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**Joint Response by the secretariats of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF  
and UN-Women  
on the Working Methods of the Executive Boards**

This paper is presented jointly by the Executive Board Secretariats of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women in response to their corresponding Executive Board decisions on working methods, adopted at the Annual Sessions 2019 of each respective Board. For UN-Women, it is Executive Board decision [2019/8](#), decision [2019/16](#) for UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, and [2019/9](#) for UNICEF. These decisions include three requests to be presented at the second regular session of the Executive Board 2019:

- Present initial proposals to improve the working methods of the Joint Meeting of the Boards, including an optimal timing for convening the Joint Meeting of the Boards;
- Propose different alternatives of adjusting the date of the second regular session, mindful that it does not overlap with the other schedules;
- Present practical proposals for improving the efficiency of the sessions of the Executive Board, including reviewing the agenda items and the efficient consideration of these.

**I. Proposals to improve the working methods of the Joint Meeting of the Boards, including an optimal timing for convening the Joint Meeting of the Boards**

**Timing:**

Currently, the Joint Meeting of the Boards takes place in late May, which is a very busy period for the secretariats and their limited capacity. It overlaps with the joint field visit, the respective field visits of each Board as well as the annual sessions of the Executive Boards. The density of meetings and events in this period presents a challenge to the secretariats in being able to cover the responsibilities this workload demands.

The Joint Meeting of the Boards could be moved to late August/early September together with a new format for the second regular session of the Executive Boards. All the second regular sessions could be scheduled back-to-back and compressed within 1 week in late August/early September, which would start with a 1-day Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards. This would mean that the second regular session is efficiently and effectively reduced to a two-day session for the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board and one-day sessions for the UNICEF and the UN-Women Executive Boards, whereby each agency/entity's Board session occurs in sequence.



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This consecutive one-week second regular session would allow for better synergies between the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards as well as shortened and more strategic sessions of the individual Executive Boards. This proposal also addresses Member States' request to consolidate, without gaps, the respective sessions of the Boards to ensure more efficient oversight functions of the Executive Boards. The proposal effectively accommodates the participation of delegates from capitals and presents a significant cost saving advantage.

Proposed Example: one-week consecutive sessions, 31 August- 4 September 2020

Monday 31 August: Joint Meeting of the Boards

Tuesday 1 September: UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Second Regular Session

Wednesday 2 September: UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Second Regular Session

Thursday 3 September: UNICEF Second Regular Session

Friday 4 September: UN-Women Second Regular Session

Other alternatives on timing for the Joint Meeting of the Boards could be as follows:

- Organizing the Joint Meeting of the Boards in February or March (before or after the first regular sessions of the respective Boards)
- Organizing the Joint Meeting of the Boards in mid-November (upon consultation with and authorization from the Committee on Conferences on other/conflicting meetings during the General Assembly)

In essence, the Joint Meeting of the Boards could be organized immediately after or before one of the three Board sessions.

### **Topics of the Joint Meeting of the Boards:**

It is proposed that the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards discuss issues of joint relevance and interest, which could include cost recovery, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual and other forms of harassment, UNDS reform implementation, Strategic Plan Common Chapter, UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, discussion of joint reports and joint evaluations or presentation of the joint field visit reports.

This could present several advantages such as avoiding duplicative discussions; promotion of coherence and collaboration across the agencies/entities; promotion of inter-agency efficiency, oversight and accountability. The autonomy, independence and oversight function of each Executive Board would be preserved, with joint topics discussed collectively, including through joint informal briefings/presentations, while decisions would continue to be adopted individually by each Executive Board. With this approach, some agenda items could be shifted from the



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programme of work of the individual Boards for consideration by the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards.

### **Documentation:**

In view of the above proposition, the Joint Meeting of the Boards will not need additional documentation as its discussions would be based on existing documentation produced for each of the respective Board sessions. While documentation should be limited to the formal sessions of the respective Boards, the respective entities could however, in addition to providing links to the individual Board documents, prepare joint informal presentations for the Joint Meeting of the Boards, highlighting the joint areas of work.

As the documentation between the JMB and the Executive Boards sessions will be mainstreamed and integrated, the workload for the JMB will be reduced for both Member States and the agencies/entities, making the governance process more effective and cost efficient.

### **Conduct of Business: Time limits for interventions**

The secretariats recommend streamlining the conduct of business for the Joint Meeting of the Boards, such as applying time limits for national and group interventions as well as agency/entity presentations, in line with the format followed in the formal sessions of the Executive Boards.

## **II. Possible alternative dates of the second regular session of the Executive Boards**

In the joint annex to the written account of the core group on the working methods of the Executive Boards, presented at the most recent Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards (May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019), the secretariats presented alternative dates for the respective second regular sessions. The mock schedule presented on page 25 in the annex showed a scenario whereby three formal sessions could take place in the first half of the year. This is because in July, there are overlaps with the High-Level Political Forum and in August, a very high number of delegates and staff are on annual leave. September is the original month of the second regular session, which was avoided as part of the exercise. The General Assembly is in session from mid-September to December, during which no other formal meeting can be scheduled.

While Member States did not discuss this item during negotiations on the working methods decision, the secretariats stress that having a Board session every 2 months is neither necessary nor efficient. In addition, based on the respective Boards' Rules of Procedure, documents should be online 4 weeks in advance of the session for UN-Women and WFP, and 6 weeks in advance for UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UNICEF and usually finalized eight weeks in advance to allow for translation and finalization of the documents. The schedule outlined in the previous response by



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the secretariats would not allow enough time between sessions to finalize and present quality documents for discussion at the Executive Boards' session. In light of the above, the following 3 options are being presented:

*Option 1:* This option relates to the JMB discussion above, namely, that all the second regular sessions are accommodated within one week in late August/early September and consolidated with the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards. As mentioned earlier in the document, this would entail a weeklong meeting that includes the JMB on the first day, subsequently followed by a two-day second regular session for UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, a one-day second regular session for UNICEF and a one-day second regular session for UN-Women. Further details appear in the first section of this note.

*Option 2:* Convene the second regular session once every two years for the approval of the respective Strategic Plans and budgets.<sup>1</sup> This would mean having an additional one or two-day second regular session every two years, and then shifting any item that would normally be considered at the second regular session to the first regular or annual session. The timing for this would be early September. This would also allow for better attendance and focus on issues at both informal and formal sessions due to Board members not being involved with General Assembly preparations. It is also an opportunity to promote time and resource efficiencies of Board meetings by streamlining the agenda and revisiting items that could be moved from the formal agenda to informal briefings/consultations. This would also allow for better spacing between formal sessions (every 6 months) as opposed to 4 months between first and annual and only 3 between annual and second.

The agencies/entities have assessed that most items in the second regular sessions could be moved to other sessions, with the key challenge being the approval of the Strategic Plans and budgets. Therefore, if those are retained in a shorter 1-day session for each Board every 2 years, then more informal briefings and consultations/negotiations could be held for those items prior to the second regular session, with drafts of the documents shared in advance.<sup>2</sup> Then once the Board is in session, there would be an efficient final review and approval of the plans and budgets.

*Option 3:* Convene the second regular session once every two years in October or November. Currently, this would not be allowed as the General Assembly is in session, thus a waiver from the Committee on Conferences would need to be granted every year. There would be risks with this approach, as the Committee on Conferences only takes decisions in September therefore an October/November second regular session would not be confirmed until close to the session, making planning and preparations for the Board challenging. If Board members would prefer a

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Women and UNOPS have biennial budgets every two years, whereas UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF have budgets every four years. So, for the latter four agencies, they may only need formal agenda items every four years.

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in the footnote above, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF may only need a second regular session once every four years.



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multi-day second regular session every year in the latter half of the year during the General Assembly session, then it would be advisable to process a formal request in this regard. Please note that the agenda items for this second regular session would be the same as in option 2, the only difference would be the timing of the session.

### III. Proposals for improving the efficiency of the sessions of the Executive Board, including by reviewing the agenda items

#### **All agencies/entities:**

- It is suggested that in addition to the statements of the respective principals of each agencies/entity pertaining to the regular accountability to their Executive Boards, only items for decision should be part of the formal sessions. Any other items could be discussed during informal briefings/consultations of the Executive Board. This should apply, at least, for the second regular session.
- Timings for individual agenda items should continue to be given close attention so that the timings are more realistic with less lost time in the agenda. Delegations should be prepared to move immediately into the next scheduled items if one item finishes earlier than scheduled.
- More joint informal briefings to the three NY-based Boards should be explored instead of having duplicate conversations with each Board, similar to the Funding Compact discussion in August 2019.
- Time management: continue to implement the newly introduced system of using electronic means (timers and microphone cut-off) to allow time for as many delegations as possible to intervene. Single delegation statements should be limited to three minutes for; five minutes for delegations speaking on behalf of a group. The secretariats will continue to ensure that agency/entity presenters are efficient in the use of their respective time.
- Decisions: Board members may want to continue the practice of starting the negotiations on the draft decisions as early as possible, perhaps at least one day before the start of each session. Facilitators may also want to continue to encourage Board members to submit proposed language for the decisions early/in keeping with the agreed timelines.

#### **Agency/Board-specific efficiencies:**

- The UNDP and UNFPA country programme documents (CPD) agenda items could be discussed jointly, especially since most of the countries whose CPDs are reviewed are also aligned across the agencies. There could be a ‘country programmes and related matters’ item under the ‘Joint Segment’ for each session and take them out of the individual UNDP and UNFPA segments. It could then be called ‘Country programmes and related matters for UNDP and UNFPA’ to reflect the joint panel. The agencies could also explore the possibility of having a joint informal on CPDs that also includes sister-agencies.



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- The UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS secretariats wish to completely stop printing documentation for all meetings in compliance with the 'Greening the United Nations Initiative'.
- The joint UNDP/UNFPA item on the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board during the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Board could be removed and instead discussed during an informal consultation or Joint Meeting of the Boards.