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Administrative, financial and institutional matters

Other administrative, financial and institutional matters

Budgetary implications of UNFCCC mandates: update on standard costs

Note by the Executive Secretary

Summary

This note was prepared in response to the request from the Conference of the Parties at its twenty-ninth session for the secretariat to update documents [FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.4](#), [FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.12](#) and [FCCC/SBI/2020/INF.3](#). It provides updated information on standard costs associated with UNFCCC activities, including for staff salaries, official travel, workshops, meetings and document preparation, with the aim of ensuring transparency and efficiency of UNFCCC budgeting and financial planning by providing current cost estimates based on historical data and projected cost drivers such as inflation.

I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. At its twenty-ninth session the Conference of the Parties requested the secretariat to update documents [FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.4](#), [FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.12](#) and [FCCC/SBI/2020/INF.3](#),¹ which pertain to standard costs associated with UNFCCC activities, including official travel, workshops and document preparation.

B. Scope

2. Standard costs are predetermined estimates of costs for producing or delivering services, goods or outputs, and are based on historical data and projected cost drivers such as inflation. Within the UNFCCC framework, standard costs are essential for budgeting and financial planning, ensuring transparency and efficiency in resource allocation. The aim of this update is to provide Parties with current standard costs and thereby facilitate informed decision-making regarding new mandates and activities. For final accounting and reporting purposes, all costs are based on actual expenditure and are presented in euros as the core budget of the UNFCCC is approved in euros. Actual expenditure is recorded in the accounting system in United States dollars. Any change in the official rate of exchange between the two currencies therefore has an impact on the estimation of costs in euros.

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

3. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation may wish to consider the information provided herein as part of its consideration of this agenda sub-item and to provide guidance to the secretariat on possible next steps, as appropriate.

II. UNFCCC standard costs

A. Staff salaries

4. The UNFCCC currently uses standard costing for salaries, in keeping with the rest of the United Nations system. The methodology follows the same principles applied by other United Nations entities and is based on historical cost, with provisions for step increases, exchange rate fluctuations and post vacancies. The costs determined for each position level are used to develop the staff cost portion of the biennial budget. Information on standard staff costs applied in the biennium 2024–2025 is contained in annex I to document [FCCC/SBI/2023/2](#) and relevant information for the biennium 2026–2027 is contained in annex I to document [FCCC/SBI/2025/8](#).

5. Given that staff costs represent approximately 78 per cent of the core budget, standard costing ensures that a significant cost factor is standardized.

B. Official travel

6. Standard costing for estimating travel costs is primarily used for planning the cost of official travel of secretariat staff and funded meeting participants. Travel is regulated by applicable United Nations rules and administrative instructions. Three main components of travel costs are covered:²

(a) Ticket cost, based on the most direct and economical means of travel in accordance with applicable travel rules;

¹ Decision [20/CP.29](#), para. 12.

² See United Nations Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2023/1.

(b) Daily subsistence allowance (DSA), to cover expenses such as meals, lodging, gratuities and other costs for services rendered during official travel.³ DSA rates are determined by the International Civil Service Commission⁴ for all travel destinations and are valid for all United Nations organizations;

(c) Terminal expenses, which are reimbursed at a rate set in accordance with applicable rules,⁵ to cover the cost of public conveyance between the airport or another point of arrival or departure and the hotel or another place of dwelling.

7. An analysis of historical official travel led to the following average standard costs:

(a) For a three-day trip: EUR 3,100;

(b) For a five-day trip: EUR 3,700.

8. These standard costs are subject to change as a result of exchange rate fluctuations and adjustments to average ticket prices, DSA and terminal expenses.

C. Workshops and meetings

9. Workshops and meetings are integral to the mission of the UNFCCC, facilitating dialogue, capacity-building and decision-making, and accurate costing thereof ensures efficient use of resources and effective planning.

1. Standard cost components

10. The standard costs for organizing workshops and meetings cover:

(a) Venue: rental cost, varying by location and size, of appropriate facilities;

(b) Equipment and technical support: audiovisual equipment, interpretation services and technical staff;

(c) Participant support: travel and DSA for sponsored participants;

(d) Documentation: preparation, translation and distribution of meeting materials;

(e) Logistics and administration: staffing, security and other operational expenses.

2. Updated standard costs

11. Based on recent data, the following example set of standardized costs for workshops, all taking place in Bonn, is presented as an indication of the range of possible costs, depending on the various parameters and inputs related to the output:

(a) Workshop A: assume a three-day workshop with 15 funded participants, no consultant support, no translation requirements, one room standard venue, and logistics and information and communication technology support. Estimated cost inclusive of programme support cost: EUR 111,000;

(b) Workshop B: assume a four-day workshop with 50 funded participants, one month of consultant time to support the preparation of materials, and other parameters as for workshop A (see para. 11(a) above). Estimated cost inclusive of programme support cost: EUR 327,000;

(c) Workshop C: assume a five-day workshop with 100 funded participants, three months of consultant time to support the preparation of materials, translation requirements for 6 languages, and other parameters as for workshop A (see para. 11(a) above). Estimated cost inclusive of programme support cost: 684,000 EUR.

³ See United Nations Secretariat administrative instruction ST/AI/2014/2.

⁴ See <https://icsc.un.org/Home/DailySubsistence>.

⁵ See United Nations Secretariat information circular ST/IC/2019/16.

12. Factors involved in estimating the cost of workshops in Bonn include number of participants, venue cost, participants' travel costs depending on place of origin and exchange rate fluctuations that affect DSA.

13. Factors additional to those listed in paragraph 12 above involved in estimating the cost of workshops outside Bonn include different DSA rates, potential requirements for greater security measures, availability of funding from the host country and inclusion of staff travel to support set-up and delivery of the workshop.

14. Costs related to the factors listed in paragraphs 12–13 above are variable workshop costs and do not include the indirect costs of staff support time or other inputs covered by the secretariat's budget.

D. Preparation of documents

15. The preparation and dissemination of official documents are central to the transparency and communication efforts of the UNFCCC. While the actual cost of a document will vary depending on specific parameters related to both its inputs and the nature of its output, an estimate can inform decision-making. An example set of standard costs for three document types was developed to indicate the range of costs involved in preparing UNFCCC documents:

(a) Document A (workshop report, 15–20 pages): a document summarizing the proceedings, including presentations made and discussions held, of a one-day workshop. The report would be prepared by Professional-level secretariat staff with in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and a good understanding of the intergovernmental process. It would be reviewed and cleared by the appropriate managers, formatted as an official UNFCCC document, edited by professional editors and published on the UNFCCC website. Estimated cost inclusive of programme support cost: EUR 6,380;

(b) Document B (synthesis report, 25–30 pages): a document synthesizing views and/or information in submissions from Parties, observers and other stakeholders as well as forum discussions on a particular topic. The report would be prepared by Professional-level secretariat staff with input from a consultant, and reviewed, cleared, formatted, edited and published as specified for document A. The resources (time, human and financial) required to prepare the report would be significantly greater than those for document A because of its numerous inputs and more complex preparation process and the larger output (i.e. length of the report). Estimated cost inclusive of programme support cost: EUR 19,150;

(c) Document C (multi-year progress report, 20–25 pages): a document detailing the progress in implementing a multi-year work programme established by the Conference of the Parties. The report would draw on a large number of sources, as specified in the terms of reference for the review adopted by the Conference of the Parties, including submissions from Parties, observers and other stakeholders; national reports; and outcomes of workshops and dialogues. The report would be prepared by Professional-level secretariat staff and reviewed, cleared, formatted, edited and published as specified for document A. The resources (time, human and financial) required to prepare the report are estimated to be much greater than those for document A because of its numerous inputs and more complex preparation process and the larger output. Estimated cost inclusive of programme support cost: EUR 76,600.

16. The example costings listed in paragraph 15 above demonstrate some of the factors involved in estimating the cost of preparing a document. These factors and others can be summarized as follows:

(a) The quantity and complexity of the inputs to be reviewed in preparing the document;

(b) The systems and tools, whether standard or specialized, required for collecting and processing the data and information required for the document;

(c) The need for contracting specialized consultants with varying levels of expertise to prepare or assist in preparing the document;

- (d) The need to support the participation of experts in preparing the document;
- (e) The translation requirements for the document;
- (f) The printing requirements for the document.

E. Per capita costs for specific internal services

17. The Administration and Operations division delivers a set of services and equipment to all secretariat personnel, including office furniture, laptops, Internet connections, standard software and general information technology support. The costs of such services and equipment for all core-funded staff are covered by the core budget under the Administration and Operations and secretariat-wide cost appropriation lines. For all other staff, the costs are covered by a cost recovery mechanism. For this purpose, a per capita amount of EUR 17,000 is included in all relevant budgets.
