Appendix 4: Informed consent form

PARTICIPANTS’ INFORMATION SHEET: SURVEY AND/OR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (to be modified depending on if participation is for survey or interview)

This informed consent information sheet is for key informants in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (including representative from NPHIs, ministries of health, multilateral organizations, NGOs, and other health systems governance experts) who we are invited to participate in surveys and/or interviews to provide their insights on NPHI-relevant governance arrangements (internal and external) and attributes, core functions, as well as roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:
- Participants’ Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form.

Title of study
Review of National Public Health Institute-relevant governance arrangements, core functions, and roles and responsibilities in Eastern Mediterranean Region countries, applying a COVID-19 lens

Introduction
The purpose of this study is to: i) generate evidence on the NPHI-relevant governance arrangements (internal and external) and attributes, core functions, as well as roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to ii) apply generated evidence in support of policy dialogues with EMR countries to build or strengthen supportive public health structures and capacities.

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We are going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research.

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them to me or to the committee who reviewed this research.

**Background and purpose of research**

Weak governance practices are a root problem undermining health system performance, accountability, and modernization. In particular, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments are recognizing the importance of identifying and strengthening health systems governance prerequisites for advancing UHC and health security in their countries. Weak governance arrangements and institutional frameworks can exist at all levels of the health system starting from macro-level policy issues down to the operational day to day transactions at the service delivery points. Focusing on improving governance as a central component of health system strengthening agenda contains a high degree of complexity as each country’s systems are characterized by different levels of information transparency; dispersions of roles and responsibilities (across governmental and non-governmental actors); and institutional arrangements at national, regional, and local levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put extreme stress on a country's health systems, not the least of which are those institutions responsible for a nation’s public health. According to the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI), these national public health institutes (NPHI) are a government agency, or closely networked group of agencies, that provides science-based leadership, expertise, and coordination for a country’s public health activities. NPHIs are a key resource to support public health system strengthening with essential public health functions and generate evidence for health policy central to national health and socioeconomic development. Reviewing NPHI-related governance arrangements, core functions, and roles and responsibilities could be considered an effective entry point to strengthen overall public health system performance and responsiveness going forward.

Accordingly, the World Health Organization’s Eastern Mediterranean Region Office (WHO/EMRO) Governance of Health Systems (GHS) team has developed a survey (Appendix 1) and key informant interview guide (Appendix 2) with questions based on the NPHI Core Functions & Attributes and the Staged Development Tool. The survey WHO/EMRO, along

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with their partners the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET), look to utilize this survey tool to collect and analyse information about the governance elements and prerequisites related to NPHI(s) (including councils or committees in lieu of institutions) in EMR. The survey will be launched online for convenience and target representatives of NPHIs, as well as other relevant EMR country experts identified by WHO/EMRO, WHO country offices and EMPHNET. The synthesized information will be used to inform and supplement the more detailed key informant interviews, to be conducted over the phone or internet, with the goal of strengthening of NPHI-related governance arrangements, delivery of core functions, and roles and responsibilities in EMR countries going forward.

Declaration of conflicts of interest
We declare that the members of the research team have no conflicts of interest.

Nature of research (type of research intervention)
The research will involve a survey and/or conducting interviews with select key informants (stakeholders) from the NPHIs, governments, and other health systems governance experts from EMR countries. The interviews will last approximately one hour.

Participant Selection
You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel that your experience and knowledge on NPHI-relevant governance arrangements (internal and external), core functions, as well as roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge.

Participants’ involvement

- **Duration/what is involved:** We are asking you to help us learn more about NPHI-relevant governance arrangements (internal and external) and attributes, core functions, as well as roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in your country. If you accept, you will be asked to complete a 10-question online survey and/or participate in a key informant interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be carried out online, using Microsoft Teams or Zoom. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and the interviewer will move on to the next question. No one else but the interviewer will be present unless you would like someone else to be there. The information recorded is confidential, and no one outside of the project research team will access the information documented during your survey or interview (i.e., recordings, transcripts). The entire interview will be audio-recorded, if you consent, but no one will be identified by name on the recording. The audio-recording and a transcript produced from this recording will be kept on a password-protected computer and backed up on a password-protected hard drive. If you name your organization or individuals during the interview, we will remove these details and replace them with an anonymized term (e.g., in my company). The recordings will be destroyed after 2 years, in order to ensure enough time for writing up the findings.

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Should the final publications be written up and published in less than two years, the recordings will be destroyed earlier. If you do not consent to the interview being audio-recorded, the interviewer will take written notes.

- **Potential Risks**
  There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, we do not wish for this to happen. We will remove potential identifiers from the interview transcripts. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal, or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable. If you become stressed, you can take some time to collect yourself. If you become uncomfortable from the prolonged sitting (approximately 60 minutes), you can take a break to stretch. You can also stop your participation at any time.

- **Benefits**
  The intention of this study is to review NPHI-related governance arrangements (internal and external) and attributes, core functions, as well as roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information will ultimately be used to inform the WHO/EMRO regional approach to strengthen health systems governance arrangements, as well as clarify functions and roles and responsibilities of relevant health systems actors in EMR countries.

There will be no direct benefit to participants, and they will not be provided with any incentive to take part in the research; however, they will be informed that their participation is likely to help us find out how to refine our regional approach to strengthening health systems governance and the role of NPHIs in different EMR country contexts. **Costs**

You will incur no costs for participating in this research, apart from a time and opportunity cost of approximately 60 minutes during which you will complete the interview.

- **Compensation**
  You will not be provided with any incentive to take part in the research.

- **Confidentiality**
  All the information that you provide during the interview will remain anonymous, which means that no one will be able to know who you are. This conversation usually takes around one hour but sometimes takes shorter or longer. I may ask you to share some information that is personal. The information you provide is confidential and will be kept private. I will not share personal information about you with anyone and any mentions of your organization will be removed from the transcript and anonymized. The recording and any other information about you will have a unique number on it instead of your name. Only I and the other members of the research team will know what your number is. Findings from the research may be published, but no details from which you could be identified will be shared with anyone. All data from this project will be stored securely.

- **Voluntary participation/withdrawal**
  Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to take part or not. If you choose not to take part, there will be no negative consequences. You may change your mind later and stop taking part even if you agreed earlier. You do not have to give reasons for choosing not to take part. If you would like time to think before you
decide whether to take part, you can tell me and come back at a later date. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to consent to the information shared in this form to show that the study has been explained to you and that you agree to be part of it. You may decide to end your participation in the interview at any time if you do not feel comfortable about continuing.

- **Outcome and feedback**  
  Participants will be contacted in the event that any further clarification is required. The data gathered by this study will be analyzed and written up in a final report/paper.

- **Feedback to participant**  
  You will be contacted in the event that any further clarification is required. If you are interested in being contacted once the findings from this research are publicly available, we will share the final report(s)/paper(s) with you.

- **Funding information**  
  This research is supported by the World Health Organization.

- **Sharing of participants Information/Data:** The World Health Organization will own the data generated by this study.

**Provision of Information and Consent for Participants**  
This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- Participants’ Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form (Participants’ Information Sheet and Certificate of Consent) once it has been signed.

**Who to Contact for Further Clarification/Questions**  
If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later about this research, please contact:

**Sebastian van Gilst**  
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Certificate of Consent for Key Informant Interviews

PARTICIPANT’S STATEMENT

I acknowledge that I have read or have had the purpose and contents of the ‘Participants’ Information Sheet: Key Informant Interviews’ read and satisfactorily explained to me in a language I understand (name of language). I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and any question I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand the contents and any potential implications as well as my right to change my mind (i.e. withdraw from the research) even after I have signed this form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have been given an opportunity to ask any questions I may have, and all such questions or inquiries have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed orally and in writing of whom to contact in case I have questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give my consent to participate in this study.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I agree to participate in a recorded interview.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give permission to include my information, without my name, in your research findings that will be shared and published.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give permission for my organization to be included in the acknowledgements section of any reports or papers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to be contacted once the publications from this research are publicly available to be shared with me.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this research study.

Printed name or initials of participant ……………………………

ID code ……………………………

Participant’s signature …………………………………… OR Mark (please specify) …………

INTERPRETER’S STATEMENT (where applicable)

I interpreted the purpose and contents of the Participants’ Information Sheet to the aforementioned participant to the best of my ability in the (……………………….name of language) language to his proper understanding.

All questions, appropriate clarifications sorted by the participant and answers were also duly interpreted to his/her satisfaction.

Name of interpreter…………………………

Signature of interpreter……………………………… Date ………………………
Contact details ..............................

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT AND SIGNATURE

I certify that I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done. I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. The participant has been given ample time to read and learn about the study. A copy of this informed consent form has been provided to the participant.

Researcher’s name........................................

Signature ..................................................... Date........................................