9.1.2 What is an "international organization"?

The UIA database, the source of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, profiles "non-profit" "international" "organizations" according to broad criteria. It therefore includes many bodies that may be perceived, according to narrower definitions, as not being fully international, or as not being organizations as such, or as not being of sufficient significance to merit inclusion. Such bodies are nevertheless included so as to enable users to make their own evaluation in the light of their own criteria.

"Organization": There are forms of social organization that may substitute for more formal or conventional forms, such as a conference series with no continuing committee, virtual organizations, networks, cartels, secret societies, religious sects, and bodies with no formal structure or fixed address. Due to the sometimes-vague structure of such bodies, they may be under-reported.

"Non-profit": The definition of "profit-making", and the extent to which any "non-profit organization" may incidentally or deliberately make a profit as defined by particular tax regimes, cannot be unambiguously resolved. This grey area is treated with flexibility, though bodies that are unambiguously constituted as "for profit" or with solely commercial aims are excluded.

"International": The editors look for the involvement of at least three countries on a more or less equal footing, to the possible exclusion of bi-lateral international bodies and those in which a particular country is dominant. Indications of "internationality" include distribution of board members, location of meetings, rotation of secretariat, source of finance, and membership. Bodies that are focused on, or derive from, a single country are likely to be excluded, which may lead to under-reporting of, for example, aid and missionary societies, or language and cultural activities.

The number and variety of organizations in the UIA database are indicators of the problems of information collection. Documenting organizations and their meetings is challenging for reasons such as the following:

- News of the creation, existence or dissolution of an organization may only be received some time after the fact. Information on an organization's activities may take time to be received and registered by the editors.
- Some organizations are reluctant to publicize their activities. They may not respond to questionnaires or may omit significant information from their replies. Some may not perceive themselves as sufficiently formalized to be mentioned in the same context as those that are legally established.
- Some organizations are ephemeral creations or are only "activated" for infrequent meetings, events or projects.
- Some organizations have frequent changes of secretariat, making continuing contact problematic.

Approximately 60% of UIA's profiles of currently active organizations include information on meetings activity. These data form the basis of this report.

More information on UIA's hierarchical typology can be found on the UIA website in the article "Types of organization".

9.1.3 Caveat

The UIA editors work continuously throughout the year on the meetings database, adding and modifying event records using information acquired from international organizations and secondary sources, whether for meetings planned for future years or for meetings which took place in years (long) past. The data in this report are extracted every year anew. The most current edition of the report is therefore the most up to date and comprehensive set of data available. Readers are reminded that data, especially for recent years, are therefore provisional: data will change as research continues and the database is updated.

The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase:
- by about 11% over the next year
- by about 34% over the following five years, and
- by about 37% over the following seven years.

9.1.4 Geographical names

It is not the intention of the editors to take a position with regard to the political or diplomatic implications of geographical names or continental groupings used. The country, city, and continental names used in this publication are chosen for the sake of brevity and common usage in English. Within the limits of standardization required for statistical purposes, the geographical names used by the organizer of the meeting are respected. This may sometimes lead to territories and dependencies being listed separately, which then affects the totals per country.

The editors are aware there may be inconsistencies in spelling or usage of city names and would welcome being given the information necessary to correct these. Some apparent inconsistencies, however, may be due to the preferences of the organizer (for example, indicating a meeting is held in a suburb or distinct district of a major city rather than in the city itself), or to the exigencies of postal agreements.

9.1.5 Other resources

Custom research reports based on these and more data from the UIA database are available on request. Contact us for more information.

Readers wishing to study the overall association meetings market may also find it useful to consult the statistics reports produced by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA). This complementary resource can be used alongside UIA statistics to create a more complete understanding, rather than an alternative or competing view, of the same market segment.

The UIA and ICCA statistics differ, in the first place, because they are based on differing definitions of what constitutes an "international not-for-profit organization". (See above "What is an international organization?".) All three of these terms – "international", "not-for-profit", and "organization" – are large enough, and vague enough, to be interpreted differently. In a matching exercise carried out by UIA and ICCA together, it was found that about four-fifths of the international organizations in the ICCA database also qualify for inclusion in the UIA database; the remaining one-fifth does not meet UIA's criteria for "international not-for-profit organizations".

UIA's association database has many organizations not included in ICCA's database because UIA has a broader definition of "international not-for-profit organization", and because UIA's criteria are not restricted to organizations holding regular, rotating meetings. ICCA's focus on the meetings activities of international associations, and its definition of "international association meeting", further refine its selection of the international organizations behind those meetings, while UIA's broader definitions allow a wider range of meetings and of organizations. For example, UIA's database also includes organizations which have no (known) meetings activity at all.

Secondly, the UIA and ICCA statistics differ because they are based on differing definitions of what constitutes an "international association meeting".

- Both include only events organized by international not-for-profit associations, but, as described above, their interpretations of those terms differ.
- ICCA includes only the meetings of non-governmental organizations; UIA includes meetings of both non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations (and acknowledges the grey zone in between).
- ICCA includes only events which occur regularly; UIA includes meetings regardless of their frequency, including one-off events.
- ICCA includes only events which rotate between at least three countries; UIA includes meetings regardless of their location, including events held always in the same location.
- ICCA includes only events which attract at least 50 participants; UIA includes meetings regardless of their participant numbers.

Finally, ICCA and UIA differ in their focus. ICCA collects the information from its members – "specialists in organising, transporting and accommodating international meetings and events" – and also from international associations. UIA derives its information chiefly by direct and regular contact with international associations, and, in the second place, from national, regional, and civic tourist authorities.