Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and WHO’s Work in Emergencies

Terms of reference

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee (IOAC) as established by the Director-General, is to oversee and guide the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (the Programme) in coordinating all of WHO’s work in emergencies, thereby enabling the Programme to fulfil its purpose under World Health Assembly decision WHA69(9). The IOAC advises the Director-General on issues within its mandate and reports its findings to the World Health Assembly and other relevant governing bodies upon the request of the Director-General.

FUNCTIONS

2. The IOAC shall be a permanent committee. Its functions shall be:

(a) to provide oversight and monitoring of the Organization’s work in emergencies specifically in the areas of preparedness, surveillance, readiness and response to epidemics, pandemics, disasters and humanitarian crises;

(b) to assess the performance of WHO’s work in all emergencies, including graded emergencies and infectious disease risks. This will include:

      (i) assessing the performance of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme at all levels of WHO including global, regional, national and sub-national;

      (ii) assessing the performance of all other WHO Divisions and Departments regarding their contribution to WHO’s work in emergencies under the central coordination of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme;

      (iii) monitoring the application of lessons learned from past events to increase the effectiveness of WHO’s work in health emergencies and the WHE Programme;

(c) to review the adequacy of the WHO financing and resourcing for work in health emergencies;

(d) to work with the Standing Committee on Health Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response and other relevant governing bodies on issues within its mandate;

(e) to advise WHO on the development of the global architecture for health emergency preparedness, response and resilience and the role of WHO within it;

(f) to provide advice to the Director-General on the matters under points (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) above and on other matters, as and when requested by the Director-General;
(g) to prepare a report on its activities, containing the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations, for submission by the Committee through the Director-General to the World Health Assembly annually and other governing bodies as requested by the Director-General.

COMPOSITION

3. The Director-General shall appoint the members and chair(s) of the IOAC. The composition of the IOAC and the qualifications of its members shall be as follows:

(a) The IOAC shall comprise a maximum of twelve members of integrity and objectivity and who have proven experience in senior positions in the areas covered by the scope of the Committee, including public health, infectious disease, public administration, humanitarian crises emergency management, community engagement, partnerships, development, pandemic preparedness and response, prevention and response to sexual exploitation abuse and harassment, and multilateralism.

(b) IOAC membership should be multisectoral and could be drawn from national governments, donors, non-governmental organizations and civil society, the private sector, academia, the United Nations system and other institutional partners;

(c) members will be required to have or acquire a good understanding of WHO’s objectives, governance structure and accountability, the relevant regulations and rules, and its organizational culture and control environment;

(d) in the selection process, due regard shall be given to geographical representation and gender balance;

(e) members shall serve in their personal capacity and cannot be represented by an alternative attendee. They shall neither seek nor accept instructions in regard to their performance on the IOAC from any government or other authority external to or within WHO, and will exercise their responsibilities with full regard for the paramount importance of independence;

(f) the term of office shall be two years. In order to ensure continuity, the term of office shall be renewable;

(g) the Committee is led by chair(s) who shall serve in that capacity for a term of two years, renewable once.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

4. The following administrative arrangements shall apply:

(a) members shall not be compensated for their work on the IOAC;

(b) members shall be provided travel entitlement in accordance with WHO rules and with the procedures applying to the IOAC;

(c) the IOAC shall hold at least two statutory meetings per year in person or by video or teleconferencing and ad hoc meetings may be arranged, as appropriate;
(d) except as provided under its terms of reference, the IOAC shall be guided by the rules of procedure of expert committees, as appropriate;

(e) the IOAC may decide at any time to obtain outside expertise if necessary and subject to available resources, as determined by the Secretariat; it shall have full access to all relevant WHO files, surveillance data and archives pertaining to the work of the Committee, which shall be treated on a confidential basis;

(f) the Office of the Director-General will ensure the IOAC is provided with adequate secretariat support.
Note from the Secretariat:

This is the fifth edition of the IOAC’s terms of reference updated on the 15 March 2023. The current revision has been introduced following the request of the Director-General to make the IOAC a permanent Committee, to strengthen the IOAC with additional Members and expertise, and to broaden the scope to WHO’s work in health emergencies. The first edition, for the 2016-2018 term of office, was adopted on 5 May 2016. That edition was revised for the 2018-2020 term of office which was published on 18 June 2018. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing demand for the IOAC’s accountability function, the Director-General approved the third edition of the terms of reference on 2 June 2021. The fourth edition was adopted following the establishment, at the request of the Director-General, of the IOAC Subcommittee on the prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment on 30 August 2021.