Agenda item 9
Progress report on the establishment of the UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices

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Executive summary

The report presents all the developments after the 24th session of the General Assembly. It underlines the progress reached and existing challenges that are essential for ensuring systematic and coherent mechanisms of frameworks for the establishment of UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices.

The paper gives a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the decisions taken at the 115th, 116th, 117th, and 118th sessions of the Executive Council and more broadly focuses on the actions undertaken by the UNWTO Secretariat as a follow-up to the 118th session of the Executive Council held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on 17 May 2023, particularly on the adoption of the Terms of Reference of the Working Group on UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices hereby submitted for consideration by the 119th session of the Executive Council and the 25th session of the General Assembly.

The Secretariat submits the proposal of the Government of Uzbekistan to establish a UNWTO Thematic Office on “Tourism on the Silk Road” in the city of Samarkand.

Action by the General Assembly

DRAFT RESOLUTION

The General Assembly,

Having examined the progress report on the establishment of UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices,

1. Takes note of all the progress achieved after the 24th session of the General Assembly and thanks the Secretary-General for all the contributions;

2. Commends the Secretariat’s active role in improving legal and operational framework for the establishment of UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices on the basis of the indications provided by the Assembly and elaborating precise distinctions between the functional models of regional and thematic offices as well as all the required proceedings for the consultative and approval process;

1 This is a draft resolution. For the final resolution adopted by the Assembly, please refer to the Resolutions document issued at the end of the session.
3. *Appreciates* the timely actions undertaken by the Secretariat in finalizing the establishment of the Working Group composed of Member States aiming at supporting the Executive Council in the improvement of the legal and operational framework on the selection and establishment of Regional and Thematic Offices on the basis of the indications provided by the Assembly;

4. *Takes note of* the Terms of Reference of the Working Group on UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices;

5. *Encourages* the Working Group to actively work towards the improvement of the legal and operational framework and to report to the Executive Council so that a final report may be examined by the 26th session of the General Assembly;

6. *Welcomes* all efforts done by the Secretariat in holding discussions and consultations with Member States interested in hosting Regional and Thematic Offices and urges the Secretary-General to continue the ongoing negotiation processes; and

7. *Reiterates* the utmost importance that all UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices comply with the legal and operational framework adopted by the General Assembly through resolution 740(XXIV) and with the requirements of the host country agreement, while extensively considering the policies and practices of the United Nations system in case of challenges during the discussion phase between the Secretariat and the Member States related to the establishment of UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices;

8. *Ratifies* the decision of the Executive Council on the approval of the Host Country Agreement between UNWTO and the Kingdom of Morocco concerning the legal framework for the Regional Office for Africa in Marrakech;

9. *Endorses* the decision of the Executive Council that the entry into force of the Host Country Agreement between UNWTO and the Kingdom of Morocco concerning the legal framework for the Regional Office for Africa in Marrakech shall be subject to the conclusion of the supplementary agreement between UNWTO and the Kingdom of Morocco on the financial and administrative arrangements of the Office, and completion by Morocco of the internal procedures necessary for the establishment of the Office in accordance with the legal and operational framework adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 740(XXIV);

10. *Authorizes* the Secretary-General to sign the Host Country Agreement between UNWTO and the Kingdom of Morocco concerning the legal framework for the Regional Office for Africa in Marrakech subject to the abovementioned conditions;

11. *Urges* the Government of Morocco and the Secretariat to continue negotiations to finalize the supplementary agreement concerning the financial and administrative arrangements of the Office and to complete all other procedures required to allow for the entry into force of the Host Country Agreement;

12. *Takes note of* the status of the negotiation process with the Government of Brazil on the Host Country Agreement for the establishment of Regional Offices in Rio de Janeiro;

13. *Encourages* the Secretariat to continue to pursue the consultative and negotiation processes with Argentina and Brazil on the establishment of UNWTO Regional Offices and to periodically report any progress made to the Executive Council;

14. *Welcomes* the proposal of the Republic of Uzbekistan to establish a UNWTO Thematic Office on “Tourism on the Silk Road” in Samarkand in accordance with the legal and operational framework on the selection and establishment of UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 740(XXIV); and

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2 Paragraph subject to the corresponding decision to be adopted at the 119th session of the Executive Council (17 October 2023, Samarkand, Uzbekistan). Find the draft decisions in the following link: [www.unwto.org/events/119-executive-council](http://www.unwto.org/events/119-executive-council)

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.
15. *Recalls* that the approval of the establishment of a UNWTO Thematic Office on “Tourism on the Silk Road” in Samarkand is subject to endorsement by the Executive Council.
I. Key points of progress and development

1. The 24th session of the General Assembly adopted the legal and operational framework for the selection and establishment of Regional/Technical/Thematic Offices.

2. Upon the request of the General Assembly, the Secretariat presented at the 116th session of the Executive Council the improved framework of Regional Offices to address the indications provided by the Assembly; however, the Council requested the Secretariat to further improve the framework in consultation with the Executive Council members. Though the report defined the difference between regional and thematic offices, a few Member States expressed concern about the significance of making clear distinctions of the scope of work of the Offices and the way they should be administered.

3. The 117th session of the Executive Council examined the substantial improvement of the paper. According to the improved version, the report precisely categorizes legal, operational, financial, political and human resources aspects for the establishment of Regional and Thematic Offices. It not only makes a clear distinction between the types of Offices in terms of geographical coverage and functionalities but also sets transparent procedures for the establishment of Offices. These rigorous and transparent procedures employ different phases of consultation and decision-making by the Governing Bodies and their subsidiary organs.

4. In continuation of the decision of the 118th session of the Executive Council, the Secretariat successfully finalized the steps for the establishment of the Working Group composed of Member States aiming at supporting the Executive Council in the improvement of legal and operational framework on the selection and establishment of Regional and Thematic Offices.

5. 37 Member States presented their candidatures for the Working Group, namely 6 from Africa, 6 from the Americas, 6 from Asia and the Pacific, 6 from Europe and 13 from the Middle East.

6. The following countries are present in the Working Group by regions: Africa – Benin, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania; Americas – Brazil, Colombia, Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay; Asia and the Pacific – Afghanistan, China, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka; Europe – Armenia, Belarus, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain; The Middle East – Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

7. The Secretariat prepared a draft proposal on the Terms of Reference of the Working Group on UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices dated 3 August 2023 and disseminated it to its members for their feedback. After organizing preliminary online meetings with the Working Group members on 14 and 15 September this year and having heard substantive comments, remarks and proposals from Member States, the Secretariat disseminated the synthesized version of the document, which the Working Group adopted on 27 September 2023 under a silence procedure (Annex I). The structure of the final paper is comprised of (a) establishment, (b) mandate, (c) composition, (d) working modalities, (d) duration.

II. Current development and progress – UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices

Morocco

8. By its decision 5(CXV), the Executive Council approved the proposal of the Government of Morocco for the establishment of a Regional Office for Africa, subject to the ratification of the General Assembly and provided that it is in compliance with the legal and operational framework governing Regional and Thematic Offices, as adopted by the General Assembly through Resolution 740(XXIV).

9. Following negotiations between the Secretariat and the Government of Morocco, the Agreement has been divided into two parts; (i) the Host Country Agreement establishing the legal framework for the Regional Office in Marrakech, in compliance with Resolution 740(XXIV) (hereafter referred to as “the Host Country Agreement”), and (ii) a
supplementary agreement on the financial and administrative arrangements of the Office (hereafter referred to as “the Supplementary Agreement”).

10. The draft Host Country Agreement has been finalised by the Secretariat and the Government of Morocco. In accordance with its Article 10(1), the Host Country Agreement shall enter into force upon the following conditions: (i) approval by the Executive Council, pending ratification by the General Assembly pursuant to Article 12 of UNWTO’s Statutes, (ii) written notification by the Government of Morocco of the completion of its internal procedures necessary for it to become effective, and (iii) the entry into force of the supplementary agreement on the financial and administrative arrangements of the Regional Office.

11. The Host Country Agreement is submitted for approval by the Executive Council at its 119th Session and, subsequently, to the General Assembly for ratification and the authorization of signature by the Secretary-General.

12. The Secretariat and the Government of Morocco will continue in their negotiations of the Supplementary Agreement and other procedures necessary for the entry into force of the Host Country Agreement, and the establishment of the Regional Office.

Brazil

13. Negotiations with the Government of Brazil for the establishment of a UNWTO Regional Office are currently ongoing and are considered to be close to conclusion.

14. The Secretariat shall keep the member States duly informed of the progress of these negotiations through an addendum to this document.

Uzbekistan

15. The Secretariat received on 12 September 2023 a letter from the Minister of Ecology, Environmental protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan, H.E. Mr. Aziz Abdulkhakimov, reiterating the willingness of Uzbekistan to establish a “Tourism on the Silk Road” UNWTO Thematic Office in Samarkand and undertaking to comply with the required legal framework.

16. In accordance with the conditions applying to UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 656(XXI) and 740(XXIV), an application to host an Office must be recommended by the corresponding regional commission for submission to the Executive Council for endorsement prior to being ultimately submitted for approval by the General Assembly. Accordingly, Uzbekistan’s application will be examined by the Commission for Europe at its 65th meeting to be held on 16 October 2023.

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Annex I. Terms of Reference of the Working Group on UNWTO Regional and Thematic Offices

I. Establishment

1. The Working Group on Regional and Thematic Offices (hereinafter referred to as the “Working Group”) was established by the Executive Council, at its 118th session held in Punta Cana from 16 to 18 May 2023, through decision 7(CXVIII).

2. The present terms of reference establishing the mandate, composition and working methods of the Working Group is submitted for approval by the 119th session of the Executive Council and further consideration by the 25th session of the General Assembly.

II. Mandate

1. The primary objective of the Working Group is to discuss and provide a report with recommendations on the improvement of the legal and operational framework on the selection and establishment of Regional and Thematic Offices (hereinafter referred to as the “Offices”) to the Executive Council based on the indications provided by the General Assembly, in accordance with its resolution 740(XXIV).

2. To that effect, the Working Group intends to provide a forum for dialogue among Member States with a view to:

   (a) Reviewing the input received on the legal and operational framework on the selection, establishment and governance of the Offices; and

   (b) Considering and preparing guidance and recommendations for the legal and operational framework on the selection, establishment and governance of Offices that are in accordance with the statutory framework of the Organization.

3. A key mission of the Working Group is to ensure that the policy and legal frameworks governing all UNWTO offices are in line with those of other organizations of the United Nations system.

4. The Working Group will present a report with recommendations on the legal and operational framework on the selection and establishment of the Offices prior to 124th session of the Executive Council and 26th session of the General Assembly in 2025.

5. In preparing the report, the Working Group may take into consideration the discussions in each Regional Commission meeting.

III. Composition

1. Membership of the Working Group will be open to designated representatives of Member States of the Organization. The composition of the Working Group will aim at ensuring the widest geographical representation.

2. The representatives of Associate and Affiliate Members in the Executive Council may participate in meetings of the Working Group as observers.

3. The Working Group will appoint a Chair and a Vice-Chair from among its Member States to serve for two (2) years. The term of office of the Chair and Vice-Chair should not...
be renewable.

4. The Chair will represent the Working Group before other organs, as appropriate.

IV. Working modalities

1. The Working Group will work remotely and meet at least twice a year, either remotely or in person.

2. The Working Group will report to the Executive Council at least annually.

3. The working language of the Working Group will be English.

4. The Working Group will take decisions by consensus among its members. Members of the Working Group will make every effort to reach a consensus that is generally accepted, so that a decision can be adopted without formal objections. In such cases, any dissenting positions or reservations will be placed on the record without constituting an impediment to the adoption of the decision in question. Where it is not possible to reach consensus on a specific issue, the divergent views will be set out in the report of the Working Group to the Executive Council.

5. Meetings of the Working Group will be recorded.

6. The Office of the Executive Director and the Office of the Director of External Relations will serve as Secretariat of the Working Group, in coordination with the Office of the Legal Counsel.

7. In cooperation with the Chair, the Secretariat will coordinate and assist with the organization and preparation of the agenda for the meetings of the Working Group, and any other support activities deemed necessary.

8. The Working Group will operate under these terms of reference and any directions given by the Executive Council.

V. Duration

1. The Working Group will carry out its mandate until the 26th session of the General Assembly unless otherwise decided by the Executive Council.