

Administrative and Operational Arrangements and Financial Support

Background Information and Guiding Questions

In the UNFCCC process, the COP Presidency rotates across the five UN regional groups every year. The secretariat supports the COP Presidency in their preparations to organize and deliver the COP. With the COP being hosted in a different venue each time, a “host country agreement” is signed between the host country and the secretariat to ensure common standards designed to facilitate inclusion and the necessary administrative and operational arrangements.

In recent years the number of applications for registration to the COPs has increased immensely. It has almost doubled in recent years, from around 16,000 in COP 23 to more than 30,000 in COP 26.¹ On the one hand, plurality of observers brings more voices to the table; on the other hand, as registration levels and stakeholders’ diversity increase, engagement opportunities (office hours, side event slots, registration rates, meeting space, access to negotiating rooms, etc.) decrease, leading to frustration among observers.

At COP 26, observers faced logistical difficulties and limited access to engagement opportunities. Some were due to technical problems, such as problems with the COP 26 Platform, but others were inherent to the process, such as the large number of observer participants and limited engagement opportunities.² What administrative and operational measures can be taken to ensure effective and meaningful engagement of observers in COP 27?

Administrative and operational arrangements that observer participants are directly affected by include venue design, number of side event rooms and exhibits and their utilities, food diversity and its price range, transportation, policies relating to disability inclusion and the booking of meeting rooms. Parties and observers are able to book rooms on a first come first served basis, but priority is given to Party bookings over observer bookings. Consequently, the confirmation of observer bookings can only be given the evening before the meeting day and is subject to last-minute cancellations or change of rooms if the negotiation requires such changes. The number of meeting rooms and layout is subject to availability at the venue. Demand for meeting rooms is highest during negotiating hours.³ Is there a way to optimize the use of available meeting rooms and to provide greater predictability for observers when booking meeting rooms?

Are there ways to further enhance disability inclusion in the UNFCCC process - at the venue, on the website, by facilitating the participation of sign-language interpreters and personal assistants, or through ensuring accessible transport to and from the venue? From the perspective of observers, what have been best practices in relation to food diversity and price, venue design, side event rooms and exhibits utilities, etc.?

- What measures can be taken by the organizers of UNFCCC sessions to improve the administrative and operational arrangements in and around the COPs?

¹ See background note, p. 7

² https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/concept_note_process_strengthen_observer_engagement.pdf

³ See supporting infographic sheet

Many observers also face financial difficulties participating in international annual conferences. The cost of travel and, in particular, limited and expensive accommodation options mean that many stay away from the venue. When the issue of providing financial support for observer participation was raised, the SBI noted that some Parties voluntarily support the participation of admitted NGOs in UNFCCC meetings, and encouraged Parties to provide voluntary support, in particular to admitted NGOs from developing countries. It furthermore invited Parties to provide information on the voluntary support provided, but decided against setting up a trust fund.⁴ What else can be done to address the financial barriers that observers face when participating in a COP?

- What financial support can be mobilized to facilitate the participation and capacity building of groups with limited financial resources (especially from developing countries)? How can such support ensure the widest possible representation of observers, without resulting in an overall increase in the number of observers?

The pandemic triggered an acceleration of remote participation in the UNFCCC process. A series of virtual technical events and consultations were held in 2020 including the UNFCCC June Momentum for Climate Change and the UNFCCC Climate Dialogues 2020. The subsidiary bodies met virtually during their May-June 2021 session and COP 26 took place in person with a strong virtual presence, whereby all meetings that were open to observers on-site were also livestreamed through “COP 26 Platform”, bringing an unprecedented level of transparency. However, some users of the COP 26 Platform experienced technical difficulties. Parties noted that, while virtual engagement has its challenges, technology can be used to enhance engagement, including that of observer organizations from developing countries.⁵ Developing modes of remote participation is an ongoing process and the secretariat seeks to continuously improve users’ experience of the virtual platform. User feedback at SB56 suggests that the virtual platform has already undergone improvements since COP 26.

- What measures can be taken by the organizers of UNFCCC sessions to enhance the experience of virtual and/or hybrid participation?

Observers are able to showcase their activities and hold events either through pavilions, coordinated by the COP Presidency, or through official side events and exhibits, and various thematic hubs coordinated by the secretariat. The secretariat facilitates livestreaming of official side events on one of the secretariat-managed YouTube channels. The “COP 26 Side Events” playlist containing 231 videos had received 23,007 views as of 25 March 2022.⁶ The COP 26 Platform enabled 248 Parties and observer organizations to showcase their work by holding virtual exhibits.⁷ However, these were poorly attended: 90% of exhibits received fewer than 40 visitors over the duration of the COP. Could differentiation between in-person and remote participation – and removing quota restrictions for the latter – be an effective way to bring side events and exhibits to a wider audience and enhance observer engagement at the COPs? What are best practices of venue design from observers’ perspectives in relation to areas that host

⁴ FCCC/SBI/2019/9, para 137

⁵ FCCC/SBI/2021/16, para 110

⁶ See page 23 of the background note

⁷ FCCC/SBI/2022/5, para 33

various events such as pavilions, global climate action space and official side events and exhibits?

- What could be venue designs and logistical arrangements that could be implemented to help side events and exhibits and pavilions obtain more visibility and draw more audience (particularly from Parties)?