

Committee on WIPO Standards (CWS)

Ninth Session
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PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ANNUAL TECHNICAL REPORTS (ATRS)

Document prepared by the International Bureau

BACKGROUND

1. At its seventh session in 2019, the CWS noted declining participation rates by Intellectual Property Offices (IPOs) in the Annual Technical Reports (ATRs) and requested input on ways to improve ATRs. Several delegations remarked that the information requested in ATRs was already available in their Office's Annual Reports. The CWS requested that the International Bureau prepare a proposal to improve ATRs. (See paragraphs 206 to 208 of document CWS/7/29.)

HISTORY

2. ATRs have been collected by the International Bureau since 1978. The ATR structure was approved by the Member States and revised periodically, with major revisions in 1996, 2007-2008, and 2010. Since 1998, ATRs have been published on the WIPO website.

3. ATRs were intended to disseminate information about IPO activities, plans, and statistics to a broader audience. When ATRs were started, online publications did not exist and information from IPOs was difficult to access. In addition, the vast number of languages used by IPOs in annual reports made information harder to locate and understand.

4. The usefulness of ATRs was considered before by the CWS predecessors, the Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT) and its Standards and Documentation Working Group (SDWG). Expanding use of IPO websites to disseminate information means that much information collected in ATRs may already be available on IPO websites. A letter from the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property in 2003 noted:

“After consulting the existing [annual technical] reports, we have noted that the number of States that submitted a report had decreased regularly during the past few years and that it had now reached a critical threshold. Furthermore, the practical usefulness of these reports appears to be very limited: apart from an occasional mention in the publication World Patent Information, they scarcely seem to be used nowadays.” (See Annex I of document SCIT/SDWG/6/7.)

5. In 2005, the International Bureau proposed discontinuing ATRs based on declining participation and usefulness for consideration by the former SDWG (see paragraphs 5 to 8 of document SCIT/SDWG/6/7). The SDWG decided instead to create the ATR Task Force to study the issues and recommend improvements (see paragraphs 59 to 61 of document SCIT/SDWG/6/11). This resulted in the structural revisions of ATR questionnaires in 2007-2008 and 2010, the last significant updates to ATRs (see paragraphs 47 to 48 of document CWS/1/10).

6. According to these documents, the same issues currently being considered by the CWS were also considered in the past. Changes were made several times to try to improve access, visibility, and usefulness of ATRs, including: moving to online publication, collecting via the wiki, improving search engine visibility, and modifying the contents of ATRs. Now the key question is: have these changes had a positive effect on ATRs?

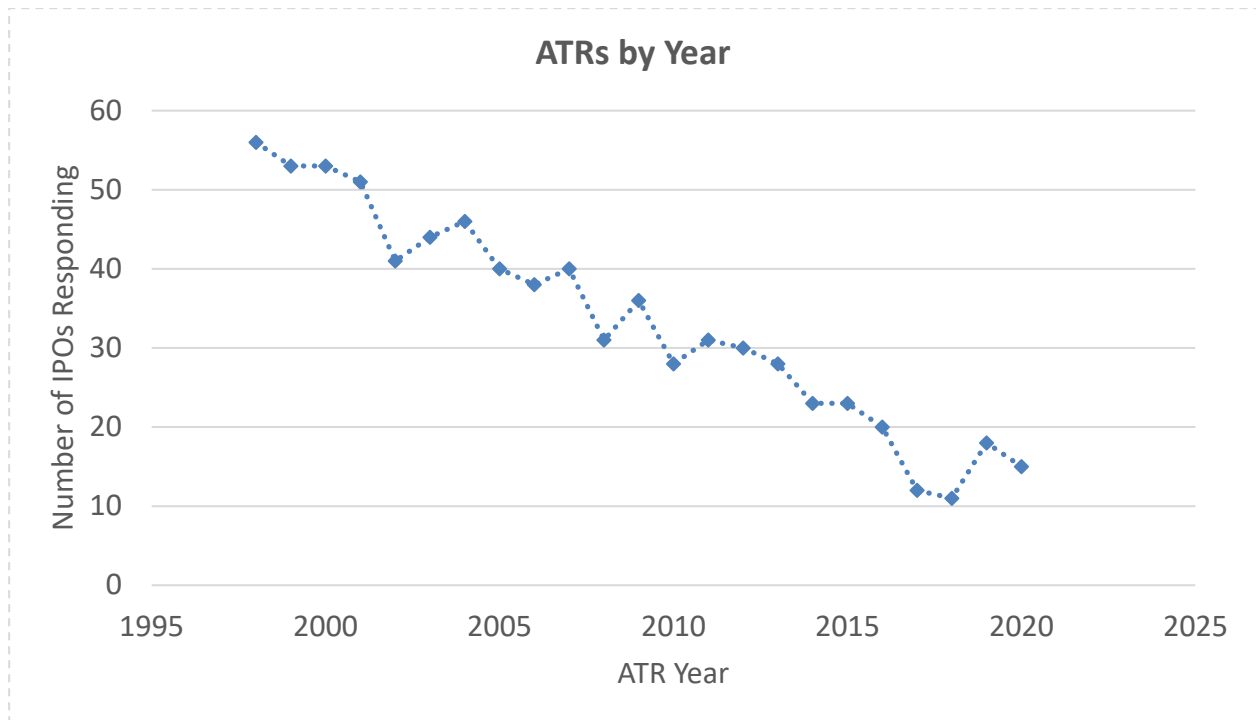
CURRENT SITUATION

7. In 2021, the environment for ATRs has changed significantly since their inception. Online publications are normal, and many IPOs publish annual reports that contain much of the information in ATRs. Automatic translation tools are widely available and becoming increasingly sophisticated, making publications easier to access by speakers of other languages. These factors address many needs that ATRs were originally meant to fulfill.

8. The question then arises: how much have ATRs been used in recent years? If we see high demand for ATRs, it indicates they may still be filling important needs, even if different from the original purpose. If we see low demand, it may indicate that ATRs are not as useful as they were in the past. We can address this question with empirical data from two sides: ATR producers (IPOs) and ATR consumers (end users).

ATR PRODUCERS

9. On the producer side, ATR submissions have steadily declined over the years. For ATR years 1998 to 2001, over 50 Offices provided ATRs each year. From 2002 to 2007, an average of 42 Offices provided ATRs. This fell to an average of 31 Offices between 2008 and 2013. From 2014 to 2018, the number of Offices steadily declined, from 23 in 2014 to just 11 in 2018. ATRs for 2020 are back down to 2018 levels, with just 11 Offices providing them. The following chart shows the decline since 1998.



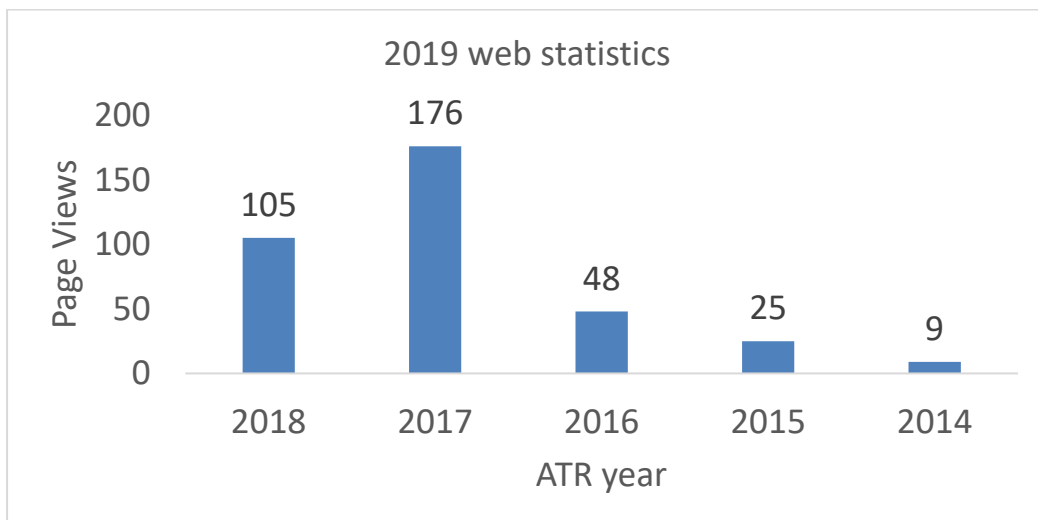
10. In one exception to the pattern, submissions ticked up a bit for 2019 ATRs with 18 Offices. These ATRs were collected in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The uptick for 2019 appears to be a temporary result as the increase has not lasted. Submissions for 2020 (collected in 2021) have fallen back down to near historic lows.

11. Based on the data, declining participation from IPOs seems to indicate that ATRs are not perceived with the same importance as they were 20 years ago from the perspective of ATR producers (IPOs).

ATR USERS

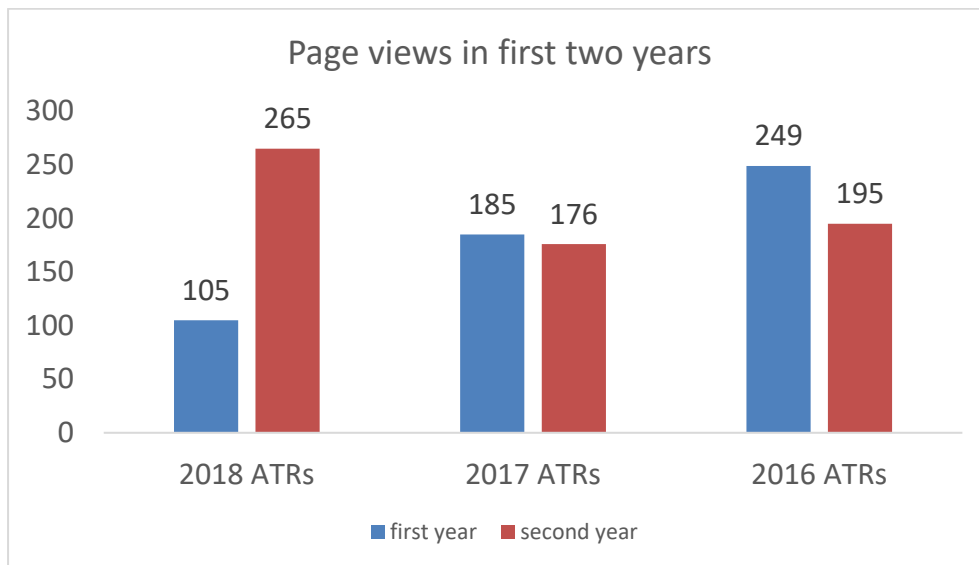
12. On the user side, web statistics for ATR page views show a similar pattern. Web statistics are available to the Secretariat from calendar year 2017 to present. Statistics for 2021 are excluded from calculations because only seven months of data are available, but the numbers so far are in line with previous years.

13. Each year, ATR page views show the same behavior. The following chart shows page views in 2019 for all ATRs collected in the indicated year:



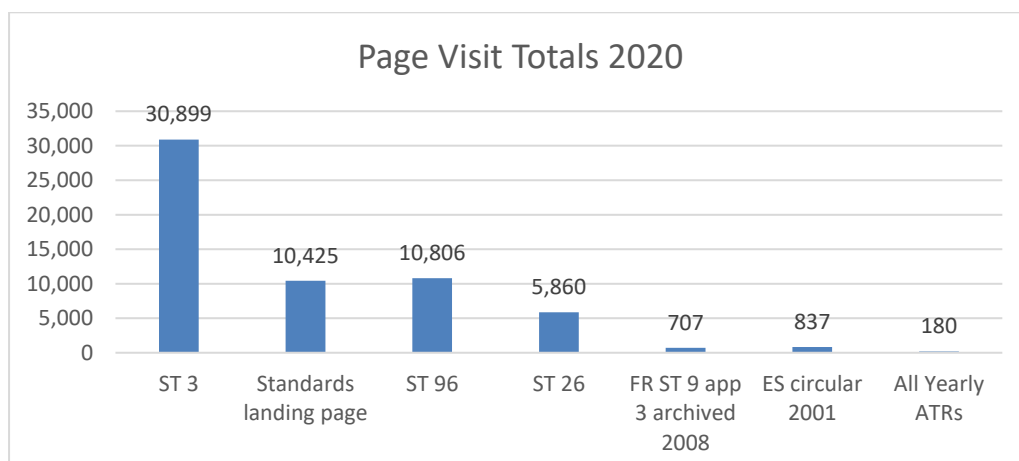
14. During 2019, ATRs for the previous calendar year (2018) are collected. These ATRs have the second highest number of views in 2019 web statistics, because the pages are published midway through the year. ATRs from the year before (2017) have the highest views, because they are available for all of 2019 and are the most recent ATRs for part of the year (until new 2018 ATRs are published). ATRs from years before this (2016 to 2014) drop dramatically in page views as the information becomes increasingly outdated.

15. For every year of web statistics in our data (2017 to 2020), the pattern is the same. ATRs get most of their views in the first two years of publication. After that, the number of views quickly drops to almost nothing. This document will focus on the first two years, when ATRs get most of their views. The following chart shows two-year page view totals for ATRs in their first two years of publication (2019 ATRs are excluded because they were published in February 2021, so only six months of data are available).



16. 2018 ATRs are the most recent year for which we have two full years of web statistics available (from calendar years 2019 and 2020). In 2019, their first year of publication, all 2018 ATRs received a total of 105 page views. In 2020, their second year of publication, all 2018 ATRs received 265 page views. That is a total of 370 page views across the first two years of publication. Other ATRs show similar totals for their first two years of publication. The split between first and second year views varies depending when during that year ATRs are published, but the two-year total remains in the 360 to 440 range.

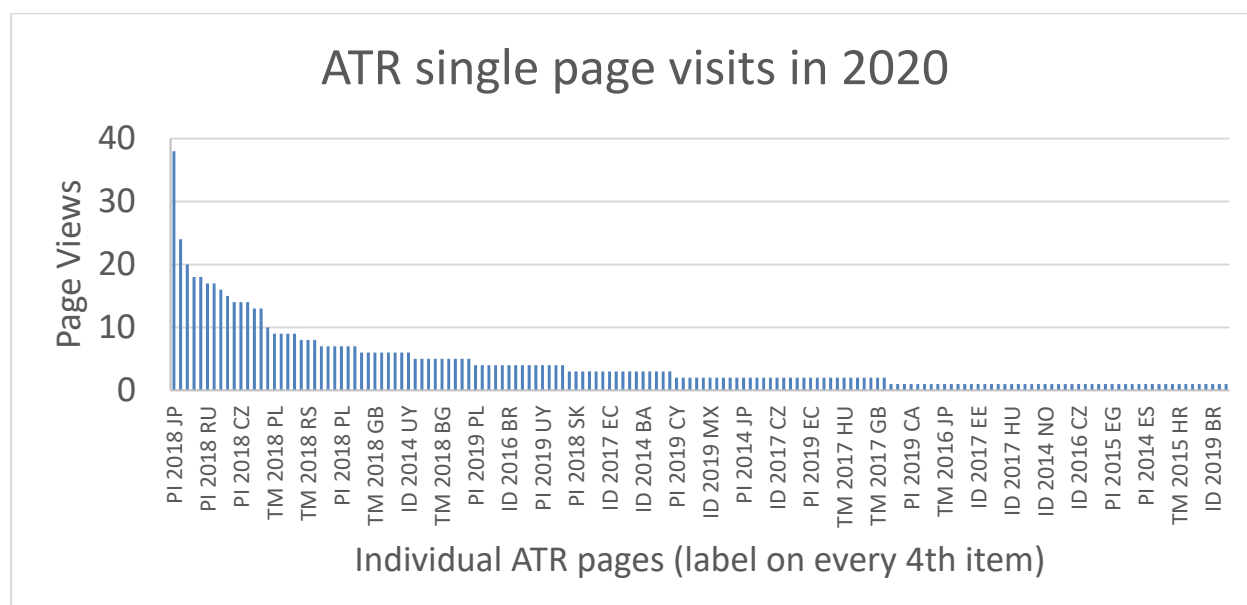
17. Based on this data, ATRs average about 180 views per year in their first two years. This is a very low figure. For comparison, here are 2020 page views for other CWS-related content:



18. WIPO Standard ST.3 on two-letter codes for States and organizations gets the most views, with around 30,000 views each year. The Standards landing page, our most popular web page, gets about 10,000 views per year. WIPO Standard ST.96 for storing IP data with XML also gets 10,000 views per year. ST.26 for nucleotide sequences gets over 5,000 views per year. These items are among our most popular CWS-related content.

19. In comparison, even outdated content still gets a fair number of views. [Appendix 3 of ST.9](#), which was archived in 2008 and last updated in 1996, still received 700 page views in 2020. A [circular in Spanish](#) published by SCIT in 2001 received 800 page views in the year 2020. In this light, the 180 views per year averaged by ATRs are exceedingly low. It is an order of magnitude lower than even outdated content.

20. And 180 is an average for all ATR pages from a given ATR year. The number of views for each individual ATR page are often in the single digits. Out of 164 ATR pages accessed in 2020, only 15 ATR pages had 10 views or more. 95 of those ATR pages had one single page view the entire year of 2020. Of 31 ATR submissions for 2018, 22 of those ATRs had less than 10 page views in all of 2020. That is less than one visitor per month for those pages.



21. This indicates that most ATR pages receive very few visitors. Given the effort required by IPOs to draft and publish ATRs, it seems that the number of visitors may not justify the level of effort currently invested by ATR providers.

SOURCE OF VISITORS

22. The web statistics do not reveal where page visits came from. Every time an IPO accesses an ATR page while preparing it for publication, the page view is recorded in WIPO internal web statistics. These page views are not by ATR users, but by the IPO preparing the ATR. This inflates the page view count during the year an ATR is prepared. It is also common for IPOs to access their previous ATR submission when preparing a new ATR, which inflates ATR page views for the preceding year ATR as well. How much these page views by the providing IPO inflate ATR numbers is unknown, but it could be a significant factor.

23. For instance, 2019 ATRs were submitted in late 2020 and published in 2021. Despite the pages not being published, WIPO's 2020 web statistics show that 2019 ATR pages were viewed 112 times in 2020. These views could only have come from the IPO submitting the page. Since most ATR years have between 100 and 200 views in the year of publication, it appears that most of these page views could be from the providing IPO rather than end users. It is unknown where the page views in the second year after an ATR publication come from, but it is possible

that many come from the originating IPO as they review their previous submission to prepare their ATR for the current year. As a result, the number of times ATRs are viewed by actual users is likely quite a bit lower than the numbers indicated by WIPO web statistics above.

PROPOSALS

24. Based on the above findings – availability of information in IPO annual reports and websites, declining numbers of ATRs provided, small number of visits to ATRs – the International Bureau proposes the following two options for changes to Annual Technical Reports:

- 1) **Discontinue ATRs** – given the apparent lack of interest and lack of use, perhaps ATRs should be discontinued. They can be phased out over a period of 2 years, allowing time for respondents and users to raise any potential issues. During the phase out period, published ATRs will remain available. Given the exceedingly low volume of collections in 2021 (only six IPOs responded), the International Bureau recommends not collecting any new ATRs from 2022. After the phase out period, published ATRs will be archived online like other historical information.
- 2) **Simplify ATR collection** – if the CWS decides to continue ATR collection, the International Bureau proposes greatly simplifying the process. Instead of asking IPOs to provide detailed text on their activities and systems, they will instead be asked to provide links to their website or annual report where the information on the current ATR questionnaires can be found. Linked information should preferably be provided in English, Spanish, or French when possible. Collection will continue to use the ATR wiki and the current ATR form, but with links provided instead of text. If an Office wishes to have their information hosted by WIPO instead of on their own website, they may provide text in English, Spanish, or French instead of links.

25. *The CWS is invited to:*

(a) note the content of this document;

(b) consider and decide whether to adopt proposal 1 or proposal 2 in paragraph 24 above; and

(c) if it is decided to discontinue ATRs, decide whether to consider Task No. 24 as completed and remove it from the CWS work program.

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