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## PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993

Elaboration of unified workload standards  
for conference-servicing staff within the  
United Nations system

Report by the Secretary-General

## INTRODUCTION

1. In section II, paragraph 4, of its resolution 45/248 A of 21 December 1990, the General Assembly, having considered the report of the Secretary-General on workload standards for conference-servicing staff (A/C.5/45/1) and the related recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) on that report, in particular paragraph 18 of document A/45/7/Add.1 of 8 October 1990, requested the Secretary-General to pursue through the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) the elaboration of unified workload standards for conference-servicing staff within the United Nations common system and to report thereon through ACABQ to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session.
2. Paragraph 6 of the same section of the above resolution contains requests to the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, through the Advisory Committee, on progress relating to the further development of workload standards in conference-servicing for all United Nations conference facilities, including those of the regional commissions.
3. Subsequently, at its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly, in section XXIII of its resolution 46/185 C of 20 December 1991, requested the Secretary-General to keep under review workload standards in the Department of Conference Services, taking into account technological innovations and the

need for further progress in productivity, and to report thereon in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995. In light of this, the Secretariat is submitting at this session its response to the General Assembly's request in section II, paragraph 4, of resolution 45/248 A, and will prepare a progress report on workload standards in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995 for submission to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

4. In March 1991, the Organizational Committee of ACC requested the secretariat of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) at United Nations Headquarters to utilize the inter-agency mechanism of IAMLADP for the gathering of data on the workload standards of the specialized agencies of the United Nations which would serve as the basis for a report to be submitted to ACC through its Organizational Committee.

5. The IAMLADP secretariat accordingly requested member organizations for information regarding the workload standards applied by them as well as the legislative authority, if any, which established the standards in respect of the following categories of conference-servicing staff:

- (a) Interpreters
- (b) Translators
- (c) Revisers
- (d) Précis-writers
- (e) Text-processors
- (f) Verbatim reporters
- (g) Reproduction staff

6. The information on workload standards for various categories of conference-servicing staff submitted by participating organizations of IAMLADP, and discussed at the 1991 session, is summarized in the following pages and annex I. For translators and text-processors, standards are expressed in number of words per staff member per work-day, since words per page and page lengths vary from one organization to another (e.g. at the United Nations a standard page consists of 330 words per page, while at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a page consists of 250 words). Standards for interpreters are shown by number of meetings per week, while work-days are used for précis-writers and verbatim reporters. For reproduction work, the unit of measurement is the page impression, i.e., the press run of each document and publication multiplied by the number of page originals. The number of page impressions per day provided by each organization represents the aggregate output of a group of reproduction staff that takes into account the variables inherent in the printing process of the documents and publications in the United Nations system.

## I. FINDINGS OF IAMLADP AT ITS 1991 AND 1992 SESSIONS

7. In September 1991, IAMLADP participants reviewed extensively the information on workload standards. It noted that only the United Nations had legislative authority for such standards. Some of the specialized agencies had reported that their workload standards were approved by senior management, but not by legislative authority. The rest advised that they had no formally established workload standards. At the United Nations the standards applicable to conference-servicing staff were established by the General Assembly in 1977, in response to a request from ACABQ to the Secretary-General for a standardized approach to calculating the financial implications of conferences and meetings. The standards were reviewed and upheld in 1980 and again in 1990. The present standards for the United Nations are those noted by the General Assembly in resolution 45/248 A referred to in paragraph 1 above.

8. Given the size of its calendar of meetings and conferences, the United Nations had the largest number of staff interpreters. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) had a small core of permanent staff (ranging from 2 to 7). The International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) did not have permanent staff. At the United Nations, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) had presented a report in June 1974 on the conditions of service of staff interpreters, endorsed by the Medical Service, recommending that the normal workload for United Nations interpreters should be not more than two meetings per day and seven meetings per week. This recommendation was accepted as a workload standard for United Nations staff interpreters by the General Assembly in 1977, 1980 and in 1990. UNESCO and GATT applied this same standard to its staff interpreters. ILO, FAO, WHO and ICAO staff interpreters serviced eight meetings a week. FAO explained that because most interpreters servicing meetings at FAO were freelance this facilitated uniformity of working patterns. All organizations required freelance interpreters to work eight meetings a week in accordance with the agreement between the Association of International Conference Interpreters (AIIC) and the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ).

9. The standards followed for précis-writing were substantially the same in most organizations. Verbatim reporting was used only at the United Nations and FAO and requirements were virtually identical.

10. With regard to the printing of documents, IAMLADP agreed that it was not practical to establish a common standard in this area because the requirements of the work generated at the different organizations were so diverse. In any event, the equipment configurations and the methods of work, as well as the number of page impressions per day, were determined by the volume and urgency of the documentation to be reproduced.

11. For translation and text-processing, however, the information submitted revealed that no two organizations applied the same standards. In the area of text-processing, the United Nations followed a different standard for the processing of the original language text and for the final translated text. The other organizations made no such distinctions; most of them based their standards on the final translated text.

12. For translators, IMF and IMO had no established standards. ILO had set standards for pre- and post-session documentation, but none for in-session work, which it indicated had to be completed during the meetings. Of course, the latter would hold true for all organizations.

13. All the other organizations had different standards. FAO had the highest standards for both translation and revision, but had a different standard for the Chinese language. Only the United Nations (and therefore also GATT, which advised that it applied United Nations workload standards for its conference-servicing staff) had a ratio of one reviser for three translators. Most of the other agencies had a 1:2 ratio; FAO's and ITU's were closer to 1:2.75 and WIPO had a 1:2.5 ratio. UNESCO applied different standards depending on the languages, using the same for English, French, Russian and Spanish texts, with separate sets of figures for Arabic and Chinese. All other organizations, including the United Nations, used the same standard for all languages.

14. Some organizations with lower standards than the rest explained that this reflected the technical difficulty of texts. On the other hand, FAO's higher standards would appear to be a result of its translation staff's adaptation to the specificities of that Organization's field of work. Documentation at the United Nations, however, covered the broadest spectrum of international activities and issues, from outer space to the environment, law of the sea, disarmament, population, the disabled, human rights, etc. Its translation staff were therefore required to constantly adapt to these changes in subject-matter in their daily work.

15. In view of the lack of consistency in the standards applied by the different organizations to translation and text-processing, IAMLADP considered that these areas needed to be examined with a view to considering the possibility of formulating uniform standards that could be applied throughout the United Nations system.

16. On this basis, IAMLADP decided that a core Working Group consisting of Geneva-based agencies (as the majority of United Nations organizations were located there) would review possibilities for the development of workload standards that could be applied system wide. The standards would comprise a range of figures that could be applied to specific conditions. The Group would also look into establishing a range for précis-writers.

17. The Working Group met at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). Representatives of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), WHO, UNOG and (for précis-writing only) ITU participated in the discussions. It was agreed

that standards should be expressed in words per day for translation, in work-days for précis-writing and in words/standard pages (for the time being) for text processing. The report of the Group was submitted for consideration at the 1992 session of IAMLADP and is summarized in paragraphs 18-28 below. Annex II reflects decisions made at the meeting.

#### A. Translation

18. The Working Group took note of the broad diversity of practices and standards among the various organizations. It was agreed that, while no single standard could be applied for all agencies, varying requirements could nevertheless be taken into account through the establishment of a range of figures within which each organization could set its own standard.

19. The Working Group proposed that there should be a basic standard representing easy, well drafted and edited texts, with support from reference and terminology services. Deductions, based on the following qualifiers, would then be made from this standard as follows:

- |                                      |            |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| (a) Poorer quality                   | 2-4 points |
| (b) Greater complexity               | 2-7 points |
| (c) No or little reference support   | 2-3 points |
| (d) No or little terminology support | 2-3 points |
| (e) Language combination             | 2-3 points |

20. The percentages deducted would be grouped into five levels, each of which would result in the standards shown in annex II. The averages were comparable to the existing ones.

#### B. Précis-writing

21. The Working Group noted that the staffing and organization of précis-writing services in the various agencies depended on:

(a) The type and length of the record required (ranging, for a typical three-hour meeting, from a full speaker-by-speaker account of the discussion to a brief statement of the main points);

(b) The length of meeting (ad hoc organization for short meetings, full rotating teams for longer sessions);

(c) The nature of the subject-matter (e.g. political, technical, administrative).

For example, full summary records were produced by WHO, United Nations and UNIDO, whereas ITU prepared shorter records.

22. From the information available, it appeared that the system of preparing multilingual records survived only in UNESCO, where statements were summarized in the original language by a six-member team and records took much longer to produce. It was not considered possible to include this system in a unified standard.

### C. Text processing

23. The Working Group noted that in the three organizations a wide variety of original texts were sent by submitting departments for processing: they might be printed texts with few corrections or heavily corrected texts, including difficult tables and charts. Diskettes were also sent for finalization of a camera-ready document, a process which might be complicated in the case of long documents and could include footnotes, checking of the format, presentation, proofreading, preparation of the table of contents, etc.

24. Consideration was given to the technical difficulty of texts, either dictated onto audio-cassettes or typed from an original which, particularly in specialized agencies, could be highly scientific and include medical terminology or chemical or mathematical formulae and could thus take longer than straightforward text.

25. Documents were frequently received in parts, not necessarily in consecutive order, creating complications when assembling the document. A double proofreading/checking was done by the person in charge of assembling the document, including the preparation of tables of contents and checking against the original language (paragraph numbers, inclusion of complicated graphs, charts and maps).

26. The Working Group also took into account the extent to which the document had been revised. It was widely acknowledged in the text processing sections that a document with more than 20 per cent corrections had to be retyped. In actual fact, it was frequently the case that more than 50 per cent of the text had been corrected when it was received back from translators/revisers. The Group considered that this arrangement did not constitute optimal use of word processors and minimized the advantages.

27. The Working Group, after considering all these elements, noted that exact standards for the whole system could not be given because the time needed for texts to be processed varied greatly not only in relation to length but also depending on whether the text contained tables, formulae or scientific terminology, and/or needed special presentation.

28. However, in order to establish guidelines for assessing needs and production capacity, the Working Group recommended a range of between 10 and 13 standard pages per operator/day for straightforward texts, with complicated work to be judged on a case-by-case basis (for example, a very complicated table taking more than three hours to type could be counted as 5/6 standard pages). (A standard page would be equivalent to 28 lines for non-proportional

typefaces equivalent to 2000 characters including spaces or 330 words, the latter applying to English only.)

## II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF IAMLADP AT ITS 1992 SESSION

29. The findings and proposals of the Working Group were thoroughly reviewed at the 1992 session of IAMLADP. Several organizations pointed out that, in addition to actual translation, translators were expected to perform administrative, training, research and terminology work, which should be taken into account when assessing workload standards. One organization emphasized that standards were of less importance for translation services than they were for budgetary and management services. Translation services had no control over the volume of documentation. Output was not therefore a question of discipline, but was bound to a ratio between the volume of work, its nature, the number of persons available to carry it out and the time in which it had to be completed.

30. A representative of another organization recalled remarks made by several participants at the 1991 session of IAMLADP, to the effect that workload standards were not necessarily a suitable means of measuring productivity but served essentially to calculate financial implications, determine budgetary resources or forecast workloads for meetings and conferences. His organization had found that the report had clearly stated the situation as regards translation, taking into account organizations' differing requirements and the variations in the quality of texts and in the provision of support services, rightly pointing out that no immediate impact on translators' productivity was to be expected from technological innovations.

31. IAMLADP observed that translation services within the United Nations system in general were moving towards the use of computer-assisted translation, but that it would perhaps be premature for most organizations to assess the impact of computers on the output of translators.

32. In this connection, a member of the Working Group explained that the Group had been unable to assess the impact of technological innovations on productivity inasmuch as there were no individual workstations for translators in their respective organizations as yet. However, while the Group had recognized that computers would certainly assist translators in securing reference material more directly and rapidly, and this would undoubtedly lead to substantial improvements in quality and economies in supporting services, the Group felt that significant increases in productivity in translation per se were unlikely, given the extra functions such as data inputting, word processing etc. which translators and revisers would be required to perform. Furthermore, translators typing onto word-processors were less likely to save time with long documents than with short ones like draft resolutions. In any case, the provision of workstations to all translators in a given organization would require a period of transition and a thorough assessment of results.

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33. One organization remarked that the cost factor was at the heart of the question of workload standards, and suggested that United Nations Headquarters draw to the attention of the Committee on Conferences the need for both Member States and substantive secretariats to reduce the volume of documentation required of conference servicing units.

34. Several members of the Working Group drew attention to the fact that IAMLADP had laid considerable emphasis on the budgetary aspects of the question while the Group had considered the question from the practical aspects of the requirements of the work.

35. In addition to the range of figures proposed for text processors in paragraph 29 and the qualifying deductions in paragraph 20, the Working Group had considered that in the case of revision, a revision/translation ratio of 2:1 was appropriate. It was also of the opinion that the current United Nations standards were no longer appropriate for the summary records now required for many meetings, which sometimes ran to 30 pages or more. The Group, therefore suggested that a range of 4 to 5 précis-writers with a full work-day of revision be introduced for full meetings. The representatives of the United Nations objected to the latter proposals, which would lead to an increase in staffing requirements, citing the financial constraints faced by the Organization. This view was shared by several agencies.

36. After further discussion, the organizations represented at IAMLADP agreed to the variable scale for translators and revisers and to the proposed standards for précis-writing set out in annex II, and accepted the range of figures for translators and text-processors proposed by the Working Group, on the understanding that each organization would have flexibility in applying the standards as circumstances required.

37. The present report includes all the relevant comments of the organizations of the United Nations system that responded to the United Nations request for information on workload standards and the outcome of the inter-agency deliberations on the subject as requested by ACABQ and the General Assembly. The Organizational Committee of ACC has been informed of the contents of this report. The views and comments of the ACABQ and the General Assembly will be relayed to members of IAMLADP.

38. As noted in paragraph 3 of the present report, in section XXIII of its resolution 46/185 C, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to keep under review workload standards in the Department of Conference Services, taking into account technological innovations and the need for further progress in productivity, and to report thereon in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995. The Secretariat is not therefore proposing any changes to the workload standards for conference-servicing staff noted by the General Assembly in 1990. The information gathered from organizations of the United Nations system contained in the present report will be taken into account when the Secretariat prepares the next report on workload standards for conference-servicing staff for submission to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session.



# DOCUMENTATION

Table 1. Text processing

(Number of words per typist per work-day)

	UN	ILO	FAO	UNESCO	ICAO	WHO	IMF	ITU	IMO	WIPO	LAEA	GATT
Original	4 290	5 000	4 000	3 520* 2 560** 1 280***	-	5 500	-	3 300	-	-	3 000	4 290
Translated	2 145	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 145
Languages				* E.F.R.S. ** A *** C								
Remarks		Includes typing, printing and re-reading	Most of text- processing is for translated text	Upward revisions being proposed for Arabic and Chinese texts	No formal standards have been established		No formal standards have been established	This includes revision, re-reading, supervision and training	No formal standards have been established	No formal standards have been established g/	This is an experienced typist and not an established standard	

Table 2. Reproduction

(Page impressions per work-day)

	UN	FAO	ITU	ILO	UNESCO	ICAO	WHO	IMF	IMO	WIPO	LAEA	GATT
Headquarters Geneva	30 000 20 000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Remarks		15 400	11 718	No formal standards	No formal standards	No formal standards	No formal standards	No formal standards	No formal standards	No formal standards	b/	30 000

a/ One typist is assigned to 2 or 3 translators, whose workload is estimated to be 1,500 words per day but whose productivity may reach as high as 3,000 words per day during servicing of meetings.

b/ Page impressions per time unit is mainly determined (a) by the volume and urgency of the required print jobs and (b) by the capacity of the equipment.

Table 3. Translation

(Number of words per translator per work-day)

	UN	ILO	FAO	UNESCO	ICAO	WHO	IMF	ITU	WMO	IMO	WIPO	IAEA	GAIT
Translators	1 650	1 750 g/	1 800	1 920(E.F.R.S)	1 040 b/	1 560	1 500	1 875	-	-	1 500	2 000	1 650
Revisers	4 950	3 500	5 000	3 840	-	3 120	3 000	4 500	-	-	3 750	4 950	4 950
Self-Revisers	1 400	-	-	-	1 600	-	-	-	1 200	-	-	-	1 400
Languages	-	-	Chinese	Arabic/Chinese	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Translators	-	-	1 200	1 440/1 120	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revisers	-	-	3 000	2 800/2 340	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Remarks	-	These figures are for pre-session and post-session work	-	Output for translations includes time spent on research, terminology etc. and for Self-Revisers, it includes the above	Lower averages for technical difficulty of texts translated	No formal standard established but Translator s and Revisers are expected to produce the output	Translators do their own editing, revising and referencing, and assist junior temporary translators	No formal standard established. 80% translators are Self-Revisers	Frequently, translators reach a productivity of 3,000 words per day	These are experienced translators who follow established standards	-	-	-

Inter-Agency average of translated words per work-day:

Translators:

- English, French, Russian and Spanish 1 658
- Arabic 1 440
- Chinese 1 160

Revisers:

- English, French, Russian and Spanish 4 011
- Arabic 2 800
- Chinese 2 620

Self-Revisers:

- 1 400

**Note:** Information provided by some agencies on output although not requested in connection with this study, has been included at their request.

g/ In 1991, the average output was 2,320 words per translator per work-day. For in-session work, there are no standards for revisers. They are expected to finish work during the session. Output is far higher than for pre- and post-session work.

b/ Although actual output is much higher, normally 2 400 words per day.

# MEETING SERVICES

Table 4 Interpretation

(Meetings per week of 2-1/2 to 3 hours' duration)

	UN	ILO	FAO	UNESCO	ICAO	WHO	IMF	ITU	IMO	WIPO	IAEA	GATT
Staff Interpreters	7	8	8	7	8	8			8	8	8 1/2	7
Freelance Interpreters	8			8			8		8	8		8

Table 5. Précis-writing

(Number of work-days per meeting)

	UN	ITU	IAEA	ILO	FAO	IMF	WHO	WIPO	UNESCO	ICAO	WHO	GATT
Précis writing	3	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4/5	-
Translation	2	2	3-5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revision	0.5	1.5		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Remarks	<p>For most meetings a team of 4 précis-writers are assigned and 1 day of revision is often required</p> <p>Do not use précis-writing</p> <p>Do not use précis-writing</p> <p>Do not use précis-writing</p> <p>Do not use précis-writing</p> <p>Do not use précis-writing</p> <p>A six-member team produces a full summary of minutes for its Executive Board with translations into English or French of statements in other languages</p> <p>Do not use précis-writing</p> <p>0.5 day for in-session work and 2.5 days for production of minutes of a meeting in the original language</p> <p>Précis-writers are included among GATT's conference servicing staff; this type of work is done directly in the divisions concerned</p>											

g/ Actual average workload is lower. Rules agreed between CCAO and AHC are applied (note - in January 1992, IAEA signed an agreement that established a common interpretation service with the United Nations whereby the United Nations now provides the services of its staff interpreters to the Agency).

Table 6. Verbatim reporting*(Number of meetings per work-day)*

	UN	FAO	ILO	UNESCO	ICAO	WHO	IMF	ITU	IMO	WIPO	LAEA	WMO	GATT
Verbatim Reporters	2 meetings per day (3-hours each) with 4 to 5 takes of 10 minutes each per day per language	2 meetings per day with 3 to 4 takes of 15 minutes each	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Do not use verbatim reporting	Verbatim reporting is done directly in the divisions concerned
Verbatim Revisers	1 work-day per meeting per language	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

## Annex II

### A. Translation workload standards: Recommended variable scale

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Points deducted</i>	<i>Words per translator per work-day</i>		
		<i>Translation</i>	<i>Revision</i>	<i>Self-revision</i>
United Nations		1 650	4 950	1 400
Inter-Agency	0	1 800	5 000	1 600
	5	1 700	4 700	1 500
	10	1 600	4 400	1 400
	15	1 500	4 100	1 300
	20	1 400	3 800	1 200
<i>Inter-Agency Average</i>		<i>1 600</i>	<i>4 400</i>	<i>1 400</i>

**Note:** "0" indicates easy, well drafted and edited texts with reference and terminology services. Deductions based on qualifiers as follows:

- (a) Poorer quality 2-4 points
- (b) Greater complexity 2-7 points
- (c) No or little reference support 2-3 points
- (d) No or little terminology support 2-3 points
- (e) Language combination 2-3 points

### B. Précis-writing: Present United Nations workload standards

(three-hour meeting)

	<i>Work-day précis-writing</i>	<i>Work-day revision</i>
<i>Summary record</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0.5</i>

C. Précis-writing: Inter-Agency suggested workload standards*(three-hour meeting)*

<i>Type of summary record</i>	<i>Work-day précis-writing</i>	<i>Work-day revision</i>
<i>Full</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Shorter</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0.5</i>

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