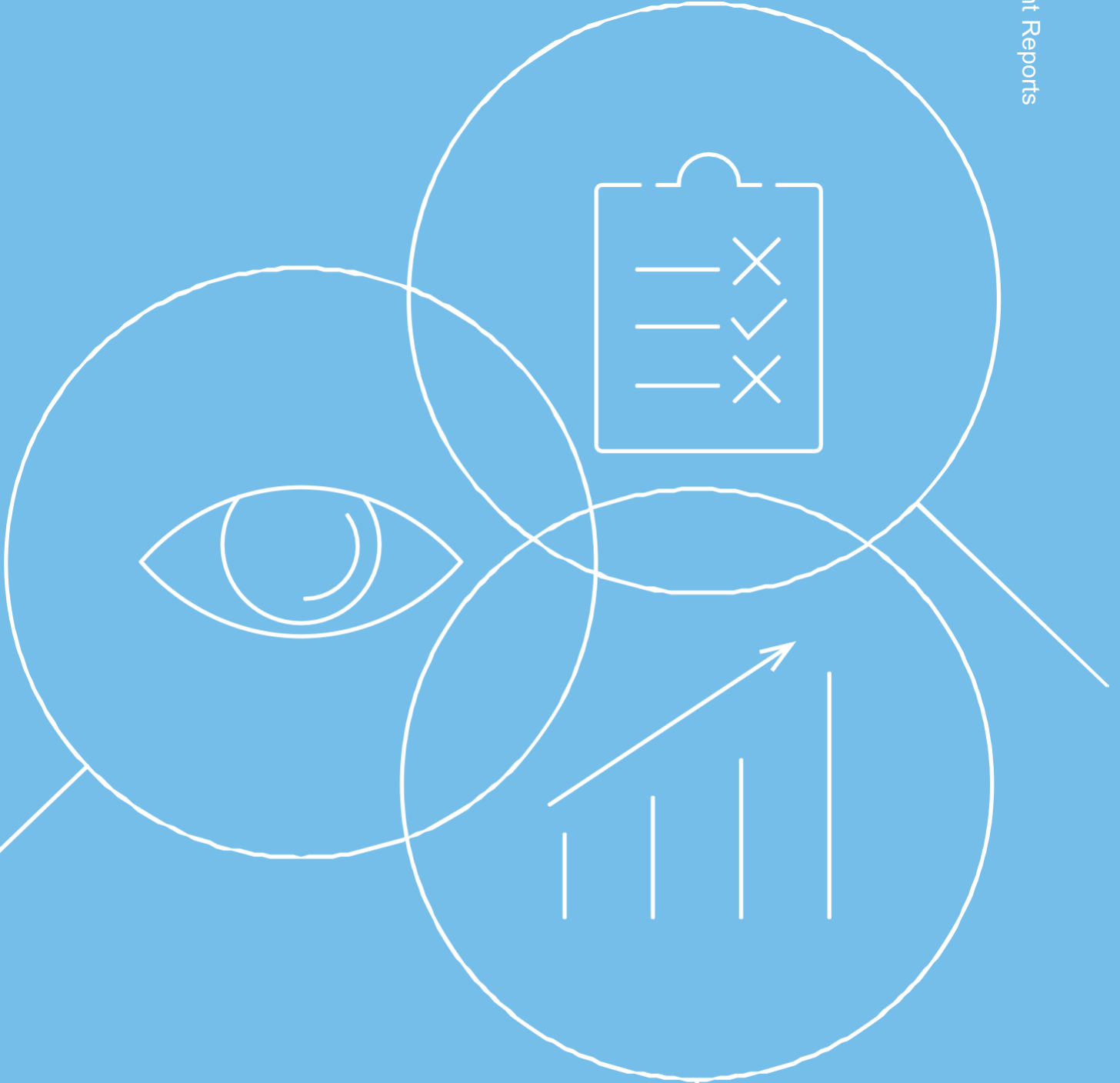


Review of the WIPO Singapore Office

Internal Oversight Reports



IOD Ref: IA 2023-03
December 15, 2023
Internal Audit Section



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1. BACKGROUND	6
2. ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES	7
3. SCOPE AND METHODS	8
4. ENGAGEMENT RESULTS – OUTCOME(S)	8
5. ENGAGEMENT RESULTS - OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	9
(A) GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE.....	10
(i) Roles and Responsibilities in Serving the Asia-Pacific Region.....	10
(ii) The Resource Management.....	11
(iii) Mobility as an Opportunity.....	12
(iv) Branding, Promotion, and Visibility of the WSO.....	13
(v) Training for Individual Contractor Services (ICS).....	16
(B) PROGRAM MANAGEMENT.....	16
(i) Performance Management.....	16
(ii) Standard Operating Procedures.....	18
(C) TREASURY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT.....	18
(i) Cash Management and Segregation of Duties.....	18
(ii) Asset Management.....	19
(D) SAFETY SECURITY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT.....	20
(i) Safety Security and Business Continuity.....	20
TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS	21
ANNEX I. RISK RATING AND PRIORITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	23
ANNEX II: ASSESSMENT OF RISKS IDENTIFIED IN WIPO ERM AND RESULTS OF TESTS OF ASSOCIATED MITIGATIONS	24

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIMS	Administrative Integrated Management System
AIPRAP	ASEAN Intellectual Property Rights Action Plan
AMC	Arbitration and Mediation Center
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCC	Business Continuity Coordinator
BCP	Business Continuity Plan
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DAP	Division for Asia and the Pacific
DDG	Deputy Director General
EPM	Enterprise Performance Management
ER	Expected Results
ERM	Enterprise Risk Management
HQ	Headquarters
ICS	Individual Contractor Services
IOD	Internal Oversight Division
IP	Intellectual Property
IPOBSD	IP Office Business Solution Division
IPOS	Intellectual Property Office of Singapore
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTSP	Medium-Term Strategic Plan
OI	Office Instruction
PI	Performance Indicator
RBM	Results Based Management
RNDS	Regional and National Development Sector
SIAD	Security and Information Assurance Division
SME	Small and Medium-size Enterprise
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SSCS	Safety and Security Coordination Service
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WSO	WIPO Singapore Office

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) established the WIPO Singapore Office (WSO) in January 2005, following the signing of a Host Country Agreement with the Government of Singapore, with the mandate of contributing to WIPO's work in the Asia-Pacific region, by among others, working with Governments, private sector, and civil society to promote cooperation, provide technical assistance and advisory, with the overall goal of supporting the strengthening and promotion of an IP culture in the region. The WSO reports to the Deputy Director General (DDG) of the Regional and National Development Sector (RNDS) of WIPO.
2. The Internal Oversight Division (IOD) did not find any critical issues during the review of the WSO. However, IOD highlighted opportunities to further enhance roles and responsibilities, and communication, branding and visibility.
3. While the mandate of the WSO covered the Asia-Pacific Region, in practice, over the years, this mandate has evolved with the strategies of the Organization, to concentrate its efforts on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which is made up of 10 nations¹. However, the Division for Asia and the Pacific (DAP) in the RNDS also holds a mandate that covers the 38 countries of the Asia-Pacific Region, including the ASEAN. IOD highlighted the need to ensure clarity in the roles and responsibilities of both units, to avoid any overlap, duplicates, misunderstanding, and inefficient and ineffective flow of information between WIPO and relevant stakeholders. Acknowledging that a number of measures have been taken by RNDS, IOD recommends that these measures be further strengthened along with coordination and communication among all parties, in particular when implementing activities under the new MoU signed with ASEAN in August 2023, which designates both the WSO and the DAP as focal points.
4. The WIPO Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) places importance on the use of External Offices to raise awareness of Intellectual Property² (IP) through multiple means of communication. Further, the WIPO Program of Work and Budget 2024/25 highlights the priority of "delivering a harmonized brand experience yet a personalized WIPO customer journey"³. While acknowledging that the WSO has undertaken various activities to promote the WIPO brand in the Region, including cross collaborations with other stakeholders, IOD however, found that more can be done regarding the look and feel of the WSO Office as an extension of the Organization in the region through measures to visually promote WIPO by taking advantage of existing promotional items that contribute to increasing the brand awareness of the Organization .
5. IOD acknowledges the efforts made by the WSO to increase its digital presence, through increased networking, diversity of activities, use of videos, newsletters, and other online publications. This is corroborated with the 33 per cent increase in the number of unique visitors⁴ to the website between 2021 and 2023. However, when compared to other External Offices, and given the regional scope of the WSO, it is expected that the number of unique visitors to the Webpage of the WSO be at the higher end of the spectrum. This is currently not the case, and the RNDS and WSO would need to reflect on the root causes and develop appropriate remediation. A plan that outlines actions to enhance branding, promotion and outreach, digital presence, and visibility, would benefit the WSO. Further, leveraging the maturing digital economy as a common denominator in the region would enable WIPO to develop innovative strategies, while considering the need to strengthen and build networks, to reach the diverse target groups and communities of the ASEAN region.

¹ ASEAN Member States - Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

² WO/PBC/32/3 - MTSP 2022-2026, page 18, paragraph 93.

³ WIPO Program of Work and Budget 2024/2025, page 11, paragraph 14.

⁴ Source: WIPO Web Analytics: 2021 - 3390 unique visitors; 2023 - 4513 unique visitors

6. Finally, the recruitment for two posts currently vacant in the WSO should be expedited, and the resource needs for 2024 should consider the potential impact of the status of these recruitments on planned activities for 2024, as well as potential spillovers of activities from 2023 as a result of the vacancies.

7. The report makes two recommendations that management has agreed to implement during 2024.

1. BACKGROUND

8. The Government of Singapore has been a Member of WIPO since 1990⁵. In 1999 both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on joint training programs in the field of IP, and a subsequent MoU, signed in 2004 with the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (IPOS), on the establishment of a Framework of Cooperation.

9. In January 2005, WIPO formally signed a Host Country Agreement with the Government of Singapore, to establish the WSO, with a mandate that included working with Governments, private sector, and civil society in the Asia and Pacific Region. The WSO reports to the DDG of the RNDS of WIPO. Subsequently, WIPO signed a MoU with the Government of Singapore in June 2006, replacing the previous MoU stated above, to further strengthen the Singapore-WIPO partnership by intensifying their cooperation to organize and conduct joint activities⁶, to promote IP awareness and build up IP capabilities in developing countries, including least developed countries of Asia and the Pacific Region. The Host Country Agreement has been renewed every six years, and in August 2023, a new MoU was signed between WIPO and the ASEAN to expand cooperation between both parties and to complement the ongoing cooperation in the framework of the ASEAN Intellectual Property Rights Action Plan (AIPRAP) 2025.

10. The WSO among other things, raises awareness of the importance of IP in business success, and promotes its use as a driver of economic, social, and cultural growth. The Office achieves this by collaborating with a range of stakeholders including Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), associations, universities, chambers of commerce, IP associations, and IP offices in the organization of promotional activities, training, and capacity building projects. With a focus on SMEs, women, and the youth sector, the WSO also provides practical information to help people in ASEAN to use WIPO's services to protect their IP around the world. The Office also provides customer service to regional clients and international callers routed to the Office, when WIPO Headquarters (HQ) is closed, due to time differences.

11. Being based in the region means the WSO can act as the link between WIPO's headquarters in Geneva and customers and stakeholders in the region. This positioning was also underlined during IOD discussions with IPOS, which highlighted the potential opportunities and greater benefits that having an Office in the Asia-Pacific Region brings to WIPO if correctly resourced and leveraged.

12. WIPO signed an Agreement with the Government of Singapore for the establishment of a WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (AMC) Office in Singapore in 2009, under the auspices of the WSO. This agreement was renewed in 2014, and further in 2019, for five years. The AMC Singapore Office was established in 2010 to serve the Asia and Pacific Region through alternative dispute resolution procedures. The WIPO staff member assigned to the Center reports functionally to the Head of the IP Disputes Section, of the AMC at WIPO Headquarters, and administratively to the Director of the WSO.

13. Two staff members from the IP Office Business Solution Division (IPOBSD)⁷ are stationed in the WSO office to support the 18 IP Offices in the region that rely on the WIPO-developed IP Office software systems, and to manage IPOBSD projects in the region. These staff members report functionally to the Division, and administratively to the Director of the WSO.

14. The WSO is currently made up of four personnel including the Director of the Office, a Counsellor (vacant), a Program Officer (vacant) and the Administrative Assistant. The

⁵ https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/treaties/ShowResults?treaty_id=1&code=SG

⁶ Activities include seminars, workshops, presentations, meetings, research, visits, and assistance/advisory.

⁷ The IPOBSD is part of the Infrastructure and Platforms Sector of WIPO

recruitment for the Program Officer and Counsellor is in progress. There are seven personnel associated to the WSO as follows:

Figure A: Reporting Structure of the WIPO Singapore Office



Source: WIPO Intranet and Business Intelligence application

15. The total budget and actuals for 2022 and 2023 are summarized below in Swiss francs.

Table 1. Budget versus actuals 2022 and 2023 (end of October)

Year	Personnel Resources		Utilization Rate	Non-Personnel Resources		Utilization Rate
	Budgeted	Actuals		Budgeted	Actuals	
2022	604,433	509,887	84%	110,965	110,965	100%
2023 (January to October 2023)	580,000	270,124	47%	475,235	349,634	74%

Source: Enterprise Planning Management (EPM)

16. The WSO expects to utilize around 90 per cent of its non- personnel resources budget by year end, as there are nine activities⁸ planned for completion by year end 2023⁹. The utilization rates for personnel resources budget reflect challenges resulting from delays in recruitment in the WSO, further explained under the Resource Management section below.

2. ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

17. The objectives of this engagement were to:

- (a) Assess the effectiveness of governance, compliance, risk management and internal controls surrounding the operations of the WIPO Singapore Office;
- (b) Verify whether the structure and resources are fit-for purpose; and
- (c) Assess the adequacy of tools and systems to support operations, including effective information flow with WIPO HQ.

⁸ Activities include – capacity building, research, workshops, presentations, advisories and various meetings.

⁹ Table 3 in Section B of this report provides more details on completed versus planned activities of the WSO

18. The engagement primarily sought to assess risk management, compliance, and internal controls in the WIPO External Office, with particular emphasis on the effective flow of information between the Office and the WIPO HQ. This review is not an evaluation of WIPO External Offices and does not seek to assess validity of the existence or further expansion of the External Offices' network.

3. SCOPE AND METHODS

19. The scope of this engagement covered the ten months to October 30, 2023; however, for analytical review, corroborative purposes and gaining specific insights, the period covered may in some instances extend beyond the stated scope. The methods included interviews with stakeholders, document reviews walkthroughs, sample, and substantive tests.

20. The fieldwork began from WIPO HQ and IOD undertook an on-site visit of the WSO between October 9 and 15, 2023.

21. The engagement was performed in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (the Standards) issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors.

4. ENGAGEMENT RESULTS – OUTCOME(S)

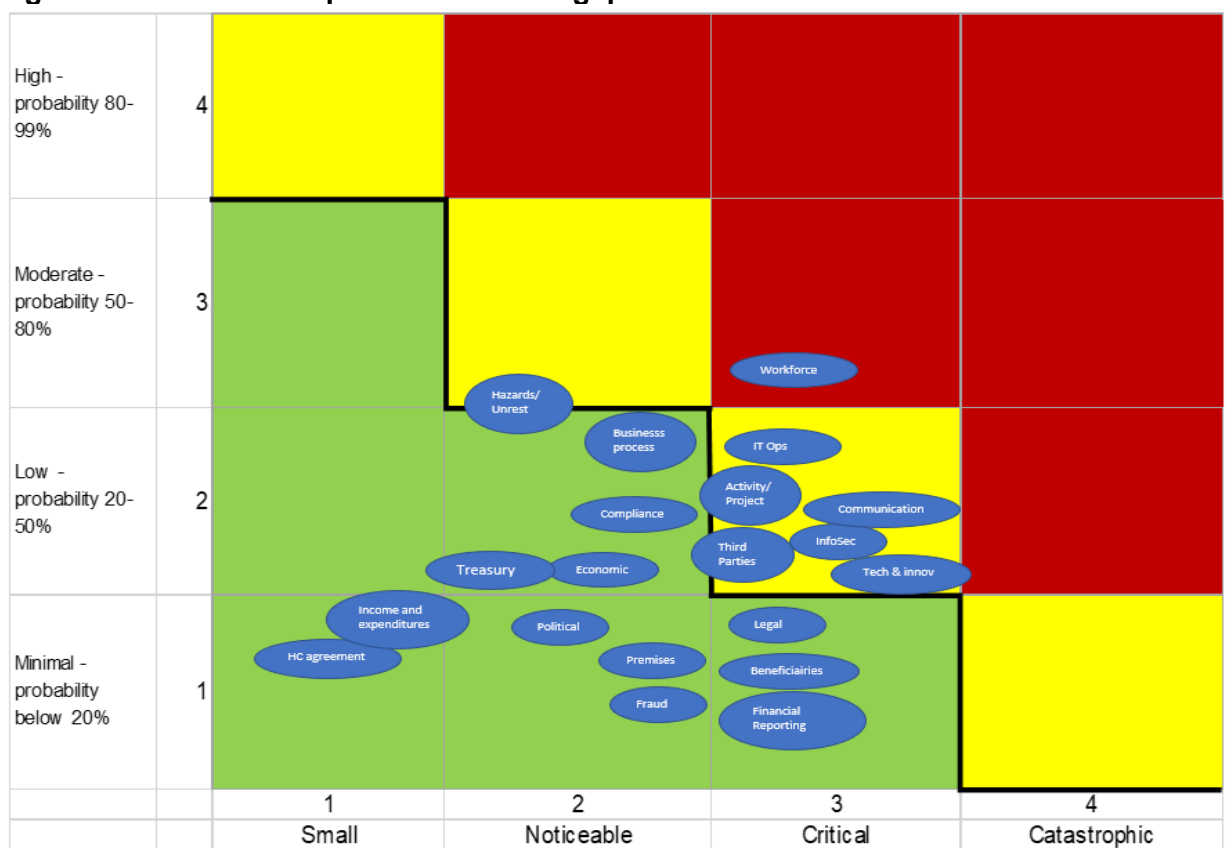
22. The objectives and outcomes of the Engagement are summarized below.

S/n	Objective(s)	Outcome(s)
	Review the effectiveness of governance, compliance, risk management and internal controls surrounding the operations of the WSO.	No critical issues were identified under this objective; IOD highlighted the need to continue to ensure effective communication and coordination between the WSO and the Division for Asia Pacific, to ensure roles and responsibilities are clear and avoid any potential duplications, overlaps, or communication inefficiencies.
	Verify whether the structure and resources are fit-for purpose.	IOD highlighted the need to expedite the recruitment process and recommended that the RNDS act on existing opportunities to enhance communication, branding, outreach, and visibility of the WSO.
	Assess the adequacy of tools and systems to support operations, including effective information flow with Headquarters.	IOD found that information flowed relatively well between Geneva and the WSO due to the role of the External Offices Coordination unit in the Office of the Deputy Director General of RNDS. IOD notes that the Business Continuity Plan of the WSO was last endorsed by the Business Continuity Coordinator in 2020, and the last onsite security audit was performed in 2018. This is largely due to the stringent travel restrictions in place between 2020 and 2022, because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. An onsite combined mission of the Business Continuity Coordinator (BCC) and Security and the Information Assurance Division (SIAD) is planned for the first quarter of 2024.

5. ENGAGEMENT RESULTS - OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

23. As part of the objectives of this review, IOD discussed risk management and internal controls with the staff of WSO to among others, gain insight on their understanding of their risk environment and efficiency and effectiveness of controls that are in place to mitigate relevant risks. The heat map below illustrates the WSO's perception of the likelihood and impact of key risks, under three categories – Strategic, Operational, and Financial - as per the Organization's Risk and Internal Controls Management Manual.

Figure B: Risk Heat Map of the WIPO Singapore Office



24. The heat map shows that risks perceived by the WSO are within tolerable areas with some exceptions. The hazard risk is related to the observed rise in COVID-19 cases around the World, with two new variants¹⁰. However, with the lack of appetite for social restrictions, and the accumulated experience gained, the impact is not perceived to be beyond noticeable. The workforce risk has materialized due to delays in recruitment of staff in the WSO. This was mitigated throughout 2023 through reliance on external partners, experts, and consultants, which in turn is linked to third-party risks. Finally, activities/projects, use of technology and effective communications are key to implementing the activities of the WSO, and as such are monitored and mitigated as required to ensure that their residual risks fall within tolerable areas.

25. The WIPO Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) system holds two risks identified by the RNDS and the WSO as follows: (i) Lack of coordination with IP technical assistance providers delivering programs in the ASEAN region; and (ii) External partners of the WSO fail to deliver agreed components of projects. Both risks relate to Third Parties risks in the above heat map. IOD assessed the mitigation put in place by the WSO and provided a conclusion in Annex II of the report.

¹⁰ the EG.5 and its sub-lineage HK.3 - both of which are descendants of the Omicron variant.

26. IOD identified the following areas for further assessment: governance, risk and compliance; program implementation, performance and resource management; treasury, and asset management; safety, security and information assurance.

27. The resulting observations and recommendations that follow, serve to further enhance governance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the WSO.

(A) GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

28. The review of the Agreement and MoUs, relevant practices of the Office, and discussions with stakeholders highlighted the following:

(i) Roles and Responsibilities in Serving the Asia-Pacific Region

29. The mandate of the WSO includes, representing WIPO and promoting closer relations and cooperation between WIPO and Governments in the Asia-Pacific Region. In practice however, IOD notes that the WSO has been focusing on the ASEAN region. RNDS indicated that the mandate of the WSO has evolved over time with the strategies of the Organization; resulting in the WSO concentrating its efforts on the ASEAN region, as captured on the WSO website, and in the Programs of Work and Budget (PWB) of WIPO.

30. RNDS further pointed out that the only area in which the activities of the WSO deal with non-ASEAN Member States of the Asia Pacific is with respect to activities under the MoU Joint Cooperation Activities' from 2006 which explicitly mentions as its objective, "To strengthen the Singapore-WIPO partnership by intensifying their cooperation to organize and conduct joint activities to promote IP awareness and build up IP capabilities in developing countries, including least developed countries, of Asia and the Pacific region".

31. IOD notes that the focal point for implementing the MoU of 2006 was the Economic Development Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, of the Economic Development Sector of WIPO (now known as the DAP of RNDS). This is because the DAP also has a mandate to cover the 38 countries that make up the Asia-Pacific Region.

32. Further, the recent MoU signed between WIPO and the ASEAN to expand cooperation between both parties, designate both the WSO and the DAP as focal points. The current setup may pose potential challenges regarding overlaps, duplicates, information flow, and roles and responsibilities, among other things; during planned activities where the DAP or the WSO leads the activities, and instances where both are designated to lead or coordinate.

33. RNDS has taken a number of measures such as designating: the WSO as WIPO's visible presence in the ASEAN Region, and the DAP as the liaison with ASEAN Permanent Missions in Geneva. Further, in meeting the large demand from the ASEAN Region, the roles and responsibilities of the WSO and DAP are decided through the development of integrated and detailed workplans by each work unit at the commencement of each year. These workplans clearly articulate the ways in which both units cooperate and support each other on individual activities. Further, regular meetings and communication between the WSO and the DAP are coordinated by the Office of the DDG RNDS.

34. While IOD acknowledges the above positive measures, there are still challenges, with instances where stakeholders were unclear about the communication lines, and both coordinators were not timely informed about their respective activities regarding the ASEAN region. Going forward, more can be done to clarify roles and responsibilities and enhancing the communication and coordination all parties, in particular when implementing activities under the August 2023 MoU with ASEAN.

(ii) Resource Management

35. The WSO currently has two staff members, the Director, and the Administrative Assistant. The Director was recruited in June 2022 on a Fixed Term limited to five years. At that time, the office had two vacant Professional (P) staff posts (P5 and P4). The process for recruiting the vacant P5 and P4 posts commenced in November 2022 and January 2023 respectively.

36. IOD notes that at the time of this report, the number of staff members in the WSO has not evolved. Discussions with the WSO revealed that:

- (a) The P5 recruitment that was published in January 2023 was extended in February 2023, then later cancelled in July 2023;
- (b) The vacancy for the P4 recruitment initiated in January 2023, was only published in August 2023 and the recruitment process was ongoing at the time of this review;
- (c) The contract type for the P4 has been changed to Fixed Term – limited to five years; and
- (d) A new vacancy position for a P3 Fixed Term – limited to five years was published in August 2023, and is ongoing.

37. A review of the staff resource report in the Enterprise Planning Management (EPM) system for WIPO, summarized below, indicate that the P5 position has been downgraded to a P3.

Table 2. Evolution of Posts in the WIPO Singapore Office

Position Number	Regular/ Temporary	Post Legacy Number	2022 Position title	2022 Grade (post)	2023 Position Title	2023 Grade (post)
10000066	Regular	C045	Director	D1	Director	D1
10000657	Regular	B228	Senior Program Officer	P4	Senior Program Officer ¹¹	P4
10000982	Regular	T679	Deputy Director	P5	Program Officer	P3
10001031	Regular	W385	Administrative Assistant	G6	Administrative Assistant	G6

Source: EPM

38. The WSO indicated that a management decision was made to have fewer senior positions and a limited term for the posts in the Office, to among others, create space and opportunity for growth, while maintaining an agile workforce. Discussions that led to the change in the posts and grades in the office, caused the delays observed in the recruitment process. Subsequent to these discussions, two vacancies (P3, and P4) were published in August 2023. While acknowledging these strategic decisions, IOD makes the following observations:

- (a) The unusually long recruitment process poses risk in effective implementation of the plan. The WSO has attempted to mitigate this risk by contracting seven Individual Contractor Services (ICS) during 2023. IOD notes that at the end of October 2023, nine activities were still in progress;
- (b) Given the status of the recruitment for the Office, IOD estimates that all posts may be filled, with respective incumbents starting by the end of the first quarter of 2024. Consequently, it would be relevant to consider the recruitment status and the potential overflow of 2023 activities in planning activities for 2024, including considering temporary

¹¹ Post allocated for the recruitment of the Counsellor

resource needs (the current ICS contracts will end in December 2023), while integrating increased activities resulting from the new MoU between WIPO and the ASEAN; and

(c) While acknowledging the move towards a more agile workforce and the necessity to provide space for growth in the WSO, as well as other opportunities that this approach brings, IOD would nevertheless highlight that the proposed setup, whereby all professional staff have nonrenewable contracts (if these have similar end-dates), may present challenges with regards to knowledge management, institutional memory, and effectiveness in sustained cooperation and coordination with third parties among others. These challenges will need to be mitigated through effective measures, such as succession planning, staggered end dates for different nonrenewable staff contracts, hand-over mechanisms, and up-to-date procedures and guidelines.

39. Going forward, the recruitment process should be expedited, and the resource needs for 2024 should align with the planned activities and consider 2023 pending and in-progress activities that may spillover, as well as the potential impact of the late recruitments in the Office.

(iii) Mobility as an Opportunity

40. WIPO Policy on Mobility to Offices Away from Headquarters (OI 17/2017) recognizes the important role that External Offices play in bringing WIPO's services and cooperation closer to Member States, stakeholders, and partners, and in providing cost-effective support services for the Organization's customer facing services among others. Likewise, The Human Resource Manual (HRM/ITO/1) recognizes Internal Mobility through Lateral Transfer as a positive tool for skills development, knowledge sharing and to maintain a high level of staff motivation and interest in the work of WIPO¹². Finally, the MTSP emphasizes the need to enable staff to rotate into new positions within the Organization to develop new skills to support the work and evolution of the Organization¹³. IOD notes that the WSO is in a unique position to benefit from internal mobility, which will benefit both staff and the Organization.

41. For instance, The IP Office Business Solutions Division (IPOBSD) has two professional staff members on site, a locally recruited Senior Program Officer, and a Senior Program Manager previously stationed at WIPO HQ. Both staff members report administratively to the Director WSO, and functionally to the Director IPOBSD. IPOBSD staff collaborate with the WSO during certain activities, such as external visits (i.e., other IP offices); for instance, during 2023, the Korean IP Office (KIPO) visited the WSO presenting an opportunity to showcase the IP business solution capabilities of WIPO. Furthermore, the WSO has been identifying further opportunities to work with the IPOBSD staff members as part of activities designed by the Office. The WSO is currently working with IPOBSD to support the ASEAN database for trademarks and designs (ASEAN IP Register), including ensuring that its interface is user-friendly for SMEs.

42. The WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (AMC) has a Legal Officer stationed in Singapore at a different location from the WSO, to be closer to other similar service providers whose offices are in the City center. However, this staff reports administratively to the WSO that also manages the maintenance of the external office space used by the AMC staff. Further, the AMC staff has also been supporting the WSO by being present during visits of external stakeholders and potential clients interested in the services offered by WIPO. Finally, the launch of the ASEAN Mediation Program in July 2023, which focuses on more support to ASEAN companies in settling IP disputes is expected to bring further collaboration.

43. While the above examples do not specifically fall within the Mobility described in the WIPO Policy on Mobility, they provide examples on how encouraging mobility can be an added value

¹² Staff Regulation 4. 3 provides the basis for lateral transfers "whenever the interests of the International Bureau so require".

¹³ WO/PBC/32/3 - MTSP 2022-2026, page 23, paragraph 131.

to both the external office, WIPO staff, and the Organization's visibility. Going forward, the WSO should engage with HRMD to seek opportunities to make use of the mobility measures offered by the Organization.

(iv) Branding, Promotion, and Visibility of the WSO

44. IOD notes various activities have been undertaken to promote the WIPO brand in the region and beyond, for instance: the WSO organizes and participates in high profile events, provides a platform for exchanging of views, sharing of experiences, and networking at multiple levels. The WSO Webpage reflects these activities and events (news and video stories) as a means of enhancing the visibility of and promoting WIPO.

45. IOD notes that the WSO has initiated cross-collaboration with the WIPO Japan Office, and WIPO China Office, to collectively promote the ASEAN Mediation Program (AMP) to business sectors in their respective regions; China and Japan being respectively first and fourth largest trading partners of the ASEAN.

46. Further, the WSO has initiated joint promotion events with the Singapore AMC and with the Shanghai AMC, as well as showcasing WIPO tools with the assistance of the IPOBSD. While acknowledging these initiatives, more can be done to further enhance the visibility and promotion of WIPO through its WSO as summarized below.

47. The WSO is meant to reflect WIPO in the Region and as an extension of the Office, it should reflect WIPO's look and feel, values and practices. IOD found that more can be done for the WSO to visually promote WIPO. For instance, while there are numerous promotional and branding materials at WIPO HQ, the WSO has no promotional items that contribute to increasing the brand awareness of WIPO. Further, displays that refer to, for example, the different Systems¹⁴ administered by WIPO, the capacity building services such as the Academy, and other normative areas were not visible. The MTSP places importance on the use of External Offices to raise awareness of IP¹⁵ through multiple means of communication. Further, the WIPO Program of Work and Budget 2024/25 highlights the priority of "delivering a harmonized brand experience yet a personalized WIPO customer journey"¹⁶.

Location and Structure

48. Location and structure also play a role in branding, promoting, and enhancing visibility. Location can convey ideas about the brand identity of the Organization, and stakeholders being targeted. Discussions with management highlighted the following:

- (a) The current location is not close to the main center of business, and the IP Office of Singapore;
- (b) The current location of the WSO may not be optimal, as potential users of WIPO services tend to not want to travel the distance to the WSO; and
- (c) While around 264 persons participated in 12 events that took place at the WSO premises between January and October 2023, eight persons visited the WSO outside the dates of the events.

49. While the WSO tries to leverage the presence of other WIPO business areas such as IPOBSD and the AMC in promoting the services of WIPO, it could be useful to reinforce the current structure of the office, by for example considering the integration of the Legal Officer of

¹⁴ The International Patent System, Madrid, Hague, and Lisbon Systems

¹⁵ WO/PBC/32/3 - MTSP 2022-2026, page 18, paragraph 93.

¹⁶ WIPO Program of Work and Budget 2024/2025, page 11, paragraph 14.

the AMC in the WSO campus, with a view to further strengthening collective presence, and potentially benefiting from the flow of AMC clients to promote other services on offer.

50. The AMC Singapore Office is currently located at Maxwell Chambers. Since 2009, the AMC maintains that Office under the Agreement between WIPO and the Government of Singapore for the establishment of a WIPO AMC Office in Singapore; the Government of Singapore covers the rent for the AMC Office. In addition to the AMC, Maxwell Chambers houses several other arbitrations institutions. Onsite observation and discussions with internal stakeholders indicating increased use of virtual meetings, among other things, could support the integration of the AMC legal officer into the WSO premises.

51. There may be an opportunity to assess whether the current location, is fit-for-purpose, and aligns with the strategy of the Organization for positioning the WSO. However, this would necessitate an assessment of various factors including but not limited to the current foot traffic to the WSO, missed opportunities if any, and benefits of a centered location versus the costs, while considering the digital presence of the Office and communication preferences of clients post COVID-19.

Digital Presence of the WSO

52. The Asia and Pacific is a large dynamic region where innovation and creativity among other things, thrive. The use of social media and new technologies is integrated in the practices of the region, and the conversation on innovation and creativity takes place both in the physical and virtual spaces. While acknowledging the current strategy of one Social Media space to represent the Organization, IOD notes opportunities to evolve that strategy to enable external offices to take part in the conversation at their level and in their respective spaces. This is particularly relevant for the WSO due to its regional scope.

53. IOD acknowledges the efforts made by the WSO to increase its digital presence, through increased networking, diversity of activities, use of videos, newsletters, and other online publications, and corroborated with the 33 per cent increase in the number of unique visitors¹⁷ to the website between 2021 and 2023. However, when compared to other External Offices, and given the regional scope of the WSO, it is expected that the number of unique visitors to the Webpage of the WSO be at the higher end of the spectrum. This is not the case. The table below compares the 2022/2023 biennium figures for the External Offices of WIPO, as of November 7, 2023.

Figure C: Number of Unique Visitors to the Webpages of WIPO External Offices

WIPO Office	Number of Unique Webpage Visitors
WIPO Japan Office	63,168
WIPO Russia Office	25,742
WIPO China Office	21,641
WIPO Brazil Office	21,486
WIPO Nigeria Office	14,282
WIPO Singapore Office	8,732
WIPO Algeria Office	6,532

Top 10 Visitors by Location	
Location	Visitors (in Thousands)
Singapore	2.17
India	0.94
USA	0.76
Indonesia	0.41
China	0.4
Malaysia	0.29
Philippines	0.25
United Kingdom	0.24
Thailand	0.23
Republic of Korea	0.21

Source: WIPO Web analytics, queried on November 7, 2023

¹⁷ Source: WIPO Web Analytics: 2021 - 3390 unique visitors; 2023 – 4513 unique visitors

54. A drill down into the location of visitors shows that 25 per cent of the visitors are in Singapore, and five of the 10 ASEAN Member States covered by the WSO, are in the top 10 visitors. Discussions with the WSO, highlight the following potential root causes:

- (a) The level of recognition or awareness of WIPO's operations and profile among stakeholders, besides IP Offices and IP professionals (such as the ASEAN IP Association comprising of law firms) in the region. The Director WSO indicated that some key stakeholders such as the regional business communities have limited awareness of and have had limited interactions with the WSO. Further, the WSO considers that more needs to be done to build up and maintain extensive networks of contact at the executive and professional levels. The focus in the past has been on government officers from IP Offices or IP-related statutory entities;
- (b) The WSO highlighted that their webpage is not designed and intended as the only access gateway or promotional channel for WIPO programs, projects and activities provided and carried out for the benefit of stakeholders in the region. These stakeholders include many under-served communities such as SMEs, women, and youth among others; and
- (c) The ASEAN consists of 10 individual markets with different development stages and sectoral priorities. English proficiency is equally diverse within the region. As such, the same target groups may require different advocacy and outreach strategies and approaches to engage and gain buy-in. Finally, resources need to be allocated to both regional and national-level activities proportionate to the intended coverage and desired impact.

55. The Office of the DDG RNDS should reflect on opportunities to further enhance the WIPO brand, promotion and outreach, digital presence, and visibility of the WSO. Leveraging the maturing digital economy as a common denominator in the region would enable WIPO to develop innovative strategies, while considering the need to strengthen and build networks, to reach the diverse target groups and communities of the region.

56. This will further operationalize the core values of WIPO, and the relevant areas of strategic focus in the MTSP, particularly, Expected Result 1. *1 - More effective communication and engagement worldwide to raise awareness of and increase understanding about the potential of IP to improve the lives of everyone, everywhere.*

Recommendations

1. The Office of the DDG RNDS should further strengthen the mechanism to ensure that roles and responsibilities of the WSO and the DAP are clear, to avoid potential duplications, overlaps, or communication inefficiencies.
(Priority: Medium)
2. The Office of the DDG RNDS, with support from WSO, should work with other relevant stakeholders to establish a branding and communication plan for the WSO, including utilization of existing branding collateral, publications from WIPO HQ and, its digital presence within the ASEAN Region.
(Priority: Medium)

(v) Training for Individual Contractor Services (ICS)

57. Individual Contractor Services are critical non-staff resources who support the achievement of the Organization's areas of strategic focus. Following a recommendation from IOD's audit of ICS and Temporary employment agencies, the Ethics Office updated the Ethics online training in November 2022, and made it mandatory for all personnel including ICS contract holders. New recruits have 30 days to complete the training following their start date. During 2023, the WSO contracted seven ICS consultants for periods of between five and eight months, with all contracts ending in December 2023. IOD however notes that none of the ICS had completed the Ethics training. This is mainly because the Office was not aware of this requirement for ICS contract holders.

58. IOD highlighted in the WIPO Japan Office audit report¹⁸ that given the critical roles played by ICS contractors, they should be included in the various training and awareness raising initiatives on accountability, security, and integrity. Specifically, it is mandatory for ICS contract holders, subject to the type of activities, to complete the information security training, The Ethics training, and the United Nations Security Awareness training as applicable.

59. The Internal Training Team¹⁹ responsible for managing WIPO trainings have indicated that the current process needs to be further streamlined and integrated to better capture all ICS training cases. They have indicated to be currently working on setting up a process and subsequently a tool to facilitate the timely integration and monitoring of mandatory trainings of ICS contractors. This is planned for 2024, and IOD will also be consulted for advisory input as part of the process.

Corrective Action Required: The WSO to liaise with the WIPO Academy's Internal Training Program to organize relevant and mandatory training (e. g., Information Security, Security awareness, and Ethics) for ICS contractors.

(B) PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

(i) Performance Management

60. Results Based Management (RBM) underpins WIPO's performance management system. For that purpose, the Organization has aligned its MTSP with RBM by cascading the four Strategic Pillars into Expected Results (ERs), specific programs and activities, measured through Performance Indicators (PIs), Baselines and Targets. The WSO is linked to five ERs and two PIs as listed in the table below:

¹⁸ IA 2022-02 IOD Review of the WIPO Japan Office, page 10, paragraph 36.

¹⁹ Part of the WIPO Academy in the Regional and National Development Sector

Table 3. Planned versus Completed Activities of the WIPO Singapore Office

Expected Result	Activities Planned	Activities Completed at November 15, 2023	Completion rate	Proportion of total Planned activities	Proportion of total completed activities	Pending/in-progress	Performance Indicator (PI)
1.1 More effective communication and engagement world-wide to raise awareness of and increase knowledge about the potential of IP to improve the lives of everyone, everywhere.	15	14	93%	45%	58%	1	No. of unique visitors to the WIPO website and the websites of the External Offices
3.1 Wider and more effective use of WIPO's global IP systems, services, knowledge, and data.	5	2	40%	15%	8%	3	
3.3 Knowledge transfer and technology adaptation is facilitated through WIPO's IP-based platforms and tools to address global challenges.	-	-	-	-	-	-	
4.2 Development of balanced and effective IP, innovation, and creative ecosystems in Member States.	1	1	100%	3%	4%	0	
4.3 Increased IP knowledge and skills in all Member States.	12	7	58%	36%	29%	5	Level of satisfaction of participants in WIPO training and skills development programs
Total	33	24	73%	100%	100%	9	

Source: Data from the WSO, and EPM

61. The table also summarizes the number of activities planned and completed as of November 15, 2023. IOD makes the following observations:

- (a) The WSO has completed 24 (73 per cent) of its 33 planned activities as of November 15, 2023. The remaining nine activities are planned for completion by year end. However, three of these activities may be completed early 2024 because of among others, limited human resource in the WSO, and ongoing coordination delays on the part of the implementation partner;
- (b) The WSO has exceeded the target for the PI - number of unique visitors to the websites of the Office by 11 per cent. (Target 7837; Actual 8732)²⁰;
- (c) Seven events were surveyed to capture data for the PI - levels of satisfaction of participants in WIPO training and skills development programs;
- (d) The 27 activities measured by the two PIs assigned to the WSO represent 82 per cent of the activities of the Office; and
- (e) Although the WSO is linked to five ERs, there are no indicators assigned to measuring their contribution to the achievement of three ERs (3. 1, 3. 3, and 4. 2).

62. While acknowledging that the PIs of ER 3. 1, 3. 3, and 4. 2 are attributed to other WIPO units, IOD notes that six planned activities involving the WSO are linked to these three ERs, representing 18 per cent of the 33 planned activities of the Office in 2023.

63. IOD further notes that ER1. 1 – More effective communication and engagement world-wide to raise awareness of and increase knowledge about the potential of IP to improve the lives of everyone, everywhere – is measured through the unique website visits. However, IOD believes that communication and engagement can also be measured through other means (such as feedback from physical activities held under ER1. 1) and focusing only on website

²⁰ WIPO Performance Report 2022, page 17. The target set (7837) was a 20 per cent increase from the baseline of 6531 visitors. The actual on November 7, 2023, is set at 8732 unique visitors.

visits limits the measurement of outcomes and impact of the various activities implemented under this ER, which represents 45 per cent of the total activities planned for 2023.

(ii) Standard Operating Procedures

64. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is a set of steps or instructions compiled to help justify, guide practices, and carry out operations. SOPs aim to achieve efficiency, quality output and uniformity, consistency, and continuity, while reducing miscommunication, ineffective flow of information, and failure to comply with internal rules and policies. IOD notes that the office has established SOPs on the WSO Newsletter and Webpage. Going forward, the WSO will identify other relevant needs for a local SOP as required, and adapt where applicable, existing WIPO SOPs.

(C) TREASURY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

(i) Cash Management and Segregation of Duties

65. IOD observed the cash count and reviewed the monthly financial reports submitted to the WIPO HQ. IOD highlights the following conditions that need to be addressed to align with best practices and comply with the Office Instruction (OI. 45/2014) on Cash Management and Financial Guidelines for WIPO's External Offices:

(a) Although the total amount is provided, denomination of bank notes and coins are not provided on the monthly cash count report;

(b) Segregation of duties can be further improved regarding cash withdrawals, recording, and reconciliations, which are currently done by the same Staff²¹. Further, there is no practice of random cash count by another person, as advised in the Office Instruction (OI. 45/2014). These conditions will be resolved once the ongoing recruitments have been completed;

(c) While the maximum cash held is fixed at 500 Swiss francs (approximately 750 Singapore dollars) according to the OI. 45/2014, IOD notes that the WSO received authorization from the Office of the Controller to withdraw up to 2,000 Singapore dollars (approximately 1300 Swiss francs) if needed. For the year 2023, up until end September 2023, the WSO had withdrawn a total of approximately 5,558 Swiss francs; and

(d) The WSO records cash transactions in a cash book, then in an Excel® worksheet, followed by a memo in a Word® document. This is a repetitive process that can be further streamlined.

66. Although the 2014 OI indicates that a local bank account should be opened, IOD notes that the WSO has no local bank account; hence all banking transaction for the WSO are managed at WIPO HQ. The reason provided by the Finance Division of the Department of Program Planning and Finance, was the relatively small number of operations, and the better control offered by this approach, among others. The Office has been issued a debit card to withdraw funds, and a corporate credit card linked to their account.

²¹ While segregation of duties is not optimal, there are compensatory controls put in place by the Finance Division at WIPO HQ, including receiving all withdrawals and expense receipts to match against the listing in the cash book and bank balances. Further, the Bank account of the WSO is located in Geneva, managed by the Finance Division of WIPO.

67. IOD considers that given the publication date (2014) of the OI on Cash Management and Financial Guidelines for WIPO's External Offices, and the 2022 Guidelines on WIPO's Internal Regulatory Framework and Related Communications²², it would be relevant to review and update the OI to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose, aligned with current practices, and with the regulatory framework. Finally, it would be pertinent to consider integrating a cash management module in future developments of the Administrative Integrated Management System (AIMS)²³, to further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of cash management in external offices.

68. The Office of the Controller has indicated that an update of the 2014 OI on Cash Management and Financial Guidelines for WIPO's External Offices will be completed in the third quarter of 2024. IOD will monitor progress and verify the adequacy of the updated guidelines during the next audit of a WIPO External Office planned for the last quarter of 2024.

Corrective Action Required: The WSO to: (i) establish the practice of a random cash count by the Director of the Office or another designated staff member; and (ii) clearly list the denomination of bank notes and coins on the cash inventory sheet during the monthly cash count.

(ii) Asset Management

69. The current WIPO policy on asset management only applies to asset values that are 10,000 Swiss francs and above. Further, a record for devices such as laptops, screens, and mobile devices, is maintained in the Cherwell™ system.

70. IOD conducted a random reconciliation between the assets listing of the WSO and physical assets found in the Office. Further, a reconciliation between the Office Listing and the listing in Cherwell obtained from WIPO HQ, identified two old laptops (XPS13 9360 and Latitude 5320) on the Cherwell list not found on the WSO listing. However, the two assets were physically identified, one was assigned to the IP Office Business Solutions Division staff in the WSO, and the other to the AMC staff stationed in another location in Singapore.

71. A new multimedia system comprising of an Interactive TV, mobile stand, camera, and sound system, for conference calls and presentations was purchased in August 2023. While this asset value does not meet the asset management threshold, it should nevertheless be recorded in the Cherwell for traceability.

72. IOD notes that a Card access and CCTV system was installed in 2019, following a 2018 security audit of the Safety and Security Coordination Service (SSCS). While this system was reimbursed by the host country, and does not need to be capitalized, it is however exclusively used by WIPO and should be recorded in the IT related equipment register for traceability, from a controls perspective.

Corrective Action Required: The WSO to provide information on the multimedia system, and the Card access and CCTV systems to the IT Technical Division for recording.

²² The guidelines set out the high-level internal regulatory framework for WIPO and the procedures and accountabilities for developing and maintaining the regulatory instruments defined in the framework and the communication methods for their issuance - [Guidelines on WIPO's Internal Regulatory Framework and Related Communications](#)

²³ The WIPO Enterprise Resource Planning system used for supporting automation and processes in finance, human resources, and procurement among others.

(D) SAFETY SECURITY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

(i) Safety Security and Business Continuity

73. The Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is prepared by the BCC, with the active participation of the management and other resources of the relevant External Office. Maintenance of the plan is the responsibility of the External Office that may request the support of the BCC.

74. The BCC will follow up with the Head of the External Office at least once a year to receive an updated plan, or to provide support in updating it if requested to by the External Office. Further, the plan is to be maintained on a regular basis throughout the year, and a more structured review of the plan is done once a year. IOD notes that the BCP of the WSO was last endorsed by the BCC in 2020.

75. The safety and security audit of External Offices falls under the mandate of SSCS within SIAD. Security audits are undertaken to among others, measure degrees of compliance with the Country Security Risk Management and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security Policy Manual. IOD notes that the last onsite security audit was performed in 2018. This is largely due to the stringent travel restrictions in place between 2020 and 2022, because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

76. IOD has been informed that an onsite combined mission of the BCC and SIAD is planned for the first quarter of 2024 to among others, conduct a safety and security audit, and update the business continuity and disaster recovery plan of the WSO.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

IOD wishes to thank all relevant colleagues for their assistance, cooperation, and interest during this assignment.

Prepared by: Alain Garba, Head, Internal Audit.

Reviewed and Approved by: Ms. Julie Nyang'aya, Director, Internal Oversight Division

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

No	Recommendations	Priority	Person(s) Responsible	Other Relevant Stakeholder	Management Action Plan	Deadline
1.	The Office of the DDG RNDS should look to strengthen mechanisms to ensure that roles and responsibilities of the WSO and the DAP are clear, to avoid potential duplications, overlaps, or communication inefficiencies.	Medium	Director, Office of the Deputy Director General (RNDS)	DAP	<p>Management acknowledges the need to strengthen communication with external stakeholders and will look to do so through various channels (webpages, social media, meetings with stakeholders etc.)”, it is noted that closing criteria are required. We would suggest holding two (virtual) coordination meetings in 2024 (Q1 and Q3) which would invite ASEAN Permanent Missions in Geneva, ASEAN IP offices and ministries in capitals and the ASEAN Secretariat. The meeting, to be opened by the DDG RNDS would involve presentations by the DAP and the WSO on their plans of work for 2024 (Q1) and a reflection on what has been achieved and looking ahead (Q3). There would be opportunity for Q&A. This would clearly demonstrate the responsibilities, roles and complementarity of the work of DAP and WSO in ASEAN. Through these interlocutors, information would be conveyed to broader stakeholders (and we could look at messaging on the webpages of the WSO and the DAP respectively in this regard).</p> <p>Closing criteria: presentation of the workplans, minutes of the meetings as applicable, and any examples of messaging.</p>	Dec. 2024

No	Recommendations	Priority	Person(s) Responsible	Other Relevant Stakeholder	Management Action Plan	Deadline
2.	The Office of the DDG RNDS, with support from WSO, should work with other relevant stakeholders to establish a branding and communication plan for the WSO including utilization of existing branding collateral, publications from WIPO HQ and, its digital presence within the ASEAN Region.	Medium	Director, WIPO Singapore Office Director, Office of the Deputy Director General (RNDS)	IDOD ²⁴ NMD ²⁵ ; CES ²⁶	Management accepts the recommendation and will establish the mentioned branding and communication plan working with internal stakeholders. Closing criteria: Development of a roadmap/plan	Dec 2024

²⁴ Information and Digital Outreach Division

²⁵ News and Media Division

²⁶ Customer Experience Section

ANNEX I. RISK RATING AND PRIORITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The risk ratings in the tables below are driven by the combination of likelihood of occurrence of events and the financial impact or harm to the Organization’s reputation, which may result if the risks materialize. The ratings for recommendations are based on the control environment assessed during the engagement.

Table I. 1: Effectiveness of Risks/ Controls and Residual Risk Rating

		Compound Risk Rating (Likelihood x Impact)		
		Low	Medium	High
Control Effectiveness	Low	Low	Medium	High
	Medium	Low	Medium	High
	High	Low	Low	Medium

Table I. 2: Priority of Recommendations

Priority of Recommendations	Residual Risk Rating
Requires Urgent Management Attention	High
Requires Management Attention	Medium
Routine in Nature	Low

[Annex II follows]

ANNEX II: ASSESSMENT OF RISKS IDENTIFIED IN WIPO ERM AND RESULTS OF TESTS OF ASSOCIATED MITIGATIONS

Risk Description	ERM Risk Score	Mitigation Action/Control	Work performed by IOD and conclusions	Control Effectiveness	IOD Risk Score
RND. 0065. 010 Lack of coordination with IP technical assistance providers delivering programs in the ASEAN region resulting in duplication of effort and activities.	Low	The WSO mitigates this risk through the organization of two meetings of the group each year in which all participants share upcoming projects and activities which encourages openness and sharing of information. The Division for Asia and the Pacific also joins the biannual meetings	The audit found that this mitigation action/control was in place (meeting of the IP Technical Assistance Providers). IOD highlighted the need to further enhance coordination and communication, to ensure clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the DAP and WSO. IOD also underlined the need to expedite the recruitments in the WSO.	Partially Effective	Medium
RND. 0065. 011 External partners of the WIPO Singapore Office fail to deliver agreed components of projects resulting in delays, and possible loss of reputation.	Low	Regular project meetings and established project milestones to monitor delivery of various commitments.	The audit found that this mitigation action/control was in place. Out of 33 planned activities, there are potentially three activities that may spillover into 2024 due to lack of workforce in WSO, and coordination delays on the part of the implementation partner.	Effective	Low

[End of Annex and of Document]

World Intellectual Property Organization
34, chemin des Colombettes
P. O. Box 18
CH-1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 338 91 11
Fax: +41 22 733 54 28

For contact details of WIPO's
External Offices visit:
www.wipo.int/about-wipo/en/offices