



UN HABITAT Executive Board
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Human Settlements
Programme

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Executive Board of the United Nations
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Item 14 of the provisional agenda*

Progress made in the implementation of the working methods of the Executive Board pursuant to its decision 2020/6 and on the basis of a survey conducted by the secretariat following the request by the Executive Board at its second session of 2021 to evaluate the effectiveness of that session so as to further improve the process and outcome of future sessions, including discussions on the schedule of future sessions of the Board

Results of the survey conducted by the secretariat following the second session of the Executive Board of 2021 to evaluate the effectiveness of that session so as to further improve the process and outcome of future sessions

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

A. Background to and purpose of the survey

1. In line with rule 1.1 of its rules of procedure, the Executive Board of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) “shall meet in regular session two or three times per year, as appropriate, at such times and for such duration as it shall determine”. The functions of the Executive Board are set out in rule 5 of the rules of procedure and include overseeing the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat and ensuring the accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of the Programme.

2. In its decision 2021/8, the Executive Board decided to include in the provisional agenda for its first session of 2022 an item on “progress made in the implementation of the Executive Board working methods in accordance with its decision 2020/6 and based on the survey to be conducted by the secretariat following the second session of 2021 to evaluate the effectiveness of the session so as to further improve the process and outcome of future sessions”. Following the second session of 2021, the secretariat therefore conducted a survey, the aim of which was to evaluate the effectiveness of that session and explore ways to further improve both the process and outcome of future sessions. The report was to be submitted to the Executive Board for consideration at its first session of 2022.

3. In consultation with the Chair and the Bureau of the Executive Board for the period 2021–2022, the secretariat prepared a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the second session of

* HSP/EB.2022/1.

2021 of the Board. On 20 January 2022, the secretariat circulated an electronic link to the survey to all 103 permanent missions accredited to UN-Habitat, with a deadline for submitting responses of 4 February 2022.

B. Participation

4. By 3 February 2022, the secretariat had only received 13 responses and therefore decided to extend the deadline for submitting responses to 7 February 2022. By that later date, a total of 24 respondents had completed the online survey, which had been set up in such a way that the responses received were anonymous and the submitters could not be identified. That brought the response rate to 23.3 per cent (24 of 103 potential respondents, there being 103 permanent missions accredited to UN-Habitat).

5. The secretariat hired an independent data analysis expert to review and analyse the responses. That analysis and a summary of the key findings of the survey are set out in the present report, which is submitted for consideration by the Executive Board at its first session of 2022.

II. Approach and methodology

6. The survey used both open-ended questions and ranking questions to explore themes. For multiple-choice questions, a rating scale of level 5 (Strongly agree) to level 1 (Strongly disagree) was used. The scale was as follows:

- Level 5: Strongly agree
- Level 4: Agree
- Level 3: Somewhat agree
- Level 2: Disagree
- Level 1: Strongly disagree

7. The survey was structured in the following six sections:

- (a) Alignment of the functions and competence of the Executive Board with the provisional agenda of the sessions of the Board;
- (b) Pre-session documents;
- (c) Briefing by the Executive Director;
- (d) The number of sessions per year of the Executive Board;
- (e) Preparations and implementation of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board;
- (f) Any other questions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive Board.

8. The survey comprised 32 questions; however, one of the questions included in the original questionnaire was not carried forward to the digital questionnaire (the question topic having been captured in part by questions 7 and 8) and no data was collected on it. The total number of questions in the digital survey was therefore 31.

III. Analysis of responses

A. Alignment of the functions and competence of the Executive Board with the provisional agenda of the sessions of the Board

9. Question: How well aligned is the agenda for each session of the Executive Board to its functions and competence of strengthening the accountability and transparency of UN-Habitat and providing an effective oversight mechanism for UN-Habitat to enhance its normative and operational activities?

(a) Of the 24 respondents, 16 either “Strongly agree” or “Agree” (6 respondents and 10 respondents respectively) that the Executive Board should review its decision 2019/4, by which it decided upon certain agenda items that should be included on the provisional agenda of the Board for consideration at its first session of each year, those that should be included on the provisional agenda for each session of the Board for consideration and those that should be included on the provisional agenda of sessions of the Board on a regular basis. Those 16 respondents accounted for 67 per cent of

all respondents. Of the others, five respondents said that they “Somewhat agree”, while two “Disagree” and one opted for “Strongly disagree”;

(b) Eleven respondents “Strongly agree” and seven “Agree” that the functions and competence of the Executive Board are clearly understood and consistently adhered to, while six respondents only “Somewhat agree”;

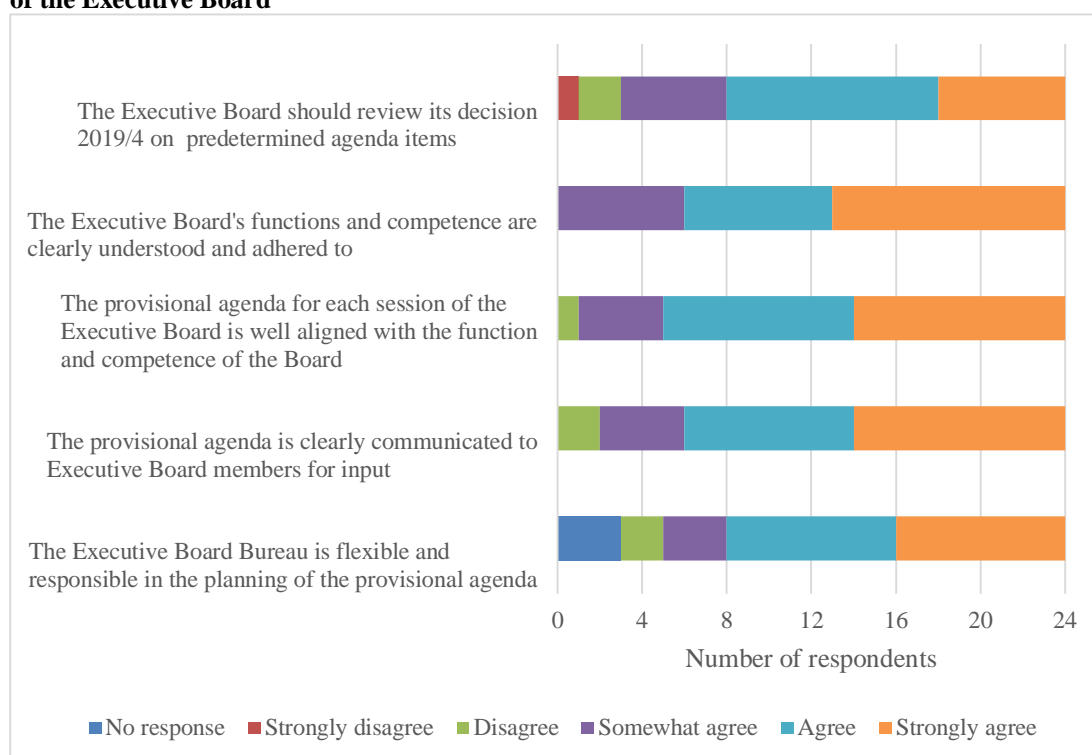
(c) Ten respondents “Strongly agree” and nine respondents “Agree” that the agenda for each session of the Executive Board is well aligned with the functions and competence of the Board. Four respondents “Somewhat agree” and one “Disagree” with the statement, which may indicate a need to streamline the agenda;

(d) Of the 24 respondents, 18 either “Strongly agree” or “Agree” (10 and 8 respectively) that the provisional agenda is clearly communicated to members of the Executive Board for their input before being finalized, while 4 “Somewhat agree” and 2 “Disagree”;

(e) One third of respondents (8 out of 24) “Strongly agree”, another 8 “Agree” and 3 “Somewhat agree” that the Bureau of the Executive Board is flexible and responsive in the planning process of the provisional agenda for the sessions of the Board, thus fulfilling the oversight role of the Board. Only 2 of the 24 respondents “Disagree”, while 3 respondents did not answer this question.

Figure 1

An overview of feedback from Member States on the alignment of the functions and competence of the Executive Board



10. In addition, respondents made the following suggestions under this section:

(a) Nine respondents suggested that it would be useful to hold an induction seminar for delegations of the permanent and observer missions to UN-Habitat in September each year, after the summer break in July and August. Nine other respondents suggested that such a seminar should be held in January each year or as requested by Member States;

(b) Five respondents suggested that the secretariat should organize training courses, capacity-building sessions and regular briefings for members of the Executive Board;

(c) Eight respondents indicated that they would appreciate clear and summarized briefings and induction courses covering the mandates and roles of all involved in the Executive Board when new members join the Board or at the request of Member States;

(d) One respondent suggested that the UN-Habitat website should be available in all six official languages of the United Nations.

11. Fourteen respondents provided suggestions on improving the process of drafting the provisional agenda for sessions of the Executive Board. Those suggestions were as follows:

(a) Two respondents suggested that the regional groups should be engaged in the early stages of the process of drafting the provisional agenda for each session, which would subsequently be further consolidated by the secretariat;

(b) Three respondents noted that the provisional agenda for each session should be focused and fit for the purpose of the session;

(c) Two respondents observed that while it is understood that the draft provisional agenda is decided upon by the previous session of the Executive Board, there should be sufficient flexibility for the Bureau to be able to adjust it to reflect and respond to more recent developments, ideally up to one day before the session.

12. Overall, the feedback provided by the respondents suggested that the functions and competence of the Executive Board are aligned with the provisional agenda of the sessions of the Board. All 24 respondents agreed that the functions and competence of the Executive Board are clearly adhered to and well understood. A broad range of suggestions were made by respondents, which could further strengthen the drafting process of the provisional agenda for sessions of the Board.

B. Pre-session documents

13. Question: How useful are the pre-session documents in their timing submission, accessibility, content and length in helping delegates to prepare adequately for the Executive Board sessions?

(a) All 24 respondents agreed to some extent (8 “Strongly agree”, 14 “Agree” and 2 “Somewhat agree”) that the timely submission and distribution of pre-session documents, in accordance with rule 6 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board (in all official languages no less than four weeks before the date of the opening meeting of a session), is adequate;

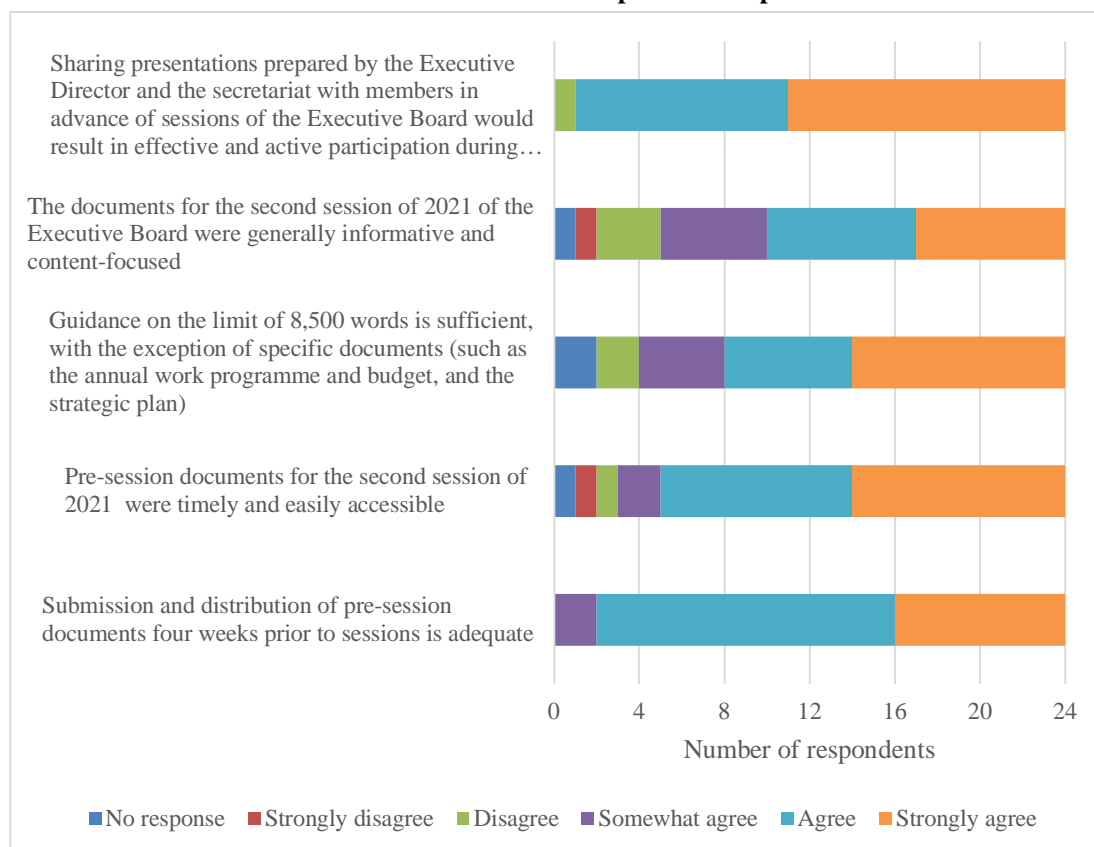
(b) Nineteen respondents said that they either “Strongly agree” or “Agree” (10 and 9 respectively) that the pre-session documents for the second session of 2021 were easily accessible to the members of the Executive Board in a timely manner; two said that they “Somewhat agree”, while two respondents disagreed (one opting for “Disagree” and one for “Strongly disagree”) and one respondent did not answer this question;

(c) A majority (16 of the 24 respondents) either “Strongly agree” or “Agree” (10 and 6 respectively) that the guidance of the General Assembly on the limit of 8,500 words for pre-session documents is sufficient, with the exception of certain specific documents, such as the annual work programme and budget and the strategic plan; 4 said that they “Somewhat Agree”, while 2 “Disagree” and 2 respondents did not answer this question;

(d) Of the 24 respondents, 7 said that they “Strongly agree” and a further 7 “Agree” that the documents submitted to the Executive Board at its second session of 2021 were generally informative and content-focused. Those respondents combined accounted for nearly 60 per cent of all responses received, in comparison with five respondents who said that they “Somewhat agree”, three who said that they “Disagree” and one who said that they “Strongly Disagree” that the documents in question were generally informative and content-focused; one respondent did not answer this question;

(e) Thirteen respondents “Strongly agree” and 10 “Agree” that sharing presentations prepared by the Executive Director and the secretariat with members in advance of sessions of the Executive Board would result in effective and active participation during the discussion of agenda items. One respondent disagreed.

Figure 2

An overview of feedback from Member States on the provision of pre-session documents

14. In addition, 11 respondents made suggestions under this section on ways in which pre-session documents could be improved, both in terms of content and length. These were as follows:

- (a) Three respondents said that all pre-session documents should be focused and kept up to date to the extent possible;
- (b) Five respondents suggested that lengthy pre-session documents should be accompanied by abstracts or summaries;
- (c) Four respondents observed that a streamlined provisional agenda and pre-session documents were needed to guide the Executive Board towards its decisions and support those decisions;
- (d) Four respondents noted that the role of the Executive Board was not as a general briefing forum for Member States, nor should it be a place for UN-Habitat to demonstrate all its work;
- (e) Four respondents said that they felt that the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board had had too many pre-session documents and that those documents were too long, taking into account the two-day duration of the session;
- (f) Two respondents suggested that draft decisions should be more clearly connected with the relevant items of the provisional agenda and supporting pre-session documents.

15. The overall finding from this section was that the feedback received was generally positive. One emerging theme was that pre-session documents are sometimes too long, taking into account the length of the sessions of the Executive Board, and that their content should be more tightly focused on up-to-date topics that are directly relevant to items on the provisional agenda.

C. Pre-session briefing by the Executive Director

Question: How useful is the Executive Director’s pre-session briefing, which takes place two weeks prior to each session, as provided for under rule 6.10 of the rules of procedure?

16. With respect to the pre-session briefing by the Executive Director, respondents noted the following:

- (a) Of the 24 respondents, 8 provided a comment with regard to this question. Of the remaining 16, 12 respondents said that they found the pre-session briefing useful and sufficient;
- (b) Two respondents said that their delegations would benefit from receiving a short annotated agenda of the briefing prior to the briefing;
- (c) The pre-session briefing should be conducted in such a manner as to encourage more discussion and a fuller exchange of ideas between delegates, the Executive Director and the secretariat.

D. Number of sessions per year of the Executive Board

Question: In your view, how many Executive Board sessions per year should cover the necessary agenda items and other relevant matters for discussion and why?

17. Since the establishment of the Executive Board in May 2019, it has met twice in 2020 and twice in 2021. Rule 1 of the [rules of procedure](#) of the Board provides that it shall meet in regular session two or three times per year. With that in mind, the questionnaire asked how many sessions of the Executive Board should take place each year, what agenda items were necessary and what other matters were relevant for discussion.

Views of respondents on how many sessions of the Executive Board are needed per year (multiple responses possible)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
No response	3
Two sessions of two days	1
Four sessions (quarterly)	2
Increase the quality of the sessions, not the frequency	2
Three sessions	6
Two sessions	11
Total	25

(a) A majority of responses indicated that two sessions per annum was the most appropriate option. In total, 12 responses were in favour of that option (11 in favour of “2 sessions” and 1 in favour of “2 sessions of 2 days”);

(b) A further 6 of the 22 responses received (multiple responses were possible) favoured the option of three sessions per annum.

18. The rules of the General Assembly and the Executive Board on documentation require 12 weeks for the preparation of pre-session documents and, in line with rule 1.3 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board, when the dates of the sessions of the Board are being set, the dates of meetings of the UN-Habitat Assembly and other United Nations bodies, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development, should be taken into account.

19. The responses received on this topic were closely related to the number of sessions of the Executive Board that respondents felt were preferable:

- (a) Ten respondents felt that sessions of the Executive Board should remain in line with current practice, namely two sessions each year;
- (b) Six respondents suggested that three sessions should be held each year;
- (c) Two respondents said that four sessions should be held each year.

20. Another matter raised by respondents was the need to take into account the meetings held by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other partner organizations of UN-Habitat. In 2022, for example, the first session of the Executive Board is widely perceived to be too close to the

resumed session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme.

21. The most commonly preferred option for future sessions of the Executive Board was the March/April and October/November pairing, which is both in line with current practice and in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Board. Depending on the length of the agenda, it may be opportune to lengthen the session, perhaps by half a day or one day. Respondents also suggested that the specific dates and timing of the sessions of the Board should take into account other important meetings, both within and outside UN-Habitat.

E. Preparations and implementation of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board

22. Question: The second session of 2021 of the Executive Board was held in a hybrid format. How do you evaluate the hybrid format of the second session of 2021 and its possible application to future sessions of the Executive Board?

(a) All 24 respondents agreed to some extent that the hybrid format, with a combination of in-person participation and participants connecting to the meeting remotely, produced a successful outcome to the second session of 2021 (13 respondents “Strongly agree”, 6 “Agree” and 5 “Somewhat agree”);

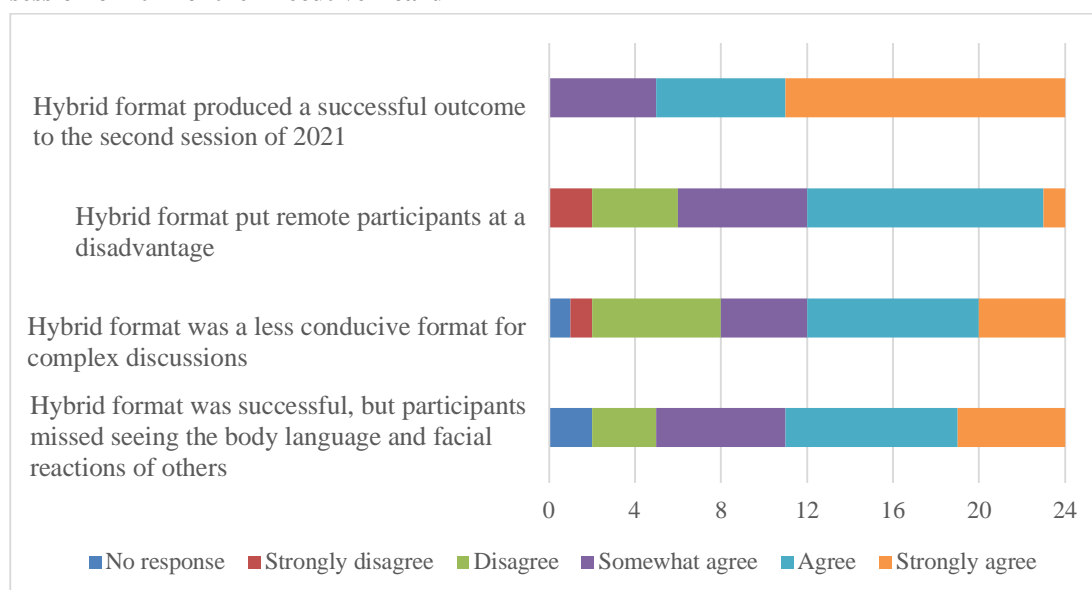
(b) Of the 24 respondents, 17 agree (1 “Strongly agree”, 11 “Agree” and 6 “Somewhat agree”) that the hybrid format put remote participants at a disadvantage, as some struggled to have their voices heard or experienced technical issues that rendered their participation less active. The six other respondents disagree (four said that they “Disagree” and two that they “Strongly disagree”) and did not believe that the hybrid format worked to the disadvantage of remote participants;

(c) While four of the respondents “Strongly agree”, eight “Agree” and four “Somewhat agree” that the hybrid format was a less conducive format for complex discussions, such as those involving negotiating and making decisions on resolutions, the survey showed greater division between respondents on this statement, with six respondents disagreeing and one strongly disagreeing with the statement; one respondent did not answer this question;

(d) Five respondents “Strongly agree”, eight respondents “Agree” and six “Somewhat agree” that the hybrid format was successful, but they commented on having missed seeing the body language and facial reactions of the participants who were connected remotely; three respondents disagreed and one respondent did not answer this question.

Figure 3

Overview of feedback from Member States on the preparation and implementation of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board



23. With regard to future sessions of the Executive Board, respondents indicated that even if they preferred in-person meetings, they regarded a full return to the in-person meeting modality as unlikely. The response rate to the question was low, with only six respondents providing a comment on the

meeting modality of future sessions and 16 respondents (representing 66 per cent of all respondents) not answering the question. It is likely that the low response rate was attributable to uncertainty, as at present it remains unclear as to the course that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic will take and what its implications may be for the future. For the respondents who did provide input on this question, the hybrid modality was seen as the most likely scenario. While in-person meetings were preferred, respondents also mentioned a number of advantages that they considered to be associated with hybrid or remote meetings:

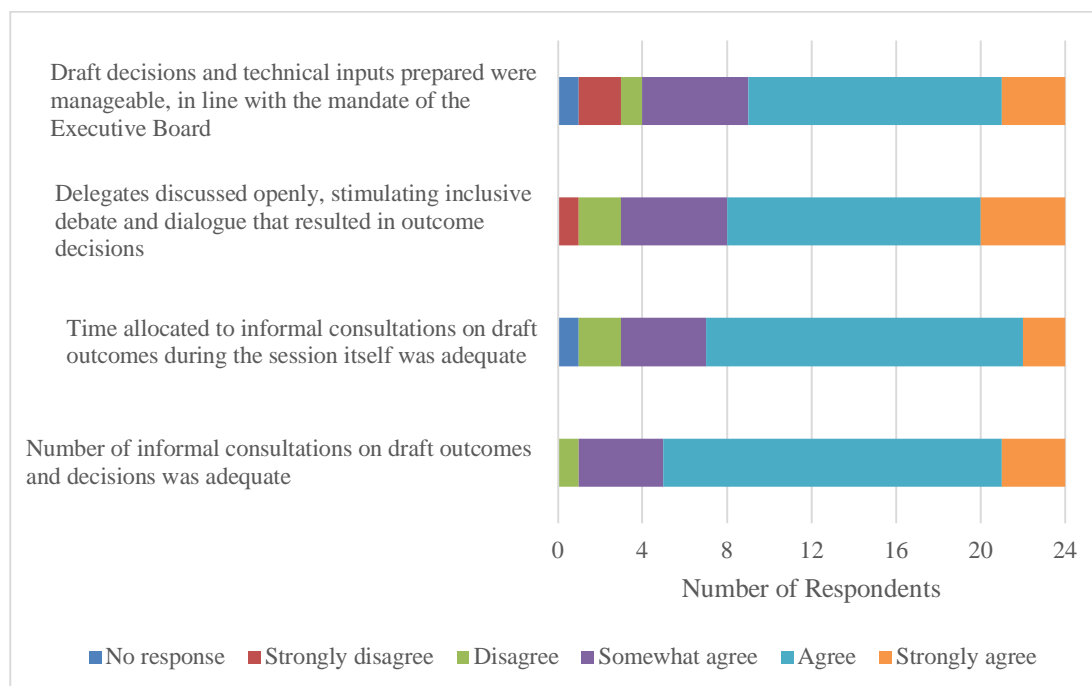
- (a) Seven respondents said that hybrid modalities would make planning and attendance easier;
- (b) Three respondents noted that attending meetings remotely would reduce the cost of attendance, including travel and accommodation costs;
- (c) Three respondents observed that less travel to meetings would reduce the carbon dioxide emissions associated with air travel;
- (d) Two respondents suggested that such advantages as those detailed in this section could potentially lead to a higher number of delegates joining meetings and enhance the accountability and representativeness of the sessions of the Executive Board.

24. A majority (five of the eight respondents to this question) said that they preferred fully in-person sessions. However, despite that preference, they did not consider that the fully in-person meeting modality was likely to be feasible in the near future and therefore suggested that forthcoming sessions of the Executive Board should continue to be organized using the hybrid modality. Further investigation, perhaps through interviews, could be conducted by the secretariat to ascertain what would need to be changed to cater for those respondents who expressed a lack of support for the hybrid modality.

25. Question: How adequate were preparations for the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board, including meetings of the ad hoc working groups of the Executive Board and informal consultations on the draft decisions of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board?

- (a) Of the 24 respondents, 16 “Agree”, 4 “Somewhat agree” and a further 3 “Strongly agree” that the number of informal consultations on draft outcomes and decisions considered by the Executive Board at its second session of 2021 was adequate, while 1 respondent opted for “Disagree”.
- (b) Twenty-one respondents agree (2 “Strongly agree”, 15 “Agree” and 4 “Somewhat agree”) that the time allocated to informal consultations on draft outcomes considered by the Executive Board at its second session of 2021 during the session itself was adequate, while 2 respondents disagreed and 1 respondent did not answer this question;
- (c) Twenty-one of the respondents agree (“4 “Strongly agree”, 12 “Agree” and 5 “Somewhat agree”) that delegates discussed openly, stimulating inclusive debate and dialogue on substantive items that resulted in outcome decisions, while 2 respondents opted for “Disagree” and 1 for “Strongly disagree”;
- (d) Twenty respondents agree to some extent (3 “Strongly agree”, 12 “Agree” and 5 “Somewhat agree”) that the draft decisions and technical inputs prepared for the consideration of the Executive Board were manageable and in line with the mandate of the Board, while 1 respondent opted for “Disagree”, 2 for “Strongly disagree” and 1 respondent did not answer this question.

Figure 4

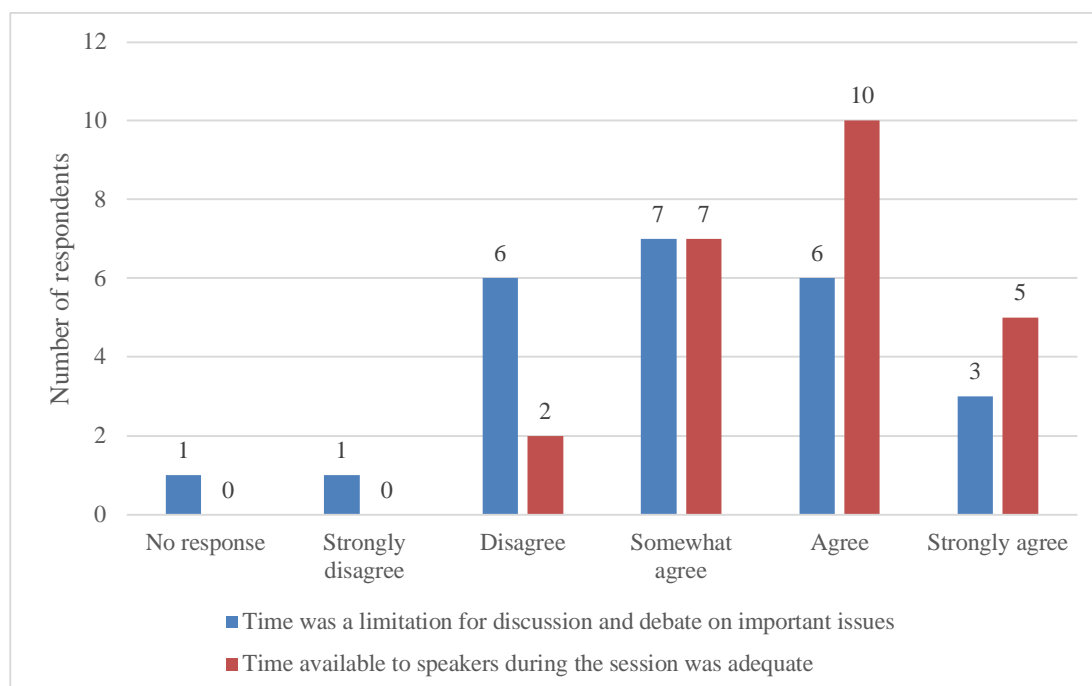
Overview of feedback from Member States on the adequacy of the preparation for the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board


26. With respect to the management of time allocated for statements during the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board, including group statements and national statements, 24 responses were received in response to the two questions:

(a) Of the 24 respondents, 16 agreed to some extent that time was a limitation for discussion and debate on important issues, with 3 respondents selecting “Strongly agree”, 6 “Agree” and 7 “Somewhat agree”, while 7 respondents disagreed, with 6 opting for “Disagree” and 1 for “Strongly disagree”; 1 respondent did not answer this question;

(b) Twenty-two respondents agreed that the time available to speakers during the session was adequate, with 5 respondents selecting “Strongly agree”, 10 “Agree” and 7 “Somewhat agree”. Only 2 respondents felt that the time provided was inadequate.

Figure 5

Overview of feedback from Member States on the allocation of time for statements


27. Eleven respondents provided comments under this section, suggesting that time management during the sessions of the Executive Board could be improved in the following ways:

(a) Two respondents proposed allocating more time during plenary meetings for discussion of agenda items and the wording of decisions, with greater focus on the most important points within decisions. They also suggested that draft technical inputs provided by the secretariat in relation to draft decisions should be briefer;

(b) Four respondents suggested that informal consultations should be completed before the start of sessions, as on occasion too many additional consultations during the session exhausted delegates;

(c) Four respondents suggested that additional pre-session meetings should be organized for preliminary discussion of key issues, so that sessions of the Executive Board are able to focus more tightly on decision-making.

28. The findings of this section of the questionnaire show that a significant majority of respondents agreed that the time available to speakers during the session was adequate. Respondents were more divided as to whether there was sufficient time for discussion and debate on important issues. One of the suggestions received was that additional pre-session meetings should be held on key issues and that that may be one way in which a forum could be created for those who feel that time for discussion and debate is currently too limited.

Question: Based on your views of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board, give suggestions on how the Executive Director and secretariat could better support Member States to ensure their active and substantive engagement in the Executive Board sessions.

29. Twelve respondents made suggestions of ways in which the Executive Director and the secretariat could better support Member States and promote their active and substantive engagement in the sessions of the Executive Board:

(a) Two respondents felt that it would be helpful to have an indication from the secretariat as to which issues were the most important for discussion and decision, so that time could be allocated accordingly;

(b) One respondent suggested that the secretariat could also communicate through UN-Habitat country offices to ensure that local UN-Habitat representatives provided concise briefings prior to sessions of the Executive Board;

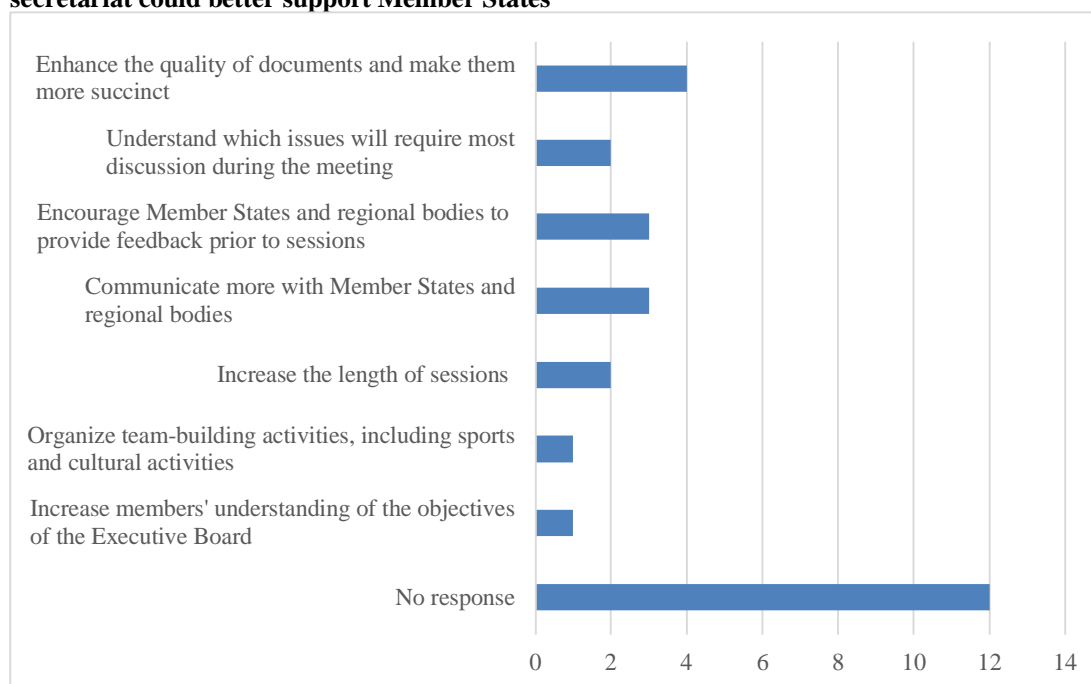
(c) Two respondents felt that greater clarity was needed with regard to the substantive content of the preparatory process, in particular during meetings of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters of the Executive Board;

(d) One respondent suggested that a shorter annotated provisional agenda, providing substantive clarity, could be sent to members in advance of sessions of the Executive Board, with a view to further stimulating discussion;

(e) One respondent said that informal discussions on issues that may generate further work would be welcome and that it was important that draft decisions should be clearly linked to the agenda items under discussion and supporting documents.

Figure 6

Overview of suggestions from respondents on ways in which the Executive Director and the secretariat could better support Member States



F. Other questions on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive Board

Question: What measures can the Executive Board consider to improve its effectiveness?

30. Nine respondents provided comments and suggestions under this section with a view to improving the effectiveness of the Executive Board:

(a) One respondent suggested allocating more time for the meetings, which could be used flexibly to encourage robust discussion, rather than having a rushed discussion of all the items on the agenda;

(b) Another respondent suggested open engagement with regard to the shortcomings of the sessions of the Executive Board and that appropriate time should be set aside to discuss previous sessions of the Board;

(c) Two respondents proposed having more informal pre-session meetings with the regional groups, either through the Executive Director or through the Executive Board, as a means of introducing more substantive knowledge of the issues and setting a better dynamic for both the meetings of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters and the sessions of the Executive Board.

Question: What other comments would you like to make about the Executive Board?

31. Nine respondents provided general comments on the Executive Board under this section:

(a) One respondent suggested that informal negotiations on draft decisions should take place during sessions of the Executive Board to allow participation by Member State-based delegates;

(b) Two respondents felt that greater interaction was needed between delegations, as well as with the secretariat and with UN-Habitat in general. While they felt that virtual briefings were useful, a closer approach in a face-to-face modality would allow for a better dynamic. That could take the form of informal meetings with directors or subject specialists within UN-Habitat, visits to the offices of the Programme, on-site visits, specific workshops or interactions at the field level;

(c) Two respondents said that it was important for delegates to become familiar with the work of UN-Habitat in a more tangible manner, beyond written documents and virtual briefings. Getting to know the people behind each pre-session document or project would improve delegates' understanding of the work of UN-Habitat in substantive terms, and thus their understanding of the collective work of the Executive Board.

IV. Summary of key findings

A. Alignment of the functions and competence of the Executive Board with the provisional agenda of the sessions of the Board

32. Twenty-four respondents gave their opinion on how well aligned the agenda for each session of the Executive Board is to its functions and competence of strengthening the accountability and transparency of UN-Habitat and in providing an effective oversight mechanism for the Programme to enhance its normative and operational activities, and 14 respondents provided additional comments and suggestions under this question:

- (a) All 24 respondents agreed that the functions and competence of the Executive Board were clearly understood and consistently adhered to;
- (b) Almost all the respondents (23 of the 24) agreed that the agenda for each session of the Executive Board was well aligned with the functions and competence of the Executive Board;
- (c) Of the 24 respondents, twenty-two agreed that the provisional agenda was clearly communicated to members of the Executive Board for their input before being finalized;
- (d) Nineteen respondents agreed that the Bureau of the Executive Board was flexible and responsive in the planning process of the provisional agenda for the sessions of the Board, thus fulfilling its oversight role;
- (e) Twenty-one respondents agreed that the Executive Board should review its decision 2019/4, by which it decided upon certain agenda items that should be included on the provisional agenda for consideration by the Board at certain sessions.

33. Suggestions made by respondents in response to this question included holding an induction seminar for delegations of the permanent and observer missions to UN-Habitat, either in September each year after the summer holiday break, in January or as requested by Member States. The secretariat was also encouraged by respondents to organize more training courses, capacity-building sessions and regular briefings for the members of the Executive Board. There was a clear demand for the provisional agenda to be well focused and fit for the specific purpose of each session and for regional groups to be more engaged in the preparation of the provisional agenda. Respondents also recommended that an element of flexibility should be introduced into the preparation of the provisional agenda, allowing for last-minute adjustments as required.

B. Pre-session documents

34. In addition to the responses of the 24 respondents to the survey on the usefulness of the pre-session documents in terms of timing, accessibility, content and length in helping delegates to prepare adequately for sessions of the Executive Board, 11 respondents also provided comments and suggestions on this topic:

- (a) All 24 respondents agreed that the timely submission and distribution of pre-session documents, in accordance with rule 6 of the rules of procedure of the Executive Board (in all official languages no less than four weeks before the date of the opening meeting of a session), was adequate;
- (b) Twenty-one respondents agreed that pre-session documents for the second session of 2021 were easily accessible to the members of the Executive Board in a timely manner;
- (c) Twenty respondents agreed that the guidance of the General Assembly on the limit of 8,500 words for pre-session documents was sufficient, with the exception of certain specific documents, such as the annual work programme and budget and the strategic plan;
- (d) Only four respondents disagreed with the statement that the documents presented at the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board were generally informative and content-focused;
- (e) Of the 24 respondents, 23 agreed that sharing presentations prepared by the Executive Director and the secretariat in advance of sessions of the Executive Board would result in effective and active participation during the discussion of agenda items.

35. In terms of comments, respondents recommended that pre-session documents should be short, informative and content-focused, and that draft decisions should be more clearly connected with the relevant items of the provisional agenda and supporting pre-session documents. It was suggested that a streamlined provisional agenda should be adopted for that purpose. It was noted by a number of

respondents that the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board had too many pre-session documents.

C. Pre-session briefing by the Executive Director

36. The survey showed that respondents considered the pre-session briefing by the Executive Director to be both important and useful. In the comments section under this question, respondents encouraged the secretariat to facilitate greater interaction during the briefing and to circulate either a concise explanatory programme or a short annotated agenda for the briefing to delegates in advance of the briefing.

D. Number of sessions per year of the Executive Board

37. A range of views were expressed regarding the number of sessions that the Executive Board should hold each year, with some respondents suggesting that the Board should meet four times a year, others three times a year and others twice a year. Certain respondents noted the budgetary constraints of UN-Habitat, which affect the capacity of the Executive Board to hold more than two sessions each year. Some encouraged the Executive Board to meet in March/April and October/November; others in March, June and October; and others in January, April, June and November. Respondents also encouraged the secretariat to consider the global calendar of United Nations legislative meetings (including the meeting roster of UNEP) when scheduling the sessions of the Executive Board.

E. Preparations and implementation of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board

38. This section of the questionnaire focused on the hybrid format of the second session of 2021; the adequacy of preparations for the session, including meetings of the ad hoc working groups of the Executive Board and informal consultations on the draft decisions of the session; and the time allocated for statements. Respondents were invited to evaluate the hybrid format and its possible application to future sessions of the Executive Board and to make comments and suggestions on each of the topics covered under this section of the questionnaire:

(a) All 24 respondents agreed to some extent that the hybrid format, with a combination of in-person participation and participants connecting to the meeting remotely, produced a successful outcome to the second session of 2021 (13 respondents opting for “Strongly agree”, 6 for “Agree” and 5 for “Somewhat agree”);

(b) Of the 24 respondents, 17 agreed (1 selecting “Strongly agree”, 11 “Agree” and 6 “Somewhat agree”) that the hybrid format put remote participants at a disadvantage, as some struggled to have their voices heard or experienced technical issues that rendered their participation less active. The six other respondents disagreed (four said that they “Disagree” and two that they “Strongly disagree”) and said that they did not believe that the hybrid format worked to the disadvantage of remote participants;

(c) Sixteen respondents agreed that a hybrid format was a less conducive format for complex discussions, such as those involving negotiating and making decisions on resolutions, while seven respondents disagreed (six opting for “Disagree” and one for “Strongly disagree”); one respondent did not answer this question;

(d) A majority of respondents (19 of the 24) agreed that hybrid format was successful (5 respondents opting for “Strongly agree”, 8 for “Agree” and 6 for “Somewhat agree”), but they also commented on having missed seeing the body language and facial reactions of the participants who were connected remotely; three respondents opted for “Disagree” and one respondent did not answer this question.

39. The survey revealed that few respondents had particularly strong opinions on the meeting modalities for future meetings. Most of the eight respondents who did provide feedback indicated that hybrid meetings were seen as the most likely modality for the future. Five of the responses indicated a preference for in-person meetings, but those respondents also acknowledged that hybrid meetings were more likely. The perceived advantages associated with hybrid or remote meetings include increased engagement with Member State-based members of delegations, easier planning, lower travel costs and a reduced carbon footprint. Only one respondent suggested that sessions should be held fully remotely.

40. Other findings under this section of the questionnaire included the following:
- (a) Twenty-three of the 24 respondents agreed that the number of informal consultations on draft outcomes and decisions considered by the Executive Board at its second session of 2021 was adequate;
 - (b) Twenty-one respondents agreed that delegates had open discussions, stimulating inclusive debate and dialogue on substantive items that resulted in outcome decisions;
 - (c) A majority of respondents (20 of the 23 that responded to this question) agreed that the draft decisions and technical inputs prepared for consideration by the Executive Board were manageable and in line with the mandate of the Board;
 - (d) Sixteen respondents agreed to some extent that time was a limitation for discussion and debate on important issues;
 - (e) A majority (22 of the 24 respondents) agreed that the time available to speakers during the session was adequate.

F. Other questions on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive Board

41. Proposals made by respondents with a view to improving time management during sessions of the Executive Board included allocating more time during plenary meetings for discussion of agenda items and the wording of decisions, with greater focus on the most important points within decisions; completing informal consultations on draft decisions before the start of sessions; and organizing additional pre-session meetings on key matters to be discussed by the Board. Respondents also called for negotiations on draft decisions to take place during sessions to allow participation by Member State-based members of delegations.
42. In response to the question on ways in which the Executive Director and the secretariat could better support Member States and promote their active and substantive engagement in sessions of the Executive Board, respondents called for improved time management during sessions generally and better allocation of time for group statements and national statements specifically; for the involvement of UN-Habitat country offices in the preparation process; and for more informal pre-session meetings.
43. It was suggested that a shorter annotated provisional agenda that would provide a focus on substantive work could be circulated in advance of sessions to further stimulate discussion. A number of respondents also recommended establishing a clear link between draft decisions and the agenda items to be considered by the Executive Board. Overall, there was a clear call from respondents for more substantive interaction between the secretariat and delegations.

V. Conclusion

44. The survey was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the second session of 2021 of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat, with a view to further improving the process and outcome of future sessions of the Board.
45. The response rate to the survey was 23.3 per cent, with 24 responses received from the 103 Member States eligible to respond. The results showed that overall, the functions and competence of the Executive Board are viewed as being aligned with the provisional agenda of the sessions of the Board, guided by its Bureau. The secretariat is considered to be adhering strongly to the rules of procedure that guide the provision of pre-session documents, a key factor in ensuring active participation by delegations, resulting in informed decision-making that supports programme delivery by UN-Habitat. Briefings by the Executive Director were viewed as informative and respondents felt that they should remain as an active tool of dialogue.
46. With regard to the number of sessions that the Executive Board should hold each year and whether the meeting format for those sessions should be in-person, online or hybrid, the survey revealed a broad range of views. The choice of meeting modality rests largely on two factors: the COVID-19 situation and cost implications for the Programme. Respondents also suggested that determination of the appropriate duration of sessions and the allocation of time for statements and deliberation of key matters could be improved.

47. The secretariat very much appreciates the time and effort invested by the delegates who responded to the survey. The responses and comments provided have provided valuable insight. In view of the response rate, the secretariat acknowledges that many delegates have not yet voiced their opinions and on that basis it will continue to seek the views of all delegations with a view to introducing further improvements into the Executive Board process.
