



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Guide

## Preparation of documents for the Executive Board

Version 0  
July 2008

# Guide

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**Version 0  
July 2008**

- **Note: Don't hesitate to contact the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies (GBS) at any time with other queries or suggestions for additional points to be included in future updates.**
- **Contact: Karima Békri-Lisner or Patricia Johnston or Michael Millward at GBS**

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# Introduction

## Why this Guide? Who is it for?

This guide is issued for the purpose of ensuring the production of documents that are relevant to the Executive Board's constitutional duties, working methods and procedural requirements, are of high quality, are geared to effective decision-making and are timely. It is intended for those who direct these processes (ADGs, Directors of Bureaux and Offices and other Central Services, Executive Officers) and for those who draft the material.

## What is the Executive Board?

*In order to prepare the right documentation for the Board you need to realize what the Board does and what it stands for*

The Executive Board is one of the two governing organs of the Organization. Its Members (currently 58) are elected by the General Conference and act collectively on its behalf, as well as in the name of the States they represent. Its main functions are to prepare the General Conference, examine the draft future programme and budget prepared by the Secretariat and make recommendations to the General Conference, oversee the execution of the programme by the Secretariat as well as implementation of the resolutions of previous General Conference sessions, through the examination of reports from the Director-General, and exercise a number of delegated financial responsibilities. It meets twice a year with an additional brief session just after the General Conference for elections.

### TIPS

- See “The Executive Board of UNESCO” brochure (updated biennially).
- **Subsidiary Organs:** Programme & External Relations Commission (PX); Finance & Administrative Commission (FA) supported by a Group of Experts (FA/EG); Special Committee (SP); Committee on Conventions and Recommendations (CR) and NGO Committee (NGO).

The Board is not only a policy and oversight body, but also a political one comprised of representatives of Governments from around the world. Errors can create diplomatic embarrassments. The perception created of the quality – or lack of it – of the work of the Secretariat through the quality of the documents can also be decisive in securing sustained support for the Organization through extra funding.

Executive Board sessions are thus the regular channel of dialogue between Member States and the executive branch of UNESCO – the Secretariat and its Director-General. Members are elected for four years (renewed by half at each General Conference) and their representatives are generally at ministerial or ambassadorial level, high-level civil servants or eminent persons. They may be assisted by one or more “alternates”. The Board works in plenary and in commissions/committees (the “subsidiary organs”). Plenary meets for three or four days at the beginning of the session for a general policy debate and for two days at the end to adopt reports and decisions. It breaks up for four days in the middle into the two main Commissions (PX and FA). The Committees meet in the week preceding the opening of the Plenary.

## The importance of good documents

*With good documents the Secretariat can save the Board's time and facilitate good decisions, while enhancing the quality of relations between it, the Secretariat and the Director-General.*

Executive Board documents can make or break a Board session.

With good documents, the Director-General and Secretariat carry out their responsibilities by keeping the Board properly and fully informed, convince it of the worth of new proposals and even engage it in valuable dialogue on issues where consensus is as yet elusive.

Poor documents can waste the time of the Board by generating endless and unnecessary debate; they can be seen as misleading or lacking in transparency, and they can discredit the image of the Secretariat.

The Board's agenda – and therefore the pressure of its workload – is constantly on the increase, at the same time as the length of its sessions is being reduced. Hence the ever greater need to keep the length and volume of Board documentation to the “bare essentials” in order to enable its Members to have access to executive-style decision-making tools and thus to enhance their working conditions.

A good document is one that is concise and well written, carries all the necessary visas and is submitted in sufficiently good time to allow for quality translation and production.

### TIPS

- Never ever think of a Board document as a chore to be done hastily and heedlessly. This will show in the final product..
- Prepare in good time. Many documents require prior consultations which always take more time than you expect.
- Do not put the task to one side because the next Board session seems a long time away. Start as soon as you know you are responsible for a document.

Although Member States often prepare their own documentation relating to an item whose inscription on the agenda they have requested, the Secretariat does sometimes have to prepare documents by the Director-General in response to such requests from Member States (*see also Section 2*).

**This guide is not meant to be static. Over time, as experience and feedback allow, and as the Board's own working methods evolve, it will be revised and improved so that its ultimate purpose – to go for maximum quality in the Board's documents and thus in its debates and decisions – is fully achieved. Readers should not hesitate to send comments and suggestions to GBS/SCX.**



## The different categories of documents

*Board documents fit into different categories. Each has its own purpose.*

### Main series documents

Most main series documents aim at *securing a decision* on the part of the Executive Board. They are published in the six working languages of the Board (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). They have a standardized reference code (number of the session, the abbreviation EX and the serial number of the document) and a standard presentation [See *Chapter 4*].

Generally speaking, documents that are issued in the main series are those addressing the subjects of main items on the Board's agenda and therefore preparing a specific substantive debate at the session, e.g. (i) the Director-General's reporting on programme execution and follow-up, (ii) other reports and policy papers; (iii) documents prepared by the Secretariat in response to a request for the inscription of an item on the agenda by a Member State.

Also considered part of this series are: (i) the agenda of the session, (ii) reports of subsidiary bodies (commissions and committees) containing draft decisions, (iii) decisions and (iv) summary records of the plenary meetings of previous Board sessions – see *Item 815, UNESCO Administrative Manual*.

#### TIPS

- e.g. 179 EX/1: the first document in the series of documents (in fact always the draft agenda) for the 179<sup>th</sup> session). GBS/SCX will give you the number for your document. It will be the same number as the agenda item.
- The DG's reporting is contained in two documents: the EX/4 and EX/5.
- Avoid including too much background text, which usually means you're trying to remind yourself or your supervisors of an issue. Use references and hyperlinks freely instead.
- Do not use annexes to insert information that does not fit into the length constraints of the main document.

These documents must be short and to the point, their drafting aiming solely at securing the decision required of the Board, hence the requirement of a length of a *maximum of six pages and preferably even less*. A **standard page** comes to 320 words.

Remember that Board Members are busy people with other important responsibilities; you cannot expect them to read and digest long explanations for the fifty to sixty main series documents tabled at each session. The 'executive' format for such documents is thus of the essence to ensure full, cogent, but focused presentations of the issues at stake for their decision-making.

Documents that are longer than six pages will be returned to the authoring unit for editing, which may mean going through the whole clearance process again.

You may be required to produce a contribution reporting on a specific follow-up issue that will be included in the Director-General's various reporting documents (EX/4 or EX/5). In this case, you will receive specific guidelines from the requesting service that has overall responsibility for this (usually either BSP or BB). Again, for the sake of concision, such material should not normally exceed two standard pages.

Any document dealing with a matter that has financial or administrative implications must contain a specific section on this, as well as a reference to same in the Summary box on the cover page. This is to enable the Board to decide whether your document needs to be examined by the FA Commission. If you are sure these implications are within the parameters of the C/5, say so briefly, because examination by FA may not be necessary. If the implications are considerably beyond the C/5, as much detail as possible should be provided, and GBS/SCX can provide models.

#### **Our advice to you:**

- ✓ Keep your document short and to the point, avoiding historical background, maximum six pages or 1,920 words; longer documents will be returned to you for editing;
- ⊖ avoid entire or partial reproduction of other documents and earlier resolutions and decisions; do not attach annexes consisting of text available elsewhere (see item 865 of Administrative Manual);
- ✓ if you are drafting a document in response to a request from a Member State, the latter should be kept informed and consulted during the document's preparation;
- ⊖ do not take any new initiative without checking with your supervisor (ADG or Director of Central Service) or with GBS/SCX.

**NB: Annexes to main series documents are designed as accessories to the decision sought through the main document. They consist of such texts as new rules of procedure, financial regulations, standard-setting texts, etc. They can in certain cases be produced in English and French only, in which case check with GBS/SCX. Other background information for Board members does not qualify as an annex. See below “Other types of document” for suggested alternatives.**

## Draft decisions

In a separate section of the document entitled “Action expected by the Executive Board”, include a proposed text for the decision you need to secure from the Board. It is sometimes useful to draft this first, before tackling the document itself, since it will help you to focus your mind and to structure your document concisely. No draft decision should be longer than a page (see *Annex; Templates and Models*). It should begin with *preambular* paragraphs recalling root General Conference resolutions, Board decisions or other sources of the matter at hand (which you will find in the timetable for document preparation and later in the draft agenda); keep the *operative* paragraphs (those that set out specific action) concise; refrain from repeating similar paragraphs from previous decisions, and avoid proposing a further report or debate on the same subject for the immediate subsequent session.

### TIPS

- Do not include any paragraphs of self-congratulation. If the Board wants to add something expressing satisfaction, it will do so itself.

### Our advice to you:

- ✓ Draft decision less than one standard page;
- ⊗ avoid repeating similar paragraphs from previous decisions;
- ✓ describe clearly and concisely the specific action proposed;
- ⊗ avoid proposing a further report or debate on the same subject before at least one year has elapsed.

## Other types of document

### Information documents

Information documents are provided to the Executive Board either as additional background information relating to an agenda item and corresponding main series document, or by way of information for the Board on a subject deemed to be of concern and interest to its Members. They are labelled as “INF” and are generally produced in English and French only. Although they are not subject to the same strict deadlines applicable to main documents, they should nevertheless be produced well in advance, lest CLD have no time to produce them or Board Members time to read them. Their production is subject to the approval of the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies.

### “DRs”

Irrespective of the draft decisions contained in main series documents, Member States on the Board can submit “Draft decisions” addressing any item on the agenda. These DRs are either amendments to decisions appearing in working documents, or proposals for new decisions. These proposals are discussed at the same time as the item during the debate in either the plenary or a subsidiary organ. They are printed in pink and carry the code of the organ that will examine them (e.g. 177 EX/Plen/DR.1 examined in plenary, or 177 EX/PX/DR.1 examined in the Programme and External Relations Commission)

### Reference documents

Again, subject to the approval of the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies, written material that is specifically *referred to* in main series documents can be distributed in the meeting room or made available upon request. It is not advisable to propose to make such information available if it only exists in one language version. You should provide GBS/SCX with the necessary number of copies. More use of/reference to available on-line background material is also encouraged.

### Reports and publications distributed

Reports and recent publications may be distributed to Executive Board members at each session, in order to provide an overview of recent programme implementation activities. Before each session, the Office of the Director-General (ODG) requests Sectors and Services to submit a list for selection and approval.

## Production timelines for main series documents

The Secretariat of the Governing Bodies begins preparations for the ensuing session of the Board immediately after the previous one has ended. It already has a fairly good initial idea of the items to be included on the agenda, since these are very often the result of previous Board decisions or resolutions of the General Conference, or have been the subject of instructions from the Director-General.

The applicable **statutory deadlines** stem from Rules 5 and 22 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board: they very clearly fix a deadline of **at least 30 days** before the opening of the session for the distribution of main series documents relating to the items on the provisional agenda. **Failure to meet these deadlines causes severe difficulties. The Director-General can only submit a main series document late with the express authorization of the Chairperson of the Executive Board.**

Documents are sent out to Members (and also to all Member States of the Organization) in a number of **dispatches** spread out over a period of about 1½ - 2 months, depending on how early the first dispatch can go. These documents are also distributed internally (hardcopy) to all members of the Directorate and are available to all staff electronically on the Executive Board website, usually some 24 hours after their official date of publication (in all six languages).

The first “salmon memo” (thus called from the colour of the paper used), distributed within the Secretariat barely two weeks after the close of a given session, conveys the first version of the preliminary draft agenda of the subsequent session. This memo asks all managers to indicate : a) whether the item should be maintained or deleted; b)

### TIPS

- The deadline of 30 days is for final despatch of the document to the Board members. The internal deadline is **at least one month earlier**, to allow for the time for translation, formatting, printing and dispatch. **No document can be officially issued until it is available in all six working languages.**

whether the title is correct; c) whether any item is missing; d) the proposed dates for delivery of the document; e) the name of the official in charge, and f) the estimated length and language version of the document, as well as expected annexes or accompanying information papers. [**See Flowchart attached in Annex.**]

Shortly afterwards, the first **Document Focal Points meeting** is convened, normally chaired by the Deputy Director-General. This important meeting is when the designated focal point, along with the respective Executive Officer (EO), can provide valuable early indications as to any constraints and/or uncertainties and political considerations that could affect the finalization of the document. Guidance can also be given by the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies on ways to address these issues, on the probability of requiring a visa from the Office of Legal Affairs (LA), along with final indications on the deadline for the submission of the document. On the basis of this deadline, GBS/SCX, in coordination with ADM/CLD, set a schedule and a date by which the document **has to be submitted to GBS/SCX bearing all the necessary clearances and visas**, as well as the text to be included in the annotated agenda. Further meetings of the Document Focal Points are convened regularly over the months leading up to the session. Once authors you have submitted their document and it has been published, they no longer need to attend.

Failure to meet the deadline agreed with GBS may set off a chain of unfortunate and embarrassing results, simply because ADM/CLD, despite all its best efforts, might not have sufficient time to produce quality translations, and the debate during the session could suffer because of this. It may also mean that the document will not

meet the statutory deadline, which may result in the withdrawal of the item from the agenda. If your document is a contribution to the Director-General's different reports (EX/4 or EX/5), and if it misses the deadline, it will be listed in the table of contents but will not appear in the main body of the report (the relevant section simply indicating "late contribution: see addendum"). We would all prefer to avoid this, for obvious reasons.

### **Clearance procedures**

A document for the Executive Board requires the visa of your Head of Section and Director (where appropriate) as well as that of the ADG of your Sector (or Director of Central Service). The ADGs and Central Service Directors are answerable to the

#### **TIPS**

- Allow time for LA to consider your file, and for possible changes it requests.
- Beware of requesting a long mission or leave period during this time. Your supervisor may be required to turn you down.
- The official responsible for a document should immediately inform GBS/SCX and his/her supervisor of any circumstances that might delay the drafting or approval of a document.

Director-General for the production of documents, their quality, relevance, conciseness and timeliness.

Visas from all other concerned sectors and services have to be foreseen within the anticipated timelines (*including* LA where relevant) before submitting to GBS/SCX which then handles any necessary approvals from the Director-General or Deputy Director-General. GBS/SCX also liaises with CLD for all matters to do with production.

Be available at all times during drafting and production to respond to queries and follow up on specific needs. Once you have finished your document, follow its progress around the clearance circuit proactively, expediting where necessary the completion of its course.

## Presentation and drafting

*Without being too restrictive, it is nevertheless good to respect a minimum “house style”.*

If you think you know how to prepare and present a document, think again and swallow your pride. Presentation can win or lose the case you want to make in your document. Use all the acquired wisdom built up over time to your own advantage; ask around; and use the models and templates we provide, as well as the on-line Style Manual produced by CLD . Many authors suffer from the “blank page syndrome”: go back to past documents and look at templates and other examples, but don’t put it to one side for want of inspiration. That is a recipe for disaster. You are also encouraged to make a gesture in favour of language diversity by not systematically submitting your document in English.

### Cover page

On the cover page you should indicate the code number, provisional agenda number and title of your document, all of which are indicated in the timetable for the preparation of documents and then later in the agenda itself. Titles should not be changed without checking with GBS. The summary on the cover page should indicate why the item is on the Board’s agenda (reference to previous decisions, or resolutions of the General Conference, or a decision by the Director-General) and explain very briefly the contents as well as any administrative or financial implications. Under “Action by the Executive Board” you should indicate the type of decision required. It is not advisable to suggest that the Board only “take note” since this would imply that there is no good reason why the matter has been placed on the agenda as a separate item. The document itself should have numbered paragraphs, for easy reference during discussions. Avoid bullet points, titles in bold or underline, and particularly the use of too many different typefaces and sizes. Keep sentences short and clear; it will be easier on the translators and the non-native readers.

#### TIPS

- The template for a Board document can be obtained from CLD upon request or found on CLD’s website. Do not change this template.



## Structure and presentation

Have no more than a paragraph or two of introduction, followed by several substantive paragraphs on the real issues on which the Board will be required to debate and decide. Include information on the financial and administrative impact and then finish with a section called “Action expected of the Executive Board”. This is where you include a proposed draft decision (see *Section 2*).

## Drafting and ‘house style’

While “house style” is not the be-all and end-all of the task of writing a document, there are a number of conventions it is as well not to ignore. Some examples: do not refer to the internal organization of the Secretariat; reports on conferences and activities should refer to output and substance and not process; always check for correct titles; be specific where you can about places, dates; avoid acronyms unless spelt out the first time; list Member States in alphabetical order (check official ERC lists for names). When quoting from documents or speeches, give references.

### TIPS

- If you really feel unsure of the quality of your English or French, the Executive Office of your Sector has a responsibility for quality. The main thing is to get the substance right. Others can take care of style. Then there will be less delay.

# Annex

**Document Flow Chart**

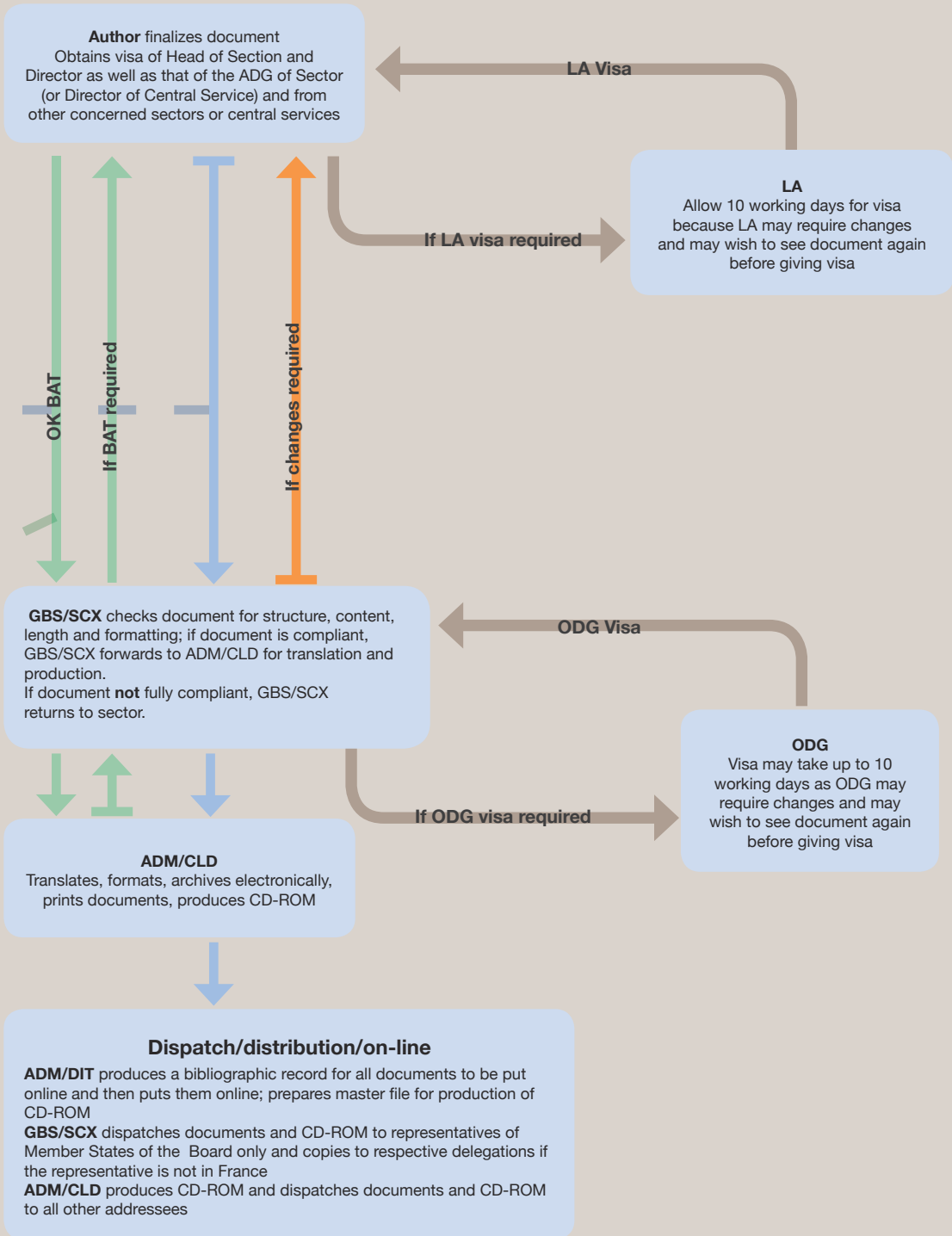
**Templates and models**

**Timelines for Executive Board documents**

# Document Flow Chart

Submitting sector/  
service hand carries  
asap hard copy of visaed  
document to GBS/SCX on  
or before agreed deadline  
and sends electronic  
version at same time.

**BAT** (= 'bon à tirer', i.e.=  
green light for printing  
and production after  
translation (workflow  
illustrated on chart in  
blue).  
BAT requests are  
addressed to GBS/SCX,  
then forwarded to ADM/  
CLD; when document  
finalized, ADM/CLD  
sends to **GBS/SCX for  
submission to author  
for approval**



# “Example” Board Document

**Number of item  
on the agenda  
in bold**

**As of 180th session,  
this should read :**  
«Action expected of  
the Executive Board:  
**Decision in paragraph**  
... (add appropriate  
paragraph number)»

**Do not forget a  
reference to financial  
and administrative  
implications, if there  
are any**



# Executive Board

Hundred and seventy-ninth session

179 EX/51

Reference code of the document

Number of the session

PARIS, 28 March 2008  
Original: English

Date of publication  
(this will be filled in by GBS)

Could be both working languages

Item 51 of the provisional agenda

## PROGRESS REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE APPLICATION OF THE GLOBAL ACTION PLAN (GAP) TO ACHIEVE THE EFA GOALS BY 2015

### SUMMARY

In accordance with 176 EX/Decision 9, the Director-General submits to the Executive Board an initial report on the application of the Global Action Plan, including at the country level.

Do not repeat here the same text as in the opening "background" paragraphs below

Decision proposed: paragraph 15.

1. The purpose of the EFA Global Action Plan (GAP) is to better coordinate the multilateral support provided to countries for achieving the six Dakar goals, in close alignment with national priorities. It commits the five EFA convening partners (UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank) to spearheading this coordinated support in line with their respective comparative advantages and within the framework of existing means and mechanisms for coordinating development assistance (see 176 EX/9 Annex, para. 6).

2. The GAP has been welcomed internationally and adopted as a reference point for joint action and United Nations inter-agency coordination at the country level. On 12 July 2006, the Executive Heads of UNDG agreed "to work on the GAP as a platform for collaboration and enhanced action in support of national efforts to achieve the EFA goals". The GAP was further welcomed as a "framework for coordinated and complementary action by multilateral aid agencies in support of country-level implementation" by G-8 leaders in St Petersburg, on 16 July 2006. An improved version of the GAP was also subsequently welcomed by the High-Level Group on EFA at its sixth meeting in Cairo, Egypt, 14-16 November 2006, and by UNESCO's Executive Board at its 176th session in April 2007. The 2007 UNDG Guidelines for CCA/UNDAF specifically requested United Nations Country Teams to review and draw as appropriate on existing joint or collaborative United Nations frameworks and strategic partnerships, including the GAP, which can both support country-level action and increase coherence in the CCA/UNDAF process. In support of this, the Chairman of UNDG, and UNDP Administrator, Kemal Derviş, sent the Cairo version of the GAP to all Resident Coordinators with the encouragement to initiate a discussion on how best to implement the Plan at country level.

3. The GAP identifies UNESCO's broad areas of support to EFA as "coordinating, convening, monitoring, developing capacity and policy input". UNESCO has been active in all these areas, in the context of the evolving framework for coordinating development assistance at global, regional

**Don't forget that as of 180th session it is compulsory to include a section entitled "Financial and administrative implications"**

**As of 180th session, this section to be named: «Action expected of the Executive Board»**

**Begin with preambular paragraph; keep the operative paragraphs concise;  
avoid the inclusion of paragraph of self-congratulation;  
avoid re-submission of item before at least one year**

a common United Nations education sector strategy that encompasses EFA. Our hope is that as we gain greater experience and credibility, we will be able to use UNESS more systematically to formulate common United Nations education strategies that include EFA in more countries and to have them accepted by governments and UNCT partners as integral elements of future One Plans/Programmes or the new generation of UNDAFs. UNESCO will give priority to preparing a UNESS for all “delivering as one” pilot countries and for the 2008 and 2009 UNDAF roll-out countries, as well as for countries requesting the United Nations system to operate along the principles of “delivering as one” (for example Malawi and Papua New Guinea).

13. The EFA-FTI has evolved sufficiently rapidly that it has served to apply the principles of the GAP at country level. UNESCO is playing an increasingly active role in local EFA-FTI donor groups, and indeed leads such groups in some countries, including Cambodia and Cameroon. As with United Nations Country Teams, our hope is that UNESCO will play more of a leading role in the EFA-FTI process in more countries.


14. United Nations reform pilot countries and UNDAF roll-out countries are not necessarily, however, those that are the most critical if EFA is to be achieved by 2015. Similarly not all such critical countries will necessarily be included in the Fast Track Initiative. As the next stage of applying the GAP at country level, UNESCO intends to examine which countries are the most important from the point of view of achieving the EFA goals and then to see what existing mechanism can best be proposed to Member States for coordinating multilateral assistance, including UNESCO’s own support.



#### Proposed draft decision

15. In the light of the foregoing, the Executive Board may wish to adopt the following decision:

The Executive Board,

- 
1. Recalling 176 EX/Decision 9,
  2. Having examined document 179 EX/51,
  3. Reaffirming the importance of accelerating progress towards the six Education for All (EFA) goals and other related development goals,
  4. Recalling UNESCO’s role as the international coordinating agency for EFA and the Global Action Plan (GAP) as a framework for multilateral coordination within the context of existing development assistance coordination mechanisms,
  5. Welcomes the progress made in applying the principles of the GAP at country level through the EFA-Fast Track Initiative;
  6. Encourages the full application of the GAP and its supportive tool UNESS by United Nations Country Teams in the “delivering as one” pilot countries, the 2008 and 2009 UNDAF roll-out countries and countries requesting the United Nations system to provide assistance along the lines of the “delivering as one” principles;
  7. Requests the Director-General to take further steps to promote the harmonization and alignment of multilateral assistance for EFA through existing mechanisms, especially in those countries most critical for achieving EFA; and to include a report on these steps in the analytical and results-based report on progress with respect to education for all and UNESCO’s contribution thereto to be submitted to the 180th session of the Executive Board and to the General Conference at its 35th session.



# Timelines for Executive Board documents

3.5 months before

S E S

Start

14-8 weeks before start of session

10-5 weeks before start of session

30 days before start of session

Authors

GBS

ADM/CLD

ADM/DIT

GBS  
ADM/CLD

Finalize document, obtain visa of Head of Section or Director as well as that of the ADG of your sector (or Director of Central Service). If LA visa required, this must be obtained before submission to GBS. Allow ca. 10 working days for LA visa, in case changes are required

Checks documents received for quality, completeness (e.g. indication of financial implications), length; forwards documents requiring DG or DDG visa to ODG. Sends documents to ADM/CLD

Translates, formats, prints documents

Prepares master files for CD-ROM, puts documents on-line when all language versions are available

GBS distributes documents and CD-ROM to Executive Board members, ADM/CLD to all other addressees

**Statutory dispatch date is 30 days before start of session**

**Depending on deadline agreed with GBS, submit to GBS 12-8 weeks before start of session**

Session

S I O N

2.5 months after

End

2 weeks after session

6 weeks after session

10 weeks after session

GBS/Managers

GBS

GBS/Authors

Preliminary draft agenda (first "salmon memo") distributed within Secretariat. Managers required to indicate whether item should be maintained or deleted, whether title is correct, whether any item is missing, proposed dates for delivery, name of official in charge, estimated length and language version of the document

First document focal points meeting, to be attended by designated focal points, along with respective Executive Officers. Early indication as to any constraints, political considerations that could affect finalization of document. Guidance by GBS on how to address these issues, whether LA visa might be required

Draft provisional agenda (internal Secretariat document) approved by DG sent to ADGs, Directors of Central Services



SESSIONS