Terms of Reference for the Technical Advisory Group on Malaria Elimination and Certification

The Global Technical Strategy (GTS) for Malaria 2016-2030, endorsed by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2015 and re-approved by the WHA in 2021, reiterates the vision of a world free of malaria. The GTS sets specific goals for malaria elimination and for prevention of re-establishment of transmission: at least 20 countries and 35 countries in which malaria was transmitted in 2015 should eliminate malaria from countries by 2025 and by 2030, respectively and all countries that are malaria-free should prevent re-establishment of transmission. Certification of malaria elimination is a mandate of WHO given by its member states and is granted by WHO to a country, further to a request from its government, after it has been proven that the criteria for certification are met. It requires proof of malaria elimination which is local mosquito-borne malaria transmission has been interrupted in the country, resulting in zero indigenous malaria cases for at least the past 3 consecutive years, and evidence that an adequate programme for the prevention of re-establishment of transmission is in place. The Technical Advisory Group on Malaria Elimination and Certification (TAG-MEC) will act as an advisory body to WHO in malaria elimination, prevention of re-establishment of transmission, and certification.

I. Functions

In its capacity as an advisory body to WHO, the TAG-MEC shall have the following functions:

1. Provide independent evaluation and advise WHO whether a country could be certified as malaria-free based on WHO criteria or certification should be postponed. The TAG-MEC shall conduct the following activities: i) Evaluate the submitted country documentation and national elimination reports; ii) Conduct country assessments and certification missions to verify the findings in the national elimination report, prepare a final evaluation report based on the field visits and submit it to WHO; iii) Review and provide comments on the final evaluation report.
2. Review the data from countries that are certified malaria-free on an annual basis and advise WHO whether a country should be de-certified based on the WHO criteria.
3. Advise WHO on the update of the certification criteria and operating procedures when necessary.
4. Provide support to WHO to resolve bottlenecks for malaria elimination at country, regional and global levels.
5. Provide advice to WHO on areas where new or improved policy recommendations or implementation guidance may be required from WHO.
6. Provide other support and advice to WHO in the field of malaria elimination and prevention of re-establishment of transmission.
II. Composition

1. The TAG-MEC shall have up to 18 members\(^1\) to meet the requirements for expertise as necessary. TAG-MEC shall serve in their personal capacities to represent the broad range of disciplines relevant to malaria elimination, prevention of re-establishment and malaria-free certification. In the selection of the TAG-MEC members, consideration shall be given to attaining an adequate distribution of technical expertise, geographical representation and gender balance. Members should have knowledge about and experience in malaria elimination and prevention of re-establishment, and at least one should be an entomologist. Members may represent fields such as epidemiology, medical parasitology, tropical medicine, laboratory science, vector biology and control, health and information systems and other specialized areas of public health such as programme management.

2. Members of the TAG-MEC, including the Chairperson, shall be selected and appointed by WHO following an open call for experts. The Chairperson's functions include the following:

   - to chair the meeting of the TAG-MEC;
   - to liaise with the WHO Secretariat between meetings.

Open calls for experts will be advertised when needed starting in 2022 in order to i) solicit potential interest amongst qualified international experts; ii) identify and appoint qualified experts when needed, for example in replacement of TAG-MEC members ending their terms or stepping down from their functions.

In appointing a Chairperson, consideration shall be given to gender and geographical representation.

3. Members of the TAG-MEC shall be appointed to serve for a period of 4 years and shall be eligible for reappointment. A Chairperson is eligible for reappointment as a member of the TAG-MEC, but is only permitted to serve as Chairperson for one term. Their appointment and/or designation as Chairperson may be terminated at any time by WHO if WHO's interest so requires or, as otherwise specified in these terms of reference or letters of appointment. Where a member’s appointment is terminated, WHO may decide to appoint a replacement member.

4. TAG-MEC members must provide independent opinions and have no conflict of interest in their advisory role with WHO. In addition, they must respect the impartiality and independence required of WHO. In performing their work, members may not seek or accept instructions from any Government or from any authority external to the Organization. WHO secretariat will perform due diligence to determine that members are free of any real, potential or apparent conflicts of interest. In addition, proposed members/members shall be required to complete a declaration of interests form and their appointment, or continuation of their appointment, shall be subject to the evaluation of completed forms by the WHO Secretariat, determining that their participation would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

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\(^1\) Members serve as full participants and partake in the decision-making process of the meeting in which they are involved.
5. Following a determination that a proposed member’s participation in the TAG-MEC would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest, the proposed member will be sent a letter inviting them to be a member of the TAG-MEC. Their appointment to the TAG-MEC is subject to WHO receiving the countersigned invitation letter and letter of agreement. Notwithstanding the requirement to complete the WHO declaration of interest form, TAG-MEC members have an ongoing obligation to inform the WHO of any interests real or perceived that may give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

6. As contemplated in paragraph II.4 above, WHO may, from time to time, request TAG-MEC members to complete a new declaration of interest form. This may be before a TAG-MEC meeting or any other TAG-MEC-related activity or engagement, as decided by WHO. Where WHO has made such a request, the TAG-MEC member’s participation in the TAG-MEC activity or engagement is subject to a determination by WHO secretariat that their participation would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

7. Where a TAG-MEC member is invited by WHO to travel to an in-person TAG-MEC meeting or to a country for field visits, WHO shall, subject to any conflict of interest determination as set out in paragraph II.6 above, issue a letter of appointment as a temporary adviser and accompanying memorandum of agreement (together ‘Temporary Adviser Letter’). WHO shall not authorize travel by an TAG-MEC member, until it receives a countersigned Temporary Adviser Letter.

8. TAG-MEC members do not receive any remuneration from the Organization for any work related to the TAG-MEC including field visits to countries. However, when attending in-person meetings or conducting country visits at the invitation of WHO, their travel cost and per diem shall be covered by WHO in accordance with the applicable WHO rules and policies.

9. TAG-MEC members conducting final certification evaluation missions should not be citizens of the applicant country nor have recently supported the country in reviewing its malaria programme nor have been involved in preparing the national elimination report.

III. Operation

1. The TAG-MEC shall normally meet at least once each year. However, WHO may convene additional meetings. TAG-MEC meetings may be held in person at WHO headquarters in Geneva or another location, as determined by WHO or virtually, via video or teleconference.

   TAG-MEC meetings may be held in open and/or closed session, as decided by WHO.

   (a) Open sessions: Open sessions shall be convened for the sole purpose of the exchange of non-confidential information and views, and may be attended by Observers (as defined in paragraph III.3 below).

   (b) Closed sessions: The sessions dealing with the formulation of recommendations and/or advice to WHO shall be restricted to the members of the TAG-MEC and essential WHO Secretariat staff.
2. The quorum for TAG-MEC meetings shall be two thirds of the members.

3. WHO may, at its sole discretion, invite external individuals from time to time to attend the open sessions of an advisory group, or parts thereof, as “observers”. Observers may be invited either in their personal capacity, or as representatives from a governmental institution / intergovernmental organization, or from a non-State actor. WHO will request observers invited in their personal capacity to complete a confidentiality undertaking and a declaration of interests form prior to attending a session of the advisory group. Invitations to observers attending as representatives from non-State actors will be subject to WHO internal due diligence and risk assessment including conflict of interest considerations in accordance with the Framework for engagement with non-State actors (FENSA). Observers invited as representatives may also be requested to complete a confidentiality undertaking. Observers shall normally attend meetings of the TAG-MEC at their own expense and be responsible for making all arrangements in that regard.

Observers should only intervene in the discussion at the invitation of the Chairperson, to present their personal views and/or the policies of their organization. Observers will not participate in the process of adopting decisions and recommendations of the TAG-MEC.

4. The TAG-MEC may decide to establish smaller working groups (sub-groups of the TAG-MEC) to work on specific issues. Their deliberations shall take place via teleconference or videoconference. For these sub-groups, no quorum requirement will apply; the outcome of their deliberations will be submitted to the TAG-MEC for review at one of its meetings.

5. TAG-MEC members are expected to attend meetings. If a member misses two consecutive meetings, WHO may end his/her appointment as a member of the TAG-MEC.

6. A yearly report shall be submitted by the TAG-MEC to WHO (the Assistant Director-General of the responsible Division). All recommendations from the TAG-MEC are advisory to WHO, who retains full control over any subsequent decisions or actions regarding any proposals, policy issues or other matters considered by the TAG-MEC.

7. The TAG-MEC shall normally make recommendations by consensus. If, in exceptional circumstances, a consensus on a particular issue cannot be reached, minority opinions will be reflected in the meeting report.

8. Active participation is expected from all TAG-MEC members, including in working groups, teleconferences, and interaction over email. TAG-MEC members may, in advance of TAG-MEC meetings, be requested to review meeting documentation and to provide their views for consideration by the TAG-MEC.

9. WHO shall determine the modes of communication by the TAG-MEC, including between WHO and the TAG-MEC members, and the TAG-MEC members among themselves.

10. TAG-MEC members will be bound to confidentiality and shall not speak on behalf of, or represent, the TAG-MEC or WHO to any third party.
IV. Secretariat

WHO shall provide the secretariat for the TAG-MEC, including necessary scientific, technical, administrative and other support. In this regard, the WHO Secretariat shall provide the members in advance of each meeting with the agenda, working documents and discussion papers. Distribution of specific documents to Observers will be determined by the WHO Secretariat on a case by case basis.

V. Information and documentation

1. Information and documentation to which members may gain access in performing TAG-MEC related activities shall be considered as confidential and proprietary to WHO and/or parties collaborating with WHO. In addition, by counter signing the letter of appointment and the accompanying terms and conditions referred to in section II(5) above, TAG-MEC members undertake to abide by the confidentiality obligations contained therein and also confirm that any and all rights in the work performed by them in connection with, or as a result of their TAG-MEC-related activities shall be exclusively vested in WHO.

2. TAG-MEC members and Observers shall not quote from, circulate or use TAG-MEC documents for any purpose other than in a manner consistent with their responsibilities and functions as indicated under these Terms of Reference.

3. WHO retains full control over the publication of the reports of the TAG-MEC, including deciding whether or not to publish them.