



How to engage with internet standardisation and governance bodies?

Practical guidance to the ITU

August 2025



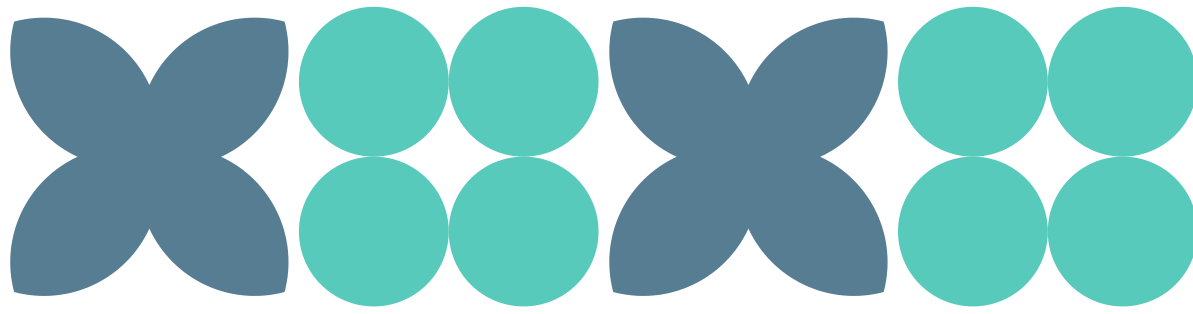
European Center for
Not-for-Profit Law



Civil Society Alliances for
Digital Empowerment



Co-funded by
the European Union



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This publication was co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Table of Contents

ITU – International Telecommunications Union

- What is the ITU, and how does it work?
- How can civil society get involved?
- How can I become an ITU member?
- Are there any materials for newcomers?

Abbreviations

ALAC - At-Large Advisory Committee

ALS - At-large Structure

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

DESA - Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN)

GNSO - Generic Names Supporting Organisation

gTLD - Generic Top-Level Domains

IAB - Internet Architecture Board

ICANN - Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

I-D - Internet Draft

IESG - Internet Engineering Steering Group

IETF - Internet Engineering Task Force

IGF - Internet Governance Forum

IRTF - Internet Research Task Force

ITU - International Telecommunication Union

ITU-D - Telecommunication Development

ITU-R - Radiocommunication

ITU-T - Telecommunication Standardisation

MAG - Multistakeholder Advisory Group

NCUC - Non-Commercial Users Constituency

NCSG - Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group

NPOC - Not-for-Profit Operational Concerns Constituency

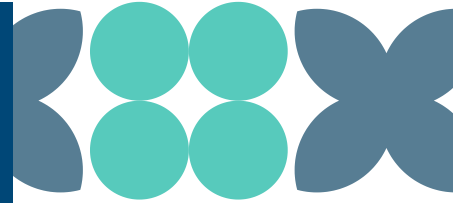
RALO - Regional At-Large Organisations

RFC - Requests for Comments

SG - Study Groups

WTDC - World Telecommunication Development Conference

WTSa - World Telecommunications Standardisation Assembly



What is the ITU, and how does it work?

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is a specialised agency of the United Nations, headquartered in Geneva with offices in all regions of the world, responsible for coordinating global telecommunications networks and services. It plays a significant role in internet governance by setting international standards for telecommunications technologies, allocating radio frequency spectrum, and facilitating international cooperation on telecommunications issues. ITU is made up of 194 member states and more than 1,000 companies, universities and international and regional organisations. ITU is governed by the plenipotentiary conference and the ITU Council. The Plenipotentiary Conference – held every four years – is the highest policy-making body, which determines the future strategy and activities of the ITU. Between plenipotentiary conferences, the ITU is governed by the Council.

ITU is divided into three sectors: Radiocommunication (ITU-R), Telecommunication Standardisation (ITU-T), and Telecommunication Development (ITU-D). Each sector has a separate structure composed of:

- Annual assemblies or conferences that set the overall direction for activities; for example ITU-T holds the annual World Telecommunications Standardisation Assembly (WTSA) and ITU-D – the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC)
- Advisory boards that guide day-to-day activities between conferences
- Study groups that carry out standardisation work on specific issues

Study Groups (SG) are the primary forum for standards development and influence on policies. Although there is not a single SG explicitly devoted to the protection of human rights or the public interest, many of them work on issues that intersect with and are relevant to human rights.

¹ For more details on engaging in WTSA, refer to this publication by Global Partners Digital: [Navigating Human Rights in Digital Environments: The WTSA](#)

How can civil society get involved?

ITU does not envision a special status or participation process for CSOs; it also does not have a dedicated staff member for outreach and exchange with civil society (as opposed to ICANN, for example). The lack of dedicated participation pathways raises important obstacles. Taking this into account, CSOs can use the following formal and informal avenues to get involved in the work of ITU.

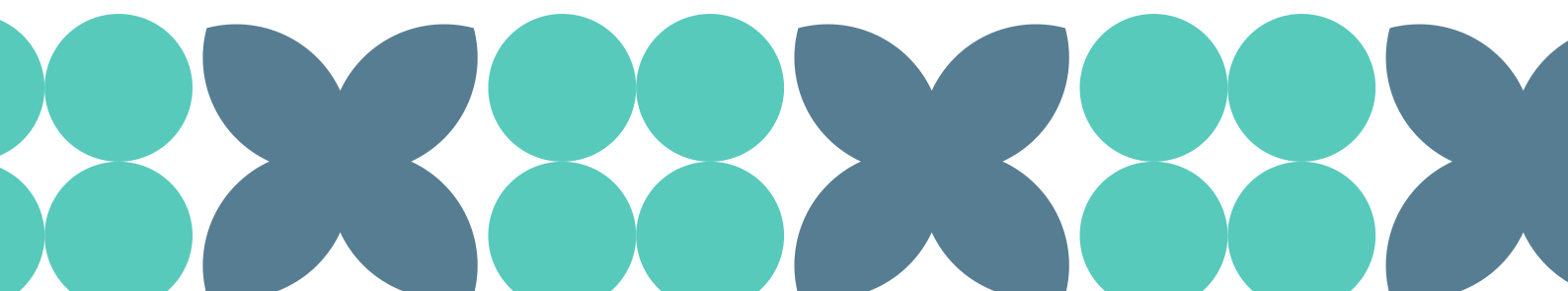
Become a Sector Member, Associate, or Academia

CSOs can choose to become a Sector Member, an Associate, or a member of Academia. This is the formal and most direct pathway to influencing ITU policies and standards, but it is linked to very high – if not prohibitive – fees. For example, yearly Sector Member fees can be over CHF 30,000, the Associate fee is over CHF 10,000, and the Academia fee (allowing participation in all three sectors) is around CHF 4,000.

One of these forms of membership is required to formally participate in ITU Study Groups and influence standards development. Members have the right to participate across the full range of activities of the sector they join, whereas associates can participate in one Study Group of a given sector – making this option more suitable for targeted interventions. However, only Sector Members can hold leadership positions in the SG.

An important caveat for national-level CSOs is that their application must be approved by the national telecommunications agency in the member state where they are based. This means that CSOs critical of the government or functioning in non-democratic settings bear a high risk of being rejected. Regional and international CSOs file their applications to the ITU Secretary General.

→ See the section ‘How can I become an ITU Member?’ below for details on the application process.



Contribute through your national delegation

For many CSOs, the most effective route to influencing policies and standards developed by ITU is by contributing through their country's national delegation. Governments are the most influential stakeholders at the ITU, with direct voting rights and the power to influence ITU's direction. Engaging with governments usually gives CSOs a better chance of identifying potentially problematic proposals before they reach the level of international negotiations.

CSOs could either:

- Seek to join the national delegation of their country
- Contribute their input to members of the national delegation

The prerequisite for this form of engagement is a good working relationship with the relevant government and its willingness to appoint CSO representatives as members of the delegation, which in the past has been more difficult for organisations in the Global South. The modalities of participation depend on each country. It is also worth noting that being a member of a delegation, and the rules related to supporting the country's position, might to some extent constrain CSOs as to what they are allowed to say.

→ Tips:

- *Identify who is leading the work on technical standards in your government and who are the current members of the delegation.*
- *Understand the rules of engagement as part of the delegation. Note that being part of the delegation does not mean that you will be able to make oral interventions at meetings.*
- *Assess how much time you can devote to work as part of the delegation, especially considering resource-intensive preparations ahead of key events, such as the World Technical Standardisation Assembly.*
- *For more details, consult this publication by Global Partners Digital: [“Navigating Human Rights in Digital Environments: The WTSA”](#)*

Contribute to open consultations

At times, ITU holds **open consultations accessible to non-members** on issues that require broader multistakeholder input. An example is the ITU Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues ([CWG-Internet](#)).

→ **More information:** [Current participation opportunities in the ITU Council](#)

Participate in ITU-T workshops or Focus Groups

ITU-T organises workshops and seminars that are free and open to the public. This is a way to provide input on specific topics to then be considered by ITU study groups. The workshops are increasingly seen as a way to collect feedback from non-members, especially those in the Global Majority.

→ **More information: [The list of upcoming workshops](#)**

Focus Groups are another pathway for non-member CSOs to contribute to the standardisation work of ITU-T. Focus groups complement the study groups and are aimed to facilitate quick responses to standardisation needs, allowing more flexibility in terms of participation and working methods. CSOs can join them by creating a free non-ITU Member account and joining the relevant mailing list, consulting documents, and attending virtual meetings.

→ **More information: [The list of Focus Groups](#)**

How can I become an ITU member?

Application form

Prospective members need to fill in and submit the online [Application Form](#). A signed copy should also be emailed to membership@itu.int.

→ **Tip: To determine the most suitable type of membership, you can contact the Membership Team (membership@itu.int).**

Eligibility criteria

ITU only accepts organisational applications; there is no way to have an ITU member status as an individual. Note that individuals can, for instance, join the national delegation instead.

Approval

Applications must be approved by the relevant national telecommunication agency in the member state where the organisation is located. Applications from international and regional organisations do not require approval by a member state – they are processed by the General Secretariat of ITU in Geneva. The approval process on the national level can take up to a few weeks. The process in Geneva for regional/international organisations usually takes only a few days.

→ **Tip: ITU recommends informing the national agency directly about your intention to join as a member to speed up the process.**

Fees

Membership in ITU can be very costly. In 2025, fees are as follows:

- Member: from CHF 3,975 (for members from developing countries) to CHF 31,800
- Associate: from CHF 1,987.50 (for associates from developing countries) to CHF10,600,
- Academia: CHF 1,987.50 (for institutions from developing countries) or CHF 3,975 CHF.

The relatively lower Academia fee is only available to academic institutions (e.g. universities or research centres, and not individual academics), so a civil society representative must simultaneously be affiliated with this institution or part of its delegation.

A fee waiver is available only to regional and international organisations and under certain conditions (e.g. it needs to be a member-based organisation present in multiple countries and needs to allow ITU to participate in its meetings free of charge and with the rights and benefits available to its members).

More Information



- [FAQ about the application process](#)
- [List of national telecommunications agencies](#)
- [Applicable fees](#)
- [Information about exemption from fees](#)

Are there any materials for newcomers?

ITU-T has guides and resources for newcomers:

- [Next steps](#) for getting started
- [Resources](#) for new members

ITU-T also has a newcomers' programme during events, which includes being welcomed at the registration desk, a guided tour of ITU's facilities and a one-hour orientation session with the relevant study group's management team.

We also recommend consulting guides developed by other civil society organisations:

- ARTICLE19: [Navigating the ITU](#) and Internet Standards Almanac on [ITU-T](#) and [ITU-R](#)
- Global Partners Digital: [The ITU: A Brief Explainer](#) and [Navigating Human Rights in the Digital Environment: The WTSA](#)



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