

Guidance for developing executive summaries and summaries for policy makers in GEO assessments

1.1 Developing Executive Summaries for chapters of an assessment report

An Executive Summary is, in principle, located at the start of each chapter to outline its key findings.

These summaries are crucial to communicate the outcomes of the assessment to its primary audience: Member States of the UN Environment Assembly, observers, and all other stakeholders. The

Executive Summaries also provide:

1. Confidence statements in support of each key finding (See next Guidance);
2. Links to the sections in the full chapter that contains the relevant supporting evidence and literature;
3. Input to the Summary for Policy Makers (SPM);
4. An explicit link between the SPM key findings and the sections within the full technical report providing supporting evidence (a traceable, evidence 'paper trail').

The summaries need to be written clearly, concisely and using simple language. This will facilitate effective communication of the key findings. Executive summaries are not the same as an abstract of a scientific paper, but they should be technical in nature and be based on the analysis set out in the chapter. One of the key differences between the Executive Summaries and the SPM is moving from setting out the technical facts to blending and synthesising the findings from different chapters into policy relevant messages. A key statement in the SPM should be readily traceable back to an Executive Summary statement(s) that in turn should be readily traceable back to a section(s) of the chapter text, which in turn should be traceable where appropriate to the primary literature through references. References to the relevant Executive Summary statement within the SPM are included in curly brackets (e.g. {1.2}).

Chapter 1 of a Global Environment Outlook assessment is often introductory in nature and reflects the scene-setting objective of this chapter. Therefore, the executive summary will differ slightly from the other chapters in having an executive summary based on 'key messages' rather than 'key findings'.

As a guideline, each chapter should aim for an executive summary of up to 10-12 key findings and no more than 1500 words. This will also vary depending on the nature of the chapter.

This guidance was developed during the GEO-6 process and was applied by participants in that process.

1.2 Developing a Summary for Policy Makers

1.2.1 What is a Summary for Policy Makers?

A Summary for Policy Makers (Summary for Policy Makers) is a short document that highlights the main messages of an assessment responding to its scoping report and tailored to the needs of policy makers. It consists of a limited number of key messages which is followed by more detailed findings and graphics. Findings are usually formulated in one or two bolded sentences each, which are further substantiated or

explained in a paragraph which follows from the main message. Findings are given with confidence levels and references which makes them traceable back to the main report.

Responsibility for preparing first drafts and revised drafts of Summary for Policy Makers lies with the report co-chairs and an appropriate representation of coordinating lead authors and lead authors, overseen by the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and the Bureau. See previous Procedure for the Preparation of the Summary for Policy Makers for time table of development and review process for an Global Environment Outlook Summary for Policy Makers.

1.2.2 The features of a Summary for Policy Makers are:

- A. sets out policy relevant messages from the assessment while not being policy prescriptive
- B. builds on the Executive Summaries (key findings) from each chapter from the technical assessment report

The development of an Summary for Policy Makers is an iterative process as explained in the steps below. You will need to make sure that information in the Chapter Executive Summaries contains the information that underpins the messages set out in the Summary for Policy Makers. And that the analysis set out in the assessment chapters supports the findings in the Chapter Executive Summary. Fundamentally, no information, data or knowledge should appear in the Summary for Policy Makers that does not appear in the technical assessment report.

1.2.3 Steps to developing a Summary for Policy Makers

Step 1: Developing chapter Executive Summaries

The first step in developing an Summary for Policy Makers, is the development of an Executive Summary for each chapter. The Executive Summaries set out the key findings with the appropriate confidence terms for a particular chapter (see section 2.3.5 for further guidance on applying Confidence Terms). The content of the Executive Summary should be technical in nature and be based on the analysis set out in the chapter.

Step 2: Identify the policy relevant messages

One of the key differences between the Executive Summaries and the Summary for Policy Makers is moving from setting out the technical facts to blending and synthesising the findings from different chapters into policy relevant messages. Each message should be referenced to where the supporting evidence can be found in the assessment chapters (see Box 2.3).

To start with you might like to begin by envisaging the different decision makers receiving the Summary for Policy Makers and assessment report. And then ask the following questions:

- What information would the decision maker expect or be surprised by from the assessment report?
- What would the questions be that the decision makers want most answered? (these are set out in the approved scoping document for an Global Environment Outlook assessment)
- What information does the decision makers need in order to implement change?

- What information would help a decision maker convince others of the rationale for further action?

There is a tendency to make very general comments when aggregating key findings together, which are often not relevant for the policy agenda. It is therefore important to keep in mind who you are writing the Summary for Policy Makers for. The importance of the Global Environment Outlook review process should be highlighted here as it gives the opportunity for governments as members of the Platform to provide comment on the Summary for Policy Makers. These insights might be helpful to continue the shaping of the Summary for Policy Makers.

Step 3: Revisit chapters in light of the identified policy relevant messages

Remember that developing a Summary for Policy Makers is an iterative process. Once you have identified the key policy relevant messages, it is important to revisit the technical assessment report and ask the following questions:

- Have we undertaken the analysis that would support the messages set out in the Summary for Policy Makers and are they central to the arguments set out in the chapter?
- Have we pulled out and brought forward the necessary facts and figures that can substantiate and exemplify the findings?
- Have we identified the uncertainties and range of views that a policy maker needs to be aware of?

Step 4: Drafting the Summary for Policy Makers

At this point you will need to think about structure of the Summary for Policy Makers. The structure should follow the key messages identified in step 2. At this point you should reflect again on the storyline for the Summary for Policy Makers (e.g. if you were to read only the key messages does it tell the story/macro-story you want policy makers to understand). It is important to identify facts and figures that can be used to illustrate, exemplify and help tell the story.

You might consider presenting the policy relevant key messages as a set on the first page of the Summary for Policy Makers. This set of short and succinct key messages should then be backed up with a more detailed summary (8-15 pages) which substantiate the key messages. The main message should be the first sentence of a paragraph and be bolded. This should be followed by text including key facts and figures and examples. Confidence terms should be applied and the range of views on a topic that a policy maker should be aware of presented. If appropriate, then use bullet points to present lists and also include key graphics or develop graphic synthesis that help to illustrate the key messages of the assessment. The context of the assessment should also be included in the Summary for Policy Makers. Once you have drafted the Summary for Policy Makers it is suggested that you reflect once again on the questions posed by the assessment and ensure that the Summary for Policy Makers addresses these.

Remember that the Summary for Policy Makers for the Global Environment Outlook assessments will be approved line by line within the Member State negotiation, therefore it is important to develop a succinct summary based upon the analysis of the assessment. Use confidence terminology to ensure that no ambiguity appear in regards to the messages and analysis in the Summary for Policy Makers.

Each finding should also contain a footnote with a reference back to the number of the section or sections of the main report that the finding is drawn from.