

# Conferencing today & tomorrow – 2 Project Report

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GENEVA



NATIONS UNIES  
GENÈVE

**CTT2.** Conferencing  
today & tomorrow  
UN Geneva

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# Executive Summary

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The purpose of the Conferencing Today and Tomorrow – 2 project was to undertake a lessons learned exercise to get views from meeting organizers, meeting participants and permanent missions about what had worked well with conferencing services provided by UNOG during COVID, and what had worked less well, as well as trying to understand their views on how conferencing was likely to develop in the future.

A wide range of different stakeholders provided their feedback, via participation in an online survey, short in-person interviews, in-depth focus group discussions, and/or two events run in conjunction with UNOG’s Knowledge & Learning Commons team at the Library & Archives.

There was almost unanimous agreement on the importance of in-person meetings. Nearly all respondents underlined their indispensable nature, particularly when it came to negotiations or discussions on sensitive issues.

Nevertheless, there was a clear view that the COVID experience of hybrid meetings and remote participation has probably altered how meetings will be scheduled and organized in the longer term. Remote participation was seen as bringing clear benefits (namely allowing wider and higher-level participation, greater inclusivity for civil society, and a reduced environmental footprint).

The challenge for the future is in ensuring that the appropriate ‘smart mix’ is adopted for the type of event that is being organized. Some meetings will require in-person only participation, others will continue to benefit from allowing remote participation. To ensure conferences with mixed participation are successful, more planning on how they are structured and produced will be required.

A number of different challenges arise from the above, the six focus areas that the report highlights are the meeting infrastructure, better integration of technical services, improved communication and a single point of entry, running remote meetings, document access and mandates and budget.

Given the complexity of addressing these issues, a series of different workshops and events are planned to explore them in more depth throughout 2022.

# I. Introduction

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The first phase of the Conferencing Today and Tomorrow project was a client needs analysis to identify how major external trends (economic, technological, social, environmental etc.) as well as internal trends within the UN led to changes in the conferencing support needs of clients. The aim of the project was to ascertain satisfaction with services and to understand future conferencing needs. The project ran from November 2018 to March 2019 and resulted in several projects.

Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the conferencing environment. It was therefore deemed timely to conduct a follow-up project, Conferencing today & tomorrow – 2 (CTT-2), to understand the changing needs and realities of clients related to COVID-19, and to help prepare conference provision at UNOG for a prolonged with-COVID reality and a potential post-COVID world.

## II. Objective and goals

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### THE CTT-2 OBJECTIVE WAS DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

To support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while leveraging international Geneva's strengths, CTT-2 will gather lessons learned to understand stakeholders' experiences of the business continuity measures in place and identify what elements they may wish to keep and how they envision conferencing in the post-COVID environment with the aim of ensuring UNOG is suitably equipped to position itself as a UN hub for modern conferencing, while respecting the framework established by the General Assembly.

### THE PROJECT HAS THREE PRIMARY GOALS:

- Identify, in consultation with stakeholders, emerging needs and expectations for conferences in a reality with, and post-COVID-19, as well as building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 period, including identifying related synergies and efficiencies.
- Develop innovative ideas for improving conferencing, including looking at the infrastructure, involving all service providers across UNOG as well as working with counterparts in NY, without compromising quality or affecting the provision of services.
- Ensure UNOG's status as a UN hub for modern conferencing within the UN's global approach to conferencing, reflecting the specificities of the international Geneva and considering the experiences of other UN entities in Geneva.

This project report primarily deals with the first goal and will outline some ideas to pursue further over the coming months to help achieve the latter two. It covers research carried out between mid-September and the end of December 2021.

# III. Methodology

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## THE PROJECT PURSUED FIVE MAIN TRACKS, NAMELY:

- > A desk review – impact of COVID-19 on conferencing
- > An online survey
- > Events at the Knowledge & Learning Commons
- > The International Geneva Task Force (IGTF)
- > Individual interviews and focus group discussions

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## 1. DESK REVIEW – IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CONFERENCING

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The desk review involved the study of different documents to understand the context and framework of conference operations at Geneva, including the following:

- > The SG's report: Pattern of Conferences
- > The ACABQ – First Report on the proposed budget for 2022
- > The Committee on Conferences (7-13 September 2021)
- > Status of conference services in duty stations during COVID-19 pandemic (bi-monthly reports)
- > Summary of the regional briefings of the Director-General, UNOG (February 2022)
- > The CTT-1 report

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## 2. ONLINE SURVEY

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The online survey was offered in English and French and targeted UN client secretariats and conference participants (NGOs as well as Member States). It was divided into Conference Organizer and Conference Participants sections as well as having a common part for both. It included multiple choice and open-ended

questions and aimed to determine what both Organizers and Participants think about UNOG conference services, as well as to reflect upon where UNOG can improve and where UNOG has done well. The survey also aimed to understand what service needs may arise in the future, so that UNOG may prepare accordingly. It was sent to all client secretariats and entities to which UNOG provides services, as well as to Member States and NGOs and was advertised widely online and at the Palais. A total of 135 responses were received, of which 72 were international organization representatives, 13 UN Member States, 16 NGOs and 34 others. Of the 135 respondents, 38 indicated that they had not participated in or organized a conference at or from the Palais des Nations since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown. Of the 97 remaining responses of interest for the purpose of this study, 58 were from conference organizers and 39 from conference participants.

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### 3. EVENTS AT THE KNOWLEDGE & LEARNING COMMONS

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Two events were hosted on the theme of 'Shaping the Conferences of Tomorrow' to discuss how conferencing had changed since the onset of COVID-19, looking at the examples of major conferences and engaging participants in an interactive reflection. The first event (21 October) was centred around UNCTAD15 and had three keynote speakers, the Coordinator of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 15 (UNCTAD), the Head of Global Affairs at the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, and the Director of the Division of Conference Management, UNOG.

The second event on COP26 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (24 November 2021), had speakers from the UK government (the Deputy Director Events for COP26 and Director of Protocol, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and Vice-Marshal

of the Diplomatic Corps), UNFCCC (Director, Conference Affairs Services) as well as UNOG (Chief, Languages Service, DCM). The total number of participants over both events was 114. Both events were interactive with break-out sessions focussed on several different topics to help solicit views on the future of conferences.

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### 4. INTERNATIONAL GENEVA TASK FORCE (IGTF)

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The International Geneva Task Force was created at the behest of UNOG Director-General Valovaya and is a grouping of conference organizers from the international organizations based in Geneva to informally discuss and learn from our collective experience of managing conferencing during the COVID pandemic. The group met twice over the last two months. One event was organized by the Director, Division of Conference Management, on 18 October 2021 and was attended by 11 other organizations. The second event on 17 November 2021 was organized in conjunction with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland and was attended by 14 other entities.

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### 5. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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The individual interviews and focus group discussions took place in two distinct ways:

1. On-the-spot interviews were conducted in a rapid, ad-hoc innovative manner to gauge the conferencing experience. The interviews were conducted by 7 volunteers in strategic areas within the Palais des Nations covering 7 meetings during morning hours and lunch breaks. Interviewers operated in pairs and offered conversations in English or French (de facto only one interview was held in French). In general, the team of volunteers found that given the constraints of COVID (masks, social distancing, fewer people on site etc.), it was not always easy to engage with potential interlocutors. Nevertheless, 26 on-the-spot

interviews were conducted generating useful feedback. Of the interviewees, 16 were meeting participants and 4 were organizers (2 unknown). In terms of their affiliation, 8 represented Member States, 6 were from OHCHR, 2 from NGOs, 1 was an expert, and 3 others provided no information.

2. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with clients, e. g. substantive secretariats, UN Agencies, Permanent Missions and NGOs, as well as with service providers, mostly from within UNOG, e. g. the Division of Conference Management and other relevant entities (a detailed overview of interview participants can be found in the annex). The questions aimed to facilitate understanding of how clients and service providers had experienced conference organization during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting on aspects that had worked well, that could have worked better, and on how the future of conferencing could be envisioned. Overall, 127 individuals took part in 30 interviews and focus group discussions.

Through the above work tracks, feedback was successfully gathered from a wide range of conference organizers, delegates and other conference participants, as well as service providers.

Feedback obtained from clients and service providers through the different tracks is clustered and summarized in the following chapter IV as Findings. The findings are then translated into recommendations in chapter V. Focus Areas and Proposals. In the following chapter VI The Way Forward, several activities are suggested to structure the process of translating recommendations into real actions.

# IV. Findings

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## HOW CONFERENCING CHANGED AT THE PALAIS DES NATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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When lockdown happened in March 2020, the UN Secretariat identified remote participation in multilateral, multilingual meetings as a business continuity need. UNOG established a cross-functional group on remote conferencing, including colleagues from the Division of Conference Management, the Division of Administration for audiovisual services and IT, and the UN Information Service (UNIS) for webcasting. Conference rooms have been upgraded. At present, 11 conference rooms<sup>1</sup> can support multilingual remote participation, this may be increased to 12 or even 15 by the end of 2022. While the UN in Geneva supported 12,371 meetings in 2019 (i. e. pre-COVID-19), it serviced 4,274 in 2020 and 5,298 in 2021. This included meetings serviced outside of Geneva (2,486 in 2019, 22 in 2020 and 1,234 in 2021).

Three platforms for Remote Simultaneous Interpretation (RSI) were experimented with. Initially, Interprefy was the primary platform used in Geneva. Over time and after expressed preference from human rights bodies, Zoom began to be used. After the Office of Information and Communication Technology

(OICT) issued a blanket approval for the use of Zoom and to minimize the impact of changing platforms, UNOG decided to make Zoom its primary platform. Interpretation is done from the booths at the Palais des Nations to ensure the best possible audio quality and connectivity. Some respondents suggested pursuing the idea of an interpretation hub or mobile booths where several interpreters could be clustered in observance of social distancing regulation outside conference rooms.

Interpreters have reported health consequences from poor audio from remote participants, exacerbated by low connectivity and sub-optimal equipment. Given the increased stress associated with remote participation, meetings with more than 30 minutes of remote interventions are limited to 2 hours (N.B. In-person meetings are three hours.), unless a reinforced team of interpreters is used. It should be noted that the decision regarding shorter meeting lengths is a Secretariat-wide position and is not specific to UNOG.

Member States and conference secretariats demonstrated a firm commitment to Geneva as a conference hub with a central function to support multilateralism in bringing together actors to negotiate and reach consensus.

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1 They include: XXI, XXIII, XXIV, XXVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX,T1,T2,T3.

## OVERALL CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

According to the online survey, conference organizers' overall experience of meetings serviced by UNOG (or held at the Palais des Nations) during the COVID-19 pandemic, was slightly above average (3.24 with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor).

3. How would you rate the overall experience (with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor) as an organiser of meetings serviced by UNOG (or held at the Palais des Nations) during the COVID-19 pandemic?

58

Responses



3.24 Average Rating

Conference participants' overall experience of meetings serviced by UNOG (or held at the Palais des Nations) during the COVID-19 pandemic, was also slightly above average with the survey giving an average rating of 3.67 (with 5 stars being excellent and 1 being poor), a marginally more positive rating than that given by conference organizers.

15. How would you rate the overall experience (with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor) as a participant in meetings serviced by UNOG (or organised at the Palais des Nations) during the COVID-19 pandemic?

39

Responses



3.67 Average Rating

## MEETING FORMATS

The clearest message, received both through the survey and the in-depth interviews, was the near unanimous agreement of the importance of **in-person meetings**. Of the 97 respondents to the online survey, this question received a rating of 4.25 (with 5 being extremely important and one not at all).

26. With 5 being very, and one at all, how important do you consider in-person meetings to be?

97

Responses



3.24 Average Rating

Member States and substantive secretariats stressed that particularly for negotiations or discussions on sensitive issues, there really was no substitute for face-to-face meetings. Online meetings, regardless of how they were structured or organized, did not allow for a fully free and open exchange. This was partly because participants were worried about being recorded and quoted and hence were not able to offer creative ideas, or deviate from an official line, and partly because without the human connection of an in-person meeting, it was more difficult to build trust and hold informal meetings on the side of the conference, often essential to reaching compromise, especially in sensitive meetings. Therefore, respondents emphasized that in-person conferences would remain crucial to achieve substantive progress on issues in the future.

However, despite this emphasis and broad consensus on the importance of in-person meetings, a majority of respondents indicated that they believed that the possibility of **remote participation** in meetings was something that should continue to be offered in the future.

There were four main reasons as to why remote participation was seen as something that should continue even when it was no longer strictly needed for business continuity purposes:

1. It allowed **wider participation** than in-person meetings, a benefit especially for smaller Member States, or those located far from Geneva who may otherwise not be able to participate.
2. It allowed **higher level**, or more expert level attendance, than in-person only meetings. A minister or a senior official was more easily able to attend a meeting with remote participation (or contribute a video message) as they did not have to factor in the travel time and cost.
3. Remote participation also provided for greater inclusivity for **civil society**, especially for NGO representatives not based in Geneva and without the resources to travel to an in-person event or with difficulty obtaining visas (N.B. Where new remote formats mean confining civil society to online observation where before they could directly interact with delegates in the room, this was seen as problematic).
4. It reduced the **environmental footprint** of conferences by allowing for attendance without the carbon cost of having to fly to an event.

Overall, COVID-19 was seen as an accelerator of a trend to online participation which had been present prior to the pandemic. With the investment in equipment already made, an increased availability of improved and affordable technology and based on the enhanced IT literacy of conference organizers and participations, online participation had become a habit and was “here to stay”, many said.

Despite the risk of losing out because of unreliable network connections, remote participation was popular as it allowed participation from

a convenient place of choice. Respondents acknowledged that online formats had increased the numbers of participants at many events, but that increased participation, in combination with a growing number of meetings, came at the price of shallower interaction. In general, it was found that online meetings functioned better for those who could rely on established relationships. In contrast, integrating into the discussions was harder for newcomers within the Geneva international community.

Online meetings will have to find ways to accommodate the need for more human interaction and networking, for example using breakout rooms or pre-meetings so participants could familiarize with each other or alternating with occasions to meet personally to build trust-based relationships.

Therefore, certain formats may be suitable for specific purposes more than others. In a “**smart mix**” of formats, online meetings may be chosen for meetings of experts who are used to working together or larger information sessions with little interaction, while in-person formats with more dedicated time for interaction may be the preferred choice for sensitive negotiations. Overall, meeting formats may be more diversified in future and traditional meeting agendas be reconstructed, with some side events being front-loaded and held online in the run-up to an event, video messages being available online for more flexible consumption, and in-person elements being used in a more target manner to reach agreement over contentious issues.

This new more multifaceted landscape of meeting formats required skillful conference design and planning by organizers, depending on the goals and purpose of meetings. Some respondents have stated that they would appreciate more guidance and advice from conference professionals to ensure a professional outward appearance of the UN conferences they have to organize.

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## UNCTAD15

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Organizing UNCTAD15 in hybrid format, UNCTAD, in collaboration with the host country Barbados, created a virtual conference centre simulating an *in situ* experience with meeting rooms, an exhibition space, breakout rooms for smaller group discussions and a beach café. The event was broadcast from two studios, one in Barbados and one in Geneva, and from 16 “antennas” in least developed countries. This TV-style production required considerable additional preparation, including a minute-by-minute scenario and extensive rehearsals. The conference programme had to be adapted to the new format. Side events were organized in the months leading up to the conference. During the main conference, the programme was limited to two sessions of 1,5 hours per day.

These and similar experiences suggest that online transmission of major events is likely to become more scripted and that expectations to have a more immersive interactive virtual experiences simulating the real conference environment may grow. UNOG may want to experiment with the design of a virtual conference environment with one or two of its more popular meeting rooms. Once designed, the virtual conference environment can be reused for different occasions.

In this new mix of formats, **hybrid meetings** are the most complex to organize, as they offer in-person and online participation at the same meeting. In consequence, they require additional resources which not every substantive secretariat will have readily available. While some respondents liked the flexibility of choosing their mode of participation, others warned that hybrid formats would have to ensure the same experiences for in-person and remote participants to avoid an experience as second-class participants. Respondents therefore suggested that meetings should

either be fully in-person or all online, to ensure that all participants had the same opportunities. On the other hand, if there are different categories of participants to a meeting it might make sense to offer different levels of participation, allowing for example to stream to a wider audience of observers not expected or authorized to actively contribute to a meeting by taking the floor. A challenge for all meetings with remote participation is the need to accommodate different time zones.

Given the continuing **uncertainties** related to the development of the pandemic and the related measures that need to be taken, conference organizers find themselves obliged to plan for different **scenarios**, regarding whether or not an event could take place and at what time and in view of the share of in-person and online elements. Sometimes adaptations in format or restrictions of participants may become necessary as a conference is already going on. The requirement for flexibility conflicts with the need for more planning and preparation of remote aspects of meetings, for example as they require rehearsals in meetings rooms which may not be easily available in light of the booking situation during SHP renovations.

The added complexity in conference organization has **budgetary implications**. While the capital cost for equipment may be an initial investment, operational costs for online or hybrid meetings are higher than for in-person meetings, due to the cost of the platforms and additional staffing requirements for technical support and moderation. These costs are incurred on the side of UNOG (some of them may be absorbed by meeting secretariats) while savings for travel benefit participants or substantive secretariats. Initially, funding was provided centrally to fund business continuity measures and in 2022 it is expected that meeting organizers cover the difference. A more long-term solution will be required to meet regular needs in future. Several Member States felt it necessary to ensure that sufficient human and financial resources were made available for the future of conferencing.

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## TECHNOLOGY

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With online and hybrid meetings becoming such an important part of conference organization, technology is a key element for client satisfaction. Such conferences require more preparation in terms of testing and training of speakers and troubleshooting, for example to resolve broken connections. The existing IT team is already stretched to cover events taking place in the 11 meeting rooms currently equipped for remote participation. This situation will get worse as more meeting rooms are being equipped. New functions are required, including **technical moderation and technical coordination**. Some DCM staff have been retrained as technical moderators, while some have been recruited from temporary employment agencies. However, there is a scarcity of people on the market who have the necessary skills, especially in combination with the required languages. To cover the current gap in technical moderation, substantive secretariats are asked to provide one moderator who works in tandem with one provided by UNOG. The feedback from substantive secretariats shows that having to manage technical moderation in addition to running the substantive side of a meeting is quite burdensome. Not all feel comfortable about the technological skills required to manage technical moderation. At the same time, some also pointed to the fact that technical moderators need to have some knowledge of the meeting substance and procedures, for example with regard to managing the sequence of speakers.

If the contribution to technical moderation by meeting secretariats were to be limited to the technical side, more staff would have to be hired. In general, two technical moderators are needed at every meeting and one audio-visual technical person is needed for every two meetings. To systematically cover hybrid meetings operating simultaneously in the

conference rooms currently equipped for remote participation, a significant increase in audio-visual technicians would be needed. A suggestion was made that opening temporary positions on an annual basis would be a more reliable option than using temporary employment agencies. A central control room could possibly help improve remote troubleshooting. Some related exploratory activities have been under way.<sup>2</sup> However, even if the control room was put in place, some in-room support would still be required.

In light of changing meeting habits under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand on webcasting has increased exponentially. It is managed by a small team at the UN Information Service (Department of Global Communications), whose main mandate is video production for external public communication, including live broadcasting. To this mandate, Member States have in recent years added the live streaming/webcasting of the principal meetings of the human rights bodies (Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, and Treaty Bodies) only.

Webcasting meetings relies principally on automated cameras which were previously installed in some rooms to cover in-person meetings (in some cases, for high-level events where there is interest from news broadcasters, manually operated broadcast cameras are used). The added complexity of hybrid meetings, where participants speak in the room and via an online platform, both live and via pre-recorded messages that need to be played out in real time, now needs to be managed by skilled technicians who can manually identify where the speaker is located (either in the room, or online) and switch camera view and open the microphone to the appropriate source in real time. These tasks can be performed by current sound operators with a long experience of conferencing at UNOG

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<sup>2</sup> The control room would serve for remote monitoring and not remote production operation, as the latter would not be supported by the current infrastructure.

and strong adaption skills to learn the new aspects that have to be covered or new staff with a technical audio-visual or IT background.

Some of the needs of broadcasting/webcasting at the scale that is now demanded have not been factored into the SHP renovations, and the UNTV team within the UN Information Service is working with SHP to adjust the planning. This will require adaptability on the part of the SHP. Equipping all rooms with modern cameras for webcasting is one crucial response to the circumstances, as is appropriate cabling that allows for signal transmission to be managed both in point-to-point mode (from conference room to studio to webcast, in standard professional broadcast modality), as well as over the IP network. More complex operations at times conflict with the size of production rooms. Alternative solutions may include the use of remote or mobile production booths.

As conference organizers increasingly envisage events that are similar to live television events (hosted, with timed and staged elements, with professional lighting requirements, etc.) related skills may have to be built up to cover the additional demand for this new type of conferencing. This may require hiring additional staff or freelance personnel who can advise on scripting and planning events and training technical moderators regarding the needs of video transmission and webcasting. As more video messages are being integrated into the conference programme, Member States and other meeting contributors should receive guidelines (and potentially additional advice and training where needed) regarding the quality and formats of their submissions. In addition, skills in broadcast engineering (in addition to TV production) are becoming more important and should be built up within the organization, following the example of UN Headquarters in New York where both functions co-exist, ensuring a professional outcome. In conjunction with building up broadcasting capacity to support business continuity in the short and medium term, the gradual migration to signal transmission via IP must be explored

and developed. Operating conference rooms simultaneously will require in-depth IP network expertise and a general reflection on the systems installed and the necessary workflows.

Among the other issues that were raised with regard to technology were the following:

- The need to continue equipping meeting rooms for remote participation, especially smaller ones to accommodate only a few conference organizers
- The need to improve equipment and set-ups for remote meetings, including the quality of connections (incl. Wi-Fi stability), cameras, software and platforms
- The need to upgrade equipment set-ups for in-person meetings, e. g. software updates on PCs in meeting rooms, better screens, more reliable printers and microphones
- Selecting user-friendly platforms (Zoom was generally considered as more intuitive and better to include participants from low connectivity settings than Interprefy)
- Protocols for conducting online meetings should be in place and clearly communicated to meeting organizers and participants (i. e. on logging on to meetings early, advance technical checks and the use of appropriate equipment)
- The need to have IT support more readily available to conference organizers and participants (e. g. through a help desk or hotline)
- Meeting organizers would like to receive meeting links earlier, to have enough time to prepare their information packages for meeting participants in several languages
- The need to have functioning online voting systems available with solutions for virtual and hybrid meetings
- The need to be able to show a timer to both in-room and online participants indicating the

speaking time as it elapses to keep with in prescribed time limits (the technical solutions exists, as the technical experts confirm; this information may have to be communicated to clients more visibly, e. g. on the website)

- Addressing security and privacy concerns.

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## CONFERENCE INFRASTRUCTURE

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In the survey, both conference participants and organizers had an overall impression of the conference infrastructure that was slightly above average (3.57 on a 1-5 scale).

22. With 5 being excellent, and one being very poor, how would you rate the conference infrastructure at the Palais des Nations?

97

Responses



3.57 Average Rating

Conference organizers praised the newly renovated conference rooms. Member States were particularly concerned about the **lack of available meeting rooms** and a perceived lack of transparency about how rooms were being allocated. The reduced availability of rooms is mainly related to the renovations under the Strategic Heritage Plan (SHP), while the meeting room capacity is constrained by COVID restrictions. One Member State suggested that priority should be given to sensitive negotiations which required in-person meetings when attributing meeting rooms. Others urged that UNOG proposed meeting rooms outside the usual premises, through collaborations with the Centre International de Conférences Genève (CICG) or other venues.

Another set of feedback concerned the **entry and navigation of the premises**. In spite of the reduced number of meeting participants, there were sometimes considerable queues at Pregny

Gate, according to some responses. For the Department of Safety and Security, managing queues is a priority, not only in the interest of client satisfaction, but also to reduce the risk of spreading COVID in crowds. Capacities have been increased at Pregny Gate (e. g. opening a third lane) and work is foreseen to make the waiting area more comfortable and to provide more covered spaces, so visitors will not be left out in the rain when waiting. A new public access will be created at the Nations Gate. Opening up access at Place des Nations might create a new need for parking spaces for bicycles, as visitors cannot bring them onto the premises.

Difficulties in orientation around the premises were especially encountered outside the building, most often in finding the Tempus Building, which is not signposted, but also in finding the way to the H-Building and the E-Building. Inside the building, some users who were not able to read Roman numbers were unable to find conference rooms. One suggestion was to use extremely large Arabic numbers as is sometimes done in cinemas to make it easier to find conference rooms. Some of the numbering is also confusing, like room 4 and room S4 which can be easily confused or the fact that door S1 is in building S2 and door S2 in building S1. Several clients reported difficulties in finding the medical service and the breastfeeding room. The **medical service**, however, does not currently cater for walk-in conference participants. They are sometimes involved in emergencies (usually it is advised to call 112) and if a person tests positive for COVID in which case the medical service makes contact with the *Medecin Cantonal* and assists with contact tracing. The nurses can always be contacted for advice at 022 917 28 07. The **breastfeeding** room can only be opened with an especially encoded magnetic badge which is currently not given to conference participants. Meeting participants can ask Security through the control centre (022 917 29 00) to open the room for them remotely, but they are most likely not aware of this possibility. During the first half of 2022 it is foreseen to extend the magnetic

badges to conference participants which would facilitate their access to the conference buildings and to the breastfeeding room, if needed. To help conference participants prepare their visit, it would be useful to make information on the responsibilities of the medical service and on accessing the breastfeeding room easily available on the website.

Some users remarked that the **walking distances** to reach meeting rooms represent serious obstacles for meeting participants with reduced mobility or for those who had to transport heavy material. They suggested that it might be useful to have an electric transport service available for those in need (similar to the service offered at airports).

Regarding the **room layout**, some expressed the need to have rooms that can be adaptable to their needs, allowing for more interactive or informal settings.

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## SERVICES

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Users rated conference services at the Palais des Nations at 3.67 on average (on a 1-5 scale).

24. With 5 being excellent, and one being very poor, how would you rate the conference services provided at the Palais des Nations?

97

Responses



3.62 Average Rating

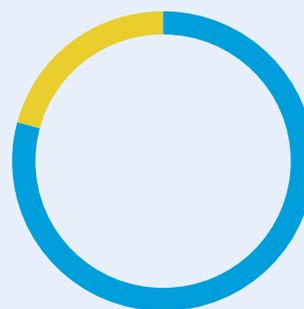
Positive feedback was provided on a number of services, including the quality of interpretation, translation and summary records. Users commented that generally UNOG staff was professional and friendly, but that the level varied (respondents did not provide specifics). The need of a **single point of contact**, that would coordinate all conference service requests, rather than the

current approach where clients had to contact different departments themselves to obtain various services, was raised at least ten times explicitly and many times more implicitly.

Respondents felt there needed to be more transparency about lines of authority and responsibilities for different aspects of conferences. A number of substantive secretariats felt that they had to take on more responsibilities in organizing conferences than previously. Some said they wished for greater flexibility to accommodate specific needs related to an event. Others said that service providers at UNOG and meeting secretariats should develop a joint culture of client orientation toward meeting participants.

Delays, caused by the reduction in meeting room capacity due to SHP and COVID restrictions, in receiving **confirmations for meeting rooms** until a week prior to the meeting were a source of frustration.

9. Did the reduction from 3 hours to 2 hours for meetings with interpretation of remote participants impact your ability to deliver your programme of work?



■ Yes 46 ■ No 12

The reduction of the length of meetings with **interpretation** in case of more than 30 minutes of remote participation from 3 to 2 hours was deemed to have an impact on the delivery of the programme of work by 79% of respondents. While many clients showed understanding for the difficulties faced by interpreters and

commended them for their efforts under COVID, some suggested there could be more flexible arrangements, such as three 2-hour slots instead of two 3-hour slots. Others urged that UNOG intensified its search for available interpreters to reinforce the existing teams.

Some clients expressed concern about the cleaning of rooms and temporary offices during the pandemic.

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## REGISTRATION

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Registration with Indico.UN seems to work well for in-person events. Some suggested that large events with several sub-sessions should offer a simplified application process to avoid having to go through the full procedure for every single session. Clients with badges to the Palais des Nations expressed concern about the additional administrative burden of having to now register through Indico.UN for every event they wished to attend. This applies especially to those attending conferences frequently. One suggestion was to scan badges at the entrance of the meeting room for COVID-tracing purposes.

Conference organizers also suggested a need to streamline registration processes for virtual and hybrid events. For the latter, registering through Indico.UN with the requirement to upload a passport and photo seemed rather burdensome for a mere online participation in an event. There was also the need to eliminate multiple registration requirements, e. g. through Indico.UN and for the online environment.

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## DOCUMENTATION

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Most respondents supported the move to online rather than paper-based systems for documents. Some were concerned that documentation was sometimes hard to find as it was spread over various places. Similarly, there was sometimes confusion over how to share documents with interpreters. Overall, there was a desire for a more consolidated, user-friendly system.

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## COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING

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While some clients appreciate how information is shared on the website, through email and other sources, others asked to improve communication. They would prefer receiving information earlier and would like to see consultations with the most important clients before decisions are taken that concern service provision (this point was made by clients in particular with regard to the reduction of the length of multilingual meetings to two hours in case of more than 30 minutes of remote participation). Some observed that important information could be overlooked if sent via email and that new colleagues had no access to communication sent prior to their arrival. They would therefore like to see all important information concerning conference organization compiled in one place, for example on the **website**. This should include information regarding:

- > Event planning (including procedures and contact persons)
- > Meeting rooms equipped for remote participation
- > The availability of meeting rooms, in particular in view of the expected further reduction of the number of available meeting rooms in connection with the SHP
- > Policies regarding the assignment of meeting rooms
- > Access to the Wi-Fi network and information about the security level of the open network for sensitive negotiations
- > COVID measures in place.

In addition, the website could provide **tutorials** about how to register through Indico.UN, how to log into and use meeting platforms, which equipment and set-up to use (e. g. speakers,

headphones, cameras and light), how to access and prepare documents. Such tutorials could also be used for communication on social media. Some clients would like to be able to call a **hotline** to speak to knowledgeable colleagues about their specific meeting-related questions. Several delegates indicated that more training on technology would be useful.

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## THE INTERNATIONAL GENEVA CONTEXT

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While the research focused on the provision of conference services within UNOG, exchanges with departments organizing conferences across Geneva brought to light some considerations concerning the broader Geneva context. Notably, users suggested that the adoption of a common approach across agencies, e. g. use of the same platform, would facilitate participation in meetings and avoid having to learn about different platforms. Joint procurement across agencies could also allow for savings.

# V. Focus Areas and Proposals

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Through analysis of the broad array of feedback provided, high priority challenges on which UNOG should focus are categorized into the following themes:

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## 1. MEETING INFRASTRUCTURE

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A substantial number of clients and Member States expressed their desire to have the possibility of remote participation on an ongoing basis. Clients expect meeting services to be able to switch between in-person, online and hybrid formats, even on a short notice, if needed. Being a hub for modern conferencing will therefore require UNOG to continue its efforts to ensure that all its conference rooms are suitably equipped. This will be particularly important in the context of the renovation of the meeting rooms in Building E. There will also be a bigger demand for smaller meeting rooms from where teams can run online meetings.

Additionally, it is clear that Secretariat staff who are participating in meetings remotely must have the right equipment. UNOG needs to ensure it leads by example in this area to encourage Member States to follow the guidance on remote participation that ensures the best sound quality for interpretation.

As online and hybrid meeting organization is more complex, secretariats may have to pay higher or additional fees if they want to use that service. These additional costs may be offset by savings for travel costs where

they are covered by the meeting secretariat. However, out of 58 respondents, only 3 expected budget savings in 2022, which they could repurpose to help cover the additional costs of conferencing with remote participation.

Finally, in conjunction with upgrades to the meeting infrastructure, UNOG built its staff capacities in technical moderation to relieve the burden on meeting secretariats. The latter may be requested to pay an additional fee. Substantive secretariats will have to stay involved in technical moderation to contribute their expertise on procedural matters.

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## 2. NEED FOR BETTER INTEGRATION OF TECHNICAL SERVICES FOR CONFERENCE SERVICES

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A consistent message, particularly from substantive secretariat clients, was on the need for better integration of the technical services that support conference services. Clients were frustrated with having to contact a range of different people to resolve technical issues, with them often not knowing who exactly they needed to speak to.

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### 3. IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND A SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY

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Both Member States and substantive secretariat staff called for better communication from UNOG. All information concerning conference organization should be compiled in one place and reliably up to date on the website. This could include tutorials about key issues of common concern. More regular information meetings with updates on the latest developments would be appreciated by both, meeting secretariats and Member States. With the impending scarcity of rooms due to the progressing SHP renovations, it would be useful to plan a communication campaign so clients feel well informed and can prepare for alternatives, if needed. Collaboration under the umbrella of the International Geneva Task Force (IGTF) may help to alleviate some of the room scarcity through collaboration and space sharing. In addition, there are broader points about client focus and how to streamline the client experience in terms of how they interact with UNOG for conferencing that need further consideration. With events becoming more diverse and complex to manage, the wish to have one entry point for conference management is being reiterated by clients.

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### 4. RUNNING REMOTE MEETINGS - DECONSTRUCTING THE AGENDA

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Substantive secretariats, and Member States provided feedback that better structured and planned remote meetings might be more effective. Consideration should be given to how UNOG can better support meeting organizers, e. g. by providing training and advice, to help structure and run effective meetings with remote participation, using the “smart mix” of available formats that is most suitable for the meeting purpose. The required additional preparatory work has to be factored into the planning process.

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### 5. DOCUMENT ACCESS

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All aspects related to documents should be streamlined and handled through the same platform. This should include intuitive guidance on how to send presentations to interpreters and those in charge of producing summary records. Documents should be managed in a way that further minimizes the use of printed copies.

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## 6. MANDATES AND BUDGET

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To ensure that client expectations regarding meeting formats can be met beyond business continuity measures, Member States will have to ensure that rules and regulations governing meeting organization will be adjusted to the new reality and adequate funding is made available.

A number of additional suggestions emanating from feedback received during the CTT-2 research could be considered to further improve the client experience:

7. Apply highest efforts to minimize technical problems and provide easy access to technical assistance for organizers and participants during meetings (e. g. through a hotline or with a centrally managed control room).
8. Continue investigating solutions to offer multilingual meetings with unlimited remote participation of the same length as in-person meetings.
9. Evaluate in more detail experiences with the voting software e-deleGATE used at meetings of the Human Rights Council. Provide reliable voting software to all clients who may need it, making transparent the terms of use and relevant information about how data privacy is ensured.
10. Provide technical solutions to allow for networking.
11. Further improve managing queues at Pregny Gate to keep waiting time reasonable.
12. Improve signposting outside the building, especially to new structures such as Tempus and the H-Building, the medical service and to the breastfeeding room (providing advance information on how to access the latter).
13. Develop (i. e. finalize ongoing activities) an interactive map, e. g. as an app, to help conference users navigate the premises. Explore offering touch screen directories at central points, such as Door 40. Any advice on navigation should also provide directions to visitors with special needs, such as wheelchair users.
14. Explore offering driving services around the premises for delegates with reduced mobility and or heavy meeting material.

# VI. The Way Forward

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To take forward the issues identified in the focus areas and to help address the feedback that has been received, the following activities are proposed:

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## 1. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS: CTT-2 RESULTS AND WAY FORWARD

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**Target group:** DCM senior management and potential project owners, UNOG senior management, Member States, selected collaborators

**Date:** Q1 2022

**Speakers:** Kira Kruglikova, Jonathan Morgan, Viviane Brunne

Results of the CTT-2 research will be presented to different target audiences, followed by discussions on the best way forward. This will help to refine the ideas proposed in this report, identify preferred practical solutions and garner support for concrete action. Discussions will be followed by an exercise to prioritize suggested activities.

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## 2. CONFERENCING BOOTCAMP

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**Target group:** DCM internal

**Date:** Q2 2022

**Duration:** 1 week

To take selected project ideas and activities forward, responding to the findings of the CTT-2 research, potential project owners may participate in a bootcamp, providing them with coaching and advice to develop their ideas further into project proposals that can be implemented.

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## 3. WORKSHOP SERIES: HOW TO GET TO A SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY?

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**Target group:** DCM, Division of Administration, with other related services (e. g. security, catering, Library & Archives, etc.)

**Date:** Starting in Q1 2022

**Speakers:** CTT-2 team, presenters about existing single point of entry solutions that may serve as models

Clients sent a strong message that they wish for an improved single point of entry approach for their interaction with conference service providers. CTT-2 research results will be translated into use cases and inspiration will be drawn from existing models, as a starting point

for designing an adapted solution for the UNOG context. Participants will be challenged to apply their creative problem-solving skills. Solutions will be tested and further developed with clients.

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## 4. COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

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A number of issues brought forward by clients could be addressed through communication activities. This should include a concentrated effort to revisit information provided on the **website**, ensuring that all relevant information regarding conferencing under COVID-19 conditions is compiled there. Mechanisms need to be put in place and responsibilities assigned to ensure that key information is regularly updated. Tutorials on key issues could be made available. Communication efforts need to ensure pro-active information to clients about **SHP renovations**. All communication should be inspired by a single point of entry approach.

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## 5. CLIENT ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

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**Target group:** DCM, clients

**Date:** Q2 2022 (annual exercise)

As an annual exercise, representatives of key clients should be invited to interactive workshops with DCM staff, to discuss user experiences related to conferencing and, using design thinking methodologies, to develop improvements. These workshops may focus on specific aspects of conference service provision and could be organized separately with different clients. The sessions may be enriched by inspirational talks by colleagues representing other UN client services, to learn about their ongoing journey to excellence.

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## 6. A FUTURE THINKING WORKSHOP ON THE FUTURE OF MEETING ORGANIZATION

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**Target group:** Selected participants, from DCM, IT, Commons (potential to expand to IGTF group)

**Date:** Q3-Q4 2022

**Resources:** External facilitator

Previous workshops were directed to driving implementation of the recommendations of the CTT-2 report. This future thinking workshop projects further into the future, thinking ahead as to how conferencing may evolve in the medium and long-term. What measures should be taken now to be future-ready with conference organization in Geneva? This activity responds to the feedback from clients that UNOG should be more pro-active about crises preparation and invest more to keep abreast of technological developments.

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## 7. CONTINUATION OF THE DCM-COMMONS EVENT SERIES

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The way conferencing is done is likely to continue to evolve and the possibility to learn from other upcoming large-scale events is of interest to UNOG and conference organizers in Geneva alike.

Debriefs at the Commons could include the following upcoming conferences:

- > World Economic Forum, Davos (if and when happening in-person/hybrid)
- > G7 (under German Presidency), G20 (30-31 October 2022, Bali, Indonesia)
- > The 75th World Health Assembly (22-28 May 2022)
- > The 110th session of the International Labour Conference, 2022

- > The Human Rights Council
- > ITU/AI for Good
- > EU events
- > HQ events: GA, Security Council, HLPF
- > Vienna or Nairobi events
- > International AIDS Conference, 29 Juli-2 August 2022, Montréal, Canada, and virtual (organized by the Geneva-based International AIDS-Society)

**Resources:** 2 event managers and 1 multi-media officer at the Commons.

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## 8. COORDINATION MECHANISMS

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Several coordination mechanisms are suggested to ensure more seamless service provision:

### a) Working group on the integration of technical services for conferences within UNOG

The working group will meet regularly to develop a seamless approach to offering technical services for conferences, addressing, inter alia, the question of the reporting line for Audio-Visual support.

**Stakeholders:** Information and Communication Technology Service (ICTS), Facilities Management Section (FMS), and Meetings Management Service (MMS).

### b) SHP coordination

Relevant entities should accompany and actively manage the impact of SHP renovations on conference delivery.

**Target group:** MMS, Interpretation, Audio-Visual team, ICTS, UNIS and key clients from substantive secretariats.

### c) International Geneva Task Force (IGTF)

IGTF meetings should be held at regular intervals to ensure improved coordination with other Geneva-based entities. The IGTF could evolve into a community of practice for conference organizers, providing a forum to discuss day-to-day issues among peers.

### c) Coordination with substantive secretariats

UNOG may wish to formalize its high-level engagement with the substantive secretariats by hosting a quarterly Director-level meeting to update on matters affecting conferencing. This could include SHP updates, as well as outcomes of budget discussions, and technical support issues.

### d) UN Secretariat coordination on conferencing

Cross-Secretariat quarterly meetings could help to understand the state of play in other locations and serve as a forum to exchange best practices. Initially, they could include the four duty stations linked to the United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) and later be expanded to Regional Commissions.

# VII. Acknowledgements

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The CTT-2 team at the Division of Conference Management would like to acknowledge and thank all participants in the surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. A full list of participants in interviews and focus group discussions can be found in the Annex..



# Annex

## Participants in interviews and focus group discussions<sup>3</sup>

SUBSTANTIVE SECRETARIATS		
Organization	Names of interviewees	
Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)	Urenthren Pillay	
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - Council Branch	Ilona Alexander Cynthia Racky Mafoua Paulo Henrique Pia De Andrade	Eliska Rybar Holubova Ljiljana Stancic
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - Treaty Bodies	Ilona Alexander Marie Araksia-Gulsadian Celine Reynaud	Adrian Somodean Myriam Tebourbi-Guerfali Simon Walker
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria	Mura Nazarov Camila Vieira Santana	Ousama Suleiman Wissam Ben Yettou
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	Miguel Bautista Lisianne Losier	Juan Jose Martinez Badillo
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)	France Font-Verot Nicola Koch Caroline Jeunet Elena Kwitsinskaia-Mayer Igor Litvinyuk Isa Mamedov	Laurence Mancini Sofia Parent Gulnara Roll Yana Trofimova Maryna Yanush
United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)	Radha Day Daniel Feakes Heegyun Jung Erika Kawahara	Peter Kolarov Hermann Lampalzer Silvia Mercogliano Ngoc Phuong Van Der Blij

<sup>3</sup> In alphabetical order

## UN AGENCIES

Organization	Names of interviewees
International Labour Office (ILO)	Dimitrina Dimitrova Monica Varela Garcia
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	Angela Asamoah Carole Gil Jessica Eileen Gorre Borja Karin de Gruijl Mercedes Jakupi Alexandre Payre Afarin Dadkhah Tehrani
World Health Organization (WHO)	Reja Sarkis

## NGOs

Organization	Names of interviewees
Centre d'Accueil de la Genève Internationale (CAGI) <sup>4</sup>	Julien Beauvallet
CoNGO	Liberato Bautista
World Jewish Council	Leon Saltiel

<sup>4</sup> While CAGI as an entity is not an NGO, the interviewee contributed CAGI's expertise on the needs of NGOs in the focus group discussion about this topic.

## PERMANENT MISSIONS OF MEMBER STATES TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Organization	Names of interviewees
<b>France</b>	<p>Olivier Lacroix <i>Conseiller politique (Affaires humanitaires, migrations et questions juridiques)</i></p> <p>Pierre Le Goff <i>Conseiller politique</i></p> <p>Claude-Henry Dinand <i>Conseiller humanitaire, Espace et migrations</i></p> <p>Marie Chopard <i>Stagiaire</i></p>
<b>Japan</b>	<p>NAGATA Masa-kazu <i>Counsellor in charge of UNOG matters in Japan mission</i></p> <p>Taguchi Kazuho <i>Minister-counsellor in Political affairs</i></p>
<b>Republic of Korea</b>	<p>Gyoung min YONG <i>Ambassador and Deputy Head of Mission</i></p>
<b>United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland</b>	<p>Miriam Shearman <i>Ambassador and Deputy Head of Mission</i></p>
<b>Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)</b>	<p>Georges Nakseu Nguefang <i>Ambassador of OIF</i></p> <p>Hajer Tlijani</p> <p>Nathalie Odounlami Beugger</p> <p>Mireille Sarah Nzenze <i>Ambassador of Gabon</i></p> <p>Sara Nasr <i>Representative of Lebanon</i></p>
<b>Meeting with the EU Delegation</b>	<p><i>Countries represented: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain</i></p>
<b>Presentation and discussion with EU Member States (at the EU Delegation)</b>	<p><i>Countries represented: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden</i></p>
<b>Presentation and discussion with the Geneva Group</b>	<p><i>Countries represented: Belgium, Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America</i></p>

## SERVICE PROVIDERS

Organization	Names of interviewees	
<b>UNOG, Division of Administration (DoA)</b>		
	Carlos Cabrera Gonzalez Cedric Kusendova	Jennifer Underhill Thibaut Viot
<b>UNOG, Division of Conference Management (DCM)</b>		
<b>Central Planning and Coordination Service</b>	Marie-Laure Avon Anna Banchieri Sven Hunziker Aishath Jeelaan	Riin Koppel Aoife Leahy Vitali Rousak
<b>Interpretation Service</b>	Xiaolan Feng Olga Markides	Cristobal Osuna Igor Sergeev
<b>Languages services</b>	Anne Fassotte Enrique Fernandez-Vernet	Nicole Maguire Vladislav Shuvalov
<b>Production and Support Service</b>	Alexei Boubnov Gang Chen Vadim Isakov Nzete Da Sama Itoua	Eleonore Milo Frank Moser Mark Murphy
<b>UNOG, Department of Safety and Security (DSS)</b>		
	Stijn De Medts	
<b>UNOG, UN Information Service (UNIS)</b>		
<b>Chief UNTV Radio Webcast</b>	Michele Zaccheo	Jean Marc Glinz
<b>UNOG, Library &amp; Archives (L&amp;A)</b>		
<b>Institutional Memory Section</b>	Blandine Bloukacz-Louisfert	
<b>Library Services</b>	Natalie Alexander Sigrun Habermann Léa Kotlar	Niverte Noberasco Francesco Pisano Alexandra Rossi
<b>UNOG, Office of the Director-General (ODG)</b>		
<b>Political Affairs and Partnerships Section</b>	Kathryn Hennessey	
<b>Senior Mediation Officer</b>	Enrico Formica	
<b>Protocol</b>	Sergey Shaposhnikov	Brigitte Ruby-Cosgrove
<b>SDG Lab</b>	Davide Fanciulli	
<b>NGO Liaison Unit</b>	Sandrine Burel Madeleine Cieniewicz	Lidiya Grigoreva
<b>Other</b>		
<b>International Computing Centre (UNICC)</b>	Roberto Cruz Flores Ninna Roco	Dimitra Ralli
<b>WTV GLOBAL (UNCTAD15)</b>	James Brown Chris Chapman	Tim Weathers



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Do you have feedback or questions? Do you want to be involved?  
Please contact us: [ctt@un.org](mailto:ctt@un.org)

