions](https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/member-states-portal/tracking-secretariat-implementation-plan-(sip)-actions) (see index numbers SIP2023_A40 and SIP2023_A41).

Appendix

DRAFT DECISION

The Executive Board, having considered the report by the former co-facilitators of the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance,¹

Decided:

- (1) to welcome the proposal for an inclusive informal model for discussions on ongoing Member State-led reform, open to all Member States, following the conclusion of the mandate of the Agile Member States Task Group and the tasking of its co-facilitators;
- (2) to request the Director-General, in consultation with Member States and taking into account paragraph 10 of the report, to continue to support informal discussions for Member State-led governance reform, open to all Member States, by providing expert technical advice, inputs and logistic support;
- (3) to invite Member States represented on the Executive Board to lead the wider membership in chairing and coordinating these discussions, continuing from the leadership of the Task Group co-facilitators; and
- (4) to request the Director-General to work with those Member States represented on the Board who present themselves, individually or in a team, to lead the wider membership in this work, to convene the first informal meeting on Member State-led governance reform no later than 30 April 2024, with a view to those lead Member States developing a work plan for tracking the achievement of and/or implementing the remaining Task Group recommendations and reporting progress to the Executive Board at its 156th session.

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¹ Document EB154/34.