

Comments by the Executive Director on Documentation to the Executive Board.

Eight meeting of the Bureau of the Executive Board for the year 2021.

10 November 2021

A. BACKGROUND

Excellencies,

During the informal consultations on the draft decisions held on 8 November 2021, Member States emphasized the need for “manageable documentation” in line with the mandate of the Executive Board” and that “information contained therein be concise, clear, transparent and to the point”. A draft decision language was in fact brought forth in that regard.

I want to be categorically clear that we agree with the observations made by Member States in terms of the volume of documents and it is our wish to work closely with Member States to streamline this rising volume.

Let me give you just a few points on how we prepare the documents.

1. First, we look into all decisions of the Executive Board and determine what actions the Executive Director and the Secretariat have been requested to report upon. This allows us to prepare the provisional Agenda for an upcoming session. We also look at paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of Decision 2019/4 which was adopted by the Executive Board at its resumed first session in November 2019 in which the Executive Board specifically decided certain specific items that must be included on the provisional Agenda of the first session of each year, and also decided on the items that should be included on provisional Agenda of each session as well as items which should be considered on a regular basis.
2. The provisional agenda, once drafted is considered by the sitting session as part of the decisions of the next session of the Executive Board. The Bureau reviews the agenda and forwards it to the Board as part of the decisions.
3. Once adopted by the Board as the provisional Agenda for the next session, we again examine that reviewed provisional Agenda as approved by the Executive Board at the previous session together with all decisions of the Executive Board and determine what actions the Executive Director and the Secretariat have been requested to report on.
4. For example, for this 2021 second session, we looked at the decisions of the Board at its 2021 first session. We also examined the outcomes of the CPR high-

level midterm review held in June 2021 for recommendations that requested reports by the Executive Director to the Executive Board at its 202 second session.

5. The Bureau then does a review in case there are any proposed changes and or recommendations to the Agenda by member states for the next session before it is sent for editing and translation to Conference Services and then subsequently shared with Member States alongside the Notification of the Executive Director.
6. We then internally prepare the relevant documents in line with the provisional Agenda. The General Assembly allowance for documentation is 8,500 words. In order to save cost and also for purposes of efficient reflection the contents including brevity, we have internally limited the word count to 5000 words for most documents. This follows our request to the Bureau of the CPR earlier in 2021 to limit each document to 5000 words, which was granted. We have extended this practice to the Executive Board documents to the extent possible. The exception to this rule is usually the work programme and budget document which, as you are aware is a large document, usually about 30,000 words in average.
7. It may interest you to know that in our Submission to UNON Division of Conference Services, we required to indicate the mandate given to the Organization by the Executive Board or any of our Governing Body to justify each document we send to them to edit and translate. Indeed, the Division of Conference Services verifies the mandates before processing each document. Essentially this means no documents would be produced by the Division of Conferences, within the allocated, General Assembly for document, if there is no mandate to support the production of such document.

Excellencies.

What I can confirm to you is that the Division of Conference Services has notified us recently, with respect to the upcoming session as they have done previously, that the volume of documents has gone beyond the entitlements availed by the General Assembly of the UN of the UN to UN-Habitat and this means we as an organization must pay from our very limited extrabudgetary resources. As an example, we have recently received a cost estimate for the upcoming second session of the Executive

Board from Conference Services of USD 389, 375 out of which, the documentation cost is USD 363,152.

You would recall that the new governance structure did not come with increased regular budget allocation. This means that the Division of Conference Services has to bill UN-Habitat for the extra documents and other services that are beyond the entitlement provided to UN-Habitat by the General Assembly under section 2 of the Regular Budget, which is what was allocated to the CPR and Governing Council prior to the new governance reform.

Therefore, and as you can see, we have no choice but to agree with the proposal for “manageable documentation” in line with the mandate of the Executive Board” and that “information contained therein be concise, clear, transparent and to the point.

(NOTE TO ED: Annex below on page 4 shows the documentation trend between 2013 and 2021 covering the period before and after the governance structure)

B. SUGGESTIONS FOR A WAY FORWARD

Excellencies,

Allow me to make a few suggestions on how we can improve efficiency in terms of documentation to the Executive Board.

1. **The provisional Agenda for each session of the Executive Board should be kept as brief as possible.** For this, the Executive Board **may wish to identify three to four items on which the Board needs to take decisions on, per session.** In this case the Bureau may assist with prior review of the provisional agenda for each session before adoption as part of the decisions for the previous session.
2. The Executive Board may need to **review its decision 2019/ 4 which pre-determined that certain agenda items must be covered** regularly at each session of the Executive Board, and also what items must to be covered at say at the first sessions and at the second session of the Board each year. Without such a review, we as the Secretariat will have to abide by that decision.
3. The Bureau may recommend to the Executive Board to make a decision that **all documents before the Executive Board should not be more than 3000 words**

per document with the exception of the work programme and Budget document and the Strategic plan document. This will be an exception to the GA guidance on a limit of 8500 words per document.

4. The Executive Board may also wish to decide **that for one of its** two or three sessions each year:
 - i. The **pre-session documents will be in English** only and not translated into six languages. Instead, the session itself will benefit from interpretation into the six UN languages. This was the practice under the old governance structure where documents before the CPR were in English only but the session benefited from translations. This will be a cost saving measure.
 - ii. There will **be no formal decisions taken by the Board during such a session**, but rather discussions which capture any recommendation for the Executive Director towards the following session or in general. This will reduce the number of mandates from the Board and subsequently the number of documents before the Board. In this scenario, an exception can be made for formal decisions to be taken on critical and urgent matters that may arise and which ensure business continuity of the Organization.
 - iii. The **duration of the session may be short**, for example, not more than two days which will also help with associated costs.
5. The Executive Board may wish to decide that **for its final** sessions each year:
 - i. It will have an **extended provisional Agenda**
 - ii. It will hold the session **for a duration of three days**, which will make in-person participation of capital-based representatives more viable.
 - iii. It will **make formal decisions** including the consideration and approval of the work programme and budget at that session.
 - iv. All documents will be translated **into all the six United Nations official languages**.

C. ANNEX: DOCUMENTATION TRENDS BETWEEN 2013 AND 2021

Source: UNON Division of Conference Services, dated 15 October 2021.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Words edited	317,774	-	07,656	-	186,218	-	233,453	165,120	188,817
Words translated	670,126	-	7,864	-	664,752	-	997,250	1,034,858	882,081
Total words processed	987,900	-	905,520	-	50,970	-	1,230,703	1,199,978	1,070,898

