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| **Agenda item: PL 2** | **Document C23/25-E** |
| **8 June 2023** |
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| Report by the Secretary-General | |
| STRENGTHENING ITU’S REGIONAL PRESENCE | |
| **Purpose**  This document reports on the contribution of the ITU Regional Presence to the fulfilment of the mandate of ITU. It provides information on the regional work towards the implementation of the ITU Strategic Plan, the Buenos Aires Action Plan and regional initiatives.  It also provides information on the use in 2022 of regular and extra-budgetary sources of funding for the work of the regional and area offices. It sets out information on the staffing level of the various regional and area offices during the year, as well as other operational information, such as fellowships granted in each region, and expert missions.  **Action required by the Council:**  The Council is invited **to take note** of the report provided in this document.  **Relevant link(s) with the Strategic Plan**  Regional presence  **Financial implications**  None.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **References**  *Council* *document* [*C23/INF/7*](https://www.itu.int/md/S23-CL-INF-0007/en)*;* [*Resolution 25*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-025-E.pdf) *(Rev. Dubai, 2018) and* [*Resolution 25*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-025-E.pdf) *(Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference;* [*Kigali Action Plan*](https://www.itu.int/en/publications/ITU-D/pages/publications.aspx?parent=D-TDC-WTDC-2022&media=electronic)*, Final Report of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (Kigali, 2022),* | |

# 1. Background

1.1 Resolution 25 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on strengthening the ITU regional presence, calls upon ITU to *“*continue to strengthen the functions of the regional and area offices so that they can play an important role in implementation of the ITU strategic plan, programmes and projects, and the regional initiatives set out in the Kigali Action Plan, pursuant to Resolution 17 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), within available resources, including those allocated by the financial plan and from other relevant sources such as voluntary contributions and sponsorships”, while Resolution 157 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Conference, on strengthening project execution and project monitoring functions in ITU, instructs the Secretary-General to “prepare a detailed annual report to the Council on progress achieved in fulfilling the functions specified in No. 118 of the Constitution and in implementing this resolution, including recommendations on how to improve programme/project execution in ITU”.

1.2 Consistent with those Resolutions, efforts continued in 2022 to enhance ITU’s regional presence through a range of measures to make the Union more responsive to the specific needs of the regions and to effectively deliver timely and high-quality products and services at the country and regional levels.

1.3 This report provides information on the implementation of the action plan and regional initiatives. It also provides information on use in 2022 of regular and extra-budgetary sources of funding for the work of the regional and area offices. It sets out information on the staffing level of the various regional and area offices during the year, as well as other operational information, such as fellowships granted in each region, and expert missions. It is supplemented by information document [C23/INF/7](https://www.itu.int/md/S23-CL-INF-0007/en) which details the following information in annexes:

Annex 1: Key achievements by region for 2022

Annex 2: Contribution to ITU Sectors and the General Secretariat

Annex 3: Support activities towards empowering regional and area offices

Annex 4: Summary of 2022 regional and area office expenditure

Annex 5: 2022 operational plan and project implementation level by region

Annex 6: Breakdown of the 2022 regional and area office expenditure by category

Annex 7: 2022 Fellowships awarded and experts recruited

Annex 8: Summary of staffing level by regional and area offices

Annex 9: Breakdown of staffing level by regional and area offices

**2** **ITU regional presence review**

2.1 Resolution 25 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) instructed the Secretary-General to conduct an overall review on ITU regional presence. The Annex to that Resolution set out elements that were to be covered by the review. At its 2019 session, the Council approved Decision 616, which instructed the Secretary-General to conduct a review of the regional presence in a bid to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) was retained to conduct that review, and the report was submitted in July 2020, makingrecommendations for improvement of the regional presence including an action plan. The report was presented to the Council in 2020 ([C20/74](https://www.itu.int/dms_ties/itu-s/md/20/cl/c/S20-CL-C-0074!!PDF-E.pdf)) and was then referred to the Council Working Group on Financial and Human Resources (CWG-FHR) to provide guidance on the way forward for the implementation of the recommendations. CWG-FHR set up an ad hoc group to assess and report back to CWG-FHR before the next session of the Council.

2.2 The ad hoc group presented its findings to CWG-FHR, which endorsed them on 3 June 2021. At the virtual consultation of councillors held in June 2021, the secretariat was directed to implement the report in accordance with those findings.

2.3 In its report, PwC recommended an action plan for the strengthening of ITU’s regional presence with four implementation streams, broken down into 15 recommendations and 50 supporting actions. The secretariat has created a workplan for full implementation of the sections of the PwC report that are within its remit (based on the decisions made by the ad hoc group) by the end of 2023. The proposed workplan is divided into three charts, separating 60 actions derived from the report into the following categories:

1. actions in progress;
2. completed recommendations; and
3. recommendations requiring Council decisions.

The ad hoc group proposed that the secretariat publish a dashboard on the Council website to track the status of the workplan for the membership. CWG-FHR agreed to this recommendation at its meeting on 25 and 26 January 2021, and the Council endorsed the decision during the virtual consultation of councillors in June 2021.

The dashboard is available to members through the regional presence page in the Council section of the ITU website: <https://www.itu.int/en/council/ties/Pages/regional-presence-dashboard.aspx>.

2.4 It is expected that the implementation of the recommendations made by PwC in its report will be completed on schedule by the end of 2023. The focus is currently on finalization of the delegations of authority for regional staff and completion and endorsement of regional strategies.

2.5 Moving forward, the regional presence will be kept under continuous review through ITU’s internal governance and oversight mechanisms. This will comprise close oversight by the Field Operations Coordination Department of BDT (led by the Deputy to the Director), reviews of each region conducted as part of the annual workplan of ITU’s Internal Audit Unit (most recently, a review of the Africa region was conducted), and ongoing follow-up to Independent Management Advisory Committee (IMAC) actions. Any comprehensive review will require consideration and decision by the Council.

3 **Establishment of an ITU area office for South Asia**

3.1 The host country agreement pertaining to the opening of the ITU Area Office for South Asia and Innovation Centre in New Delhi, India, was concluded on 3 March 2021.

3.2 Following the agreement, BDT and the Government of India worked throughout 2022 to finalize the logistical and administrative arrangements for the office to become operational.

3.3 On 22 March 2023 the ITU Area Office for South Asia and Innovation Centre was inaugurated by His Excellency Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, in the presence of ICT ministers, regulators, UN agencies and private sector representatives. It was followed by the Regional Innovation Forum, exhibitions and an inaugural co-creation session of the Innovation Centre at the Area Office premises. At the Regional Innovation Forum, ICT ministers shared their insightful suggestions and proposals for the operationalization of the Area Office and Innovation Centre. The Innovation Centre will have a global reach.

**4. Achievements at regional level during 2022 (operational plan, regional initiatives, and projects)**

4.1 The implementation of regional initiatives and the execution of programmes, projects, and activities in the field take place under the leadership of regional and area offices. The results achieved are regularly reported to the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) and the Council.

4.2 Following the disruptions in the convening of ITU world conferences in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ITU in 2022 convened an unprecedented three world conferences in 2022: the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly 2020 (WTSA-20) in Geneva in March, the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022 (WTDC-22) in Kigali in June, and the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 (PP-22) in Bucharest in September.

4.3 BDT was also impacted by ITU budgetary deficits, resulting from decreases in realized revenues compared to projections for the period. Despite the reduction in staff time resulting from the convening of world conferences (including WTDC) in 2022, and budgetary constraints, BDT implementation rates for activities conducted under the operational plan (OP) budget remained strong in 2022. BDT implemented activities valued at CHF 4.1 million under the OP. Details of the OP budget and implementation for the year are set out in the table below.

**Table 1. Implementation of BDT operational plan in 2022**

*(amounts in thousands of Swiss francs (CHF))*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Objective | Impl. level  CHF (000) | Actions in Africa | Actions in America | Actions in Arab States | Actions in Asia and Pacific | Actions in CIS | Actions in Europe |
| Objective 1 - Coordination | 1 266 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Objective 2 - Modern and secure telecommunication/ICT | 522 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 6 |
| Objective 3 - Enabling environment | 853 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| Objective 4 - Inclusive digital society | 663 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 7 |
| **Total** | **3 304** | **16** | **19** | **11** | **7** | **19** | **19** |

4.4 Project implementation in 2022 continued to thrive with an overall 113 projects being implemented with the value of funds as shown in (Table 2).

**Table 2. Spending on project implementation in 2022**

*(amounts in thousands of US Dollars (USD)*

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4.5 The Council decided in 2018 to allocate resources to fund projects to implement the WTDC-17 regional initiatives (RIs). For 2018-2019, CHF 2 million was approved, and another CHF 3 million was included in the Financial Plan 2020-2023 for the 2020-2021 period. There was no allocation of funds for 2022. During the period 2019 to 2022, ITU signed 97 projects with a total value of CHF 58.9 million and allocated CHF 9.4 million in cash contributions to these projects (including CHF 3.3 million from the ICT Development Fund ). This represented a significant increase in BDT project funding over the previous period. It should be noted that 60 of these projects (61 per cent of the total) benefited from RI funding allocated by the Council.

4.6 WTDC-22 approved RIs across ITU’s strategic objectives, creating synergies across regions which will be leveraged in implementing the RIs. The implementation of these initiatives has already commenced by the establishment of coherence among the operational planning process, projects planning, and RIs. In BDT's assessment, effective implementation of these RIs needs additional dedicated funds, as set out in document [C23/26](https://www.itu.int/md/S23-CL-C-0026/en).

4.7Regional and area offices contributed to the implementation of the ITU strategic plan and ITU-D operational plans. The summary of key achievements is provided by region in Annex 1 to document C23/INF/7.

**5.** **Contribution to other Sectors and the General Secretariat**

5.1 Regional and area offices contributed to the implementation of the ITU strategic plan and the operational plans of ITU-R, ITU-T and the General Secretariat, as described in Annex 2 to document C23/INF/7.

**6 Structure and staffing level**

6.1 Annexes 8 and 9 to document [C23/INF/7](https://www.itu.int/md/S23-CL-INF-0007/en) provide the breakdown of the staffing level as of end 2022 for the regional and area offices by grade, region, and office. The structures and staffing levels take into consideration the recommendations of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit on ways to improve the ITU regional presence as well as the need to better respond to membership expectations.

6.2 The capacity of regional and area offices in specific areas of expertise continues to be strengthened through the recruitment of associate technical experts and support staff under regional initiatives and projects, drawing on networks of highly specialized experts. The recruitment of junior professional officers (JPOs) has been introduced in the Asia and the Pacific (ASP) region, providing additional resources that have been instrumental in improving delivery. Opportunities are being explored to expand this approach to other regions.

7 **Support activities towards empowering regional and area offices**

7.1 The support activities implemented in 2022 to empower regional and area offices are described in Annex 3. The need for additional human resources in those offices to enhance ITU’s capacity to conduct higher-impact efforts in Member States was recognized in the PwC review of ITU’s regional presence and in several internal assessments. BDT has been working closely with Member States to address this issue by the secondment of experts to ITU, with good initial results. This approach not only enhances BDT’s impact by increasing the overall level and scope of implementation, but also builds additional capacity in Member States in areas of importance for national development. Member States are encouraged to participate or expand their contribution through this methodology.

7.2 Another key area of impact has been improvement in coordination with the United Nations, achieved using short-term staff members attached to several regions. This process began in 2021 in the ASP and Arab regions, and was expanded in 2022 to the CIS and Europe regions.

7.3 In Asia and the Pacific, a UN coordination officer was recruited to deepen and expand coordination with the UN development system, including resident coordinators (UNRCs), the Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) and country teams (UNCTs). Examples of deepened engagement with UNCTs are found in Thailand and Indonesia where ITU was asked to co-lead digitization and innovation results groups of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. ITU was also asked to support the development of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks ("cooperation frameworks") in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Viet Nam in 2022. The UN coordination officer has been instrumental in bringing UN agencies to other areas of ITU work, such as the celebration of Girls in ICT Day, digital inclusion, digital services, financing and emergency telecommunications.

7.4 In the Arab region, a UN coordination officer was recruited to prepare an engagement strategy to deepen and expand coordination with UNRCOs, UNDCO and UNCTs. This has resulted in effective engagement in cooperation frameworks at the regional level and prepared the ground for further engagement in 2022. The office has signed a cooperation framework for Bahrain and is currently in discussion regarding cooperation frameworks in the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and Morocco.

7.5 In the CIS region a UN coordination officer was recruited to support ITU engagement with the UN country teams and resident coordinators in those countries, as well as with the UN Economic Commissions. This has allowed ITU to join UNCTs in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan and build communication with resident coordinators in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. ITU supports UNCTs as part of the development and implementation of UNSDCF and provides inputs to UN INFO and common country analyses (CCAs). Engagement with the UN system in the countries of the CIS region was instrumental for promoting the activities of ITU, elaborating new partnerships with UN agencies on the ground in implementing ITU programmes such as school connectivity, statistics, digital inclusion of women and youth, child online protection, gender digital divide, smart and sustainable cities and others, and in raising the visibility of ITU through the UN web presence. Cooperation also extended to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Together with the European Office for ITU and UNECE, the ITU Regional Office for CIS conducts coordination activities of the UN Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia.

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