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|  | **Document TDAG-25/24-E** |
|  | **1 April 2025** |
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| Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau |
| Strengthening the Regional Presence - Criteria for Establishing Future Regional and Area Offices |
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| **Summary:**This document reports on the measures undertaken by the secretariat to strengthen ITU’s regional presence, in alignment with the ITU Strategic Plan as well as the Kigali Action Plan. It summarizes the debates that have taken placeon the criteria for the establishment of future regional and area offices, and seeks to assist TDAG in providing its views on the topic.**Action required:**TDAG is invited to note this document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.**References:*** Resolution [25 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-025-e.pdf) of the Plenipotentiary Conference
* Council Documents [C24/79](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0079/en), [C24/98](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0098/en) and [C24/25](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0025/en)
* [CWG-FHR-20/2](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CWGFHR20-C-0002/en) and [CWG-FHR-20/DT/1](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CWGFHR20-250217-TD-0001/en)
* [CWG-FHR-16/10](https://www.itu.int/md/meetingdoc.asp?lang=en&parent=S23-CWGFHR16-C-0010) and [CWG-FHR-16/24(Rev.1)](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/23/cwgfhr16/c/S23-CWGFHR16-C-0024%21R1%21MSW-E.docx)
* Documents [TDAG-24/7(Rev.1)](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG31-C-0007/en), [TDAG-24/12](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG31-C-0012/en)
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The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has been actively working to enhance its regional presence, aiming to strengthen the delivery of support through projects and other operational plan activities to Member States in a timely, effective, and impactful manner. The [Regional Presence Dashboard](https://www.itu.int/en/council/ties/Pages/regional-presence-dashboard.aspx) to track the implementation of specific priorities to strengthen regional presence is updated regularly. It includes the implementation of PwC recommendations, internal and IMAC audit recommendations as well as the actions undertaken by the Secretariat to strengthen regional presence.

Well-planned and implemented interventions have attracted extrabudgetary funding from donors for the implementation of projects, including for regional initiatives. The regional offices continue to play a crucial role in this context, serving as the frontline for ITU’s engagement with local stakeholders and governments. A detailed report on the implementation of the Regional Initiatives can be found in [TDAG-25/3](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0003/), which includes an annex mapping projects to Regional Initiatives. Below are some key examples of the positive impact that specific measures taken to strengthen regional presence between 2023 and 2025([TDAG-25/2](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0002/) and [TDAG-25/3](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0003/) provide detailed information) have had:

# Membership engagement and implementation of projects and operational plans

The effectiveness of ITU’s regional activities significantly contributes to its global mission of connecting the world and fostering sustainable digital transformation. These efforts are strategically designed to ensure that ITU remains responsive to the fast-evolving needs of digital economies and societies worldwide.

1.1 **ITU-D Operational Plan**[[1]](#footnote-2) is aligned with the structure of the strategic plan for the Union for 2024-2027. The structure follows the Kigali Action Plan (KAP), outlining the ITU-D Priorities and Enablers, and their corresponding outcomes, products and services as well as the performance indicators to measure their achievement level produced by the activities of the Sector. Currently, a total of one hundred and twenty-two (122) activities are being deployed globally and across regions. To enhance implementation, synergies are sought among regional outputs, as well as between regional and global initiatives, in collaboration with other ITU Bureaux and the General Secretariat.

1.2 **Coordinated Planning on OP and Projects:** ITU’s Regional and Area Offices have been working closely with Headquarters on the identification, implementation and monitoring of the operational plans, as well as on the design, implementation and monitoring of projects for technical assistance within their respective regions. This includes the delivery of ITU-D products and services to Members States as well as addressing country specific needs, in alignment with the [ITU-D Priority and Enablers and Regional Initiatives](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/tdc/D-TDC-WTDC-2022-PDF-E.pdf) adopted at the [WTDC-22](https://www.itu.int/wtdc). This integrated approach allows BDT to provide better services to ITU Member States, and to leverage on the synergies between the regular and extrabudgetary activities undertaken by the Bureau. The BDT Projects Board plays an important role to ensure that projects are formulated in alignment with the Kigali Action Plan, as well as to ensure the proper governance of the BDT project portfolio.

1.3 **Project design and implementation:** Following WTDC-22, the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), in collaboration with relevant partners, has identified, formulated and implemented a wide range of projects that have contributed to the implementation of the priorities defined for WTDC-22. These projects also contribute to the implementation of Regional Initiatives to meet the regions’ particular needs. BDT projects contribute to the development of a variety of products and services in alignment with the ITU-D priorities and enablers defined by the Kigali Action Plan, as well as by the ITU Strategic Plan in each of the ITU’s six regions. The projects implemented and/or ongoing under each Regional Initiative adopted at WTDC-22 for the period 2023-2025 are mapped in Information Document [TDAG-25/INF/4](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-INF-0004/).

1.4 **Regional Development Forums (RDFs)**: In 2025, between February and April, BDT organized a series of six RDFs back-to-back with the ITU Regional Preparatory Meetings for WTDC-25. The Regional Development Forums promote multi-stakeholder partnerships among Member States, industry, academia, civil society, the UN system as well as regional and international development agencies and organizations, on specific regional telecommunication and ICT matters. RDFs provide an opportunity for high-level dialogue between the Telecommunication Development Bureau, Member States and ITU-D Sector Members, primarily on the implementation of the Regional Initiatives, and the Kigali Action Plan as adopted by the [WTDC-22](https://www.itu.int/wtdc).

1.5 **P2C Matchmaking:** Each Regional Development Forum (RDF) includes P2C Matchmaking Roundtables as follows:

* Arab States (RDF/P2C Matchmaking Roundtable) took place on 3 February 2025 in Amman, Jordan.
* Europe (RDF/P2C Matchmaking Roundtable on Fostering Partnerships for Development) was held on 24 February 2025 in Budapest, Hungary.
* Asia and the Pacific (RDF/P2C Matchmaking Roundtable) took place on 19 March 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand.
* Americas (RDF/P2C Matchmaking Roundtable) was held on 31 March 2025 in Asunción, Paraguay.
* Africa (RDF/P2C Matchmaking Roundtable ) took place on 7 April 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya
* Commonwealth of Independent States – CIS (RDF/ P2C Matchmaking Roundtable) was held on 23 April 2025 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

1.6 **Stakeholder engagement**: from May 2024 to March 2025, ITU signed 73 agreements with a wide range of partners. Further details are posted on the ITU-D [Partnership webpage](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/partnerships/home/partnerships/).

1.7 **New projects signed:** from May 2024 and March 2025, ITU signed a total of 35 new projects and addenda valued at CHF 26.7 million. These figures confirm the positive trend experienced in the last years in the increase of funds mobilized by BDT in support of projects, showcasing enhanced confidence in ITU as a leading partner in implementing ICT initiatives, both in projects to provide technical assistance to ITU Member States, as well as in projects funded by third party donors. Further details on project implementation by BDT are included in [TDAG-25/5](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0005/), as well as in the [ITU-D projects portal](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/Pages/Portfolio.aspx), which includes an interactive dashboard for TDAG members with further information about BDT project portfolio.

1.8 **Existing projects, partnerships, and cooperation activities:** During 2024, BDT implemented a total of 105 projects, valued at CHF 91.8 million. Figure 1 presents the overall distribution of this portfolio by region and the overview of (1) the funds mobilized to support the implementation of these projects, (2) the seed funding allocated by ITU from the ICT Development Fund (ICT-DF).More information on BDT projects is available in document[TDAG-25/5](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0005/) and more information on resource mobilization efforts and partnerships is available in document [TDAG-25/9](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0009/).

**Table 1: Overview of ITU projects by region with activities in 2024 (figures in k CHF)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Number of Projects** | **Funding from partners**  | **ITU funds**  | **Total project funding** |
| AFR  | 17 | 26,548.5 | 1,516.8 | 28,197.8 |
| AMS  | 19 | 12,600.3 | 335.5 | 13,211.4 |
| ARB  | 5 | 2,989.6 | 664.5 | 3,654.1 |
| ASP | 15 | 6,667.2 | 655.6 | 7,804.7 |
| CIS  | 4 | 342.0 | 532.2 | 874.1 |
| EUR | 4 | 4,034.6 | 44.2 | 4,078.8 |
| MUL (\*) | 41 | 26,852.4 | 6,676.5 | 33,979.1 |
| **Total** | **105** | **80,034.7** | **10,425.3** | **91,800.0** |

(\*) Multi-regional projects benefiting all regions

# 2. Discussions at Council on Strengthening Regional Presence

2.1 The Council Working Group on Financial and Human resources, during its meeting on 11-13 October 2023, examined and discussed briefly the following two documents, both on the topic of establishing criteria for the creation of future area offices: [CWG-FHR-16/10](https://www.itu.int/md/meetingdoc.asp?lang=en&parent=S23-CWGFHR16-C-0010) - Strengthening the Regional Presence - Criteria for Establishing Future Area Offices, submitted by the Secretary-General, and [CWG-FHR-16/24(Rev.1)](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/23/cwgfhr16/c/S23-CWGFHR16-C-0024%21R1%21MSW-E.docx) - Multi-country contribution - The Proposal for Establishing Future Area Offices, from Algeria, China, Cuba, Russian Federation and South Africa

2.1.1 The documents were sent to the January 2024 CWG-FHR meeting, for continued discussions and possible deliberation on a proposal to be sent to the Council.

2.1.2 The CWG-FHR, during its meeting on 24-26 January 2024, resolved the following:

2.1.3 Some Member States motioned for the report to be forwarded to Council for approval while others expected additional information from the advisory committee, coordination with other ITU sectors, and enhanced overall fidelity in the document. It was noted that the proposed criteria should be measurable and that it should incorporate the role of regional organizations. After further general discussions on the topic, it was decided that the CWG-FHR would send a Liaison Statement to TDAG and to the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), asking the advisory group and ISCG to review and provide any feedback to the next meeting of Council.

2.2 The CWG-FHR, during its meeting in March 2025 reviewed the report submitted by the Online Correspondence Group (OCG), which included the revised Terms of Reference (ToR).

2.2.1 During the discussion, several delegates sought clarifications and provided comments on key aspects of the revised ToR, including:

* The scope of stakeholder consultations,
* The alignment of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and
* The process for review and evaluation.

2.2.2 Following these discussions, it was agreed that the Chair of the Online Correspondence Group would engage with members who had raised comments and observations in an informal consultation. The outcome of these consultations would then inform the preparation of a revised report for further consideration by the Council Working Group.

2.2.3 Following the completion of the informal consultations, amendments were made to the Terms of Reference. The revised document was subsequently submitted to the 20th Session of the CWG FHR for consideration. The revised Terms of Reference, subject to minor typographical adjustments were adopted, and are reflected in Annex A ([TDAG25/24(Ann.1)](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0024/)) to this document.

# Summary of documents in reference

3.1 [CWG-FHR-16/10](https://www.itu.int/md/meetingdoc.asp?lang=en&parent=S23-CWGFHR16-C-0010)

3.1.1 The document established that the expansion of ITU’s regional presence should be considered where there are verified gaps in ITU’s coverage, which comprise sufficient countries to justify the expansion. An assessment should be conducted to determine whether there are any gaps in the current coverage of ITU’s regional presence. If the assessment identifies a geographical gap where multiple countries are not effectively covered, this should be identified as a potential “area” for coverage by ITU, which may be suitable for a new ITU presence.

3.1.2 Once it is determined that there is a geographical area comprising multiple countries whose needs cannot effectively be addressed from an existing office, the next step is to determine whether it would be appropriate to expand ITU’s regional presence to address that gap, and where the ITU presence in the area should be situated.

3.1.3 The following criteria are presented regarding the opening of a new presence in an area where a gap has been identified:

* Relevance – the proposed new location should improve ITU's ability to generate impact across several countries.
* Exclusivity – the suggested location does not duplicate any existing presence at sub-regional level.
* Feasibility – Sufficient resources can be secured to establish the office and support a minimum critical mass of technical skills for an extended period, and the host country has the resources and commitment to meet the obligations required to host an ITU office.
* Security - The location should be assessed by UNDSS as having a low security level, i.e. the location should not represent any specific threat to staff safety and business continuity.
* Proximity – Efficient geographical proximity to countries in need, particularly LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS, and good access to regional or sub-regional hubs of other UN Agencies and/or a Regional Telecom Organization.
* Accessibility – the suggested location provides access to an airline hub with extensive international connections (facilitating external access) and direct connections with the other countries in the sub-region.

3.1.4 Having determined that an additional presence of ITU is desirable, and identifying the possible locations of the ITU presence, it should be determined what form the presence would take. This may involve the opening of a new regional or area office or partnering with other international agencies or entities to increase ITU’s activities in the area.

3.2 [CWG-FHR-16/24 (Rev.1)](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/23/cwgfhr16/c/S23-CWGFHR16-C-0024%21R1%21MSW-E.docx)

3.2.1 The document establishes that the regional presence plays a vital role in the achievement of ITU's mission, enhancing the Union's understanding of local contexts and responding to countries' needs effectively. n particular, the role of the ITU regional and area offices is to assist countries in the regions in many areas, such as in execution of and follow-up to projects, including ones related to the regional initiatives, bridging the standardization gap, capacity building related to frequency management, updating the regions on ITU activities and strengthening collaboration with regional telecommunication organizations.

3.2.2 The document provides views on the support provided by ITU’s Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) through the regional presence. It notes that most of the recommendations made to strengthen the regional presence have been implemented, or are in progress, and that the results have improved steadily since 2019.

3.2.3 The document makes the following proposals:

1. The establishment of area offices should comprehensively consider various factors, including the host country's willingness to host a new office, the needs from the relevant areas, the financial resources availability, geographic representation etc. and should also take the previous experience into account.
2. Considering that the BDT is responsible for regional and area offices, the criteria identified for establishing area offices should be fully reviewed and discussed in TDAG and the future Council. Both should be able to investigate and obtain all necessary information regarding the potential gap in serving Member States and propose the process as well as the necessary criteria and indicators for each region to report back to future Council for consideration.
3. The main purpose for the establishment of an area offices is to provide better services to Member States which ar in need of assistance. Any criteria to be developed for the establishment of a new area office should fulfil this objective.
4. The establishment of area offices should consider the social and economic development of the countries intended to be served, with a particular priority to area offices serving the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

3.3 [CWG-FHR-20/2](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CWGFHR20-C-0002/en) and [CWG-FHR-20/DT/1](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CWGFHR20-250217-TD-0001/en)

3.3.1 The 19th meeting of the Council Working Group on financial and human resources (CWG-FHR), took a decision to establish an online Correspondence Group to develop Terms of Reference for the ITU secretariat to complete a review of regional presence under [*Resolution 25*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-025-E.pdf) *(Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*. The Correspondence Group was tasked to review the Terms of Reference submitted at the 19th meeting of the CWG-FHR and to submit its report to the 20th meeting.

3.3.2 Between 22 November 2024 and 15 January 2025, the Correspondence Group undertook its work, leveraging online tools to facilitate collaboration among members. Three virtual meetings were convened, enabling in-depth discussions and the exchange of diverse perspectives.

3.3.3 Through rigorous analysis of Resolution 25, the Correspondence Group developed a revised set of Terms of Reference. The revisions aim to both strengthen and sharpen the ITU’s review of its regional presence, with a view to enhancing operational efficiency, and fostering greater engagement with regional and area offices

3.3.4 The documents to the 20th meeting of CWG-FHR present the work conducted by the Online Correspondence Group and include the Terms of Reference (see Annex A of Document [TDAG25/24(Ann.1)](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG32-C-0024/)) that provide a strategic framework to guide the review process ensuring it is thorough, impactful, and aligned with the organization's long-term goals.

# 4. Conclusion

TDAG is invited to note this document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate as input to the next meeting of the Council.

1. Document [TDAG-24/12](https://www.itu.int/md/D22-TDAG31-C-0012/en) on ITU-D Operational Plan 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)