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| Note by the Secretary-General |
| REPORT ON PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 167 (REV. DUBAI, 2018) |
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| SummaryITU has been supporting physical meetings with multilingual webcast since 1998 and multilingual interactive remote participation since 2010. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated the adoption of virtual meetings as a business continuity measure not only for the ITU, but across all sectors and industries. This report summarizes the actions ITU has taken regarding the electronic working methods (EWM) measures in Annex 1 to Resolution 167, addressing the legal, technical, security and financial implications of increasing the EWM capability of ITU, and challenges faced by the Union while implementing these actions.The necessary additional resources to support fully virtual, and physical meetings with remote participation for 2024-2027 are included in the UMACs detailed in the 2024-2027 Draft Financial Plan.Action requiredThe Plenipotentiary Conference is invited **to take note of** this report.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_References*PP-18* [*Decision 5 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/DEC-005-E.pdf)*,* [*Resolution 167 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-167-E.pdf)*Documents* [*C22/65*](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0065/en)*;* [*C22/69*](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0069/en)*;* [*C22/73*](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0073/en)*;* [*CWG-FHR-15/19*](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CWGFHR15-C-0019/en)*;* [WTSA Resolution 32](https://www.itu.int/pub/T-RES-T.32-2022)(Rev. Hammamet, 2016), [TSAG-TD1191](https://www.itu.int/md/T17-TSAG-220110-TD-GEN-1191/en), [TSAG-TD1253](https://www.itu.int/md/T17-TSAG-220110-TD-GEN-1253/en).[WTDC Resolutions 1 and 5 (Rev. Kigali, 2022)](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/md/18/wtdc21/c/D18-WTDC21-C-0103%21R1%21PDF-E.pdf) |

This report details activities that were implemented in accordance with PP-18 Resolution 167 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) during the period 2018-2022.

1. **Introduction**

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

1. **Physical** – all the participants are onsite, present in the meeting room.
2. **Fully virtual** – all participants are participating remotely through a web-conference platform, in their respective locations.
3. **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 participate remotely through a web conference platform.

This report summarizes the actions ITU has taken regarding the electronic working methods (EWM) measures in Annex 1 to Resolution 167, addressing the legal, technical, security and financial implications of increasing the EWM capability of ITU, and challenges faced by the Union while implementing these actions.

1. **Meeting preparation**
	1. *Factors to be considered in order to establish whether the event/meeting should be physical, fully virtual, or physical with remote participation*

The many factors to be considered for the choice of meeting type include: purpose, likely participants, proportion of participants who will be on site, nature of the meeting (decision-making or not), expected voting component, global and local COVID-19 related sanitary conditions and travel restrictions, format of event (Study Group meeting, panel discussion, workshop, etc.), duration of the event (participants are unlikely to travel to attend a 2-hour session), global/regional (in the regions, distances are smaller), interpretation needs, availability of suitable meeting room(s), context (e.g., last meeting before a major conference), inclusiveness, and environmental considerations. This list is not exhaustive.

* 1. *Registration process, participant authentication, attendance tracking and reporting*

Registration to member-only statutory ITU events and other events requiring focal point approval continue to be conducted via the ITU event registration platform. Online registration forms allow participants to indicate if they intend to participate remotely.

To ensure that only the registered participants can access virtual event sessions requiring authentication (e.g. from focal point), ITU developed a [”Restricted Virtual Events portal](https://www.itu.int/en/events/Pages/Virtual-Sessions.aspx)”, where only registered participants can access the virtual rooms of the meeting sessions. Once in the virtual room (Zoom), participants are identified by their representation (delegation), as per their registration platform.

For fully virtual events open to the public (workshops, webinars, etc.) where no focal point approval is required, the ITU developed a simplified event registration process that provides registered participants with remote participation connection instructions via email. An ITU User Account is not necessary to register and participate. Adapted attendance reports and statistics have also been developed.

Attendance is updated in the event registration platform to show how each event participant was present: either physically, remotely (by connecting to the remote participation platform), or both. The attendance reporting system has been updated to allow for reporting the different types of participation.

With remote participation introduced, there is a greater discrepancy between the announced and actual participation in events, either physically or virtually. Further effort must be made to better capture the intention of participants with respect to their physical and/or virtual participation.

Regardless of the platform, efforts to unify data fields and data collection facilitate ITU meeting participation analysis.

* 1. *Where may delegates obtain information on the Event or meeting sessions*
* [Calendar of Events](https://www.itu.int/en/events/Pages/Calendar-Events.aspx)
* [Restricted Virtual Events page](https://www.itu.int/en/events/Pages/Virtual-Sessions.aspx)
* [Public Virtual Events page](https://www.itu.int/en/events/Pages/Public-Virtual-Sessions.aspx)
* [MyWorkspace](https://www.itu.int/myworkspace/#/Home) ([Calendar](https://www.itu.int/myworkspace/#/Calendar) and [Meeting Sessions](https://www.itu.int/myworkspace/#/E-meetings))
* On each event website
* Registration confirmation email
	1. *Time zone considerations*

For physical meetings with remote participation, the general practice is to hold the meeting during the core working hours of the location where the physical meeting is being held, and remote participants have to make themselves available for joining the sessions of interest.

For fully virtual meetings, while most of them are organized within the central hours of the day in Geneva, there exists the possibility of holding them during the working hours of other time zones, with overtime cost implication for support staff who are based in ITU HQ in Geneva. Additionally, there are increased costs for interpretation for meeting sessions that last longer than three hours.

* 1. *Web-conference platform for fully virtual meetings or physical meetings with remote participation*

Zoom has become the de facto standard for the majority of ITU meetings. ITU no longer utilizes Adobe Connect or Interprefy platforms, in accordance with Member States request to ITU to streamline platforms.

For some specific Correspondence Groups whose participants are unable to connect to Zoom, ITU-R falls back to using GoToMeeting/GoToWebinar or Teams. These situations are becoming less frequent and therefore only two GtM/GtW licenses are being retained until next year for those situations.

ITU-T uses MyMeetings by default for meetings without interpretation and Zoom for meetings with interpretation.

While Zoom has become the de facto standard at present, the web-conference market is an evolving one. There may be other products in the future that better meet ITU requirements. The General Secretariat is monitoring the evolution closely, and platforms will be adapted/adopted according to market development and end-user preferences.

* 1. *Impact on meeting sessions planning*

Meeting rooms need to be reconfigured and tested to support remote participation. Very often, it may not be possible to have back-to-back physical sessions with remote participation in the same room if the configuration of the next remote session must be different from the one before. Usually, a minimum of 30 minutes is needed in between the two sessions to perform the reconfiguration of the remote participation session. However, if there is a need to split or join the physical room (e.g. for Popov to become Popov1 and Popov2, or vice versa) while continuing to support remote participation, the reconfiguration takes a minimum of two hours and can even take up to a half of a working day if there are reconfiguration issues.

1. **Pre-meeting arrangements**

The organization and preparation for a physical meeting with remote participation is considerably more complex than a meeting that is purely physical or purely virtual. The additional tasks include:

1. adapting the registration form/process;
2. differentiating the list of physical/remote participants, and then finding/configuring a suitable meeting room,
3. providing participants with the link to access the virtual session, in addition to the location of the physical meeting,
4. providing audio integration and technical support for remote participants,
5. sharing guidance and updates with participants on the organization and rights of remote participation (e.g., in a meeting document/guidelines document, announced by the Chairman at the start of a session, via a website or mailing lists),
6. adapting working methods to ensure effective screen sharing, management of floor requests, etc.,
7. addressing the higher volume of requests for technical support for participants attending either physically or virtually,
8. planning the flow of the virtual session and all production of all associated audio and video content.

The additional work required for physical meetings with remote participation can result in increased work/overtime for technicians and secretariat staff.

Test sessions for remote participants were initially used extensively; however, as delegates and staff have grown accustomed to virtual working, test sessions are now provided only when needed. Virtual rooms are generally opened 30-60 minutes before sessions start in order for delegates, interpreters, and captioners to test/configure their audio equipment.

1. **During the meeting**

One of the main challenges for running physical meetings with remote participation is how the chairman manages floor requests in the physical room (delegates physically raising their hand/nameplate, or pressing the request for floor button), and the raise-hand request coming from the web-conference platform. At present, there is no technological solution to combine the floor requests from the physical room (push of a button) and from the Zoom raise-hand feature and displaying them as one list in chronological order. Furthermore, due to budgetary constraints, not all meetings make use of the *name handling system* to label the microphones in the physical room. When the name handling system is in use, the best that can be achieved at the moment is to display both lists side-by-side on the same screen, allowing the chairman to decide who is next to be given the floor. The secretary and technical moderator also assist the chairman in managing the two request-for-floor lists.

*General Secretariat, SPM*

Depending on the meeting, e.g., for the 2022 Council session, priority was given to participants in the room and then remote participants. In other meetings, the chairman tries to note who made the request first and give the floor in chronological order, while following the status of the delegation. In some physical meetings with remote participation, the chairman requests remote participants to open their mic and announce their desire to speak.

*ITU-R*

ITU-R meetings have avoided the need to manage two lists of requests for the floor by having all delegates connect to the Zoom platform and use the raise-hand feature irrespective of whether they are participating virtually or physically. Onsite delegates can still intervene verbally using the microphones in the room as the Zoom platform is integrated with the meeting room’s audio system. ITU-R delegates have broadly praised this approach because everyone sees their place in the queue. The chat function in the Zoom platform is used to share text and send private messages.

Having all delegates connected through the Zoom platform enables remote chairmen to handle floor requests. However, in such cases there is the risk that the chairman has a poor-quality connection or loses their connection. For such cases, a stand-in person is identified who is physically present in the meeting to take over should the chairman’s connection fail.

In general, the chat function in the web-conference platform is used to highlight technical problems or to obtain help from the moderator. It is not used for asking for the floor, or as an official communication record.

*ITU-T*

ITU-T requests that one leader (chairman) must be present in the room for physical meetings with remote participation, and announce best effort nature for supporting remote participation; e.g., during the last WTSA, it was made clear that decisions are taken by those physically present. Floor requests from participants in the room or remote are treated equally.

In the event that the chairman is remote, ITU-T has requested a stand-in person to be in the room so that they can immediately take over should the chairman's connection fail. Chairmen have also to take into consideration the possibility of connectivity failures with remote participants, and take actions to allow disconnected participants to return to items where they can again intervene.

*ITU-D*

ITU-D strives, as far as possible, to treat all participants equally, thus giving the floor to participants in chronological order of their request for the floor, regardless of whether they participate physically or virtually.

1. **Implications of virtual meetings and remote participation**

*5.1 Impact on meeting attendance*

As participants may connect both remotely and attend sessions physically, ITU observed a significant increase in participation, e.g., at major events in 2022: WTSA - 1569 total, 877 onsite, 692 remote; WTDC - 1762 total, 1307 onsite, 455 remote, WSIS Forum[[1]](#footnote-1) - 2090 total, 780 onsite, 1310 remote.

Since the adoption of virtual meetings and wide acceptance of remote participation, the number of attending participants has multiplied by two to three, depending on the event. As the financial costs (travel, per diem) associated with virtual participation to a meeting is near zero, participants are able to attend more events than before. There is, however, a downside to virtual events or remote participation in physical events: some participants from developing countries have difficulty to connect and meaningfully contribute to events. E-fellowships have been offered to allow participants to have better connectivity, if possible. There is also a downside related to time zones of remote participants (e.g., for the Pacific when meetings are in Geneva time zone). Regular and unified post-event surveys can help collect and inform on further implications and improve event delivery.

*5.2 Impact on and additional measures to increase meeting efficiency and productivity*

With the return to physical meetings, some ITU groups saw an improvement in their productivity, the quality of the discussions amongst delegates, the ability to reach consensus decisions, and the rate of progress of the technical work. ITU received feedback from physical participants in meetings that connecting to the remote participation platform while on-site provided them with unanticipated benefits, e.g. the ability to share text in the chat function. It has also been shown that physical meetings, with or without remote participation, can be far more effective for progressing technical work than fully virtual meetings. The extent of the improvement in the ITU-R meetings’ efficiency and productivity was significant and vital.

Generally, offline discussions, e.g., during coffee breaks, can only be attended by physical participants. Remote participants do not have the possibility to set up their own chat room to quickly/informally address some specific topics with a reduced group of participants. The Remote Participation Task Force (RPTF)[[2]](#footnote-2) is working on a “*Virtual Events Venue*” solution, allowing onsite participants to interact with the remote participants, and to facilitate communications even after an event has terminated.

Alternatively, some ITU-R meetings now include the opportunity for delegates to progress work on certain topics by setting up email discussions that are held during the course of the meeting. Working methods have been established for such email discussions, which include the following elements:

* A clearly defined scope for the work, including an identified convener for the email discussion, and a specified starting and ending time of the discussion.
* An up-to-date list with all current topics for email discussion made available for all delegates’ awareness,
* Any round of email discussions should be open for a minimum duration of 36 hours in order to give an opportunity to all registered members to review and reply to the discussion.
* Documents under discussion are shared via a dedicated SharePoint folder.
* Upon the closure of the discussion, the results are reported to the next session of the group that had set up the activity.

Notably, even if delegates are not always able to follow an email discussion, they would have the opportunity to review the outcome and provide comments as needed during the formal sessions of the group.

1. **Implications for gender equality**

Virtual events and remote participation can provide flexibility conducive to greater participation of women in ITU events. Caregiving roles and other personal limitations on foreign travel can reduce someone’s availability to attend meetings in person, particularly for long events. This may have a greater impact on women versus men, particularly in some cultures. Despite all efforts, remote participants are at a disadvantage in influencing the outcome of meetings as compared to those who participate physically. Therefore, with the return to physical meetings, it will be important for women’s progress in influencing the outcomes of ITU meetings is not set back either by them physically attending meetings at a lower rate than their male colleagues or by remote participants having a lesser influence in determining the outcomes of the physical meetings with remote participation. A better understanding of women's experiences can help make ITU meetings, processes, and outcomes more gender responsive.

1. **Environmental implication**

Offering inclusive remote participation or going fully virtually, can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of an international meeting or event since air travel is a major contributor. Given the urgent need to fight climate change, making the most of ICTs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be a key consideration when deciding on the event format, especially considering ITU's role in leading coordination on ICTs and climate change.

With almost all official travel at a standstill and meetings being moved online, Covid-19 resulted in significant reductions of ITU’s greenhouse gas emissions (emissions from flights issued by ITU's Travel Section reduced by more than 1 400 tonnes of CO2 per year in 2020 and 2021 compared to 2019) and offered insights into the potential of replacing certain trips with electronic means also post-Covid in order to help ITU achieve its GHG emission reduction targets in line with UN-wide objectives as per the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030.

1. **Security and privacy implications**

The RPTF, in addition to identifying best practices and new processes and procedures for supporting virtual events and meetings with remote participation, also analyses the security issues resulting from extending the physical meeting to remote locations. The requirements for end-to-end encryption, web-conference service providers to be SOC 2, ISO 27001, GDPR compliant, etc., are essential elements for the selection of the web-conference platforms.

For physical meetings, ITU only records which delegation has attended particular sessions for quorum purposes. On the other hand, web-conference platforms record the date and time when participants joined the session, and the session can also be recorded, including chat messages, close up videos of the delegates taking the floor, etc.

1. **Legal implications**

The legal framework for remote participation in ITU meetings is found in PP Resolution 167 (Rev. Dubai, 2018), *Strengthening and developing ITU capabilities for electronic meetings and means to advance the work of the Union*, and the General Rules of conferences, assemblies and meetings of the Union (GRs).

While PP Resolution 167 highlights the benefits of, and the need to, strengthen electronic working methods in the work of ITU, the Resolution also recognizes that the current status of interactive remote participation (IRP) allows “remote intervention” rather than “remote participation” insofar as a remote participant cannot take part in decision-making (see Recognizing d)). As a result, remote and physical participants do not enjoy in this context the same participation rights. Indeed, and although remote delegates participate in the consensus-building process, decisions are ultimately taken by the delegates physically present in the meeting room. It should also be noted that only delegates physically present at a meeting can exercise the right to vote (GR 115), that quorum is based on the number of delegates physically present (or represented) at a meeting (GR 93), and that remote participants cannot raise motions of order (including, in particular, the motion for closure debate - GR107) because these motions are inherently related to the exercise of the right to vote. Finally, and as confirmed by the Union’s practice, a technical glitch which may affect a remote participant’s connection to a meeting does not interrupt the meeting itself.

Holding fully virtual meetings was neither the scenario envisaged when PP Resolution 167 was first adopted, nor when it was last modified in 2018; therefore, this text provides little guidance in this regard, and the same can be said for the text of the General Rules of Conferences, Assemblies, and Meetings of the Union. Despite the lack of a clear legal framework for the organization and holding of fully virtual meetings, membership adopted during the pandemic a pragmatic approach whereby all decisions of sectorial meetings (e.g. Study Group meetings, Advisory Group meetings, etc.) could still be taken by consensus. In the absence of such consensus, decisions were postponed to the next physical meeting. Finally, a specific ad hoc framework was put in place for Council meetings whereby virtual consultations of Councilors (VCCs) were held, with formal decisions made by correspondence after each VCC, in accordance with Rule 3 of the Council’s Rules of Procedure.

1. **Financial implications**

While no budget provision had been made for the current financial period (2020-2023) for support of virtual meetings and remote participation, the secretariat allocated resources for investments and operational costs to ensure business continuity of the Union’s activities. Since March 2020, with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant increase in support was required, especially impacting the IS Department.

The secretariat provided funds to support virtual events to upgrade some meeting rooms at ITU HQ to be able to support multilingual virtual meetings and remote participation, allowing interpreters to work either onsite or remotely, in addition to the participants. Other small meeting rooms were also upgraded to support monolingual meetings with remote participation. Web-conference platforms were integrated into the ITU registration, accreditation, and access control processes, accessible through the ITU website/portal. Continuous enhancements are being made to further improve participants’ onsite and online meeting experience. For events held outside the ITU HQ, the IS Department has assembled five mobile sets of multilingual remote participation equipment for temporary installation at the remote event venues, hence freeing up the burden of the Host Country to support physical meetings with multilingual remote participation, which in many cases is expensive and hard to obtain locally. e.g., WTDC-22, PP-22.

The need for remote participation moderators to support virtual meetings or remote participation was also covered by ad hoc funding provided by the ITU secretariat. In some cases, additional moderated test sessions are arranged as required. It demands also more staff time to organize events with remote participation.

For physical meetings with remote participation, in addition to the pre-meeting arrangements and room/equipment configuration, it is necessary to synchronise the presentations, requests for the floor, images of the onsite and remote speakers, captioning transcript, speech timer, and document IDs on both the physical and virtual screens. This demands additional equipment, planning time of the technical and event organization staff, and additional audio-visual and remote participation production staff (tasks mostly performed manually until automation can be achieved).

One of the downsides of fully virtual events is the need to observe shorter meeting hours per day, which often forced the meeting to be conducted over a larger overall time period. Due to the availability of the required support staff, fully virtual meetings were mostly held during Geneva working hours. Delegates attending ITU meetings from the easternmost and westernmost time zones were constantly required to participate either very late in the evening or very early in the morning, respectively, which were decried for a lack of fairness or shared burden. Attempts were made to hold 4-hour virtual meetings with interpretation. However, holding a 4-hour virtual meeting also required using two interpretation teams and doubling the interpretation costs as compared to a physical meeting held for 6 hours per day with a lunch break of 90-120 minutes.

Finally, the demand from Member States to support virtual meetings outside Geneva working hours will require staff working on a roster, or extended hours, which would incur additional costs.

While there is a reduction in cost for ITU membership to attend ITU meetings remotely, there is an additional cost for ITU in supporting fully virtual or physical meetings with remote participation.

Table 1 shows an estimate for the financial investments and operational support costs to be budgeted for the IS Department to deliver such services on a regular and ongoing basis.

**Table 1 – ITU IS Department estimated costs for implementation and operations of fully virtual, and physical meetings with remote participation**

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| **Item** | **CHF** | **Unit (Figures in CHF)** |
| **Investment costs (every 5 years):** | **1'000'000** |  |
| * Equipment to support multilingual remote participation, webcast, and floor-only captioning
 | 500'000 | 100'000 per meeting room (5 meeting rooms) |
| * Equipment to support floor-only remote participation
 | 100'000 | 20'000 per meeting room (5 meeting rooms) |
| * Mobile set of equipment to support multilingual remote participation, webcast, and floor only captioning for meetings away from ITU HQ
 | 400'000 | 80'000 per set (5 sets) |
| **Recurrent operation costs (yearly)** | **855'000** |  |
| * 2 full time moderators
 | 250'000 |  |
| * 1 full time event organization support assistance
 | 125'000 |  |
| * Web-conference platform and event portal license/usage cost
 | 200'000 |  |
| * Audio-visual technician and operator
 | 80'000 | 2'000/day, estimated 40 days |
| * Ad-hoc moderators for larger events/peak periods
 | 200'000 | On demand (200/day/moderator) |
| **Other recurrent operation costs (yearly)** |  |  |
| * Time zone overtime
 | Note[[3]](#footnote-3) |  |
| * Additional team of interpreters for sessions going beyond 3 hours
 | Note[[4]](#footnote-4) | 10'332 CHF per day for 6 languages |

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1. The total and remote numbers are unofficial statistics as access to the virtual room did not need to go through the ITU portal. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ITU internal group created in April 2020 following the wide adoption of web-conference platforms as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, to identify best practices and new processes and procedures for supporting virtual events and meetings with remote participation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Amount to be budgeted based on events requirements and if the support could be provided in the fields or Headquarters. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Amount to be budgeted based on events requirements. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)