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| **Council Working Group on  Financial and Human Resources**  **Fourteenth meeting – Virtual, 20 – 21 September 2021** |  |
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|  | **Document CWG-FHR-14/5** |
| **5 August 2021** |
| **English only** |
| **Contribution by the Secretariat** | | |
| Discussion on the Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on  the functioning and activities of ITU | | |

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| Summary  At C21/VCC-1, Document [C21/74](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0074/en) was presented as a preliminary analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on some areas of activity and functioning of the Union, presenting facts, underlining lessons learned and highlighting some aspects that could make ITU more resilient and sustainable in the future. The Council agreed that the document and the points raised in the discussion should be subsequently presented to CWG-FHR and CWG-SFP for their consideration and recommendations for the next session of the Council and, if necessary, PP-22.  This document provides key considerations from Document C21/74, includes the points raised by Councillors during C21/VCC-1 and outlines the latest developments following the consultation by correspondence of Council Member States.  Action required  The CWG-FHR is invited to advise on a possible way forward and make recommendations for the next session of the Council and, if necessary, PP-22.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  References  Documents [C21/7](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0007/en), [C21/29](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0029/en), [C21/54](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0054/en), [C21/68](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0068/en), [C21/70](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0070/en), [C21/72](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0072/en), [C21/74](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0074/en), [C21/49](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0049/en), [C21/81](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0081/en), [C21/DT/1-E](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0001/en), [C21/DT/4](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0004/en), [DT/5](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0005/en), [DT/6](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0006/en) |

## Introduction

* 1. Document [C21/74](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0074/en) provided a preliminary analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the activities and functioning of ITU, presenting facts, underlining the lessons learned, and bringing the attention to some aspects that could be considered by the Council (C21/VCC-1) to make ITU a more resilient and sustainable organization while continuing to provide a high quality of services to its membership. The document analysed the COVID-19 impact on three main areas, namely i) ITU’s World Conferences, Meetings and Events, ii) ITU’s Working Methods, Working Space and Sustainability, and iii) ITU’s Financial position and Membership, followed by suggestions for ITU’s strategic role in the new normal.
  2. Following the guidance of the Council (C21/VCC-1), a further analysis on the following points may be discussed and considered by CWG-FHR – also taking into account discussions taking place on related documents –, in order to identify ways to adapt to the new normal and improve ITU’s efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.
  3. The CWG-FHR is invited to consider document C21/74, advise on a possible way forward, and make recommendations for the next session of the Council and, if necessary, PP-22.

## Impact of COVID-19 on ITU World Conferences, Meetings and Events

* 1. Based on lessons learned, challenges and constraints deriving from the necessity to move meetings and events online or to a later point in time, with Document C21/74 the following was proposed to be considered by the Council:
* Considering the success of virtual meetings organized in 2020-2021, encouraging virtual or hybrid formats for certain events and meetings in the post-COVID time may be considered by the Councillors, resulting in efficiencies and reduced environmental impacts mainly linked to international travel in line with ITU’s mandate and role as a front runner in using ICTs for sustainable development. At the same time, the methods used to take decisions in 2020 and/or 2021 could be assessed and alternative decision-making processes appropriate for different situations may be considered in particular for hybrid events where physical participants currently enjoy greater rights than remote participants.
  1. In the ensuing discussion at C21/VCC-1 considerations from one or more Councillors included that attention needs to be given to ensuring equal participation in virtual meetings, and highlighting that in some cases virtual meetings in fact enabled participation, and ranged from indicating preference for physical meetings to proposing that ITU considers how to take advantage of different meeting formats, including hybrid meetings. While one Councillor cautioned that care should be exercised when developing ITU decisional processes; those provided for under the current rules, such as consultations by correspondence, should be given priority, others put forward that meeting rules relating to decision-making should be relaxed in some meetings, without undermining the importance of physical meetings where crucial decisions were to be taken. Additional inputs included that the number and frequency of virtual meetings must remain reasonable, that in view of travel restrictions six months’ notice be given for physical meetings; if the pandemic continued, hygiene measures at physical meetings should be carefully considered; for virtual or hybrid meetings, ITU should ensure a good-quality communication platform with sound logistics to accommodate participants unable to travel, and contingency plans for the PP-22 electoral process should be considered.
  2. New developments and Updates
     + Council noted document [DT/6](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0006/en) on the results of the informal consultation on streamlining ITU events in 2022, and the revised schedule of future conferences, assemblies and meetings of the Union: 2021-2024 as contained in document [DT/5](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0005/en).
     + Council endorsed the report on ITU’s environmental sustainability as contained in document [C21/68](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0068/en), highlighting the need for ITU to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions including from air travel to meet the UN-wide agreed reduction targets.

## Impact of COVID-19 on ITU Working Methods, Working Space and Sustainability

* 1. Taking into account the new requirements for space mitigation, staff support and internal communication in response to social distancing concerns and increased teleworking, as well as the significant reductions in CO2 emissions from air travel as a result of the seizure of missions, with Document C21/74 the points below were proposed to be considered by the Council:
* How to translate the learnings on new ways of work and travel modalities from the COVID-19 pandemic into a longer-term emission reductions strategy instead of bouncing back to pre-COVID levels of GHG emissions including by reducing emissions from flights.
* The Guidelines of the High-Level Commission on Management (HLCM) of the United Nations on: a) Model policy of Flexible Working Arrangements and b) Operationalization of the Senior Leadership Commitments more flexible ways of contracts and working in the new normal, in line with the UN system strategy on the future of work ([CEB/2019/1/Add.2](https://unsceb.org/topics/future-work)).
* The prioritization of the ITU digital transformation initiative and adoption of a digital transformation strategy to be included in, and aligned with, the ITU Strategic Plan.
* The working conditions aligned with the perspectives of Gender and Accessibility.
  1. In the ensuing discussion at C21/VCC-1 it was mentioned that the project of ITU headquarters should be reviewed to ensure that due attention was given to health security issues, such as social distancing and ventilation in buildings.
  2. New developments and Updates
* During C21/VCC-1 an information session took place on the new Headquarters premises project.
* Council noted document [C21/7](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0007/en) ‘Progress report on the Union's headquarters premises project’, took note of the selection of DREES & SOMMER to support ITU for the Staff Working Conditions Strategy and Implementation Plan as contained in document [C21/29](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0029/en), and approved the revised decision as proposed in document [C21/81](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0081/en).
* Council endorsed the report on ITU’s environmental sustainability as contained in document C21/68.
* Council endorsed the draft policy contained in the annex of document [C21/72](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0072/en) on ITU Accessibility Policy for persons with disabilities, with the update of the title of the draft policy to include persons with specific needs.
* C21/VCC-1 requested the secretariat to present the revised draft decisions contained in Annexes 1 to 3 of document [C21/54](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0054/en) to the next CWG-FHR meeting in September for further discussion.

## Impact of COVID-19 on ITU’s Financial position and Membership

* 1. Considering that Covid-19 generated savings during the implementation of the 2020 budget, that the quality and extensive support for the members have secured the revenues of the Union, and that the diversification of tools was key to communicate externally on ITU activities and with possible new members, with Document C21/74 the following was proposed to be considered by the Council:
* The financial support for the projects or programmes that facilitate the communication with the existing and potential members of the Union, such as My ITU, ITU website, unified platform for meetings, and dedicated platform for approval of decisions by correspondence.
* The financial support for making ITU meetings and events more accessible, making ITU a champion on accessibility.
  1. In the ensuing discussion at C21/VCC-1 it was proposed that ITU considers allocating unused budget from the pandemic period to a fellowship for developing countries, to connect the unconnected.
  2. New developments and Updates
* Council authorized the Secretary-General to use the savings made by organizing virtual events for fellowships (C21/DT/6).
* Council authorized the Secretary-General to use the 2021 budget implementation surplus to fund the priority urgent mandatory activities for 2021 contained in document [C21/DT/4](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-210608-TD-GEN-0004/en).
* Council instructed the secretariat to present the implementation of these requests as well as other unfunded mandatory activities outlined in Table 1 of document [C21/49](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0049/en) planned for the 2021-2027 time-frame to the CWG-FHR session in September 2021 and the next Council sessions.
* Council delegated to the CWG-FHR the decision to authorize the Secretary-General on the use of the 2021 budget implementation surplus to fund other mandatory activities planned for 2021 as contained in document C21/49.

## ITU’s Strategic role in the new normal

* 1. Considering that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the crucial role of ICTs for the continued functioning of society but also amplified digital inequalities, taking into account the growing competition in the international environment regarding the coordination of different projects on connectivity or financing the connectivity, and noting the need for a “One ITU” approach clearly articulating ITU’s critical role towards enhancing ICTs for sustainable development, with Document C21/74 the points below were proposed to be considered by the Council:
* Invite Member States to share the expectations in the post-COVID world and how ITU can best deliver against those expectations.
* Developing a long-term vision about the role of ITU in the post-COVID world and given the framework of the development of the new ITU strategic plan for 2024 – 2027, inviting ITU membership to actively participate in the open process to co-create the new strategies for the Union.
  1. In the ensuing discussion at C21/VCC-1 Councillors expressed appreciation for the role played by the Union during the pandemic; ITU’s leadership role in preparing for and providing support in future emergencies should be strengthened. The pandemic had highlighted the importance of ICTs in all aspects of life, but it had also revealed digital inequalities worldwide. Global efforts were needed to bridge the digital divide and achieve sustainable growth post-pandemic. ITU might explore the establishment of a multilateral cooperation mechanism to make progress on digital inclusion. Councillors also proposed that all of the recommendations made should be taken into account in the ITU strategic and financial plans.
  2. New developments and Updates
* Council approved the establishment of a Council Working Group for the elaboration of the draft Strategic and Financial Plans for 2024-2027. The Group will convene for the first time from 29-30 September 2021. The recommendations included in document C21/74 will be presented to CWG-SFP, together with this document.
* An online informal consultation, to be conducted by the Chair of the CWG-SFP, takes place from August 4th to September 3rd for ITU membership to participate in the process to develop the Union's Strategic and Financial Plans 2024-2027.

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