

Explanatory note:
Expectations of UNEP accredited Major Groups and their
representatives in the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, including
Regional Facilitators (Code of Conduct)
Supplement to the UNEP Handbook for Stakeholder Engagement
October 24, 2022

I. Introduction

1. The purpose of the explanatory note (the Note) is to explain the expectations of UNEP with respect to the participation of UNEP accredited Major Groups and their representatives, including Regional Facilitators (RFs), in the Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC). It outlines what UNEP expects of Major Groups, their representatives in the MGFC, including RFs, in their engagement with UNEP.
2. The Note aims to foster transparent, inclusive, and equal participation opportunities for the engagement of all accredited Major Groups.
3. It is meant to guide Major Groups, RFs and members of the MGFC in their daily work.

II. Applicability

4. The explanatory note applies to all accredited Major Groups and Stakeholders, members of the MGFC and RFs.
5. The Explanatory note is not a legal document. It supplements [UNEP's Stakeholder Engagement Handbook](#) and reflects best practices related to stakeholder engagement with UNEP. It does not replace the UNEP Stakeholder's Engagement Handbook.
6. The Explanatory note shall be read with the UNEP Handbook for Stakeholder Engagement and the [UN Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN System Events](#) (UN Code of Conduct for System events).

III. Engagement of Major Groups with UNEP

7. The following shall be taken into consideration during the engagement with UNEP:
 - a. **Self-Organization:** UNEP respects the right of each Major Group to self-organization. Major Groups may organize themselves independently.
 - b. **Transparency:** All available information shall be made accessible to all accredited Major Groups.

- c. **Participation:** All accredited Major Groups may participate in meetings, phone calls, google groups, WhatsApp groups, amongst other, except for groups with limited membership (e.g., MGFC).
- d. **Openness:** Decisions made by the MGFC related to all activities concerning Major Groups shall be made considering the views and opinions of all Major Groups. The views and opinion of all Major Groups shall be respected for all matters involving them.
- e. **Mutual respect:** Mutual respect between Major Groups, MGFC and RFs and UNEP is required in the engagement with UNEP. There shall be respect for difference of opinions during meetings, calls, conferences, and Major Groups engagement with UNEP at large.
- f. **Action oriented:** Participants to meetings, calls, conferences, and Major Groups engagement with UNEP at large shall be in a constructive manner, with a view to achieving concrete results and to move processes forward.
- g. **Consensus based decision making:** Decisions are taken by consensus. A vote can be taken when the parties are not able to arrive at a consensus regarding the decision to be made.

IV. Members of the MGFC and RFs:

- 8. Members of the MGFC and RFs are expected to lead by example for the benefit of the organizations that nominated them and for which they belong at the time of their election to these positions.
- 9. Persons who have been a subject of a fully completed and decided investigation by another UN entity which imposed measures on them, shall not be eligible for consideration for positions in the Major Groups Facilitating Committee or as Regional Facilitators. They shall be required to inform UNEP of such outcome and measures imposed from such investigations. Should they not disclose an investigation for which specific measures were imposed following the investigation or if it becomes known to UNEP, their term may be terminated depending on the nature of the investigation and the measures taken.¹
- 10. Their election to the positions in the MGFC and as RFs shall be based on their ability to maintain a standard of integrity. They shall uphold a professional and moral standard of conduct in their engagement with their teams and other members of MGFC and RF. The members of MGFC and RFs shall not abuse their position by imposing their views on others in any way. Abuse of position may include but is not limited to use of intimidation, threats, blackmail, or coercion. UNEP may recall its endorsement of Members of MGFC and RFs if they breach the standard of integrity.

¹ Such measure includes but are not limited to dismissal, request to step down from a position, separation for a period of time either temporary or permanently.

11. The role of the MGFC and RFs is to facilitate the engagement of their Major Groups with UNEP. The facilitator acts on behalf of her/his respective Major Group. The facilitator shall always seek consensus, and/or support before a decision is made.
12. Both MGFC and RFs for each Major Group or region have equal rights and obligations to engage with their constituencies.
13. Major Groups are regarded as equal regardless of the number of individual organizations that are in a Major Group.
14. RFs in the MGFC are encouraged to be active during their tenure and share work equally between them.
15. MGFC members including RFs are required to:
 - a. Maintain an up-to-date list of accredited organizations in their Major Group or region.
 - b. Inform UNEP about any changes related to specific Major Groups (e.g., new email addresses).
 - c. Regularly send out information to all accredited organizations within one Major Group or region, to highlight information that is relevant for the given Major Group or region.
 - d. Set up communication platforms such as a google group, WhatsApp group etc. which is open to all interested organizations of a certain Major Group or region.

V. Communication

16. Exchange of information and communication between Major Groups and the representatives of Major Groups in the MGFC shall be actively facilitated by:
 - a. Selecting and using an adequate communication platform. The Major Groups shall explore the most appropriate communication platform to meet the needs for distribution of information and communication.
 - b. Holding regular teleconference and physical meetings (e.g., during the United Nations Environment Assembly -UNEA-) that are open for all accredited organizations.
 - c. Participating in the regular teleconference of the MGFC.
 - d. Highlighting information of special importance (e.g., working documents that had been sent by UNEP).
17. In facilitating communication among Major Groups, the members of the MGFC and RFs are expected to ensure that all communication and exchange are done in a constructive and open manner. Using non adequate language, aggressive language, and other form of oral or written harassment is not tolerated. Harassment or any communication of a sexual nature through written or oral communication is prohibited.

VI. Conflict resolution and grievances

18. Each Major Group shall put in place mechanisms to address conflicts, complaints, and grievances among their members and between members of different Major Groups. Such mechanisms shall be open, fair, and transparent. Information on such mechanisms should be made publicly available online.
19. UNEP shall only review conflicts, complaints and grievances related to UNEP official meetings, conferences, symposia, assemblies, receptions, scientific and technical events, expert meetings, workshops, exhibits, side events and any other forum organized or hosted by UNEP in whole or in part such as UNEA or the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) meetings in line with the [Code of Conduct to prevent, harassment, including sexual harassment at UN Systems events \(Code of Conduct for UN systems of events\)](#).
20. UNEP may take interim measures following the receipt of a complaint pursuant to the UN Code of Conduct for UN Systems events.
21. Interim measures may include but are not limited to temporary suspension of UNEP's endorsement of individual members of the MGFC or RFs, suspension pending review of complaint.
22. The interim measures taken shall depend on the nature of the complaint received, the need to protect possible victims, the need to preserve UNEP's reputation, the risk of repetition of the conduct/incident, and the need to preserve the working relationship among Major Groups.
23. UNEP may ask Major Groups to select a temporary replacement of the suspended representative of MGFC or RF as the need may arise.

Procedure for review of complaints filed pursuant to the Code of Conduct for UN systems event

24. The following procedure shall apply for the review of complaints received by UNEP against members of MGFC or RFs:
 - a. Complaints should be sent to UNEP-MajorGroups-Complaints@un.org
 - b. The complaint shall be reviewed by the Legal Unit in the Corporate Services Division, upon receipt pursuant to the Code of Conduct UN systems of events. The review of the complaint shall be to determine if there is a likelihood that the allegations or concerns are substantiated.
 - c. The review of the complaint shall either be desk-based review, or the concerned parties may be contacted to obtain additional information, as needed. Additional information may be requested from the concerned parties.

- d. UNEP shall maintain the confidentiality of all complaints. The complainant and the person against whom the complaint was raised are encouraged to maintain the confidentiality of the complaint while the review is on-going.
 - e. In conducting the review, UNEP shall consider whether the complaint is made in good faith and not malicious, whether enough evidence exists to substantiate the allegations or concerns raised or any other factor(s) reasonable in the circumstances.
 - f. Upon completion of the review, UNEP shall decide whether to close the complaint, or take any action as it may deem fit.
 - g. Following the review, a review report shall be submitted to the Executive Director of UNEP which shall also include recommendations for action to be taken.
 - h. Upon completing the review, UNEP may suspend the engagement of the representatives in the MGFC, including RF's with UNEP for a specified period of time or indefinitely as needed.
 - i. The decision taken will depend on the facts and documents collected during the review.
 - j. UNEP shall communicate in writing the outcome of the review to the complainant and the person implicated in the complaint.
 - k. UNEP may provide information regarding the outcome of the review to third parties should third parties request information about the complaint with legitimate interest in the outcome of the review.
 - l. The person implicated in the complaint may provide comments regarding UNEP's decision within 14 days from when the decision is communicated to them. UNEP shall decide to respond to the comments as needed.
 - m. The outcome after the review of the comments shall be considered UNEP's final decision.
25. Major Groups, MGFC and RF are expected to cooperate with reviews of complaints conducted by UNEP.

VII. Role of the Civil Society Unit

26. UNEP's Civil Society Unit (CSU) is part of the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies. Its main role is to facilitate the engagement of Major Groups and RFs with UNEP governing bodies and to advocate within the organization for enhancing opportunities for Major Groups' engagement. Its role in this regard is as follows:
- a. Ensure that the relevant information for Major Groups and RFs is regularly shared with them, either by direct mail or through websites.
 - b. Administer accreditation requests and maintain a list of accredited organizations. The list of accredited Organisations is publicly available through the Civil Society Website: <https://www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement>
 - c. Assist in organizing elections of MGFC members and RFs upon request by the respective Major Group and contribute to capacity building of Major Groups.

- d. Oversee the participation of representatives of accredited Major Groups in the meetings of UNEA and its subsidiary organs, including the facilitation of related events such as the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum.
27. CSU does not represent Major Groups nor acts on their behalf. CSU is not involved in the self-organization of Major Groups, unless specifically requested, shall not give preferential treatment to any organization or individual representing Major Groups and shall not be engaged in the resolution of disputes between Major Groups.