

WHO Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO)

Call for Experts (Version 20 August 2021)

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Deadline: 10 September 2021

The World Health Organization (WHO) is seeking experts to serve as members of the WHO Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO). This “Call for experts” provides information about the advisory group in question, the expert profiles being sought, the process to express interest, and the process of selection.

Background

The rapid emergence and spread of SARS-CoV-2 has highlighted the importance of being prepared for any future event, to be able to identify novel pathogens early and to address the risk factors that contribute to their emergence and spread. In May 2020, the World Health Assembly, through resolution WHA73.1, requested the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) to continue to work closely with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and countries, as part of the One Health approach, to identify the source of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the route of introduction to the human population.

There have been an increasing number of high threat pathogens emerging and reemerging in recent years with, for example, SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV, Lassa, Marburg, Ebola, Nipah, avian influenza, the latest being SARS-CoV-2. There is not only need for robust surveillance and early actions for rapid detection and mitigation efforts, but a need for a robust and systematic processes to establish the study around the emergence of these pathogens and routes of transmission from their natural reservoirs to humans.

To this end, the Director-General has established the WHO Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins on Novel Pathogens (hereinafter referred to as ‘SAGO’). The SAGO will advise the WHO Secretariat on technical and scientific considerations regarding emerging and re-emerging pathogens, and will be composed of experts acting in a personal capacity. It is established in accordance with the WHO Regulations for Study and Scientific Groups, Collaborating Institutions and Other Mechanisms of Collaboration.

Functions of the SAGO

In its capacity as an advisory body to WHO, the SAGO will have the following functions:

1. To advise WHO on the development of a WHO global framework to define and guide studies into the origins of emerging and re-emerging pathogens of epidemic and pandemic potential;
2. To advise WHO on prioritizing studies and field investigations into the origins of emerging and re-emerging pathogens of epidemic and pandemic potential, in accordance with the WHO global framework described in point (1) above;
3. To provide information and views to assist the WHO Secretariat in the development of a detailed work plan of the SAGO;
4. In the context of SARS-CoV-2 origins:
 - a. To provide the WHO Secretariat with an independent evaluation of all available scientific and technical findings from global studies on the origins of SARS-CoV-2;
 - b. To advise the WHO Secretariat regarding developing, monitoring and supporting the next series of studies into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, including rapid advice on WHO's operational plans to implement the next series of global studies into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, as outlined in the Joint WHO-China Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2:China Part report published on 30 March 2021 and advise on additional studies as needed; and
5. To provide additional advice and support to WHO, as requested by the WHO SAGO Secretariat, which may include participation in future WHO-international missions to study the origins of SARS-CoV-2 or for other emerging pathogens.

Operations of the SAGO

The SAGO shall meet regularly. The first meeting will be held towards the end of 30 September or early October 2021. SAGO meetings may be held in person or virtually (at WHO headquarters in Geneva or another location, as determined by WHO), via video or teleconference. SAGO meetings may be held in open and/or closed session, as decided by the Chairperson in consultation with WHO. The working language of the group will be English. 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”. The SAGO may decide to establish smaller working groups (sub-groups of the SAGO) to work on specific issues. SAGO members are expected to attend meetings. Reports of each meeting shall be submitted by the SAGO to the WHO Director-General. All recommendations from the SAGO 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 SAGO. The SAGO shall normally make recommendations by consensus.

Who can express interest?

The SAGO will be multidisciplinary, with members who have a range of technical knowledge, skills and experience relevant to emerging and re-emerging pathogens. Up to 25 experts may be selected.

WHO welcomes expressions of interest from individuals with significant expertise in one or more of the following technical disciplines in order to ensure a One Health approach:

- infectious disease epidemiology and conducting epidemiological studies;
- field research;
- virology;
- ecology;
- molecular epidemiology;
- sero-epidemiology;
- medicine;
- bioinformatics;
- outbreak analytics;
- health statistics;
- microbiology;
- veterinary medicine;
- food safety;
- bacteriology;
- environmental science;
- biosafety;
- biosecurity;
- occupational health and safety;
- laboratory safety and security;
- ethics and social sciences;
- or other activities related to the emergence or re-emergence of pathogens of pandemic potential.

Submitting your expression of interest

To register your interest in being considered for the SAGO, please submit the following documents by **10 September 2021 24:00 CET** to SAGO@who.int using the subject line “Expression of interest for the SAGO”:

- A cover letter, indicating your motivation to apply and how you satisfy the selection criteria (maximum 500 words). Please note that, if selected, membership will be in a personal capacity. Therefore do not use the letterhead or other identification of your employer);
- Your curriculum vitae; and
- A signed and completed Declaration of Interests (DOI) form for WHO Experts, available at <https://www.who.int/about/ethics/declarations-of-interest>.

After submission, your expression of interest will be reviewed by WHO. Due to an expected high volume of interest, only selected individuals will be informed. WHO intends to complete the selection of members of the SAGO by late September 2021.

Important information about the selection processes and conditions of appointment

Members of WHO advisory groups must be free of any real, potential or apparent conflicts of interest. To this end, applicants are required to complete the WHO Declaration of Interests for WHO Experts, and the selection as a member of the SAGO is, amongst other things, dependent on WHO determining that there is no conflict of interest or that any identified conflicts could be appropriately managed (in addition to WHO's evaluation of an applicant's experience, expertise and motivation and other criteria).

All SAGO members will serve in their individual expert capacity and shall not represent any governments, any commercial industries or entities, any research, academic or civil society organizations, or any other bodies, entities, institutions or organizations. They are expected to fully comply with the Code of Conduct for WHO Experts (<https://www.who.int/about/ethics/declarations-of-interest>). SAGO members will be expected to sign and return a completed confidentiality undertaking prior to the beginning of the first meeting.

At any point during the selection process, telephone interviews may be scheduled between an applicant and the WHO Secretariat to enable WHO to ask questions relating to the applicant's experience and expertise and/or to assess whether the applicant meets the criteria for membership in the relevant AG.

The selection of members of the SAGO will be made by WHO in its sole discretion, taking into account the following (non-exclusive) criteria: relevant technical expertise; experience in international and country policy work; previous participation in WHO international missions on studying the emergence of emerging and re-emerging pathogens; communication skills; and ability to work constructively with people from different cultural backgrounds and orientations. The selection of SAGO members will also take account of the need for diverse perspectives from different regions, especially from low and middle-income countries, and for gender balance.

If selected by WHO, proposed members will be sent an invitation letter and a Memorandum of Agreement. Appointment as a member of the SAGO will be subject to the proposed member returning to WHO the countersigned copy of these two documents.

WHO reserves the right to accept or reject any expression of interest, to annul the open call process and reject all expressions of interest at any time without incurring any liability to the affected applicant or applicants and without any obligation to inform the affected applicant or applicants of the grounds for WHO's action. WHO may also decide, at any time, not to proceed with the establishment of the SAGO, disband an existing technical advisory group or modify the work of the SAGO.

WHO shall not in any way be obliged to reveal, or discuss with any applicant, how an expression of interest was assessed, or to provide any other information relating to the evaluation/selection process or to state the reasons for not choosing a member.

WHO may publish the names and a short biography of the selected individuals on the WHO internet.

SAGO members will not be remunerated for their services in relation to the SAGO or otherwise. Travel and accommodation expenses of SAGO members to participate in SAGO meetings will be covered by WHO in accordance with its applicable policies, rules and procedures.

The appointment will be limited in time as indicated in the letter of appointment.

If you have any questions about this “Call for experts”, please write to SAGO@who.int well before the applicable deadline.