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|  | **Document CWG-LANG-14/6** |
| **15 February 2024** |
| **English only** |
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| REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ON THE USE OF THE SIX OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE UNION (CWG-LANG) | |
| **Purpose**  This document contains the annual report of the Chair of the Council Working Group on Languages (CWG-LANG) to the Council, pursuant to Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) and Council Resolution 1372 (Rev. 2019).  **Action required**  A summary of this report will be submitted to the 2024 session of Council **for endorsement**.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **References**  [*Report by the Secretary-General*](https://www.itu.int/md/S23-RCLCWGLANG13-C-0002/en)*;* [*Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-154-E.pdf)*;* [*Council Resolution 1372 (Rev. 2019)*](http://web.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0138/en) | |

1. **Opening of the meeting and approval of the agenda   
   (Document [CWG-LANG-14/1(Rev.2))](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0001/en)**
   1. The meeting was opened by the Chair of CWG-LANG, Ms Sharon Bosire (Kenya). After welcoming the delegates and vice-chairs, the floor was given to the ITU Deputy Secretary-General, Mr Tomas Lamanauskas.
   2. In his opening remarks, Mr Lamanauskas emphasized the importance of multilingualism to ITU in ensuring effective participation, inclusivity and diversity. He welcomed the ideas and perspectives of delegates on maximising the use of resources to improve efficiency and productivity whilst maintaining the high quality of translation and interpretation services. New technologies had matured and were now providing viable use cases. ITU was leading by example with the use of the ITU Translate machine translation tool providing more content in all official languages on web pages and increasingly on documents as a supplement to, not a replacement for, human translation. ITU remained committed to multilingualism, including through the work of the Coordination Committee on Terminology (CCT), and ongoing efforts to harmonize the ITU website in all six languages. Delegates’ feedback on ITU Translate and support in ensuring accessibility of information in all official languages was very welcome.
   3. The Chair submitted the draft agenda for approval.
   4. One delegation queried the legitimacy of the use of “chair’’ instead of ‘’chairman’’ in English documents following the decision by Council 2023 to abrogate Decision 500, stating that there had been no subsequent decision by Council explicitly indicating that ‘’chair’’ should be used; and that it was a matter for the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (PP) rather than Council to settle formally as it implied a change to the convention and constitution of ITU.
   5. One delegation referred to the statement of the ITU’s legal department in a parallel meeting which clarified that the decision to use ‘’chair’’ in the English language had been confirmed by Council and had no impact on the constitution or convention; another delegation stated that the issue should be discussed within AOB rather than at this stage of the meeting.
   6. It was so agreed and **the agenda was approved as presented**.
2. **Report by the Secretary-General (****Document [CWG-LANG-14/2](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0002/en)**[)](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0002/en)
   1. The secretariat provided figures on the evolution of budget and actual expenditures for translation and interpretation services, as well as volumes produced over the period 2018 -2023. The [Measures and Principles for Translation and Interpretation document](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-INF-0007/en) governing the requirements for translation and interpretation could be reviewed and updated as necessary with the sectors and Sector Advisory groups to reflect any changes arising from the endorsement of the Guide on multilingualism following Council 2024.

2.2 Efforts to further develop the use of new technologies included extending the use of ITU Translate and monitoring the evolution of remote simultaneous and AI-powered interpretation tools.

2.3 The secretariat reported on the continuing activities of the ITU CCT in harmonizing terminology and definitions with a revised workflow and new website. Following the CWG-LANG’s approval in its last session of the proposed collaboration with Member States on translation of terminology, Circular Letter CL23/42 had been issued in November 2023 and had attracted interest from several Member States; further collaboration was welcomed.

2.4 The secretariat noted the ITU strategy to improve the ITU website as outlined in information document CWG-LANG-14/4, to be discussed in conjunction with a Member State contribution as item 4 of this agenda; ITU’s collaboration with other organizations in the international language community; and issues raised by councillors in the October 2023 session of CWG-LANG on provision of interpretation services and working with Regional Offices on activities in non-official languages.

2.5 One delegate commended the work of the secretariat on the editorial committee at WRC and then queried why there had been a decline in the volume of English translations when comparing two WRC years, 2019 and 2023, despite the increase in input contributions at WRC 2023. He asked for confirmation that the total translation volumes did include WRC and questioned whether the numbers were for human translation only or also included machine translation.

2.6 The secretariat confirmed that the total number of contributions received at WRC 2023 had indeed increased by 16% over the 2019 conference, but as the percentage of documents received originally in English had also increased, the volume of translations into English had decreased. All official WRC documents were translated by human translators, who may or may not have made use of machine translation tools in their work.

2.7 The Chair confirmed that the report under agenda item 3 had been noted by CWG-LANG and would be included in the Chair’s summary report to Council in its 2024 session.

**3. Guide to current and future practices in multilingualism at ITU and its accompanying staff guidelines on the use of machine translation (Document** [**CWG-LANG-14/3**](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0003/en)**)**

3.1 The Chair introduced document 14/3, noting that it had been produced following the 2020 JIU report on multilingualism in the UN system which had led to the development of a policy framework on multilingualism at ITU, endorsed by ITU Council in its March 2022 meeting. The Council had requested the secretariat to develop the accompanying guide to the implementation of multilingualism in conjunction with CWG LANG to meet the objectives of the JIU report and the policy framework. The guide had been introduced at CWG LANG in October 2023 and was now presented with revisions reflecting comments received at that meeting and subsequent technological developments.

3.2 The secretariat presented Document CWG-LANG/14/3 in its updated version which included an overview of governance and practices in implementing multilingualism in ITU; future strategies to increase the availability of ITU content in all six languages; details of the work of CCT; more details on the use of machine translation throughout ITU’s work; and collaboration on non-official language content, following interest expressed in this issue by delegates at the October 2023 meeting.

3.3 Another representative of the secretariat presented an introduction to the translation of ITU resources into non-UN official languages from the regional perspective, providing examples of how such translation had been done. In Europe and the Asia and Pacific Region, the ITU Child Online Protection (COP) guidelines had been translated into a number of non-official languages, including Bahasa Indonesia, Mongolian (with sign language), Thai, Albanian, Maltese and Serbian. This work had been carried out via collaborations between ITU, national administrations and sister UN agencies, and accompanied by a range of training sessions and awareness-raising activities. In addition, the 2016 edition of the Radio Regulations had been translated into Polish in conjunction with the Polish National Institute of Telecommunication, ensuring that stakeholders could fully understand and adhere to the regulatory framework. These examples of partnership with other UN agencies and with ITU focal points and academia at national level were presented as useful examples for the deliberation of CWG-LANG.

3.4 The Chair welcomed both reports and CWG-LANG proposed that the Council:

* endorse the Guide to current and future practices in multilingualism in ITU and its accompanying staff guidelines on the use of machine translation (Document [CWG-LANG-14/3](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0003/en))

**4. Update on progress of website harmonization (**[**CWG-LANG-14/INF/1**](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-INF-0001)**) and contribution by the Russian Federation – Comments on update on progress of website harmonization (Document** [**CWG-LANG-14/4**](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0004/en)**)**

4.1 The secretariat presented document CWG-LANG14/INF/1 on the progress on website harmonization, which outlined the process of establishing project and web governance, identifying the info architecture and taxonomy, cleaning up and archiving pages and content, executing front and backend development and creating new pages by PP in 2026. Search functionality and search engine optimism for third party search platforms were integral components of the project, which had the highest support of ITU leadership. The web project team would work with the transformation team on a data informed information architecture, ITU wide web governance and change management, and would ensure that interested Member States were engaged in the research and analysis before the implementation of the search system as requested.

4.2 The Russian Federation presented document CWG-LANG/14/4 in response, asking for concrete dates on when improvement on the website could be seen, as the timelines given for this issue were continually moved forward. The ITU search engine was very unsatisfactory, providing for example no responses for WTSA 24 or different responses in different languages. The three sectors had limited harmonization of common features, making it difficult to locate information. The CCT website was difficult to find and should be created in the same way as a Study Group to help users access documents. Machine translation should be monitored to avoid major discrepancies. The main proposals were to accelerate harmonization of the websites and work together with the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) as this was an intersectoral coordination issue.

4.3 A delegation called upon ITU to continue improving the availability of webpages in French and in all other languages, as many pages were only partially translated or not translated at all, and important publications and documents, including technical documents and ITU podcasts, were only available in English, limiting access to information and the ability to contribute for many francophone countries and individuals.

4.4 The secretariat welcomed the comments on the ITU podcasts and proposed exploring the use of generative AI tools to provide translations of podcast voices in other languages. Updates and improvements to increase the availability of content on the website in all official languages would continue, in particular through the use of machine translation. Any comments on machine translation of web pages would be very welcome, as discrepancies could be corrected with the post-editing tool and all feedback would help to improve the quality of the machine translation tool and the websites translated.

4.5 Delegates echoed the need for better visibility for the CCT and ISCG web pages at the same level as Study Group; a representative of the CCT secretariat confirmed that work was underway to move the CCT website under the general secretariat pages and harmonize access to documents.

4.6 One delegation expressed concerns that improvement of the search engine programme should be cost-effective and consider commercial options if appropriate. The secretariat confirmed that ITU was seeking to assess new search engine providers and improve results, including indexing all ITU sites, not just those that were public facing. The current ITU search engine was open source with no associated costs.

4.7 Another delegate questioned the disparity between the quality of the search engine used for the proposal management system at WRC 2023, which was excellent, and the very poor results of the ITU search engine itself. He also asked that the name of the proposal management tool be consistent across sectors and conferences, expressing a preference for ‘proposal management web’.

4.8 The secretariat explained that the proposal management system was based on a different concept than that of the website search tool and had been designed much more recently. It was indeed critical to improve the search function as a high priority; the request to maintain the proposal management web terminology was duly noted.

4.9 One delegation pointed out that ITU documents could not be accessed from all messenger systems; the new ITU website was very useful, but associated surveys and questionnaires could not be accessed in certain geographical areas. A specific ITU survey platform could be created to enable all Member States to fully express their views.

4.10 Another delegate asked for improvement in access to Arabic documents and web pages, in particular on Study Group pages. The secretariat highlighted the use of the auto-translate tick box on the dropdown machine translation menu, which in some cases enabled all subsequent pages to be translated into the same language.

4.11 One Member State representative asked for an e-mail address for feedback and comments on machine translation to be included in the Chair’s summary report, and requested a clear roadmap outlining the steps the secretariat was taking to improve website harmonization and the search engine ahead of PP-26.

4.12 Welcoming these concrete suggestions for improvement, the Chair invited the relevant representatives of the secretariat present at this meeting to return to CWG-LANG in the future to provide further updates. She proposed that the secretariat prepare a table of comments and issues on the website to provide an overview of achievements, outstanding items, any budgetary implications and any need to escalate to other groups including Council. A live demonstration of website functionalities could be given in future CWG-LANG sessions to clarify issues and potential solutions. The secretariat was requested to provide the e-mail address for feedback on machine translation on the screen in the meeting and in the Chair’s summary report; a summary of these website discussions under agenda item 4 would be made available to CWG-FHR in its next meeting where this cross-cutting issue would also be addressed.

4.13 CWG-LANG agreed that a clear roadmap of the steps to improve website search and harmonization would be presented to the 2024 session of Council.

**5. Contribution by the Russian Federation – Draft revision of Resolution 1372 (C15, last amended C19) on Council Working Group on Languages (CWG-LANG) (Document**[**CWG-LANG-14/5**](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-RCLCWGLANG14-C-0005/en)**)**

5.1 The representative of the Russian Federation presented a proposal for the revision of Resolution 1372 based on the new version of Resolution 154 adopted at PP-22. The proposal was to include text on the instruction of PP to Council to maintain CWG-LANG and to the Secretary-General to implement all necessary measures to maintain CWG-LANG; it would perhaps be necessary to remove or edit one of these additions to avoid repetition. The remaining revisions were editorial, apart from a new item requesting CWG-LANG to improve the website search engine in all languages and the proposal that CWG-LANG should be able to make recommendations to Council within its terms of reference. Welcoming comments from other members of CWG-LANG, the Russian Federation highlighted that this contribution was a joint document proposal from Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

5.2 Several delegations expressed their appreciation to the Russian Federation for this valuable contribution.

5.3 One delegation queried the use of square brackets around the date 2024 in reference to Resolution 1386; it was clarified that this was because Resolution 1386 would be presented to Council for endorsement in its 2024 session.

5.4 Another delegate queried whether the role of the CWG-LANG in implementing the Policy Framework on Multilingualism and its objectives should be included in this resolution.

5.5 A delegation pointed out a repetition of the word ‘’that’’ in the section on *taking into account*; this editorial change was agreed upon and enacted.

5.6 Following some discussion amongst delegates, it was agreed to retain the reference to the decision of PP-22 in the *taking into account* section but, to avoid potential repetition with the *instructs*, to remove all additional proposed text after CWG-LANG in this section.

5.7 The Chair noted that, following its initial presentation to CWG-LANG in its October 2023 session, the revisions to this resolution had been updated to remove problematic language in the terms of reference and on the image of One ITU. The document as revised in this 14th meeting of CWG-LANG would be included in the Chair’s summary report. CWG-LANG proposed that the Council:

* endorse the draft revised Resolution 1372 (C15, Mod. 2024) on Council Working Group on Languages (CWG-LANG) attached here as [Annex A](#AnnexA).

**6. AOB and closure of the meeting**

6.1 A delegate raised the issue of the lack of interpretation in informal meetings such as working groups, which hindered participation in decision-making processes and prevented full involvement of all Member States. Qualitative and quantitative standards of translation and interpretation should be maintained to guarantee inclusivity; it would be important to know how requests for ad hoc interpretation demands could submitted and supported by budgetary allocations.

6.2 Several delegations supported this request, highlighting the challenge of ensuring equal participation when so many meetings were conducted only in English, acknowledging the budgetary limitations and asking whether it would be possible to maximise financial resources or address this issue in any other way, including through the use of new technologies such as generative AI. The secretariat was requested to provide a report to the next meeting on the reliability and latest development of tests of AI interpretation; it might also be possible to provide machine interpretation of webcast meetings.

6.3 The secretariat acknowledged that interpretation was not currently provided for most CWGs in line with the current requirements of the Measures and Principles of Translation and Interpretation. Member States could request interpretation for a CWG if required by proposing a change to the terms and reference of that group to Council; adequate budgetary resources would have to found and endorsed by Council. The Measures and Principles document could be revised by sector advisory groups with any changes endorsed by Council taking into account budgetary implications.

6.4 Another representative of the secretariat noted that ITU closely monitored developments in AI-powered interpretation and continued to test and evaluate its use within the existing regulatory environment. AI-powered interpretation had been tested successfully in informal meetings, but the quality was not currently sufficient for formal meetings including those with negotiations and was less acceptable in certain languages. An additional project in progress was ensuring that ITU meeting rooms with no interpretation facilities were equipped with the AI interpretation solution for future use.

6.5 Echoing the request for a report on the potential use of AI interpretation, one delegate requested that any potential risks be evaluated to ensure the pace of development did not negatively impact upon the accuracy of translation, and to include fully the requirements of remote participants.

6.6 The Chair requested the secretariat to prepare a report on the challenges and opportunities of the use of AI-powered interpretation for the next meeting of CWG-LANG to inform future decisions or requests to Council; it might also be possible to trial the technology within the context of a CWG-LANG meeting whilst following the correct procedures.

6.7 At the request of CWG-LANG, the secretariat confirmed that the document governing the provision of language services was the Measures and Principles of Translation and Interpretation.

6.8 The delegate from France proposed organizing an event in ITU on the French language and technology in spring 2024, to be financed by the Organisation de la Francophonie as part of its annual Sommet de la Francophonie, which France would host.

6.9 The delegate from Canada announced a proposal to work with the Regional Office in Brasilia to help promote the use of aboriginal languages for specific projects. It would be important to address this challenge to ensure the participation of intended audiences who did not speak one of the official UN languages; it would be interesting to see if partners could be brought together in the Americas region but also in the African region with its multiplicity of aboriginal languages.

6.10 The Chair noted that the summary report of the October 2023 meeting of CWG-LANG had been published and included in its Annex A the draft resolution 1386 on the ITU CCT as approved by CWG-LANG in its last meeting. This would be presented to Council together with the documents recommended for adoption in the course of the current meeting as part of the Chair’s summary report to Council 2024.

6.11 A delegate reminded the meeting that in the next cluster of Council Working Groups planned for September 2024, there would be challenges in finding sufficient time given the inclusion of two new Council Working Groups in the agenda.

6.12 The Chair noted this concern and proposed liaising with the secretariat and the chairs of other CWGs ahead of Council 2024 to adjust the timetable for future CWG-LANG meetings as necessary. She thanked the delegates, vice-chairs and secretariat and closed the meeting.

* E-mail address for feedback on machine translation: [ling-it-support@itu.int](mailto:ling-it-support@itu.int)

aNNEX A

RESOLUTION 1372 (MODIFIED 2024)

Council Working Group on Languages (CWG-LANG)

The Council,

recalling

*a)* UNGA Resolution 76/268, on multilingualism;

*b)* Resolution 154 (Rev.  Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on use of the six official languages of the Union on an equal footing;

*c)* Decision 5 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on revenue and expenses for the Union for the period 2024‑2027;

d) Decision 11 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on Creation and management of Council working groups;

*e)* Resolution 1238, on use of six official and working languages of the Union, adopted by the Council in 2005;

*f)* Resolution 1386 [2024], on the joint ITU Coordination Committee for Terminology (ITU CCT),

taking into account

that thePlenipotentiary Conference, in its Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022), instructed the Council to maintain CWG-LANG;

recognizing

*a)* the work accomplished by CWG-LANG, as well as the work by the secretariat to implement the working group's recommendations as agreed by the Council at its sessions, in particular with regard to the unification of linguistic databases for definitions and terminology and the centralization of editing functions as well as harmonizing and unifying working procedures in the six language services;

*b)* that the ITU website represents an essential tool for Member States, the media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the general public,

recognizing further

the budget constraints facing the Union,

noting

*a)* that the advisory groups of the three Sectors of the Union have regularly reviewed recommendations on appropriate interim changes to working methods and practices in relation to the use of languages with a view to reducing language costs;

*b)* the work accomplished by the ITU CCT on the adoption and agreement of terms and definitions in the field of telecommunications/ICTs in all six official languages of the Union,

resolves

1 to continue the work of CWG-LANG, open to all Member States of the Union, in particular those representative of and reflecting one or more of the six official languages of the Union, and to conduct its work mainly by correspondence;

2 to approve the terms of reference provided in the Annex;

3 to instruct CWG-LANG to submit annual progress reports to the Council,

instructs the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the Directors of the Bureaux and with the advice of the Council Working Group on Languages

1 to implement all necessary measures in order to finalize the implementation of Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022), to maintain CWG-LANG, in order to monitor progress and report to the Council on the implementation of this resolution, working in close collaboration with ITU CCT and the Council Working Group on Financial and Human Resources within the financial limits of the Union as defined in its budget, while ensuring the required high quality of interpretation and translation;

2 as required by Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022), to present annually to the Council and to CWG-LANG, a report on the implementation of Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022);

3 to intensify work on harmonization of the ITU Sectors' websites in a manner to ensure use of the six official languages of the Union on an equal footing,

further instructs the Secretary-General and the Directors of the Bureaux

1 to provide all relevant information and assistance to CWG-LANG;

2 to continue to identify and implement the most efficient measures in order to facilitate the implementation of Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) within the financial limits of the Union;

3 to report to CWG-LANG on the measures taken to ensure on the ITU website

i) the publication of new or modified pages in the six official languages simultaneously and ii) equality in terms of functionality and navigation, ensure clarity and ease of navigation,

4 take measures to improve the search engine of the ITU website in all the official languages of the Union.

**Annex:** 1

ANNEX

Council Working Group on Languages (CWG-LANG)

Terms of reference

1 to review proposals presented by the members of the Working Group and the General Secretariat, the Directors of the Bureaux and the Sector advisory groups on the annual report submitted by the Secretary-General according to the mandate of Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022);

2 to evaluate the current ITU publications policy and procedures as far as all the official languages of the Union are concerned and to propose new cost-recovery and financing mechanisms in accordance with Resolution 66 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022);

3 to evaluate the processes implemented by the General Secretariat and the Bureaux for the publication of new pages on the ITU website (as well as modifications to existing pages) and, as appropriate, to propose measures to ensure that the pages in question are made accessible to the public in all the official languages simultaneously and are equal in terms of functionality and navigation;

4 to develop recommendations for efficient and effective use of the six official languages of the Union on an equal footing including particular incentives for each linguistic group, based on practical experiences of the Sectors and the secretariat;

5 to analyse the adoption by ITU of alternative translation procedures, in order to reduce translation and typing expenses in the budget of the Union, while maintaining or improving the current quality of translation and the correct use of technical telecommunication terminology;

6 to analyse, including through the use of appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators, application of the updated measures and principles for interpretation and translation adopted by the Council, taking into consideration the financial constraints, and bearing in mind the ultimate objective of full implementation of treatment of all the official languages on an equal footing;

7 to review results of implementation of operational measures from *instructs the Council* 4, Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022), drawing special attention to equitable use of the six languages on the ITU website;

8 to assist in the review of possible approaches to financing and maintaining a WSIS Forum website, available in all the official languages of ITU;

9 to coordinate and cooperate with the ITU CCT and the Council Working Group on Financial and Human Resources to improve efficiency of work and to avoid duplication;

10 to monitor progress on the implementation of Resolution 154 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) and to prepare reports, including making recommendations, as appropriate, for consideration by the Member States and annual session of the Council and a final report for transmission to the next Plenipotentiary conference, as appropriate.

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