

COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION
Committee 2 (Postal Policy and Regulation)
| Publication of members' replies to universal postal service survey
Memorandum by the International Bureau
(Agenda item 5)

1 Subject Publication of members' replies to the universal postal service survey.	References/paragraphs §§ 1 to 10 and Annex 1
2 Decisions expected Committee 2 is invited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – take note of this document and provide comments; – approve the proposed publication of the responses, the frequency of the survey, and the review and update of the questionnaire. 	§§ 1 to 10 and Annex 1 §§ 8 to 10

I. Introduction

1 According to article 1.1.18 of the Universal Postal Convention, the universal postal service (UPS) is “the permanent provision of quality basic postal services at all points in a member country’s territory, for all customers, at affordable prices.” Bound by article 3 of the Convention, UPU member countries are required to provide such service.

2 Even though there are articles defining members’ obligations, such as mandatory services (section IV) and liability of designated operators (DOs), it falls within the sovereignty of member countries to define their own UPS. For example, a country can include postal financial services in the scope of the UPS even though it is not mandatory to provide those services under the UPU Acts, while the UPS may be defined without any parcel service, although such a service must be provided in accordance with the UPU Convention. These examples cause confusion among policymakers, regulators and operators in defining UPS, and make it important to see examples of other countries.

3 In this context, the UPU International Bureau (IB) launched a monitoring system on the provision of the UPS by Union member countries in 2003 (based on resolution C 18/1999), which then became a regular survey (C 10/2004). The aggregated responses to the survey have been reported to the Council of Administration (CA) since 2003, and each country’s individual responses have been published on the UPU website since 2013.¹

¹ upu.int/en/Members-Centre/Policies-Regulation/Universal-Postal-Service.

4 In 2003, the survey consisted of six sections and a total of 29 questions. In 2017, the survey contained ten sections and 58 questions. In 2022, it was restructured by reducing the number of sections to seven and the total number of questions to 52 for the sake of simplification and to allow participants to better understand the questions and provide relevant information. Each section now covers a critical aspect of the UPS concept and/or provision. The sections are listed in table 1 below, with a main question describing the contents of each section.

Table 1: Structure of the UPS survey

Section	Key question	Number of questions
1 Definition	Whether and how the UPS is defined?	3
2 Scope	What services are included in the UPS?	9
3 Access and service standards ²	What are the quality standards for the UPS?	14
4 Customer/consumer protection standards	How are customers/consumers protected?	13
5 Financing mechanism	How is the provision of the UPS financed?	5
6 Postal regulator	What are the functions of a postal regulator?	1
7 Policy changes	How is the change in the UPS managed?	7

5 Compared to the 2017 survey, the 2022 version included a question on changes to the universal service provision in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This question is included in section 7.

II. Survey results

6 Sixty-three member countries completed and returned the survey to the IB between September and November 2022. These results have been consolidated with the results from previous editions of the survey to ensure that the database containing the relevant UPS information is as representative as possible of the single postal territory that the Union member countries constitute. Since 2003, 20 member countries have never responded to the survey. Table 2 presents an overview of the responses to the UPS survey since 2003. The current database includes responses from 10 different years, from 172 member countries, with almost 80% of the responses received since 2013.

Table 2: Responses to the survey on UPS provision (2003–2022)

Year	2003	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2013	2015	2017	2022
Number of updates received	94	90	83	82	86	74	62	84	74	63
Total number of responses ³	94	123	138	146	155	162	165	169	169	172
Number and percentage of last responses ⁴	3 (1.7%)	2 (1.2%)	3 (1.7%)	6 (3.5%)	12 (7.0%)	12 (7.0%)	7 (4.1%)	21 (12.2%)	43 (25.0%)	63 (36.6%)

/ 7 The consolidated version of the responses to the survey is provided in Annex 1.

² Questions 4.3 to 4.4.1 should be reallocated from section 4 to section 3. This will be reflected in the questionnaire for the next survey.

³ Total number of member countries having responded to the survey at least once.

⁴ Example: three member countries (1.7%) last responded to the survey in 2003, two member countries (1.2%) last responded in 2005, etc.

III. Next steps

8 The IB will publish this document and each country's responses in document format in the database on the UPU website⁵. The information collected from the survey will also be entered into the electronic regulatory database that will be established later in the Abidjan cycle. The new database will have some tools that will allow users to query and compare information, and to allow information to be accessed at aggregate level so that it can serve as a reference for analysis. The regulatory database will be supplemented with data from other sources.

9 The IB will conduct the survey once every Congress cycle. However, member countries can always submit the form that is published on the UPU website⁶ to notify any changes in their UPS provision and policy, which means that the database and the published country answers will need to be updated in a timely manner.

10 The IB will review the survey structure and questions at the beginning of the next Congress cycle.

| Berne, 1 May 2023

⁵ [upu.int/en/Members-Centre/Policies-Regulation/Universal-Postal-Service](https://www.upu.int/en/Members-Centre/Policies-Regulation/Universal-Postal-Service).

⁶ [upu.int/en/Members-Centre/Policies-Regulation/Universal-Postal-Service](https://www.upu.int/en/Members-Centre/Policies-Regulation/Universal-Postal-Service).

Results of universal postal service survey(s)

This document presents the results of the responses received to the survey on universal postal service (UPS) provision (circular letter 0115(DPRM.PPRE.PRA)1086 of 29 August 2022), and also includes responses received in relation to previous versions of the survey in those cases where member countries did not respond in 2022.

0 Overview

1 One hundred and sixteen countries (67.4% of the cumulative 172 responses) define the UPS with regard to all five aspects covered by the questionnaire. A total of 170 countries define at least one of these aspects. The list of aspects and the number of countries that replied “yes” are indicated in the below table. It should be noted that the number of countries having at least one of the five aspects has increased, but that the number of countries having all of the aspects has decreased from 125 to 116 since the last survey.

Table 1: Aspects of UPS provision and number of affirmative replies for each aspect

Aspect	Sub-aspect	Number of “yes” replies	
		2022	2017
Definition (section I)	–	147	148
Scope (section II)	–	148	147
Access and service standards (section III)	Access to postal service	166	164
	Quality of service	146	148
Customer/consumer protection standards (section IV)	Complaint handling and satisfaction	129	129
	Claim and liability handling	144	148
	Security	153	152
Funding mechanism (section V)	–	135	142
At least one of the five aspects		170	168
All five aspects		116	125

2 In addition to the five aspects below, the survey also collected information on the authority responsible for regulating the postal sector (section VI), processes to review and bring changes to the UPS (section VII), and the transparent publication of performance and compliance results with respect to the UPS (section VIII).

3 The most commonly defined aspect is access to postal services. Among the total number of 172 respondents, 166 define at least one of the following three standards: i) access to the postal network by the general public; ii) number of days per week for collection and delivery; and iii) minimum post office opening hours.

4 The UPS funding mechanism is the least common aspect defined by member countries. Among others, the reserved area is the most common mechanism, followed by a government subsidy. The detailed results and breakdown are as follows.

I. Definition of the UPS

5 Seventy-five of the 94 countries (79.8%) that responded to the first survey in 2003 defined the UPS in their respective territories, while 147 countries out of 172 respondents (85.5%) defined it in 2022. Twenty-four respondents do not define the UPS.

6 Moreover, 139 of the 147 respondents with a definition of the UPS define it formally, through legislation, concessions, licences, manuals, or other means (including service charters), most commonly by legislation.

7 Twenty-five respondents indicated that they do not formally define the UPS, with 19 of them also indicating that they plan to do so within a period ranging from six months to two years.

II. Scope of the UPS

8 In most of the 172 respondents, the UPS includes letter post (148 responses, 86%) and parcel post (119 responses, 69.2%). In 2006, when member countries were first asked to indicate the scope of their UPS, 71 (85.5%) and 58 (69.9%) out of a total of 83 respondents indicated that letter-post and parcel-post items were included in the scope of their UPS, respectively. It should be noted that, over the last 20 years, parcel post has been eliminated from the scope of the UPS in certain countries among those 58 responses.

9 In over 50% of the total of 172 respondents, the following four categories were part of the UPS: letter post, parcel post, financial services and non-financial services, including 14 different services and four supplementary services. Typically, the services included in or recognized as pertaining to the UPS are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Scope of the UPS in the majority of the 172 respondent countries

<i>Category</i>	<i>Type or services</i>	<i>Most common weight limit</i>
Letter post	Priority and non-priority	Up to 2 kg
	Books, newspapers and periodicals	Up to 2 kg
	Items for the blind	More than 2 kg
	Small packets	Up to 2 kg
	Supplementary: registered	–
Parcel post	–	Up to 20 kg

10 Financial services are included in the UPS by 69 (40.1%) of the 172 respondents to the survey, more than half of which recognize and provide postal transfer and money order services.

11 Other non-postal services are also included in the UPS in 63 countries (36.6%), more than half of which provide pension payments (36) or services on behalf of public utilities (42), such as licensing (fishing, arms, driving, etc.), transactions of identifications or certificates, bill payments (mostly taxes and fines), etc.

III. Access and service standards

i Access

12 One hundred and nine countries (63.4% of the 172 respondents) have standards for access to the postal network by the general public. Around two thirds of them determine the standard distance to a post office from a major population centre. Moreover, around half of them have other standards, such as the population per post office, or similar distance or population standards associated with letter boxes.

13 One hundred and fifty-four respondents (89.5%) have standards for the number of collection and delivery days per week. In less than half of them (75), the DOs collect and deliver postal items at least once a working day (some even at the weekend) throughout their national territory, regardless of urban or rural areas.

14 In addition, 126 (73.3%) of the respondents indicated that their countries have standards for minimum opening hours. One hundred countries have daily or weekly opening hours in a variety of forms, including fixed or minimum length, or a range.

15 Certain questions were developed in 2017, so the cumulative database contains only 106 responses. It should, therefore, be noted that among these countries, access to the postal network for delivery and collection is exclusive to the DOs, in 69 and 64 of them, respectively.

16 It should also be noted that most of them (98) have standards for delivery points, mostly end-to-end (82), and around half of them (52) also have standards for redelivery in case the items are not received at the first attempt. More than two thirds of these 98 respondents have post offices as standard delivery points.

ii Service

17 For the three major services comprising the UPS (priority letters, non-priority letters and parcels), 84 countries out of the 172 respondents have service standards for all of these services. This number was 93 in 2017, out of 169 cumulative responses in that year. One hundred and forty-six countries have standards for at least one of these, while 148 countries did in 2017. The number of countries with these service standards and the ranges of their standards are summarized in the table below:

Table 3: Number of countries with service standards for priority and non-priority letters and parcels

<i>Service</i>	<i>Number of countries</i>	<i>Range of standards</i>	<i>In more than one half of countries</i>
Priority letters	128	D+0 to D+15	D+3
Non-priority letters	110	D+0 to D+15	D+5
Parcels	118	D+0 to D+15	D+5

18 Seventy-two respondents indicated that they have standards for services other than the above three, which implies that these services are included in the UPS in those 72 countries. These include EMS, express, registered and insured items, literature for the blind, newspapers, direct mail, money orders, etc.

19 One hundred and fourteen respondents indicated that they measure their international mail standards in conjunction with other countries, and 91 have agreed standards for the clearance of postal items by their respective customs authorities.

IV. Customer/consumer protection standards

i Customer complaints and satisfaction

20 One hundred and twenty-two (70.9%) of the 172 respondents have UPS standards relating to the treatment of customer complaints. Among these, 97 respondents indicated that they measure the time taken to respond to and/or settle customer complaints. The type of complaints, range, and median response and settlement time are as indicated in the table below.

Table 4: Type of customer complaints, range, and median response and settlement time

<i>Category</i>	<i>Type of complaints</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Median</i>
Speed of response	Telephone	Immediate up to 30 days	Within two hours
	Letter	Same day up to 90 days	Within one week
	E-mail	Immediate up to 60 days	Within three days
Case closure time	Domestic	Same day up to 90 days	Within two weeks
	International	One day up to six months	Within two months

21 However, only 64 countries have customer satisfaction standards. More than half of the 172 respondents indicate that they do not have any standards in this area. Among those that do, the standards were mainly measured by survey, interview, or consumer satisfaction indices.

22 Seventy-five of the 106 respondents since 2017 (the year in which this question was developed) have a specific body that deals with customer satisfaction, which is independent from the designated operator (DO) in half of them and mainly the postal regulator. Almost half (80) of the 172 respondents indicate, however, that they do not have an independent body which acts as the voice of the customer with regard to the UPS.

ii Claims and inquiries

23 The questionnaire asks respondents whether they have standards for: a) settling claims according to the amount of compensation; b) settling claims according to the time limit; and c) the time for responding to and settling inquiries. One hundred and forty-four countries out of the 172 respondents indicated that they have at least one of the three types of standards, and 100 respondents indicated that they have standards for all three types of claims and inquiries.

24 One hundred and nineteen countries replied “yes” to the question (c) in the above paragraph. Among them, 96 countries measure the time taken to respond to and/or settle inquiries. The type of inquiries, range, and median response and settlement time are as indicated in the table below.

Table 5: Type of inquiries, range and median response and settlement time

<i>Category</i>	<i>Type of complaints</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Median</i>
Speed of response	Telephone	Immediate up to 30 days	Within one hour
	Letter	Same day up to 90 days	Within one week
	E-mail	Immediate up to 60 days	Within one day
Case closure time	Domestic	Same day up to 90 days	Within three weeks
	International	One day up to six months	Within 1.5 months

iii Security

25 Regarding security standards, respondents were asked whether they have standards to: a) ensure the safe receipt and dispatch of mails at airports; b) detect and prevent the postal transmission of dangerous goods; and c) prevent the theft of national and international mail. One hundred and fifty-three countries out of the 172 respondents indicated that they have at least one of these three standards, and 114 respondents indicated that they have standards for all three of these security aspects.

V. Financing mechanism

26 In 2006, when the question on the UPS funding mechanism was first asked, 72 (86.7%) of the 83 respondent countries answered that they have certain mechanisms, the most common being by reserved area (95.8% of those 72 countries), followed by government subsidies (22.2%).

27 This trend has not changed in the 2022 cumulative dataset, with 135 countries (78.5%) answering that they have funding mechanisms, most commonly the reserved area, followed by government subsidies. However, the proportion of government subsidies has increased significantly while that of the reserved area has decreased. The UPS is now at least partly financed by a government subsidy in 65 (48.1%) of the respondent countries which indicated that they have a financing mechanism. One hundred and four countries (77.0%) have a reserved area.

28 It should be noted that among the 69 countries which indicated that they had a reserved area in 2006, 26 of them have eliminated it since then.

29 Twenty-six countries in the cumulative dataset replied regarding the scope of their reserved area. It is most commonly defined as basic letter post, with a maximum weight and/or price limit. It is usually up to 50 grammes and 2.5 times the price of a basic product among European countries. However, the weight limit ranges from 500 grammes to two kilogrammes in some African, Arab and Asian countries.

30 More than half (101) of the 172 respondents say that they have a price-setting process for the UPS. In most cases, the DOs set the prices and the ministries responsible for the postal sector or the postal regulators approve them. In some cases, only the prices for reserved services are approved by the ministries or regulators. Moreover, price caps and/or floors are sometimes applied.

31 Since 2017, there is a new question regarding a UPS cost calculation mechanism and 60 (56.6%) of the 106 respondent countries since 2017 have such a mechanism. Most of them (36) calculate the total cost of UPS provision, which means that they are able to calculate the cost of providing the UPS in a direct and explicit way. Twenty-nine respondents said they calculate it as the difference between the actual total cost and the estimated total cost without the universal service obligation (USO). Twenty-five countries consider the cost of the UPS as the difference between the actual total cost and the cost of non-UPS business.

32 Among the responses to another new question on a lower tariff obligation, 60 out of 106 member countries have such an obligation for items for the blind, while only 29 have one for newspapers and periodicals. Only 19 and 12 countries have a funding mechanism for their respective obligations, mostly a state subsidy or under the state budget. In the remaining countries, these are the sole burden of the DOs.

VI. Postal regulator

33 This section is also new since 2015. Sixty-five of the 127 respondent countries since 2015 indicated that they have a postal regulator that is independent of the supervisory ministry for the postal sector, with its common (in the case of more than half of the 65 countries) role or function being to:

- monitor compliance with the USO, service standards and/or legislation;
- regulate prices;
- establish service standards and basic principles of cost accounting;
- grant licences to DOs and non-DOs;
- establish postal sector policy and propose relevant enabling legislation;
- act as an arbiter in disputes between customers and postal operators; and
- represent the country in relations with international organizations.

VII. Policy change

i General

34 A majority (89, 51.7%) of the 172 respondents indicate that they do not have any process for gathering and reflecting public needs in establishing the definition and scope of the UPS. However, in a new question since 2017 asking whether the UPS is regularly reviewed or not, more than half (63 out of 106) of the respondents indicate that their UPS is regularly reviewed, mostly as a result of market evolution (47) and/or change in customer needs (46).

35 There is also a new question on any anticipated change to UPS policy, to which 54 of the 106 respondent countries replied in the affirmative since 2017. Most of them (41) indicated the cost of the UPS as one the key drivers. Technological change (28) and the growth of e-commerce (31) are also commonly seen as key drivers.

36 In another new question on viewing the UPS and the postal network as a tool for development, more than 80% of the 106 respondents were in the affirmative since 2017. Social inclusion is the most commonly indicated area of development (71), followed by economic development (66).

ii Response to the crisis – COVID-19 pandemic

37 A question on the impact of COVID-19 was included in the 2022 questionnaire, with member countries being asked whether they had modified any aspects of their UPS as a result of the pandemic. A majority (38) of the 63 respondents indicated that they had not modified any aspects of the UPS (20 respondents indicated that the UPS was modified, and five did not respond to this question).

38 Among the 20 respondents indicating that they had modified some aspects of the UPS in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, access and service standards were the most commonly modified aspect (19 out of 20 respondents) among the five options listed in table 1, followed by customer/consumer protection standards (15 respondents) and the scope (14) of the UPS. In most of these countries, the standards have been loosened (e.g. extended delivery time, reduced opening hours) and the scope has been reduced.

VIII. Transparency

39 A number of questions ask whether the achievement of standards with respect to certain aspects of the UPS are published (access, service, customer satisfaction, handling of claims and liability, and security). More than half (127) of the 172 respondents indicated that they publish standards in respect of at least one of these five areas. The results are summarized in the table below.

Table 6: Aspects of the UPS and number of countries in which the achievements against related standards are published

<i>Standards</i>	<i>Number of member countries publishing achievement thereof</i>
Access standards	65
Service standards	73
Customer satisfaction	72
Claim and liability handling	67
Security standards	28