

EU reply

CL 2023/82/OCS-EXEC

Request for Comments on the Future of Codex - Part 3 - Model for Future Codex Work

Mixed Competence Member States Vote

The European Union and its Member States (EUMS) are pleased to provide the following comments to the questions raised in the Circular Letter.

As stated in the document provided, the EUMS agree that the need to address the nature of the meetings, as resources are limited and the responsibility towards sustainability and environment are becoming more and more important.

a) With regard to the four meeting formats presented in Table 1, are there any additional strengths or weaknesses of the meeting formats that should be highlighted.

Please see additional elements and changes suggested in track changes in Table 1 below.

b) From your perspective as a Member country or Observer is there a particular meeting format that is most effective in terms of time, cost and efficiency. Please provide the rationale for your answer noting that more than one option may be selected. Please also indicate the resource implications for you with regards with the four meeting formats, i.e. in-person only, virtual only, in-person with webcast, in-person with possibility of virtual interventions.

While “In-Person” meetings have proven to be very effective, in particular when consensus has been difficult to achieve the EUMS consider that two meeting formats deserve further attention, namely:

- the format “In-person with webcast”: for a rationale, please see the pros listed in table 1, like face-to-face interaction, informal interaction, possibility of ad hoc working groups, same time zone; the EUMS also value the increased transparency compared to the in-person only meeting format;
- the format “In-person with the possibility of virtual intervention”, especially for CAC, as this is the most inclusive, offering access to all members, enabling last-minute participation and saving high costs for long journeys.

In terms of efficiency “Virtual only” meetings have their merits and should remain an option. They may be suitable especially when electronic workings groups have paved the way to a wide consensus before a meeting. Although virtual only meetings may need more days to complete their agenda due to differences in time zones, they offer benefits such as

a decreased carbon footprint and reduced/non-existing travel requirements (regarding expenses and safety) that should also be taken into account.

c) Are the core values of Codex, transparency, inclusiveness, collaboration, and consensus-building guaranteed by the four meeting formats described. Do you have any concerns that would need to be addressed with regard to using a particular format for a Codex meeting?

Virtual meetings are transparent formats and comply in many ways with the core values of Codex. They also allow for additional delegates / observers to follow a meeting without great expenses instead of relying on the report only. However, for a meeting of CAC and considering the advance in technology, only the format “In-person with the possibility of virtual intervention” seems to fully address all core values of Codex. The other meeting formats may suffice depending on the type and length of a meeting. For example, virtual attendance may be a good option for a one-day event but may not constitute a suitable option with respect to collaboration and consensus-building when it comes to longer meetings foreseeing work on Codex texts.

d) Are there other meeting formats that should be considered?

The EUMS are of the opinion that Committees working by correspondence (CWBC) constitute another fully-fledged meeting format that should be considered in the Blueprint. Furthermore, the EUMS are of the opinion that the approach followed to draft the criteria and procedural guidelines for CWBC could be applied to the meeting formats currently considered in the Blueprint to ensure procedural consistency and high-level guidance.

e) How can we continue to improve inter-session working mechanisms to ensure they provide a good basis for the work of Codex committee meetings?

Working groups should be strengthened as they are essential to ensure successful outcomes of meetings. Delegations should be strongly encouraged to take part in working groups. Their inter-session work may be further facilitated by enabling virtual exchange in addition to several rounds of written comments. However, for the organization/setting-up of such an exchange, WG chairs may require some support, most likely from the Codex secretariat or, eventually, from the host country secretariat. A handbook for eWGs would be of great value in this regard.

As indicated below, changes to the Codex Online Commenting System should be considered with the aim to simplify access to it and to allow members to view each other's comments in OCS during the commenting period, to further promote and support transparency and consensus-building.

f) Are there other key issues that need to be considered in developing the model for Codex work that will ensure its efficiency and effectiveness in the coming years?

Seeking feedback from Members and Observers on a regular basis will likely be useful in identifying emerging issues and for ensuring that the work of Codex remains efficient and effective.

Concerning OCS, the EUMS support to make OCS more user-friendly. Furthermore, it would be useful to be able to view the replies of the other Members to the CLs but only after the end of the consultation period.

Table 1: Overview of strengths and weaknesses of different meeting formats

Format	Strengths	Weaknesses
In-person only	<p>Face to face interaction greatly facilitates collaboration, informal interactions, network development, relationship building, ad hoc meetings and consensus building</p> <p>Faster work pace – more can be achieved</p> <p>All meeting participants in the same time zone so can work full days</p> <p>Strong dedication of the participants to the meeting</p>	<p>Accessibility is resource dependent, limited to those who have the resources to travel and are able to secure necessary travel documentation in a timely manner</p> <p>Limited transparency for those not present (meeting report)</p> <p>Carbon footprint higher than virtual meetings</p> <p>Participation may be affected by travel conditions (delays, strikes, weather etc.)</p> <p>Increased risk of illnesses for participants depending on the location</p> <p>Time consuming in case of long journey to venue</p>
Virtual only	<p>Increased inclusivity as accessible to more members and observers</p> <p>Increased transparency as more accessible to all members</p> <p>Can proceed even when outside factors prevent physical meetings</p> <p>Carbon footprint lower than in-person meeting</p> <p>Cost effectiveness / less financially demanding for delegates</p> <p>Time otherwise used to travel can be used for work</p> <p>Ease of collaboration with other national experts</p>	<p>Time zone challenges</p> <p>Limited work time per day</p> <p>Very limited opportunity for informal interaction. Informal interaction likely to be less transparent/inclusive than during in-person meetings</p> <p>May take longer to make progress and may need to be spread over more days</p> <p>Little flexibility / increased difficulties for the organization of in session working groups</p> <p>Challenges for delegates to join and participate virtually while also fulfilling expectations to undertake their daily work role/tasks</p> <p>Delegates attending online may have more difficulties to make interventions, especially if the digital connection is not optimal</p>
In-person with webcast	<p>As for in-person with some increase in transparency and some increase in inclusivity (It allows a delegation to attend partially in person and partially through webcast, even if the delegates attending through webcast cannot take the floor)</p> <p>Increased transparency as all members/observers can access discussions</p>	<p>Limited inclusivity as in-person participation is still limited to those who have the resources to travel</p> <p>Time zone issues can make it challenging to follow live online</p> <p>Still some transparency limitations as cannot follow informal discussions</p> <p>No record in the list of participants for those who follow webcast</p> <p>Carbon footprint higher than virtual</p>

		<p>meetings</p> <p>Increased costs and more complex organization for host county.</p> <p>The registration and the counting of the attendance of a delegation through webcast should be clarified, as they can attend the meeting even without the right of intervening</p>
<p>In-person with possibility of virtual interventions</p>	<p>Increased inclusivity as more accessible to all members</p> <p>Increased transparency as more accessible to all members. Facilitates progress, networking and consensus building</p> <p>Delegates can still participate even if last minute issues (flight cancellations, weather etc.) prevent their travel.</p> <p>Gives participants the choice of how to attend.</p>	<p>Integration of participation of both in person and virtual participants is challenging.</p> <p>Challenging to match quality of online experience with the in-person experience (e.g. time zone issues).</p> <p>No opportunity for virtual participants to take part in informal discussions.</p> <p>Delegations who would wish to participate physically might not receive funding for travel if the meeting modality offers hybrid participation.</p> <p>Carbon footprint higher than virtual meetings.</p> <p>Highly increased costs and much more complex organization for host country.</p>