|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Document CWG-FHR-21/8** |
| **8 August 2025** |
| **English only** |
|  |  |
| Report by the Secretary-General |
| REDUCING FINANCIAL BURDENS ON HOST COUNTRIES OF ITU CONFERENCES, MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES |
| **Purpose**This document provides an assessment of the proposals on reducing financial burdens on host countries of ITU conferences, meetings and activities presented to Council 2025 within the multi-country contribution in Document [C25/95](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CL-C-0095/en). **Action required**The Council Working Group on financial and human resources is invited to **consider** this document.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**References** [*CWG-FHR website*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/cwg-fhr/Pages/default.aspx)*; Council Documents* [*C25/95*](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CL-C-0095/en) *and* [*C25/105*](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CL-C-0105/en) |

Introduction

The multi-country contribution on reducing financial burdens on host countries of ITU conferences, meetings and activities (Document [C25/95](https://www.itu.int/md/S25-CL-C-0095/en)) presented to Council 2025 included concrete proposals to facilitate the broader participation of countries, especially developing countries, as hosts of ITU activities. The Council requested that the secretariat assess the feasibility of these proposals for the consideration of the Council Working Group on Financial and Human Resources (CWG-FHR).

Proposal 1: Utilize local and/or national interpretation resources

Recruiting qualified local interpreters would reduce the cost of travel, accommodation and per diem expenses for interpreters otherwise borne by the host country or ITU.

Current practice

Interpretation for ITU events held outside Geneva involves both salary and travel-related expenses. Interpreters are contracted as ITU short-term staff with the same travel rules and conditions as regular ITU staff. This means that, typically, ITU covers interpreter salaries whilst the event host country covers travel, accommodation, and daily subsistence allowances. These costs can be significant, particularly for conferences involving all six official languages and multiple parallel sessions, such as WRC and PP, which require more than 60 interpreters. Shorter conferences, such as WTSA and WTDC, require more than 30 interpreters; multi-day events, such as GSR, need a team of a minimum of 14 interpreters to cover all six languages.

Existing measures to reduce interpretation expenses for host countries

The ITU interpretation service consistently prioritizes recruitment of qualified local interpreters from the host country, as well as national interpreters from the relevant language regions, in order to reduce travel and related expenses. At PP-2022 in Bucharest, Romania, one local interpreter and four national interpreters were recruited; at WRC-23 in Dubai, UAE, six local interpreters and five national interpreters were present; whilst at WTSA-23 in Delhi, India, six national interpreters were employed.

Measures to formalize and expand the use of local and national interpreters

A larger pool of local and national interpreters may be created by inviting host countries, Member States and other international organizations to recommend qualified local and national conference interpreters to the ITU secretariat. With the support of Member States, the ITU interpretation service may also collaborate with universities in relevant language regions to help train qualified interpreters for future assignments.

It should be noted, however, that sourcing qualified simultaneous interpreters for all six official languages may be difficult, given that UN conference interpreting requires highly specialized training and significant experience in interpretation of multilingual meetings. Additionally, travel-related costs will still apply for interpreters not available locally.

Remote Simultaneous Interpretation (RSI)

RSI offers a viable, cost-effective alternative to onsite simultaneous interpretation. RSI enables interpreters to work remotely, thereby substantially reducing travel-related costs. For business continuity reasons a mix of RSI and onsite interpretation may be used. The ITU interpretation service has been working with the IS department to test RSI solutions for ITU meetings extensively in recent years. RSI may be used for events outside Geneva with the agreement of the host country and with close technical collaboration between the ITU IS team and the host country technical team to ensure all elements are in place for successful remote delivery.

Proposal 2: local provision of IT equipment and devices

The host country may rent or provide locally available IT equipment to reduce freight costs, customs duties and potential delays, whilst also encouraging the use of local experts and resources in line with Annex 2, Article 5 of Decision 5.

Current practice

For major conferences held outside Geneva, the secretariat typically ships a standard kit of ITU-owned hardware (access-control turnstiles, badge printers, servers, laptops, routers, and secure storage media). We bring all servers to the venue to ensure uninterrupted event operations in the event of internet connectivity loss. This includes local print servers, Active Directory, database, and application servers, allowing us to maintain essential services independently of external network access. While this approach guarantees full compliance with ITU security baselines and service-level agreements, it entails significant freight, customs-clearance and insurance costs, and introduces schedule risk if consignments are delayed. It improves, however, onsite deployment timing and conference setup, reducing the onsite presence of ITU staff. ITU submits a tailored Table of Requirements to the host country at the start of the planning process. This includes, but is not limited to, items such as laptops, multifunction printers, staff monitors, and signage screens—adapted to the specific needs of the event and venue. The host country determines the models and quantities of network switches based on the number of network connections requested by ITU. Edge networking equipment, such as access switches and wireless access points, is always provided by the host country. For items like laptops, ITU also provides a standard list of required software to be pre-installed.

Measures

The ITU technical services team is currently exploring certain measures to support local provision of the IT equipment and devices, including:

1 **Mapping minimum technical specifications**. A reference list of hardware classes (workstation, badge printer, etc.) and performance benchmarks is being finalised so that host countries can source functionally equivalent devices while ensuring interoperability with ITU conference applications and cybersecurity controls.

2 Whilst it is usually the responsibility of the host country to provide such equipment, it may be possible to collaboratively **develop a pre-qualified vendor pool**. Regional panels of certified suppliers —covering hardware rental, on-site support and secure disposal— are being compiled in consultation with UN procurement colleagues to accelerate local contracting and reduce freight lead times.

3 **Piloting hybrid support models**. For events scheduled in 2027, the team will explore hybrid support models, including opportunities to move services —where feasible— to the public cloud. While endpoint devices and edge networking will be procured locally under ITU supervision. This approach aims to reduce reliance on ITU’s private cloud infrastructure in Geneva while maintaining secure and effective event operations.

4 **Enhancing service continuity.** Standard operating procedures are being updated to ensure consistent quality, security, and incident response when using rented or locally provided equipment. These measures will enable host countries to leverage domestic rental markets, reduce shipping needs, and support local ICT ecosystems —aligned with Annex 2, Article 5 of Decision 5 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022).

Proposal 3: transition to digitalized registration and accreditation conference processes

Transitioning from printed identification materials to digital conference credentials reduces the administrative and material costs of badge production and enhances sustainability.

Current practice

ITU statutory events run registration and accreditation processes before delivering physical secured credentials (RFID-based photo badges). The badges are printed in situ on presentation of a digital invitation and require the visual check of a government-Issued ID. Photos are captured in situ through dedicated booths. The process requires the construction of booths, cabling of the badging stations and training of local personnel by ITU's security and data privacy compliance specialists. Variable costs borne by the ITU consist of the RFID blank cards, lanyards, and card printer ink cartridges. The computers, printers badge readers and camera are provided by ITU. Pilot experiments with QR-code e-passes have so far been limited to small, Geneva-based workshops where robust perimeter control was less critical

Measures

The ITU technical services team is currently exploring measures such as:

1 **Pilot experiments to further digitalize registration and accreditation processes** through a Software as a Service (SaaS) solution linked to existing delegate registration databases, with the issuance of physical credentials or dematerialized solutions (provided that the physical risk vulnerabilities of the chosen system are acceptable). The credential generally needs to be as resilient as the current system in force.

2 **Inter-agency benchmarking**. Technical staff are analyzing the solutions already deployed by UNOG and UNFCCC to identify integration opportunities and common IT security standards (e.g. ISO/IEC 27001 compliance, OWASP Mobile Top 10 mitigation). These solutions are being analyzed by the Safety, Security and Resilience Division.

3 **Improving the Registration and Accreditation Experience** The technical team is examining client-centric, digitalized registration-to-badging value chains, drawing on case studies from major events such as the Olympic Games, international sports competitions, and high-profile exhibitions. These and other examples currently under review will be analyzed and compared to existing ITU practices. The goal is to identify the most effective solutions that can deliver:

– Enhanced participant satisfaction

– Greater cost-efficiency

– Increased processing capacity (throughout)

– Strengthened security at ITU premises and events by deterring, delaying, or denying the intent and capability of threat actors

– Resilient access to Union services, including quorum verification, gift distribution, lost-and-found tracking, and Wi-Fi connectivity.

4 Although digitalization is well aligned with ITU’s paperless meeting strategy and promises sources of savings, the concept should embrace digitalization from the registration / accreditation and badging as an interdependent system (value chain) to leverage administrative savings. The choice of the badge (physical or digital) will primarily be based on vulnerabilities and operational assessment.

5 **Progressive rollout plan**. As ITU is still in the early stages of benchmarking, the project will focus on designing and evaluating several possible digitalized value chains for registration, accreditation, and badging. These will be tested across different event types, including:

– statutory events versus public events, which present varying risk profiles

– events held in or near Geneva (with lower mobility costs) versus those hosted abroad (with higher mobility costs)

 The rollout plan aims to reach full operational maturity by 2027, potentially aligning with a major event such as WRC-27. Key milestones will be scheduled in reverse from this target date, including:

– establishment of the task force and completion of benchmarking activities by the end of 2025

– development and formulation of solution options in early 2026

– pilot testing during selected events throughout 2026.

6 Sustainability dividends and savings will be assessed at a later stage.

By pursuing these measures, the Secretariat aims to modernize delegate accreditation, lower operational costs for host countries, and enhance the overall experience, whilst ensuring safety, security and resilience to the event participants and processes.

Additional considerations

To further ease the financial burden on host countries, the organizing team continuously reviews and refines event requirements in close collaboration with the ITU Conferences team and the Host Country. This ensures that, for each event, the necessary venue infrastructure and services, rooms and capacity, and staffing support are requested —reflecting actual needs and avoiding unnecessary or excessive demands on hosts. Additionally, efforts to test and evaluate AI-based interpretation and captioning in non-plenary meetings will continue as part of the long-term interpretation strategy.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_