

The UN-Women Executive Board

An Informal Guide

October 2021



UN-Women

In July 2010, United Nations Member States adopted the General Assembly Resolution 64/289 establishing a new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) consolidating four separate former United Nations entities. In creating UN-Women, the international community sent the message that gender equality and women's rights are on par with other global imperatives.

UN-Women has unprecedented global reach. In 2020, UN-Women supported 95 countries and territories, including high income countries, to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women is a powerful advocacy voice with governments, with United Nations sister agencies, with United Nations country teams, with nongovernmental organizations, with the private sector, and with the public at large. Thanks to its close ties with women's organizations on the ground, UN-Women understands what women believe are the most critical issues globally. As a United Nations organization, UN-Women is in a position to amplify these voices and to make heard women's concerns, realities and priorities.

UN-Women is unique in that it has two multi-tiered governance structures. One consists of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Executive Board. It is the governance structure for the organization's operational activities and provides operational policy guidance to UN-Women.

The other consists of the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Commission on the Status of Women. It is the governance structure for the organization's normative support functions and provides normative policy guidance to UN-Women.

ECOSOC is responsible for establishing appropriate and concrete linkages between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Executive Board to ensure consistency between the overall policy guidance set by the Commission and the operational strategies and operational activities approved by the Executive Board (paragraph 67(b) of GA resolution 64/289).

UN-Women operates on the basis of voluntary contributions from Governments and donations from the private sector, including National Committees for UN-Women, foundations and individuals. UN-Women also receives funding from the assessed contributions of the United

Nations regular budget.

UN-Women is administered by the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director under policies established by the Executive Board in accordance with such principles as may be laid down by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

The Executive Board

The Board consists of 41 members: 10 from African States; 10 from Asian States; 4 from Eastern European States; 6 from Latin American and Caribbean States; 5 from Western Europe and Other States; and 6 from top contributing countries.

The functions of the Executive Board are outlined in annex 1 of General Assembly resolution 48/162 of 20 December 1993 (the annex is attached) and in the provisions of General Assembly resolution 64/289.

In general, the Board provides guidance to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director on the operational work of UN-Women; ensures that its operational activities and strategies are consistent with the overall policy guidance set forth by the General Assembly, ECOSOC and monitors the organization's performance; approves its Strategic Plans, programmes and activities, including those at the country level; and decides on its administrative and financial plans and its budgets, among other things.

The Executive Board's annual term is identical to a calendar year and runs from 1 January to 31 December. Each year, the Economic and Social Council elects members to the Board from among the United Nations Member States. To ensure continuity of experience, only a certain number of new members are elected in any given year. Usually, each member serves a three-year term.

The Western European and Others group has established a rotation schedule for its members under which some States do not serve a full three-year term.

Functions of the Executive Board

The working methods of the Executive Board evolve as Board sessions unfold and lessons are learned. The examples provided below reflect the common practices of similar Boards. They are intended as a guide only. The Executive Board of UN-Women is in the process of developing its own working methods as it proceeds.

The Executive Board is responsible for providing intergovernmental support to, and supervision of, the operational activities of UN-Women in accordance with the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and in accordance with its respective responsibility as set out in the Charter of the United Nations, as well as for ensuring that UN-Women is responsive to the needs and priorities of recipient countries. The Executive Board of UN-Women is thus subject to the authority of the Economic and Social Council and has the following functions:

- (a) To implement the policies formulated by the General Assembly and the coordination and guidance received from the Economic and Social Council;
- (b) To receive information from and give guidance to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director on the work of UN-Women;
- (c) To ensure that the activities and operational strategies of UN-Women are consistent with the overall policy guidance set forth by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with their respective responsibility as set out in the Charter;
- (d) To monitor the performance of UN-Women;
- (e) To decide on administrative and financial plans and budgets;
- (f) To recommend new initiatives to the Economic and Social Council and, through the Council, to the General Assembly, as necessary;
- (g) To encourage and examine new programme initiatives;
- (h) To submit annual reports to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session; these could include recommendations, where appropriate, for improvement of field-level coordination.

The Bureau

The officers of the Executive Board constitute the Bureau, and are elected by the Executive Board at its first regular session of each year from among the members for that year. The five officers — the President and four Vice-Presidents — represent the five regional groups, with the presidency rotating among groups every year.

The Bureau serves as a bridge between the UN-Women secretariat and the regional groups, dealing primarily with liaison, administrative and functional matters to enhance the effectiveness of the Executive Board. Members of the Bureau normally coordinate informal consultations within their respective regional groups. The Bureau normally meets regularly and as necessary during the sessions.

The Bureau is responsible for organizing Board meetings, facilitating transparent decision-making and promoting dialogue. The President, or a Vice-President acting as President, presides over Board meetings. Although the Bureau does not have the authority to make decisions on substantive matters, its work is indispensable to the smooth and efficient functioning of the Board.

The Bureau of the Executive Board of UN-Women will participate with the Bureaus of ECOSOC and other governing bodies in informal coordination meetings on operational activities for development.

The Secretariat of the Executive Board

The Secretariat of the Executive Board is responsible for maintaining effective relationships between the UN-Women secretariat and the Executive Board. In consultation with the President and other members of the Bureau, it organizes the business of the Executive Board and services all its sessions and meetings.

Executive Board sessions

The Executive Board holds an Annual Session, usually in June, as well as two regular sessions, the first generally in February and the second in September of each year. These sessions are held at United Nations Headquarters, unless the Executive Board decides otherwise. The Executive Board maintains a general outline of the division of labour between annual and regular sessions, although it retains the flexibility to discuss topics as required at any given session. The number of regular sessions is dictated by the workload of the Executive Board in a given year, as determined at the beginning of each year in order to accomplish its work as set out in its annual workplan, and taking into account the time needed to produce documentation.

Annual organization of work

The Executive Board approves its annual programme of work at the last session of the preceding year. The programme of work is subject to change, as the Board also approves the specific agenda for each session at the start of that session. At all sessions, the Under-Secretary-General /Executive Director, as required, reports to the Executive Board on the relevant issues on the agenda.

Joint meeting with UNICEF, UNDP/UNFPA and World Food Programme Executive Boards

The agendas for the joint meetings, which are usually held around the time of the annual session in May, are agreed upon by the secretariats of the funds and programmes and other Entities, in consultation with the members of the Executive Boards through their respective Bureaus.

The meetings focus on overarching themes of relevance to all participating agencies such as the transition from relief to development; harmonization of budgets; staff safety and security; ‘delivering as one’; progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, least developed countries and middle-income countries. Documentation for the Joint Meeting is made available on the UN-Women website.

Inter-sessional meetings

Inter-sessional meetings or informal briefing and consultations are held periodically during the year to discuss issues of particular interest to members or to provide additional information about subjects to be discussed at upcoming sessions. These meetings are held at United Nations Headquarters and are announced in the *Journal*.

As a rule, a pre-session informal meeting is organized before each session of the Executive Board. At these procedural meetings, delegations have the opportunity to comment on the provisional agenda for the session or to raise with the secretariat questions about any of the agenda items.

Prior to each session, the secretariat may organize briefings on specific agenda items for the regional groups. Delegations are advised by the secretariat of the date and time of these meetings, which are held either in one of the smaller conference rooms at United Nations Headquarters or, if these are unavailable, or at UN-Women premises.

Conduct of sessions

The Executive Board President presides over each session, and opens with introductory statements by the President and the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director and the adoption of the agenda. All session meetings are supported by interpretation in the six official languages of the United Nations.

The provisional agenda, organization of work and timetable for each session are prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau. Delegations have an opportunity to comment on the provisional agenda at the pre-session information meeting, held before each session, and at the opening of the session itself.

Agenda items may be considered separately or in clusters. Each item on the agenda is introduced by the appropriate member of the secretariat and discussed by the Board. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director and other members of the secretariat respond to the statements made

and issues raised by delegations at intervals during the debate of each agenda item. The Board may take a decision on the item in question or, if it is presented for information, take note of it.

The effective use of time in deliberations is important. Debate is confined to the question before the Executive Board and the President may call a speaker to order if his or her remarks are not relevant to the subject under discussion. The Board may limit the number of times the representative of each member may speak on any question. To make the best use of the time available, if the Board concludes its consideration of an agenda item ahead of schedule, it immediately moves on to the next agenda item.

Decision-making

The Executive Board takes all of its decisions by consensus. The decisions are to be short, in principle without a preamble, action-oriented and should address the specific issue under consideration. To facilitate the decision-making process, the secretariat, in preparing documentation for consideration by the Executive Board, is mandated to include the text of a draft decision if action by the Board is required in that area.

In addition, delegations may submit additional proposals on issues that reflect developments emerging from the debate, on issues covered in the documentation and on other subjects. Deadlines for the submission of written draft proposals may be announced to ensure sufficient time for translation and negotiation. Under normal circumstances, delegations should have at least 24 hours to examine proposals before decisions are taken.

The Executive Board President usually nominates one of the Vice Presidents to facilitate the negotiation of a draft decision. Consultations and negotiations can start before the formal session starts due to time constraints and to avoid scheduling drafting sessions in parallel with plenary meetings. Delegations may also hold informal consultations among themselves and reach consensus on draft decisions. Once agreed upon, final drafts are referred to the formal plenary session for action.

Participation of observers

Any State Member of the United Nations that is not a member of the Executive Board may have a representative attending Board meetings as observers and may participate in its deliberations without the right to vote. The Executive Board may invite, when it considers appropriate, representatives of the United Nations Secretariat, specialized agencies, and others to participate in the deliberations for questions that relate to their activities or those involving coordination questions. The Executive Board may also invite, when appropriate, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to participate in its deliberations for questions that relate to their activities.

Informal discussions

The Executive Board sometimes chooses to hold informal discussions during its formal sessions. These discussions allow delegations and the secretariat to address issues without requiring that a formal document be prepared or to have a dialogue without the limits of an official debate. The discussions may focus on programmatic and operational issue and procedural issues if needed.

Documentation

The UN-Women secretariat submits all documentation of the Executive Board. The Secretariat works closely with the United Nations Department of General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), which is responsible for the editing, translation, publication and distribution of all official documents.

All official documents are translated into the six official languages of the United Nations, with the exception of conference room papers (CRPs), which are available in English, French and Spanish only. In keeping with United Nations guidelines, documents must not exceed 16 pages, unless an exemption has been granted by DGACM.

Documents are submitted to DGACM for processing eight weeks prior to each session, to be published four weeks before the session. If the language versions are not available at that time, the Secretariat distributes the document to delegations in the original language of submission.

Advance copies of the documents for each session can be made available in the original language of submission at the Executive Board section of the UN-Women website.

Final versions in languages are uploaded on the UN-Women website 4 weeks prior to the formal session. They are also available online via the Official Documents System (ODS) of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>). Questions regarding access to ODS should be addressed directly to DGACM.

In addition to the documents prepared ahead of each Executive Board session, in-session documents, including conference room papers, statements, draft decisions and attendance lists, are produced and distributed during the course of the sessions. Following the end of each session, the final texts of all adopted Executive Board decisions are available the next day on the UN-Women website.

The official reports of Executive Board sessions are prepared by the Secretariat. The report details the organization of the session, a summary of the deliberations and the decisions adopted at that session. Each report is completed as soon after the session as possible and circulated to members for comments, corrections and clarifications. The final report of the session is then posted on the UN-Women website.

In line with efforts to reduce the amount of documentation produced by the United Nations, the Executive Board increasingly is expected to be using oral reports by the secretariat in place of formal, written reports.

Logistics of the sessions

Credentials

Prior to each session, delegations send formal credentials to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director or the Secretary of the Executive Board conveying the names of their delegation members. The announcement of each session and request for credentials appear daily in the United Nations Journal, beginning four to six weeks prior to each session. A provisional list of participants based on the credentials received is distributed by the secretariat as soon as possible during the session, and the final list is circulated by the Secretariat before the close of the session.

Documentation

All documentation for the session is available on the UN-Women website. Member States are encouraged to send their statements to the eStatements@un.org for uploading on the UN Journal.

United Nations grounds passes

Delegations of States members normally obtain United Nations grounds passes from the Protocol and Liaison Service through their Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

General information and schedules

The Secretariat maintains a support office in close proximity to the conference room, and its staff, as well as the conference servicing staff, is available to assist delegates. Meeting times and the order of debate are listed in the Journal.