

Comparative Chart of Appointment Procedures for Executive Heads of Select International Organizations

The following chart compares procedures for the appointment of five international executive head positions within the United Nations (UN) system: the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Directors-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

All of the listed organizations, except the UN for the post of Secretary-General and the FAO, have specified qualifications or criteria that any candidate must meet. The FAO is in the process of establishing such criteria.

All of these organizations, except the UN for the post of Secretary-General, issue detailed timelines for the appointment process of their executive heads, including opening and closing dates for nominations. In the case of FAO, ILO and WTO, these details are publicly announced on the organizations' websites.

During the appointment process for the executive head of each organization, with the exception of the appointment of the UN Secretary-General, lists of candidates and their CVs are made publicly available on the organization's website—provided, in the case of WHO, that the candidate or nominating state does not disagree. These are often made available very soon after the closing date of nominations.

All of the listed organizations, except the UN when appointing its Secretary-General, arrange for hearings in which candidates can present their vision and answer questions from members. The ILO provides for the observation of hearings by video link and the WTO arranges for press conferences with shortlisted candidates immediately after the hearings.

Several organizations have reviewed and improved their recruitment practices in recent years, and some of them have adopted a Code of Conduct to ensure a fair and transparent selection process. These Codes of Conduct include the prohibition of influencing the process through promises or commitments in exchange for candidate support (WHO) and the use of the organization's resources to support a candidate (ILO).

All of the listed organizations, except the UN when appointing its Secretary-General, select a candidate from among several presented to them. The WTO seeks a consensus decision, and the ILO, FAO and WHO vote by secret ballot until a majority is achieved. The WHO recently changed its rules to require that the appointing body is now presented with more than one candidate.

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| Position | Selection criteria | Appointed by | Timetable | Nominations | List of candidates | Vision statements |
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| UN Secretary-General | No formal criteria. A 1945 report by the UN Preparatory Commission set out qualities but these have not been adopted or referenced in appointments. GA resolution 60/286 states that candidates should display, "commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, extensive leadership, and administrative and diplomatic experience." | Article 97 of the UN Charter: General Assembly (193 Member States) appoints upon the recommendation of the Security Council (15 Member States) | No formal timetable. GA Res 51/241 states the appointment should take place as early as possible, preferably no later than one month before the end of term. | By member states. Informal practice excludes nationals of the five permanent Security Council members. For past three appointments "regional rotation" has been considered but is not a formal requirement. GA resolutions specify appointment of best candidate with due regard to regional rotation or geographic balance and gender equality. | No official list or shortlist. | Not officially sought. |
| ILO Director-General | Candidates required to be committed to values, work and tripartite structure of ILO; to have experience in economic, social and labour issues, international affairs, leadership and organisational management; and have appreciation of cultural, social and political diversity. Candidates must indicate proficiency in official ILO languages and provide certificate of good health. | Governing Body (Includes all 56 members of the ILO and 66 deputy members) | Deadline for submissions formally set by Governing Body and publicised on website. Deadline to be at least two months before election date. Last election determined to close submission of candidatures 6 months and 3 weeks before end date of incumbent's term and to conduct hearings 3 weeks later. Process publicly available on website. | Chairperson of Governing Body calls for candidatures to be submitted by ILO Member States or members of the Governing Body. Call for candidates is posted on website. | Candidatures circulated to Governing Body and ILO members with CVs and statements, if submitted. List of candidates, their CVs and vision statements are published on website with name of government submitting the candidate. | Vision statements (up to 2000 words) for shortlisted candidates on website. |
| WTO Director-General | Procedures document WT/L/509 of 2003 specifies candidates must have extensive experience in international relations, encompassing economic, trade and/or political experience; a firm commitment to the work and objectives of the WTO; proven leadership and managerial ability; and demonstrated communications skills. | A General Council, consisting of all member governments | Process starts nine months before expiry of incumbent's term, with a letter from the General Council Chair to the membership. Members have one month from start of process to nominate candidates. Candidates then have three months to engage with Members. A candidate is selected over the following two months. Appointment is made at a General Council meeting not later than three months before the expiry of the incumbent's term. Process is publicly available on website. | Call for nominations and CVs, including deadlines, is sent to members by General Council Chair. Letter is published on website. Candidates from all regions are invited to apply. Members can only submit nominations of their own nationals. | Submissions, with CVs, are circulated to members as they come in. Immediately after closing date of nominations, the Chair sends members a consolidated list of candidatures received. Candidates are listed on website days after the closing date, with biography and photos. | Candidates' statements to the General Council and recordings of their press conference are posted on the website. |
| WHO Director-General | Executive Board resolution EB97.R10 sets out criteria: a strong technical and public health background, extensive experience in international health; competency in organizational management; proven historical evidence for public health leadership; sensitivity to cultural, social and political differences; a strong commitment to the work of WHO; good physical condition and sufficient skill in at least one of the official and working languages of the Executive Board and Health Assembly. | Appointed by the World Health Assembly (which consists of all Member States) from three nominations by the Executive Board. | Letter from Director-General to WHO members announcing nominations and giving deadline (public on website) at least six months before next Board session. Note emphasizes criteria. Executive Board document EB130/INF.DOC./1 sets out a four-stage process: screening for candidates against criteria, shortlisting, interviewing and voting. | Only members can submit proposals for one or more candidates, which must be accompanied by CV and supporting information (up to 3,500 words) that addresses criteria established by the Board and includes a vision statement and priorities and strategies. Template is provided. Due regard paid to equitable geographic representation but "paramount consideration" is the need to secure the highest standard of efficiency, competence and integrity. | Executive Board chair may authorise the publication of names of candidates, their CVs and vision statements unless the candidate or nominating member state stipulates otherwise. Web posting to be done at same time as information is sent to members. Copy of CV template is publicly available. | Vision statement on priorities and strategies to be submitted with nomination. |
| FAO Director-General | FAO is considering the following qualifications: clear vision and strategy; commitment to achieving global food security and strengthening cooperation with partners including civil society; extensive relevant international experience; recognized consensus building skills; excellent communication and advocacy skills; thorough understanding of the UN system; and demonstrated commitment to gender equality (CCLM 96/4 2013). | Appointed by FAO Conference consisting of all 194 Members. | Appointment placed on agenda of FAO conference session immediately before expiry of term, or 120 days before. Council of 49 members informs all members and associate members of when the 3 months nomination period begins, which will end at least 30 days before a Conference session for hearings with candidates. Last time, the Council announced timeline for nominations in June 2014 for election one year later (CL 149/8). | Members can submit candidate proposals along with CV. | List of candidates sent to members and associate members one week after deadline. Candidate list is made public on website, along with CVs. | Candidates make statements at Council sessions and present vision to Conference. |

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| Position | Hearings | Unethical practices | Transparency | Final selection |
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| UN Secretary-General | No official interviews or hearings with UN Member States. | No prohibition of the practice of influential states seeking promises from candidates in exchange for support. | Secret process. No information is provided to Member States not on the Security Council or to the public. | Security Council puts forward one candidate to the GA. This is not a formal requirement but has been practice since described as desirable in GA Res 11(1) of 1946. Current practice is appointment by acclamation, although Rule 141 of the GA's Rules of Procedure requires vote by secret ballot. |
| ILO Director-General | Hearings conducted by Governing Body at private sitting but video link facility provided to enable observation of hearings by all member states not part of the ILO's Governing Body. Order of candidates determined by lot. Each candidate makes time-limited presentation and takes questions from workers, employers, and governments. Date of hearings publicised. | The Governing Body explicitly "prohibits unethical practices such as promises, favours, gifts, etc., provided by, or in support of, candidates for the post of Director-General". The use of ILO resources to campaign for or support any candidate is prohibited. On appointment, candidate must divest of any income, gift etc. that could have or be perceived to have impact on objectivity and independence of the appointee who must comply with financial disclosure procedure. | Full information of candidatures published on website and circulated to members. Hearings are available via video link to all member states. | Selected by ballot at meeting of Governing Body (date publicised). Candidate must receive more than half the votes of eligible members. As many ballots to be held as necessary. After each ballot, lowest-scoring candidate(s) are eliminated. |
| WTO Director-General | Nominated candidates have three months to "make themselves known" to members through meetings. They participate in a formal General Council meeting, at which they make a brief presentation and present their vision, followed by Q&A. Arrangements for all candidates to give press conferences after interacting with WTO membership (live webcast). | No formal statement. | WTO procedures (WT/L/509) include commitment to "full transparency and inclusiveness at all stages". Regular, public updates are provided at key moments through statements on the website and are circulated to members. Last time, after the first round, web update listed which five candidates had advanced; after second round, which two candidates had advanced. | By General Council in consultation with all WTO members. Chairs of two bodies are facilitators. General Council Chair consults with members on shape of process. Aim is a consensus decision by narrowing field of candidates in successive stages based on revised slates. Last process involved three consultations, with the outcome reported to members each time. Voting only as "an exceptional departure from customary practice". If final selection is between "equally meritorious candidates", one factor considered is "diversity of WTO's membership in successive appointments to the post". |
| WHO Director-General | In first stage Board assesses whether candidates meet criteria. Second stage covers shortlisting of five candidates through secret ballots. In third stage candidates have 60min interviews to present their vision, future priorities and analysis, followed by Q&A of randomly drawn questions. Board selects nominee(s) for appointment by World Health Assembly. | The World Health Assembly adopted a Code of Conduct to promote "an open, fair, equitable and transparent" election process (WHA66.18). Covers conduct of candidates and member states, disclosure of campaign activities (on web), and refraining from combining official travel with campaigning. Member States and candidates to refrain from improperly influencing the process, by "granting or accepting financial or other benefits as a quid pro quo for the support of a candidate or by promising such benefits". Refers to prohibitions in JIU/REP/2009/8. | Board meetings relating to nomination are "open", with one representative of each member and associate member not represented able to attend without the right to participate. No official record is kept. Procedures are posted on the website and updates are publicised and circulated to members and the media. The World Health Assembly, in WHA66.18 of 2013, established a non-decision-making candidates' forum open to all members and associate members, with candidate presentations and Q&A. It also created a private web forum for members. | The World Health Assembly, in WHA65.15 of 2012, states the Board "will nominate three candidates" for the Assembly's consideration. Previously, the Board nominated only one candidate to the World Health Assembly for appointment (EB 128/27 of 2010). In exceptional circumstances, or where not practical, it may decide to nominate less than three. The follow-up report WHA66.18 sets out what happens if three, two and one name(s) are put forward. Voting is by secret ballot, with candidates needing a 2/3 majority. |
| FAO Director-General | At least 30 days after end nomination date and at least 60 days before Conference session, candidates address the Council and hold a Q&A with members and associate members. Council shall "not draw any conclusion or recommendation" from this session. Candidates present their vision and respond to members' questions at the subsequent the Conference session, during which the appointment is made. | As part of its ongoing efforts to improve the appointment process, the Council is considering adopting a statement condemning and prohibiting unethical practices such as promises, favours, invitations, gifts, etc., provided by candidates in return for favorable votes, as per JIU/REP/2009/8. | Candidates' names and CVs are posted on the on website. A process is underway to further improve transparency. | Conference of Members votes by secret ballot until one candidate achieves the required majority, with those with least votes eliminated in each round. Details of voting published. |