



Guidelines on the management of fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation*

Purpose

The guidelines and annexes contained within this document provide high-level guidance on the management and governance of fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation at ITU.

Scope

These guidelines concern all meetings of the Sectors and General Secretariat and do not conflict with the existing regulatory frameworks and working methods of Sectors.

1 Meeting categories by modality

ITU events today have meeting sessions falling under one of the following four categories:

- a) **Physical** – All the participants are onsite, present in the meeting room.
- b) **Fully virtual** – All participants participate remotely through a web-conference platform, in their respective locations.
- c) **Physical with remote participation (intervention)** – The physical meeting room is connected to a web conference platform. Participants may attend on-site, in the meeting room, and/or actively participate through a web-conference platform¹.
- d) **Physical with webcasting** – Means the (real-time or almost real-time) transmission of an event online without the possibility of direct intervention.

2 Structure of these guidelines

These guidelines respond to the criteria established by Annex 1, section 2, of Resolution 167 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) on strengthening and developing ITU capabilities for fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation, and the electronic means to advance the work of the Union, either within the body of the guidelines or within the annexes to the guidelines, as appropriate.

The review of current applicable policies and practices for fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation as detailed in Annex 1, section 1, to Resolution 167 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) is provided as [Annex 1](#) to these guidelines.

* As adopted by 2025 Council (see Document [C25/114](#)).

¹ By way of clarification, webcasting is not included in this category.

Guidelines

1 Clarification on the rights of different categories of members participating remotely in terms of decision-making in different types of meetings

1.1 Status of remote participants in physical meetings with remote participation

Resolution 167 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference emphasizes the importance of remote participation for diverse and inclusive participation and sets the legal framework for remote participation. The Constitution, the Convention, and the General Rules do not have specific provisions for remote participation.

Resolution 167 states in *recognizing e)* that the current status of interactive remote participation allows "remote intervention" rather than "remote participation", insofar as a remote participant cannot take part in decision-making. As a result, the following clarifications are provided with respect to rights of remote participants in physical meetings where remote participation is allowed:

- a) Remote participants do not enjoy the same participation rights in physical meetings with remote participation as do on-site participants.
- b) Remote participants have a right to participate in discussions and debates as part of the consensus-building process as much as possible.
- c) Remote participants may not take part in the decision-making process. This means that:
 - i) Remote participants do not have the right to vote, and they are not taken into account for the calculation of quorum (cf. GR 93, GR 115).
 - ii) A decision can still be taken by consensus amongst participants physically present, even if remote participants disagree.
 - iii) Remote participants cannot raise points of order or motions of order.
- d) As the chair of a meeting is responsible for directing deliberations, enforcing procedural rules, and putting questions to vote (cf. GR 59), as well as duties outside formal meetings, correspondingly (s)he should be present at any physical meeting, including meetings with remote participation. As a corollary to the above, it would be advisable that vice-chairs be physically present, as they may be called to stand in for the chair in case of unavailability of the latter, or to chair sub-committees or ad hoc groups.

1.2 Status of participants in fully virtual meetings

Since PP-22, fully virtual meetings have been explicitly recognized and accepted as a meeting modality in the ITU regulatory framework (cf. Decision 5 and Resolutions 25 and 167). Resolution 167 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) provides a comprehensive mandate for the ITU to develop and strengthen its capabilities to organize and conduct fully virtual meetings. Given the decision of the Plenipotentiary Conference to maintain *recognizing e)* of Resolution 167 as is, any such development and strengthening of fully virtual meetings in ITU must remain within the limitations set by the aforementioned clause.

Although a strict reading of *recognizing e)* suggests that virtual meetings cannot reach any decision, ITU's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and the objectives of the Resolution

would support a liberal view that all participants in a fully virtual meeting can participate in consensus-based decision-making. More specifically, the ITU membership's acceptance of decisions made by consensus in fully virtual meetings during the pandemic has led to legal outcomes that are now part of ITU's operational history. This practice indicates a collective understanding and acceptance that, in the context of fully virtual meetings, consensus amongst participants is a legitimate form of decision-making within the Union. Furthermore, the lack of challenge to this practice by ITU's supreme organ, the Plenipotentiary Conference, in September 2022, could be perceived as an endorsement of the legality and acceptability of decisions by consensus taken in virtual meetings not only with respect to the past, but also regarding the future.

As a result, the role of participants in fully virtual meetings is as below:

- a) Participants in a fully virtual meeting can participate in discussions and debates as part of the consensus-building process.
- b) Decisions in fully virtual meetings can only be made by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved at the meeting, the matter at hand must be reopened at a future meeting.
- c) Given that a fully virtual meeting operates without a physical venue, it is logically understood that all participants involved, including those in leadership roles such as chairs and vice-chairs, participate in the meeting remotely.
- d) ITU's established practice in fully virtual meetings to operate by consensus reflects an understanding of the current regulatory constraints regarding decision-making. In such an environment, the procedural tools of points of order or motions of order should not be used, as the objective remains to decide by consensus rather than by a vote.

2 Interpretation services for meetings with remote participation

2.1 Provision of interpretation services

Interpretation services for all ITU conferences, assemblies, and meetings are provided in accordance with Document C22/INF/7 on measures and principles of translation and interpretation in ITU and are available equally to all participants, whether participating physically or remotely.

Currently, the rules for provision of interpretation services are applicable to physical meetings, fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation. The maximum length of one session is three (3) hours, and there can be a maximum of two (2) sessions per day. A break of at least ninety (90) minutes is required between sessions.

Conditions for the provision of remote interpretation services in meetings are also on the agenda of the existing consultation mechanism between the United Nations Common System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).

2.2 Technical considerations and risks for interpretation services in meetings with remote participation

The technology for remote participation has improved significantly in recent years, both in quality and reliability. Remote participants are also more aware of best practices when intervening remotely, such as speaking at an adequate pace and articulating clearly. While

significant progress has been made in the provision of interpretation services in meetings with remote participants, certain technical risks remain, such as equipment or connectivity malfunctions on the side of remote participants or on-site, which can cause service disruptions. Interpretation quality can also suffer due to issues with remote participation platforms, causing poor sound quality or voice fading. The quality of network connections and equipment such as headsets is critical in providing interpretation services in meetings with remote participation.

To mitigate risk, real time monitoring can be established by creating communication channels through which participants can quickly report any problems with interpretation or audio that may occur. In addition, a back-up channel will be available that can be activated if remote participants experience any technical problems.

3 Technology neutrality – Web-conference platforms

The web-conference platform used for fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation must be available and accessible to all participants regardless of their physical location and when choosing it possible technical restrictions for the participants that would prevent their full and equal participation should be taken into account. The web-conferencing platform must also allow integration with interpretation services. Furthermore, to access the platform, participants may not have to download or purchase any software to access it and will receive a link with the meeting invitation through which they can join.

For fully remote meetings, event organizers are required to make best efforts so that participants have equal and full access to web conference platforms. Information about meetings and relevant documents could be shared via email in addition to any online collaboration spaces to help ensure alternative ways to receive information and participate in discussions. If event organizers determine a technical barrier for interested participants, alternatives should be found.

4 Choice of meeting modality

Factors to be considered in the choice of meeting modality include the purpose of the meeting, likely audience, the proportion of the participants who will be on-site, nature of the meeting (decision-making or not), expected voting component, structure of meeting (plenary, panel, workshop etc.), duration of the event, global or regional reach, availability of meeting rooms and technology, context (e.g. final meeting before a major conference), inclusiveness (e.g. geographical or gender considerations), budgetary constraints and environmental considerations.

5 Engaging in offline discussions

Remote participants may engage in offline discussions (e.g. ad hoc sessions) as long as they are held in places/rooms integrated with the virtual platform. Many web-conference platforms also support “breakout rooms” allowing participants to create their own breakout sessions for off-line discussions. However, there may be instances where remote participation in ad hoc discussions may not be possible, such as when a Chair calls a meeting spontaneously without prior notice or in a room which is not integrated with the virtual platform. In such cases, once the meeting resumes remote participants should be informed of the discussions

or agreements reached during the ad hoc discussions and given the opportunity to express their comments or points of view before a decision is formally taken.

6 Practical measures to support equitable opportunities for participation, in particular for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs

For physical meetings with remote participation or fully virtual meetings, captioning can be followed on the web-conference platform or via the webcast service.

Sign language may be made available upon request (subject to the availability of resources) in any ITU meeting and may be extended to the web conference and webcast platforms.

Web-conference platforms selected by ITU include accessibility features (e.g. screen reader support, adjustable font size, keyboard) for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs.

In the registration form for the meetings, participants will be asked to indicate in advance if they require any special support for their participation in order to assess the feasibility of implementing the necessary measures to guarantee accessibility during the event.

At the beginning of the sessions, the participants will be informed of the accessibility features available on the platform during the meeting in order for all participants to be informed and for these features to be enabled if necessary.

7 Flexibility in the length and timing of meetings bearing in mind the time zones of participants

For physical meetings with remote participation, the guidance is to hold the meeting during the core working hours of the location where the physical meeting is being held. Remote participants join as required. Some degree of flexibility as to timing is required: the first session typically begins at 0800 or 0900 hours local time in the location of the physical meeting, and finishes at 1700 or 1800 hours, while lunch breaks may be cut short to accommodate the different time zones of remote participants.

Currently, fully virtual meetings with global participants are organized within the central hours of the day in Geneva (1100 – 1500 hours). For the convenience of Member States in all regions, fully virtual meetings may be held during the working hours of other time zones, with resource and overtime cost implications for support staff based in ITU HQ in Geneva. If the meeting covers multiple topics or sessions, it can be divided into blocks to better suit the participants' schedules. To accommodate different working weeks in various countries, as well as time zones, efforts should be made to avoid scheduling virtual meetings on Fridays whenever possible

In all instances, event organizers are required to make best efforts to accommodate different time zones, taking into account the implications for enabling fair participation of delegates across the ITU Member States, supporting staff in headquarters and field offices, staff overtime and interpretation costs.

8 Training, as appropriate, for ITU meeting organizers, regional office staff, chairs, rapporteurs, editors and delegates, with particular attention to chairing and effectively managing remote participation

Since 2020, on-the-job training has been provided to meeting organizers and staff. Briefing sessions to chairs include information on better streamlining of discussions involving onsite and remote participants. Guidance material and training is regularly provided to delegates, in particular when significant remote participation is expected. Depending on resource availability, ITU technical moderators may assist participants joining ITU meetings remotely, as well as help the chair and secretary in giving the floor to remote participants.

9 Best practices in managing meetings with remote participation

9.1 Registration process

For events open to ITU membership only, remote participants follow the same registration and accreditation procedure as onsite participants, and access to the physical room and virtual room is controlled through a similar authorization verification mechanism.

For public events such as workshops, the AI for Good Summit or WSIS Forum, remote participants do not need to go through the full accreditation process. A simplified CRM registration system designed to support registration for the above-mentioned public events may be used by the General Secretariat and the three Bureaux.

9.2 Managing requests from the floor

The chair is required to manage requests for the floor from the room where delegates physically raise their hands/nameplates or press the request button, and from the web conference platform, where delegates raise a virtual hand. The chair could adopt different approaches in ITU meetings:

- The chair gives priority to participants in the room and then moves to remote participants
- The chair responds to requests in chronological order as far as possible
- The chair asks remote participants to open their microphones and request to speak
- All delegates, whether present physically or remotely, are requested to connect to the web-conference platform and use the virtual raise-hand feature.

9.3 Use of the chat function

The chat function in the web conferencing platform is not automatically enabled. When it is enabled, it does not form part of the official meeting records. Remote participants must recognize that, for various reasons, the chair and secretariat may be unable to read messages in the chat of a meeting. However, the chat function may be used to provide certain inputs upon request of the chair (for example, a specific proposal made during the debates) or to share text and send private messages. It may also be used to highlight technical problems or obtain help from the moderator.

It may not be used to ask for the floor.

Annex: 1

ANNEX 1

Current practice in the management of fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation

A full list of documents covering existing guidance of fully virtual meetings and meetings with remote participation was presented to the 17th meeting of CWG-FHR in January 2024 in Document [CWG-FHR-17/INF/4](#).

Document [CWG-FHR-20/3\(Rev.2\)](#) also contains additional considerations for holding fully virtual meetings and physical meetings with remote participation.
