

Contingency arrangements for an accelerated procedure for the nomination of a WHO Regional Director for Europe

This working document is presented for consideration by the 76th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe.

It proposes contingency arrangements for an accelerated procedure for the nomination of a WHO Regional Director for Europe, should a vacancy arise following the conclusion of the process of election of the next Director-General by the Eightieth World Health Assembly in May 2027.

The proposed contingency arrangements aim to ensure continuity of regional leadership and minimize the duration of any interim arrangements, while preserving the authority of the Regional Committee and the substantive safeguards governing the nomination process.

They include a provisional timetable, arrangements for the appointment of a Regional Evaluation Group and the temporary suspension or adaptation of specified procedural requirements, as necessary and in line with the applicable Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe.

The Regional Committee is invited to consider the proposed contingency arrangements and the accompanying draft decision. Any decision would be strictly conditional, without prejudice to the outcome of the election of the Director-General and would not be implemented unless the specified contingency arose.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. The appointment of the next Director-General will be considered by the Eightieth World Health Assembly in May 2027 following the nomination of up to three candidates by the Executive Board, at its 160th session (25 January–2 February 2027). The next Director-General will take office on 16 August 2027.
2. Further to the proposal by the Government of Belgium of the serving WHO Regional Director for Europe for the position of Director-General, it is considered prudent to examine, as a contingency measure, the procedural arrangements that would enable the WHO European Region to nominate a new Regional Director without avoidable delay, while ensuring full respect for the authority of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the applicable procedural safeguards.
3. Any recommendation and/or decision by the Regional Committee would be strictly contingent in nature. It would be without prejudice to, and would not anticipate or presume, the outcome of the process for the nomination and appointment of the Director-General.
4. Similar contingency arrangements have been considered by the WHO Regional Committee of the Eastern Mediterranean, at its 73rd session, in line with the provisions of the rules of procedure of that Regional Committee.

RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

5. The Regional Committee may wish to take the following considerations into account:
 - ensuring continuity of regional leadership;
 - minimizing the duration of any interim leadership arrangements;
 - preserving the authority of the Regional Committee over the nomination process;
 - ensuring transparency, fairness and equal treatment of Member States and candidates;
 - providing sufficient time for Member States to nominate and consider candidates;
 - maintaining requirements relating to candidates' forums, interviews, private meetings and secret ballot nomination; and
 - ensuring appropriate stewardship of the Organization's resources by limiting additional administrative, financial and organizational requirements, where possible.

APPLICABLE RULES OF PROCEDURE

6. Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe makes provisions for the nomination of the Regional Director. Under Rule 47.1, the Regional Committee shall appoint a Regional Evaluation Group (REG) at the session preceding the one at which a person is due to be nominated as Regional Director. In addition, minimum time periods are specified for inviting, receiving and circulating proposals for candidates for the REG in Rule 47.2(a).
7. Rule 47.2(a) provides that the selection of members of the REG shall be carried out, *mutatis mutandis*, in accordance with the procedure set forth in Rule 14.2.2, which makes provision for the appointment of the REG, nominations for which should be invited no less than eight months and received no less than six months before the opening of the Regional Committee where the REG is to be appointed.

8. If a vacancy in the position of Regional Director were to arise following the Eightieth World Health Assembly, adherence to these standard time periods could make it difficult to complete the nomination process during the remainder of 2027. Use of an accelerated procedure would require a decision of the Regional Committee, including on the convening of a special session of the Regional Committee to appoint a REG and on suspending, as necessary, the applicable time limits in Rules 47.1 (including the application *mutatis mutandis* of Rule 14.2.2), 47.3, 47.4, 47.8, 47.9 and 47.10.

9. In the absence of advance contingency arrangements or the convening of a special session of the Regional Committee, the standard nomination procedure could result in the WHO Regional Committee for Europe considering the necessary procedural arrangements at its 77th session in October 2027 and nominating a candidate at its 78th session in October 2028, followed by the candidate being appointed by the Executive Board at its session in January 2029. Interim leadership arrangements would therefore last approximately 17 months (16 August 2027 to January 2029), compared with approximately five months (16 August 2027 to January 2028) under an accelerated procedure, which would enable the nomination to take place at the regular 77th session of the Regional Committee.

10. Rule 48 permits the Regional Committee, subject to the WHO Constitution, to suspend its Rules of Procedure, provided that the applicable notice requirements are met. Such a decision must therefore be taken by the Regional Committee in a formal session.

ACTION BY THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

11. The Regional Committee is invited to consider a draft decision establishing an accelerated procedure for the nomination of the Regional Director, should this be required in 2027.

12. The decision would be strictly conditional. It would become operative only if the serving Regional Director were appointed Director-General by the Eightieth World Health Assembly, in anticipation of the resulting vacancy in the position of Regional Director.

13. It would also ensure predictability for the Secretariat in the preparation of communications, documentation and operational arrangements should the specified contingency arise. It also provides Member States and prospective candidates with advance clarity concerning the proposed arrangements.

14. The proposed decision would:

- approve an accelerated nomination procedure for the Regional Director, including a provisional timetable;
- make provision for an accelerated nomination procedure for the REG by including the invitation for provisional nominations via the regular nominations and elections procedure for 2027;
- make provision for the convening of a special session of the Regional Committee in May 2027 on the margins of the Eightieth World Health Assembly following the conclusion of the Director-General election process to establish the REG;
- authorize, solely for the specified contingency, the necessary suspension of the time limits in Rules 47.1 (including the application *mutatis mutandis* of Rule 14.2.2), 47.3, 47.4, 47.8, 47.9 and 47.10, as well as the time limits for notices for the Regional Committee in Rule 4;
- request the Director-General to initiate the procedure if the contingency occurs;
- preserve all substantive safeguards governing the submission of candidatures, candidates' forums, interviews and nominations by secret ballot; and
- provide that the decision would have no effect if the specified contingency did not arise.

15. The provisional timetable prepared for consideration envisages a sequence of proposed actions, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Provisional timetable for the accelerated procedure for the nomination and appointment of a WHO Regional Director for Europe

Indicative date	Proposed action
27–29 October 2026	The Regional Committee decides, in principle, to adopt an accelerated procedure for nomination of a WHO Regional Director for Europe in the event that this is required following the appointment of the Director-General at the Eightieth World Health Assembly. The procedure also provides for an exceptional procedure for the appointment of a REG at the margins of the Eightieth World Health Assembly through a special session of the Regional Committee.
26 May–1 June 2027	A special session of the Regional Committee is convened on the margins of the Eightieth World Health Assembly, at which a REG is appointed.
Early June 2027	The Director-General informs Member States in the WHO European Region that candidatures for the post of Regional Director should be submitted before 9 July 2027.
9 July 2027	Candidatures for the post of WHO Regional Director for Europe should be received by the Director-General.
Mid to end August 2027	Candidate interviews are conducted by the REG and REG meets with Director-General.
Early September 2027	The REG makes arrangements for all candidates to give a time-limited oral presentation at a meeting of all Member States in the European Region (including via a web-based platform).
14 September 2027	Not less than six weeks before the opening of the 77th session of the Regional Committee, the Chairperson of the REG sends the REG's evaluation report and a shortlist of not more than five candidates to the President, the Executive President and the Deputy Executive President of the Regional Committee; to each Member State in the Region; and to the Director-General.
Mid-September to mid-October 2027	Web forum period.
26–28 October 2027	The Regional Committee nominates a candidate for the post of Regional Director and submits its nomination for consideration by the Executive Board in January 2028.
January 2028	The Executive Board appoints the new Regional Director.

SAFEGUARDS

16. This proposal also ensures that the following safeguards remain in place:

- Strictly conditional: the arrangements become operative only if a vacancy were to arise following the conclusion of the process of election of the next Director-General by the Eightieth World Health Assembly in May 2027.
- Without prejudice: the decision expresses no position on the outcome of the Director-General process; does not presume a vacancy in the post of Regional Director; and does not affect the status, functions or remaining term of the serving Regional Director.

- Limited suspension: only the time limits in Rules 47.1 (including the application mutatis mutandis of Rule 14.2.2), 47.3, 47.4, 47.8, 47.9 and 47.10, are suspended, and only for the specified contingency. All other provisions of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe continue to apply.
- Authority of the Regional Committee: the Regional Committee retains full authority to interview the candidates for the post of Regional Director and to nominate a person for appointment by the Executive Board.
- Universal proposing rights: every Member State may propose one or more candidates.
- Circulation to all Member States: candidatures and particulars are sent to Member States and the REG chairperson.
- Candidate visibility: the candidate presentation/forum and web forum remain central to the process.
- REG evaluation: the REG conducts an independent evaluation, interview and shortlist of not more than five candidates.
- Private deliberation: the nomination by the Regional Committee takes place in a private meeting under Rule 47.12.
- Secret ballot: the nomination itself remains by secret ballot, and the results are announced publicly.
- No precedent and automatic lapse: the decision creates no precedent for future nomination processes or for the suspension of the specified rules in other circumstances and it will not be implemented unless the specified contingency arises.

RELATED CONSIDERATIONS

17. The adoption of a decision for contingency arrangements for an accelerated procedure for the nomination of the Regional Director will also require the corresponding alignment and coordination of other relevant governance processes, arrangements and timelines.

18. These include:

- existing provisions concerning the dates and venues of Regional Committee sessions, notably resolution EUR/RC60/R10, which provides for sessions to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in years of nomination of the Regional Director; and
- the five-year governance review,¹ which is traditionally undertaken in the year preceding the election of the Regional Director.

19. Any such consequential adjustments arising from the accelerated procedure will be identified and addressed by the Secretariat in an integrated and coherent manner, ensuring consistency with the applicable governance framework and the mandates of the governing bodies concerned, and under the stewardship of the Thirty-fourth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe, as necessary.

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¹ Based on the request by the Regional Committee, made in resolution EUR/RC60/R3, for the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe “to initiate a cycle of comprehensive reviews of governance in the WHO European Region and to report back to the Regional Committee on lessons learned in this regard at such intervals as the Standing Committee itself deems appropriate”.