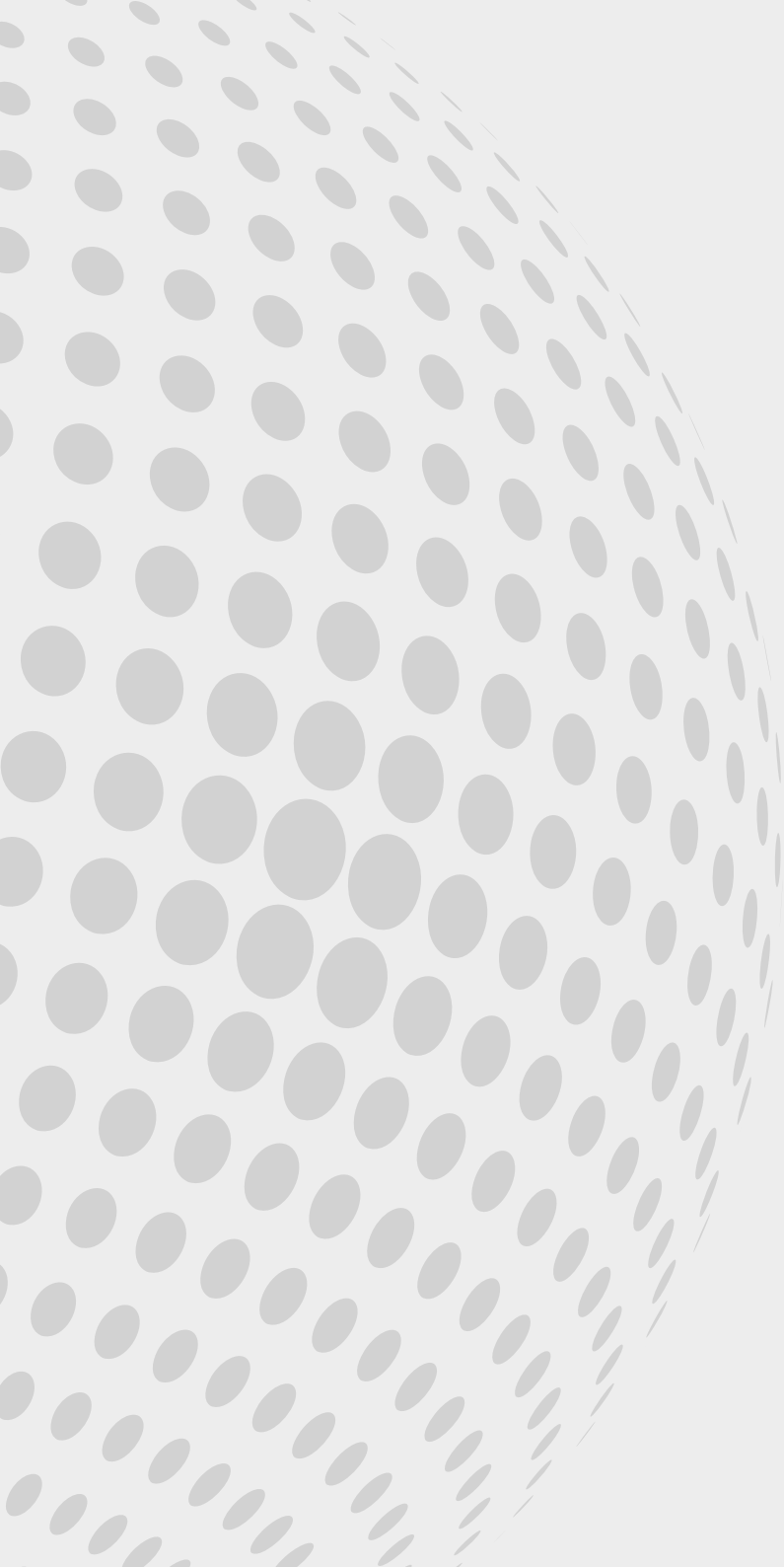# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

# ▶ INDEX

# ▶ I. MANDATES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

## a. What is the General Conference?

The General Conference consists of the representatives of the States Members of the Organization. It meets every two years, and is attended by Member States and Associate Members, together with observers for Non-Member States, Intergovernmental Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Foundations.

## b. What are the functions of the General Conference?

The General Conference determines the policies and the main lines of work of the Organization (article IV of the Constitution):

❚ discussing all the issues concerning the general policy of the Organization, and occasionally by focusing on certain major themes;

❚ adopting for the next four years a programme and, for the next two years a budget, the draft of which is submitted to the General Conference by the Executive Board and is the outcome of a consultation process between the Member States and the Secretariat;

❚ electing the Members of the Executive Board; (**Rules 99-101**)

❚ appointing, every four years, the Director-General; (**Rules 102-105**)

❚ adopting the (eight-year) Medium-Term Strategy of the Organization.

# ▶ II. FUNCTIONING

## a. How often does the General Conference meet?

The General Conference meets every two years in ordinary session. If required, it may also hold extraordinary sessions. (**Rule 1**)

Since the founding of UNESCO, the General Conference has met 41 times in ordinary session and 5 times in extraordinary session.

## b. Where does the General Conference meet?

The venue for the next session shall be fixed by the General Conference during its regular session, based on the proposal of the Executive Board. (**Rule 2**)

## c. What are the different stages of the General Conference?

The General Conference begins with an opening ceremony in plenary, temporarily presided over by the President elected at the previous session.

It approves its agenda, prepared by the Executive Board, then elects its President and Vice-Presidents, on the proposal of the Nominations Committee. (**Rules 9, 14 and 28**)

Next, the Chairperson of the Executive Board and Director-General introduces the general policy debate by presenting the report on the activities of the Organization and the draft programme and budget.

During the last days of the session, the Plenary resumes its work in order to consider and adopt the reports of the Commissions and the budget by the Commissions. Once adopted, they become Resolutions of the General Conference.

## d. How are decisions taken? How does the voting process work?

### *Voting rights*

Every Member State that meets the credential requirements outlined in Rule 23 or has received exceptional admission with full voting privileges by the Conference, even in cases of non-compliance with that rule, is entitled to cast one vote in the General Conference or any of its affiliated Committees, Commissions, or Subsidiary Organs. (**Rule 80.1, Art IV.C §8.c Constitution**).

In case the financial contributions of one Member State exceed the total amount of contributions payable by it for the current year and the immediately preceding calendar year, such Member State looses its right to vote in the General Conference and all subsidiary organs, except in cases of that the circumstances leading to such failure are beyond that State's power. (**Rule 80.2**)

### *Simple VS two-third majority*

Decisions of the General Conference shall be taken by a simple majority of the Members present and voting, except in the cases listed in Rule 82. (**Rule 81**)

A two-thirds majority is required for various cases, including admitting new Member States not part of the United Nations, admitting Associate Members, adopting international conventions for ratification, admitting observers from non-governmental or semi-governmental organizations, amending the Constitution, and establishing regulations for amending the Constitution, among others. (**Rule 82**)

### *Method of voting*

The default method for decision-making is by a vote, typically conducted by a show of hands. However, if consensus is evident or requested, the President may propose a decision without a vote, although a vote must be held if a Member State requests it. (**Rule 84**)

Secret ballot voting is required for specific cases, including the election of Executive Board Members, the appointment of the Director-General, and other decisions related to individuals when requested by five or more Members or at the President's discretion. (**Rule 91**)

More information regarding the voting procedure can be found in Part XV of the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference.

# ▶ III. COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

## 1. Who are the members of the General Conference?

The General Conference consists of the representatives of the Member States of UNESCO, forming the Delegations, as well as of Associate Members. Furthermore, by a vote of two-thirds majority of Members present, the General Conference may admit observers, non-governmental or semi-governmental organizations at specific sessions. (**Rule 21**)

## 2. Delegations

### a. How are Delegations composed?

Each Member State and Associate Member appoints no more than five delegates and may include up to five alternate delegates and as many other advisers and experts as the Member State in question deems to fit. The head of each Delegation can designate any delegate, alternate delegate, adviser and expert of his or her Delegation to represent that Delegation in one of the Committees, the Commission or within any other subsidiary organ. (**Rule 22**)

## 3. President and Vice-President

### a. How are the President and Vice-President elected?

The General Conference elects a President and several Vice-Presidents (max. 36) at the beginning of each Session, as may be required for the execution of the agenda of each session. This President will hold his or her office until the President of the next session has been elected. The Vice-Presidents hold office until the closing of each session at which they have been elected. (**Rules 28-31**)

### b. What role do they play in the General Conference?

The President shall declare the opening and closing of each plenary meeting of the Conference. He or she should furthermore direct the discussions, ensure observance of the rules, accord the right to speak, put questions to the vote and announce decisions. He or she shall rule on the points of order and control the proceedings and maintenance of order. He or she can propose a limitation of time for speakers, a limitation of times one speaker may speak, as well as the closure of the list of speakers or closure of a debate. The President may propose the exclusion of the item under current debate.

The President has no right to vote but forwards this right to one member of his Delegation to exercise his or her functions under the authority of the General Conference. Lastly, the President takes part as *ex-officio* character in the Executive Board.

In case of absence of the President, he or she shall appoint one of the Vice-Presidents to take-over his or her tasks. (**Rules 28-31**)

## 4. Plenary meeting

The General Assembly of the Member States, or plenary meeting, examines the recommendations submitted to it and takes all decisions. Heads of Delegation attend the plenary meetings and take part in the General Policy Debate.

## 5. Bureau of the Conference

The Bureau of the General Conference consists of the President and Vice-Presidents of the General Conference, and the Chairpersons of its subsidiary bodies. The Bureau steers the work of the session and coordinates the work of the commissions and committees. It sets the agenda of the plenary meetings, draws up the list of speakers in the general policy debate, and examines requests for the inclusion of new items in the agenda. The Chairperson of each Commission makes a regular report to the Bureau on the progress of the work. (**Rules 39 and 40**)

## 6. Commission and other Subsidiary Organs

The General Conference may set up, at each session, whatever subsidiary bodies (generally Commissions) it deems necessary for the conduct of its work. In view of the many topics to be addressed, the plenary meeting refers a large part of the agenda items to the Commissions and Committees. Each Commission may establish Special Committees to carry out their conduct of work. Any Commission consists of representatives of each Delegation. Other subsidiary organs' composition is to be determined by the organ which establishes it.

The elected bureau of each commission consists of a Chairperson, four Vice-Chairpersons and a Rapporteur, who are assisted by a Secretariat composed of staff members specially seconded to the Commission for the duration of the session. The agendas of the Commissions are organized around one of the main themes (major programs) of UNESCO's programme, but each Commission considers a great variety of topics connected with the central one. (**Rules 41-46**)

## 7. Four statutory committees

### a. What are Committees?/ What are their functions?

❚ The General Conference may establish as many Committees, Commissions and other subsidiary organs as are required for the execution of its tasks and as required by the agenda of each session. At any time, the Committees shall include the Nominations Committee, the Legal Committee, the Headquarters Committee and the Bureau. Committees elect their own Chairpersons. (**Rules 26 and 27**)

### b. What is the role of the Committees within the General Conference?

❚ The Legal Committee consists of 24 members elected at the previous session; it is responsible for considering draft amendments to the Constitution or Rules of Procedure of the General Conference, and legal matters which are submitted to it. Acting as a Credentials Committee, the Committee shall also examine and report to the Conference on the credentials of the Delegations of Member States and Associate Members, of representatives of the United Nations and the specialized agencies, and of observers sent by non-Member States and other Intergovernmental Organizations. It must review proposals for amendments of the Constitution, agenda items referred to it by the General Conferece, other legal questions submitted to it as well as reports on Conventions and Recommendations transmitted to it. (**Rules 34 and 35**)

❚ The Nominations Committee consists of the heads of all the Delegations with voting rights at the General Conference; it examines and submits to the General Conference proposals concerning the composition of commissions and committees and other bodies whose members must be elected by the General Conference. It should forward the to the General Conference the list of nominations for the post of President and Vice-Presidents of the General Conference and for the composition of the several other committees. (**Rules 32 and 33**)

❚ The Bureau steers the work of the General Conference and coordinates the work of commissions, committees, and other subsidiary organs; it is made up of the President and Vice-Presidents of the General Conference and the Chairpersons of the subsidiary organs. (**Rules 39 and 40**)

❚ The Headquarters Committee consists of 24 members elected at the previous session; it advises the Director-General on questions concerning the Organization's Headquarters. It reports thereon to the General Conference. Furthermore, the Committee shall report on the work carried out and programs to be planned for the future. (**Rules 37 and 38**)

## 8. Director-General and the Secretariat

The Director General participates, without the right to vote, in all meetings of the General Conference and meetings of the Committees and other sub-organs. The Director General can forward questions to the Committees, Commissions, and other subsidiary organs, orally or in writing. Furthermore, he or she may appoint a Secretary of the General Conference.

The Secretariat acts under the authority of the Director-General. It receives, translates and distributes the documents, reports and resolutions of the General Conference, its Committees and other sub-organs and provides interpretations of speeches, drafts and circulates the verbatim and summary records of the meetings and is responsible for the safe-keeping of documents. (**Rule 47**)

# ◗ IV. WORKING METHODS

## 1. How is the agenda being composed for sessions?

The approval of the provisional agenda is a pivotal step, and it is conducted by the Executive Board at its first ordinary session of the year in which the General Conference is scheduled. Once the provisional agenda is approved, it is promptly communicated to Member States and Associate Members shortly after the closure of the Executive Board session.

Member States or Associate Members can influence the agenda by requesting the inclusion of supplementary items. To do so, they must make their requests at least eight weeks before the opening date of the General Conference session. (**Rule 12**)

A revised provisional agenda is prepared during the second Ordinary Session of the Executive Board in the year of the General Conference.

The draft resolutions proposing amendments to the Draft Programme and Budget must be submitted in writing and reach the Director-General at least six weeks before the opening of the General Conference session. The Director-General then communicates these draft resolutions, along with any relevant notes, to Member States and Associate Members at least 20 days before the session begins. (**Rule 77**)

## 2. In which languages is the General Conference held?

The official languages of the General Conference are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish Italian, Hindi, and Portuguese. (**Rule 52.1**)

The working languages of the General Conference are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. (**Rule 48**)

In case the Conference is held in a Country where the national language is different to the official working languages, special arrangements can be made concerning the use of the national language. (**Rule 49**)

Simultaneous interpretation is provided in these six languages; all documents which require a decision by the General Conference are also published in these languages.

Information documents (C/INF.), reports (C/REP) and the Journal of the General Conference are available in English and French only.

## 3. What are the differences between public and private meetings?

Public meetings are the default mode for the Conference and its bodies, where proceedings are open to all unless specific exceptions apply. These meetings include various stakeholders and prioritize transparency, with decisions announced publicly.

Private meetings are rare and are held under exceptional circumstances. They restrict attendance to a select group and emphasize confidentiality. Decisions made in private meetings are eventually disclosed in public meetings to maintain transparency and accountability, typically when discussing sensitive or confidential matters. (**Rule 57-58**)

## 4. How is the list of Speakers produced?

Before or at the beginning of the session, check the Speakers' List on the General Conference website that the day and time when the head of your delegation is due to speak in the General Policy Debate in Plenary correspond to the request made by your delegation.

If your country is not yet on the Speakers' List, and if the head of your Delegation would like to speak in plenary, please send an email to GPD42@unesco.org as early as possible.

# ▶ V. DOCUMENTS

## 1. What are the different documents of the General Conference?

### a. Difference between Main series documents and Information Documents

#### *Main series documents*

Main series documents require a resolution by the General Conference or a decision by the Executive Board.  There are main series documents for most items on the agenda.

Examples for the General Conference are:

- ▌ C/1 Agenda of the session
- ▌ C/2 Organization of work of the session,
- ▌  C/3 Report by the Director-General on the activities of the Organization,
- ▌ C/4 Draft Medium-Term Strategy,
- ▌ C/5 Draft Programme and Budget
- ▌ C/6 Recommendations by the Executive Board on the Draft Programme and Budget.

#### *Information documents (INF)*

Information documents bring information to the attention of the General Conference and Executive Board, but do not require a Resolution/Decision. They are issued under the document symbols C/INF and EX/INF and are published in English and French only.

## b. Presentation of the different documents specific to the General Conference

### *Resolutions*

Resolutions adopted by the General Conference are published in the six working languages of the General Conference (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese) and are circulated by the Director-General to the Member States and Associate Members of the Organization within 60 days after the close of the session.

### *Proceedings*

The Verbatim Records (VRs) of plenary meetings are produced in the language of delivery, followed by a translation into English or French when the language used was one of the other four working languages (Arabic, Russian, Chinese, or Spanish).

### *REP*

REP documents are reports to the General Conference by the International and Intergovernmental Bodies and reports of international or regional Conferences organized by UNESCO. They are issued in English and French and do not require a decision.

### *NOM*

NOM documents contain information on the elections to be held by the General Conference (names of outgoing candidates, number of seats to be filled, etc.).

### *Draft resolutions (DR)*

A draft resolution (DR) is a proposal submitted by one or more Delegations with a view to having it adopted as a resolution of the General Conference. There are two categories of draft resolutions. On the one hand, there are draft resolutions aiming to modify the draft programme and budget and which are examined initially by the commissions. On the other hand, there are draft resolutions referring to any other item of the agenda, which may be examined initially by a Commission or Committee or directly by the Plenary depending on the attribution of the item concerned.

### *LEG*

LEG documents contain information on items examined by the Legal Committee, as well as the reports by the Committee.

### *COM*

COM documents contain information on items examined by the Commissions.

## 2. What are the most important documents to read?

Two documents: C/1 (Agenda) and C/2 (Organization of work) must be read so that you can decide which Commissions and meetings you will attend.

The same applies to the Journal of the General Conference, which is issued every day, starting on the first day of the session.

Basic Texts, 2022 Edition
Rules of Procedure of the General Conference, 2022 Edition

## 3. When are documents distributed?

Documents pertaining to items on the provisional agenda of each session of the General Conference shall be distributed to its Member States and Associate Members, so far as possible, at least 25 days before the opening of the session. (**Rule 11**)

## 4. Where can documents be found?

The UNESCO Digital Library "UNESDOC" houses a collection of all the documents of the General Conference. The UNESCO Digital Library provides full-text access to documents published since 1945, as well as resolutions from all the Main Bodies and documents from the plenary sessions since 1946.

The QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response Code) present on each document allows you to download the text onto smart devices.

The agendas bear annotations and hyperlinks to the documents.

More information regarding the Documents can be found in the UNESCO guide to the preparation of documents for the Governing Bodies, 2022 Edition

# VI. PRACTICAL QUESTIONS FOR DELEGATES

## 1. What are the seating arrangements for delegates?

In the plenary meeting rooms and in the Commissions, Member States have a place which is allocated in alphabetical order according to the name of each country in French, starting with a country which is chosen by drawing lots. For the 42nd session, seating will start by Lebanon.

The number of seats per Delegation varies according to the room. Places will be set aside for observers.

## 2. Credentials and Accreditations

Credentials must be sent to the Director-General one week before the opening date of the session (Rule 23 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference).

Delegations whose credentials have not been presented in advance to the Director-General are requested to hand them directly to the Secretariat of the Credentials Committee, which is responsible for checking the credentials of all the delegations.

### a. Submission of credentials (**Rule 23**)

1. The credentials of Delegates and alternate Delegates shall be issued by the head of the state, the head of the government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs. However, the Organization shall accept as valid credentials which have been signed by some other appropriate Minister when the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Member State concerned has filed with the Director-General a statement that such Minister is authorized to issue credentials.

2. The credentials of Delegates and alternate Delegates of Associate Members shall be issued by the competent authorities.

3. These credentials shall be communicated to the Director-General. The names of the head of the Delegation, Delegates and alternate Delegates shall be communicated to the Director-General one week before the date of opening of the session.

4. The names of experts and advisers attached to Delegations shall also be communicated to the Director-General.

***Note from the Secretariat:***

The credentials letter issued by the competent authority should reach the Secretariat one week before the opening of the Conference, directly to the Secretariat of the Legal Committee as soon as possible during the session.

## b. Accreditation

Security badges bearing a picture of the holder are necessary to accede and circulate in all buildings. ID-size pictures must be uploaded while doing registration online. All delegates having registered online (and provided an ID-size picture) will find their badges ready on arrival.

## 3. Is the General Conference webcasted?

Yes, all meetings of the Sessions are webcasted on the General Conference website.

## 4. How can a Member obtain more information?

### *Delegates' Information Bureau*

The Delegates' Information Bureau is responsible for the website of the General Conference; the daily e-journal; the announcements on the flat-screens and the MAG.

The e-journal of the General Conference includes the agenda of the proceedings of the day and reports on the debates and the proceedings of the previous day. It provides information on the side events such as special meetings and official visits.

The Information team coordinates the information available on the screens - located throughout Fontenoy, Miollis and Bonvin buildings - announcing the agenda and timetable of the programme commissions, results of elections etc.

The MAG is a magazine which will be available on the first day of the session of the General Conference. It offers an overview of the special meetings and the side events taking place throughout the Conference.

Delegates are welcome to contact the Delegates' Information Bureau for any update on the work of the General Conference.

## 5. What is INDICO ?

"Indico.UN" is a United Nations software created to improve event management.

Alike other UN bodies, UNESCO uses this tool to manage participation in agency events, including the General Conference and the Executive Board.

Indico is used particularly for online registration, transmission of information, production of identification badges.

## 6. Contacts

*Governing Bodies Secretariat:*
❙ Secretary of the General Conference: Mr Sachin Bhatt
❙ Deputy Secretary of the of the General Conference: Mr Luis Salamanques
❙ Documents Reception Service: Ms Sandra Gallet; Ms Nathalie Hellec: gc-secretariat@unesco.org
❙ Assistant to the Director of the Governing Bodies: Ms Sandrine Garcia
❙ General Policy Debate: Ms Amna Nass: GPD42@unesco.org;

*Information Service:*
❙ Delegates' Information Service: GC-InformationTeam@unesco.org

*For side events:*
❙ Priority Africa and External Relations Sector: pax@unesco.org

*Focal point for The high-level meeting of Ministers of Education:*
❙ Ms Lydia Ruprecht

*Credentials:*
❙ Submission of Credentials: Mr Guillermo Trasancos

*Press acreditations:*
❙ Mr Thomas Mallard

*Badges:*
❙ Badge Office: badgeurs@unesco.org

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❙ INDICO registrations: gcregistrations@unesco.org
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