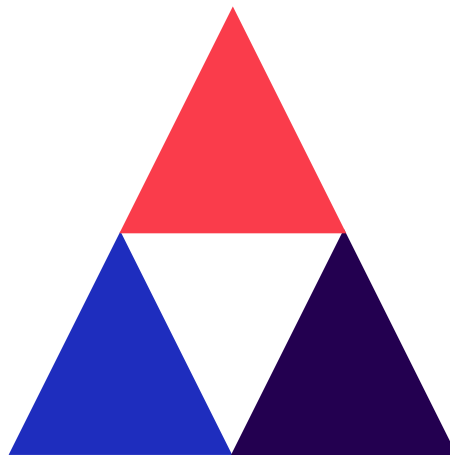




► Reviewing the functioning of the Governing Body

Background document for discussion at the Tripartite Meeting on the Review
of the Functioning of the Governing Body
(Geneva, 5–8 May 2025)



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► I. Introduction

1. At its 352nd Session (October–November 2024), the Governing Body decided to undertake a review of the areas of its functioning identified in section I of document GB.352/INS/8(Rev.1) and to convene two tripartite meetings to that end.¹ The first meeting will be held from 5 to 8 May 2025 and the outcome of its deliberations will be presented to the Governing Body at its 355th Session (November 2025).
2. This document brings together the information necessary to review the seven areas of the functioning of the Governing Body that have been identified, namely:²
 - (i) agenda setting;
 - (ii) time management;
 - (iii) policy-related discussions and use of the High-Level Section;
 - (iv) Committee of the Whole and inclusiveness of all interested constituents in policy-related discussions within the Governing Body;
 - (v) Office support to the Government group;
 - (vi) document production;
 - (vii) other procedural aspects.
3. The document is divided into three parts, the first of which is this brief introduction. Part II provides an overview of the progress made since the reform of 2011 to give the necessary context to the meeting's participants. Part III contains a description of the areas identified for review and related proposals for improving the functioning of the Governing Body.

► II. The functioning of the Governing Body from 2011 to date

II.1. The Governing Body reform package introduced in 2011

4. Between 2009 and 2011, the Governing Body undertook an in-depth review of its functioning through the Working Party on the Functioning of the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference. The outcome of that review was a comprehensive reform package adopted at the 310th Session (March 2011), which led to a revised version of the Standing Orders and the Introductory note that are part of the *Compendium of rules applicable to the Governing Body of the International Labour Office* (Compendium of rules).³
5. The 2011 reform package was guided by the following orientations:
 - focusing on supervision and constituent-led governance of the Office while avoiding micromanagement;
 - ensuring full tripartite participation through the active engagement of all three groups;

¹ GB.352/PV, para. 436.

² GB.352/INS/8(Rev.1).

³ The *Compendium of rules* also includes seven annexes containing other related standing orders and procedures.

- giving priority to policy- and decision-making debates, including follow-up to Governing Body and Conference decisions;
- alignment with the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008) (Social Justice Declaration); ⁴ and
- maintaining appropriate space for high-level and strategic discussions.

6. On that basis, the reform comprised the four main pillars outlined below.

A. An improved agenda-setting mechanism

7. One of the major changes introduced with the 2011 reform was a fundamental overhaul of the agenda-setting process in response to constituents' calls for greater involvement in determining the Governing Body agenda, which at that time was primarily driven by inputs from the Office. ⁵
8. As reflected in article 3.1 of the Standing Orders and paragraph 34 of the Introductory note, since the reform, the agenda of Governing Body sessions has been drawn up by a tripartite screening group. While initially the reform package adopted in March 2011 called for the Screening Group to meet during a given session to set the agenda for the subsequent session, this did not prove feasible for constituents, who required additional time to consider the proposed agenda items. The process was subsequently reviewed to respond to the needs expressed by constituents.

Reducing the duration of Governing Body sessions

9. Although according to paragraph 27 of the Introductory note, the length of each full session is determined by its agenda, since November 2013, the practice has been to set it at nine working days, starting on the Monday following the session of the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) and ending on the Thursday of the following week.
10. The duration of the March sessions at which the programme and budget proposals are considered was reduced from 13/14 to 10 working days (one more than the other sessions) in the Programme and Budget for the 2014–15 biennium. ⁶ The 10-day duration was implemented in 2015 and 2017. As of March 2019, even the duration of those sessions has been set at 9 working days.

B. A new Governing Body structure

11. The 2011 reform established a new structure for the Governing Body, which was based on two fundamental and interrelated principles, namely that no more than one meeting should take place at any time and that the Governing Body should hold its meetings in the form of a continuous plenary, structured in defined spaces called sections and subject to the existing rule of a quorum of 33 members. The continuous plenary format allows the full involvement of all Governing Body members in the deliberations and decision-making process. ⁷ As a result, with the exception of the CFA, the former committee structure was discontinued.
12. To align the new Governing Body structure with the Social Justice Declaration, five sections were established, the mandates of which correspond to those of pre-reform Governing Body

⁴ The [Social Justice Declaration](#) was subsequently amended in 2022 to reflect the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO framework of fundamental principles and rights at work.

⁵ GB.310/9/1, Part II(A).

⁶ GB.317/PFA/1/1, para. 8.

⁷ Paragraph 6.3.1 of the Standing Orders and paragraphs 25 to 27 and 35 to 37 of the Introductory note.

committees, with some expansion to encompass issues which were not adequately covered in the previous structure. The five sections are:

- Policy Development (POL), consisting of four segments: Employment and Social Protection, Social Dialogue, Development Cooperation, Multinational Enterprises;
 - Legal Issues and International Labour Standards (LILS), consisting of two segments: Legal Issues, International Labour Standards and Human Rights;
 - Programme, Financial and Administrative (PFA), consisting of three segments: Programme, Financial and Administrative, Audit and Oversight, Personnel;
 - Institutional (INS), dealing with standing items and matters related to the functioning of the Office and of the Organization, including constitutional obligations and urgent matters arising between or during Governing Body sessions;
 - High-Level (HL), which includes the Strategic Policy Segment and the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization.
13. To facilitate the decision-making process, the reform package introduced two measures: (i) instead of proposing amendments to a decision point during the discussion, members should send them in advance in writing; and (ii) the use of screens to display amendments in the meeting room would be tested.
14. Full sessions of the Governing Body, including the INS, PFA, LILS and POL Sections, continue to take place in March and November, and a half-day session is held in June, immediately after the annual session of the Conference, comprising an INS Section only. On the first day of the Conference session there is also one sitting of the PFA Section to examine the financial statements and the report of the external auditor for the previous year, and to forward those documents to the Conference for consideration, in accordance with articles 28 and 38(2) of the Financial regulations.⁸ As the financial statements and the report of the External Auditor are published on 1 May every year, it is not possible for the Governing Body to consider them at its March session. Occasionally, other administrative matters that cannot be submitted to the March session are added to the agenda of the brief session held on the first day of the Conference.⁹

C. Enhanced transparency and Office support to the tripartite constituents

15. In order to enhance active participation by all three groups, a standard procedure has been introduced to ensure that any issue, paper or relevant information submitted by the Office for consultation is shared simultaneously with the secretariats of the Employers' and Workers' groups, the Chairperson of the Government group and the regional coordinators. The same procedure is followed for the preparation of discussions to be held at the Conference and for the preparation of technical meetings and meetings of experts.
16. With respect to improving support to the Government group, the following measures have been implemented:
- (a) Before every session of the Governing Body and the Conference, briefing sessions for the permanent missions are held to provide detailed information both on the substance of the

⁸ Financial regulations of the ILO.

⁹ See for example the agenda of the [341st bis Session](#) (21 May 2021), and of the [350th bis Session](#) (3 June 2024).

issues to be discussed and on the specific rules and procedures of those governance bodies, as well as the logistical arrangements and programme for the session.

- (b) Orientation seminars for diplomats newly arrived in Geneva are also organized to enhance their understanding of the work and functioning of the Organization.
- (c) The Official Relations and Correspondence Unit (RELOFF) provides direct support to the Government group, the regional coordinators and all governments.

D. Better presentation of documentation and time management

- 17. Even though it was not considered feasible to establish a single limit on the number of pages for all Governing Body documents, steps were taken to ensure that texts are clear, concise and decision-oriented, by requiring authors to avoid long historical backgrounds and to replace long quotations from other documents with weblinks.¹⁰
- 18. Before the reform, the established practice was to publish documents submitted to the Governing Body no later than one week before they were scheduled to be discussed. Since the reform, documents must be made available electronically, in the three official languages, at least 15 working days before the start of the session. This rule does not apply to documents arising from meetings, missions and initiatives taking place immediately before or during the Governing Body session and oral presentations may also be made on urgent matters.¹¹
- 19. As regards time management, it was found to be unrealistic to introduce a single time limit for all statements given the nature of the items to be discussed and the different types of statements. However, according to paragraph 43 of the Introductory note, each section is expected to determine its own time management procedures, including via the use of a standard default procedure, such as specific or indicative time limits and time-control devices available in the Governing Body room.

II.2. Review of the implementation of the reform package by the Governing Body in 2014–15

- 20. As foreseen in the 2011 reform package, a first review of its implementation was undertaken in March 2014,¹² providing an opportunity to recall the four objectives of the reform and the arrangements that had been put in place since November 2011 to meet them. There was general agreement among the tripartite constituents about the positive impact of the reform, in particular regarding the following points: full involvement of all Governing Body members in the deliberations and decision-making process in the context of a continuous plenary; stronger involvement of all parties in the agenda-setting process; and enhanced transparency by way of regular informal consultations and follow-up to Governing Body decisions.
- 21. It was also recognized that the practical implementation of the reform had raised several challenges and that there was scope for further improvement in the following areas:
 - (a) ensuring that the agenda was of a manageable size and avoiding duplication of topics and debates across sections and segments;
 - (b) allocating more time for policy debates;

¹⁰ GB.310/9/1, para. 29.

¹¹ Paragraphs 5.6.5, 5.6.6 and 5.6.7 of the Standing Orders.

¹² GB.320/WP/GBC/2 and GB.320/INS/13.

- (c) ensuring the smooth running of the continuous plenary;
 - (d) improving the process for the submission of amendments to draft decisions;
 - (e) requiring speakers to register in advance to facilitate the time-management process;
 - (f) enhancing the consultation process; and
 - (g) continuing efforts to move towards a paperless policy.
22. At its 320th Session (March 2014), the Governing Body endorsed the recommendations of the Working Party on the Functioning of the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference to the effect that relevant follow-up action should be taken by the Officers, the Screening Group and the Office, as appropriate, with regard to a specific list of issues.¹³
23. The **Officers** were expected to take follow-up action with regard to the following issues: ensuring greater fluidity of the Governing Body proceedings by adopting time-management methods; reviewing the mandate of the High-Level Section; and reviewing the process for consideration of the deferral of agenda items where the Governing Body has previously determined that an item be considered at its next session.
24. The **Screening Group** was expected to take follow-up action with regard to the following issues: its composition and the timing of its meetings; ensuring that the Governing Body agenda is of a manageable size and that there are no duplications; ensuring an appropriate balance between the number of items allocated to the various sections and segments; structuring the agenda thematically; ensuring a governance-oriented approach and effective use of the respective mandates through appropriate planning and distribution between the sections and segments; and providing for sufficient time for group meetings.
25. The **Office** was expected to take follow-up action with regard to the following issues:
- concerning the agenda-setting process: (i) providing the Screening Group with an annotated list of agenda proposals for the following Governing Body session, indicating clearly the rationale for each proposed item, any previous decisions to which the proposals refer and the estimated time needed for the discussion of each item; (ii) ensuring the same degree of involvement between the three groups, by communicating concurrently any change in the proposed list of items to all members of the Screening Group; (iii) providing advice to the Screening Group on the appropriate scheduling of Governing Body agenda items; (iv) communicating to the three groups, at an early stage, a tentative order of business for the entire session;
 - improving the process for submitting amendments to draft decisions;
 - enhancing the consultation process;
 - pursuing such initiatives as the organization of a one-day orientation seminar for diplomats newly arrived in Geneva;
 - ensuring that Governing Body documents are reader-friendly and decision-oriented; and
 - giving consideration to extending the deadline for web posting the draft minutes owing to the heavy workload of some sections.

¹³ GB.320/PV, paras 253–255.

26. The Governing Body was informed of the progress made in the implementation of the measures indicated in paragraphs 23–25 at its 323rd Session (March 2015) and requested the Office to prepare amendments to its Standing Orders for consideration at its 326th Session (March 2016).¹⁴ After the adoption of those amendments in March 2016,¹⁵ there has been no decision concerning a possible further assessment of the functioning of the Governing Body.
27. As part of the follow-up action, the Office introduced further adjustments to the agenda-setting process and the current practice is described below.
- (a) In the week before each Governing Body session,¹⁶ the Office distributes to the Screening Group members a preliminary list of items for the agenda of the subsequent session on the basis of mandated functions, existing cycles or previous decisions of the Governing Body or the Conference. The annotated list includes brief explanations on the origin of each item that is not a standing item and may include a few items proposed by the Office. The early distribution of this proposed list of agenda items is intended to allow Screening Group members, especially regional groups, to consult with the different groups' members during their meetings before and during the Governing Body session and provides an idea of the potential number of items on the agenda.
 - (b) Immediately after each session of the Governing Body, the Office updates the list of items in the light of any decisions made by the Governing Body and resubmits it to the members of the Screening Group for their consideration. Screening Group members are requested to submit any new proposals within one week, accompanied by a brief description of the rationale behind them, to allow sufficient time for translation and circulation to other members.
 - (c) If a new proposal is received from any group, the list is circulated for a third time at least one week before the Screening Group meeting to allow groups to consult internally before the Screening Group meets to decide on the final list of items on the provisional agenda.
 - (d) After each meeting or consultation of the Screening Group, the Office summarizes in an email to all its members the agreements reached. When the Screening Group has reached agreement on all items on the provisional agenda, it is immediately published on the Governing Body website.
 - (e) If, however, there is no consensus on the inclusion of specific items, publication of the agenda is deferred and the matters are referred to the Officers of the Governing Body for decision; additional consultations with the Screening Group may take place by email before the provisional agenda is finalized.
 - (f) The Office informs members of the Screening Group about any consultations held or decisions made by the Officers regarding the agenda. While these communications and the emails referred to in subparagraph (d) above are not posted on the Governing Body website, each member of the Screening Group is free to share them within their constituency. The Office keeps records of all these communications in case any member of the Screening Group requires them for reference purposes.
 - (g) The agenda must be circulated to the members of the Governing Body so as to reach them, at the latest, 15 working days before the opening of the session.

¹⁴ GB.323/WP/GBC/2 and GB.323/PV, para. 178.

¹⁵ GB.326/LILS/2 and GB.326/PV, para. 484.

¹⁶ The list of agenda items for the June session is prepared at the same time as the list for the March session.

- (h) The provisional agenda, as approved by the Screening Group or the Officers, can be updated by the Officers to include urgent matters at any time before its publication through additional consultation with the Screening Group.
 - (i) After the agenda has been circulated, urgent items can only be added if the Officers so decide following consultation with the members of the Screening Group, or by a decision of the Governing Body.
 - (j) A few weeks before each Governing Body session, the Screening Group is consulted, usually by email, on a tentative programme of work for the session, including the sequencing of items and the estimated time allotted to each item, which determines indicative time limits for group and individual statements.
- 28.** To improve the process for submitting amendments to draft decisions and ensure optimal use of time, the procedure that has been put in place for handling amendments provides that proposed amendments must be sent at the latest 24 hours in advance so that the Office can make them available to the groups in the three official languages before the discussion of the item concerned and display the proposed amendments on screens in the meeting room during the discussion.

II.3. New call for a review of the functioning of the Governing Body

- 29.** During the preparation of the agenda of the 350th Session (March 2024), various groups proposed the addition of two agenda items, namely the democratization of the ILO's governance organs and the review of selected aspects of the functioning of the Governing Body. Following discussions at the Screening Group and a series of consultations among the Officers of the Governing Body, two items were included in the agenda of that session. The first one focused on the ongoing efforts for the entry into force of the Instrument for the Amendment of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation, 1986, and the broader discussion of the democratization of the ILO's governance structure. The second item focused on the identification of areas of the functioning of the Governing Body where the rules and practices might need to be reviewed and the possible arrangements and time frame for results-based follow-up action.
- 30.** The document prepared by the Office for the second item in consultation with the groups, included several specific topics identified by some groups as requiring further discussion or clarification. The Governing Body considered those topics at its 350th Session and requested the Office to organize tripartite consultations to seek convergence on the areas for improvement, and to prepare, on the basis of those consultations, proposals on the issues to be addressed and the modalities for continuing the discussion for consideration at its 351st Session (June 2024).
- 31.** During discussions at its 350th and 351st Sessions, the Governing Body agreed that the review would concentrate on six aspects related to its functioning: (a) the agenda-setting process; (b) time management; (c) policy-related discussions and the use of the High-Level Section; (d) the Committee of the Whole and inclusiveness of all interested constituents in policy-related discussions within the Governing Body; (e) Office support to the Government group; and (f) document production. The Governing Body also requested the Office to prepare for its 352nd Session (October–November 2024) an issues paper containing an analysis of those areas that could be considered for further review and improvement and relevant recommendations.¹⁷
- 32.** In addition to the six areas above, the issues paper identified other procedural aspects having regard to legal questions raised by constituents which may require an update of the Compendium

¹⁷ GB.350/INS/9, GB.350/PV, para. 448, GB.351/INS/6 and GB.351/PV, para. 120.

of rules. Although those aspects had not been previously considered by the Governing Body, the Office deemed it important to bring them to its attention as addressing them could contribute to improving the functioning of the Governing Body.

33. Following the discussion of the issues paper at its 352nd Session, the Governing Body decided to undertake a review of the areas of its functioning identified in section I of document GB.352/INS/8(Rev.1), including the additional procedural aspects identified by the Office, and to convene, to that end, two tripartite meetings governed by the Standing Orders for technical meetings, with the suspension of article 3, paragraph 2, and article 9, paragraphs 2, 3 and 8, and for which arrangements would be made to enable remote participation. The meetings will be composed of one representative of each interested Government, and eight representatives of the Employers' group and of the Workers' group respectively, with the possibility of their being accompanied by advisers.¹⁸
34. To give effect to this decision, the Office has made the necessary arrangements for holding the first tripartite meeting from 5 to 8 May 2025; the deliberations and outcome of which will be presented to the Governing Body at its 355th Session (November 2025); while the second tripartite meeting would be held in January/February 2026, if necessary,¹⁹ and its outcome presented to the Governing Body at its 356th Session (March 2026).
35. As discussions are ongoing within the Government group concerning the representation of governments in the Screening Group, issues pertaining to its composition are not expected to be discussed at the tripartite meeting and hence, are not covered in this document.²⁰

► III. Areas identified for the review and related proposals for improving the functioning of the Governing Body

III.1. Agenda setting

A. Description of the issues

36. Having noted with concern that the agenda of the most recent Governing Body sessions has resulted in a very full order of business that has led to more frequent extended and late sittings, increasing financial costs and operational inefficiencies, some groups have asked the Office to identify possible means to reduce the number of agenda items for each session. The initial strategy to reduce the size of the agenda would be to review all Governing Body functions so as to identify possible items for which reports could be provided or guidance obtained by means other than discussions in the Governing Body. The functions listed in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Introductory note stem from the Constitution, the Standing Orders of the Conference or the Financial Regulations. The proposals outlined in section B below could contribute to reducing the number of items on the agenda that require a decision without having to amend texts other than the Compendium of rules, as well as to addressing structural and procedural inefficiencies.

¹⁸ GB.352/INS/8(Rev.1) and [GB.352/INS/8\(Rev.1\)/Decision](#).

¹⁹ GB.352/PV, para. 435.

²⁰ GB.352/PV, para. 436(c).

B. Proposals for addressing the issues concerning the agenda

(a) Streamlining the handling of standing items

37. Standing (also known as recurrent) items are those systematically placed on the agenda of a March, June, or November session. The list of all standing items can be found in the appendix. There are 22 such items in March, 25 in November and 7 in June.²¹ These do not include progress reports on strategies or action plans adopted by the Governing Body that cover specific reporting cycles such as the Human Resource Strategy, the Development Cooperation Strategy, the Information Technology Strategy, the ILO policy on disability inclusion and action plans on gender equality and youth employment.
38. Currently, there are two categories of items: those for decision and those for information. With the 2011 reform, a third category of items, “for debate and guidance”, was removed to ensure that the Governing Body would devote all its sittings to discussing items leading to a decision. To this end, all documents submitted for items on the agenda (that is those that are not labelled as being “for information”), must include a draft decision for consideration and adoption. This practice is not readily applicable to certain standing items where the purpose of the Governing Body discussion is to take note of the information provided by the Office and give guidance. Therefore, items for debate and guidance have never been discontinued. The related documents include on the first page an indication that they are presented for debate and guidance and contain draft decisions including the words “took note” and “take into account the guidance provided”. These are not decisions per se and have caused confusion on certain occasions, resulting in a suboptimal use of the limited time available during Governing Body sessions.
39. For example, the following items have typically fallen into this category:
 - Preview of programme and budget proposals;
 - ILO programme implementation;
 - Report of the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee;
 - Report of the Chief Internal Auditor;
 - Annual Evaluation Report;
 - High-level evaluations of strategies and Decent Work Country Programmes;
 - Matters relating to the Joint Inspection Unit.
40. Clarifying the distinction between items submitted for debate and guidance and those submitted for decision would contribute to improving the distribution of time among all items in the tentative order of business. It is therefore proposed to reorganize the agenda items under three categories as described below.

²¹ According to the first paragraph of Annex II of the [Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy](#) (MNE Declaration), the Governing Body “reviews on a regular basis the overall strategy and underlying activities to promote the [MNE Declaration]”. The standing item concerning the promotion of the MNE Declaration can be placed on the agenda of the March or the November session.

Items for decision

41. The time for the consideration of such items in the tentative order of business will continue to be allocated with two possibilities:
- (a) for matters that typically require more time to achieve consensus on the decision to be taken, there is the possibility to have more than one discussion during the session;
 - (b) certain non-controversial items are dealt with in an expedited manner.

Items for debate and guidance

42. Documents in this category would no longer contain a draft decision. Therefore, the time allocated for the consideration of these items would be within one sitting during which Governing Body members can formulate their observations and provide guidance to the Office through brief statements, followed by a reply by the Office to any requests for clarification or further information. Since no decision would be adopted, the minutes of the meeting would include, at the end of the discussion, the following sentence: "The Office took note of the guidance provided". Nevertheless, when preparing the agenda of each session, the Screening Group would be consulted on which items to include in this category, leaving open the possibility to submit them for decision at a specific session, if deemed necessary.

Items for information

43. Since the 2011 reform, items that are purely for information are listed in the agenda of each session, the related documents are published on the Governing Body website ten working days before the session and the Governing Body takes note of their content through the adoption of one single decision in a supplementary report of the Director-General.²²
44. As explained in paragraph 44 of the Introductory note, the Screening Group may decide that the Governing Body should discuss a document for information at a specific session if the request is made by a member of the Governing Body at the latest five working days before the opening of the session. This possibility has not been put in practice, but on some occasions the Screening Group has decided, when preparing the agenda of a session, to include for discussion an item that is usually for information and vice versa. This provides some flexibility in managing the size of the agenda and therefore no change is proposed in the way items for information are handled.

(b) Reviewing the content and periodicity of standing items

(b.1.) Streamlining the content of certain standing items

Report of the Director-General and its supplementary reports

45. Most of the information contained in the regular report of the Director-General is available on the ILO website. It is therefore proposed to discontinue it. The standing item "Report of the Director-General" could be renamed "Reports of the Director-General concerning institutional matters". Instead of a regular report and supplementary reports, all documents under this item would be identified as first, second, third report and so on in the same way as the reports of the Officers. The regular report would no longer be produced and its contents would be distributed in separate documents as follows:
- the section on publications would be removed;

²² See for example [GB.352/INS/19/3](#).

- the sections concerning membership of the Organization and progress in international labour legislation would be submitted in a document for information under the LILS Section;
 - the section concerning internal administration that contains the appointments made by the Director-General in the Director and Principal Officer category would be submitted in a document for information under the PFA Section.
46. Obituaries would no longer be reported to the Governing Body, as no provision is made for this in the Compendium of Rules. Any group wishing to pay tribute to the memory of a late Governing Body member could do so during the opening or the closing sitting in a statement that would be reflected in the minutes of the session.
47. Certain matters that are presented as supplementary reports would be dealt with as follows:
- (a) **The appointments at the Assistant Director-General level or similar** would be reported in documents for information. In cases where an oath needs to be sworn, the time required for this would be included in the tentative order of business.
 - (b) **The report concerning the follow-up to Governing Body decisions** would be submitted for information.
 - (c) The outcomes of technical meetings (or meetings of experts) would be submitted under a dedicated item in the Social Dialogue Segment of the POL Section, while the report of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians that takes place every five years would be submitted as a standing item in the INS Section, as is the case for Regional Meetings.

Consolidating the programming and reporting of all official meetings

48. At present, one of the standing items on the agenda of the Social Dialogue Segment of the POL Section concerns reporting on sectoral meetings held since the previous session and proposals for sectoral work for the following year, while reporting on other technical meetings or meetings of experts is done through supplementary reports and their programming through the standing INS item “Composition, agenda and programme of standing bodies and meetings”, which also covers the programme of sectoral meetings.
49. The reporting on and programming of all meetings, including sectoral meetings, could be consolidated under the Social Dialogue Segment, thereby ensuring equal treatment for the discussion of the outcome of all ILO meetings, as well as greater consistency and visibility in their programming. The standing item concerning sectoral meetings would be maintained with the same scope, except for the proposals for future meetings, which would be included, together with proposals for other official meetings, in a new item entitled “Proposed programme of ILO official meetings for [the period concerned]”. The document for this item would contain all the proposals for the period concerned regardless of their source – be it to give effect to recommendations of the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group or to provide a follow-up to Conference resolutions and conclusions.
50. Consequently, **the item “Composition, agenda and programme of standing bodies and meetings”** would be removed from the agenda and the contents of the document would be distributed as follows, taking into account the delegation of authority to the Officers for most of the decisions (see section III.7(A)(a) below) therein:
- appointments of members of standing bodies, such as the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), the Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART)

or the Chairperson of the CFA, could be dealt with as a report of the Officers containing a draft decision for adoption by the Governing Body;

- the composition, agenda and other arrangements for proposed future official meetings would be included in the new item in the Social Dialogue Segment together with the programme of meetings approved by the Officers;
- the list of intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations to be invited as observers to the Conference and to official meetings would be issued as a document for information once approved by the Officers.

(b.2.) Reviewing the periodicity of standing items

51. It is proposed to merge the item in the INS Section every March session concerning arrangements for that year's session of the Conference with the item on the agenda of every November session concerning the analysis of measures taken to improve the functioning of the Conference at the previous session. Only the item on the March session would be retained and the document would include a brief section on lessons learned from the previous year's Conference, based on comments provided by constituents at the June session of the Governing Body.
52. Consideration could be given to moving the item on the review of annual reports under the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration from the March to the June or the November session. This would provide the Office with a more appropriate time frame for preparing the document and ensuring its timely publication. At present, the time available is too short as documents submitted to the March session must be published in mid-February and this document needs to include information that is only available in early February.

III.2. Time management

A. Description of the issues

53. Time management has been a concern in all three of the most recent reviews of the functioning of the Governing Body. On each occasion, similar measures have been considered and recommended in relation to one or more of the existing variables: the number of agenda items, the time available for plenary discussions, the number of speakers in the plenary discussion of each item and the time available for each statement. The following measures are currently in place:
 - seeking a timely start and end to group meetings and plenary sittings;
 - limiting last-minute changes to the order of business to very exceptional circumstances and ensuring that any such changes are announced as early as possible so that all groups are prepared for the discussion;
 - exceptional use of late sittings, to be planned in advance only as a safety net in case some discussions require more time to be brought to a conclusion;
 - avoidance of protocol-related parts of statements, such as congratulations on appointments, and of other parts of statements that do not relate to the substance of the item under discussion;
 - a tentative programme for the session, which included the approximate duration for the discussion of each item and corresponding time limits for statements, proposed by the Office in consultation with the Officers and the Screening Group;
 - preferred use of group statements, with statements by individual members being limited to additions or clarifications concerning the position of the member in question;

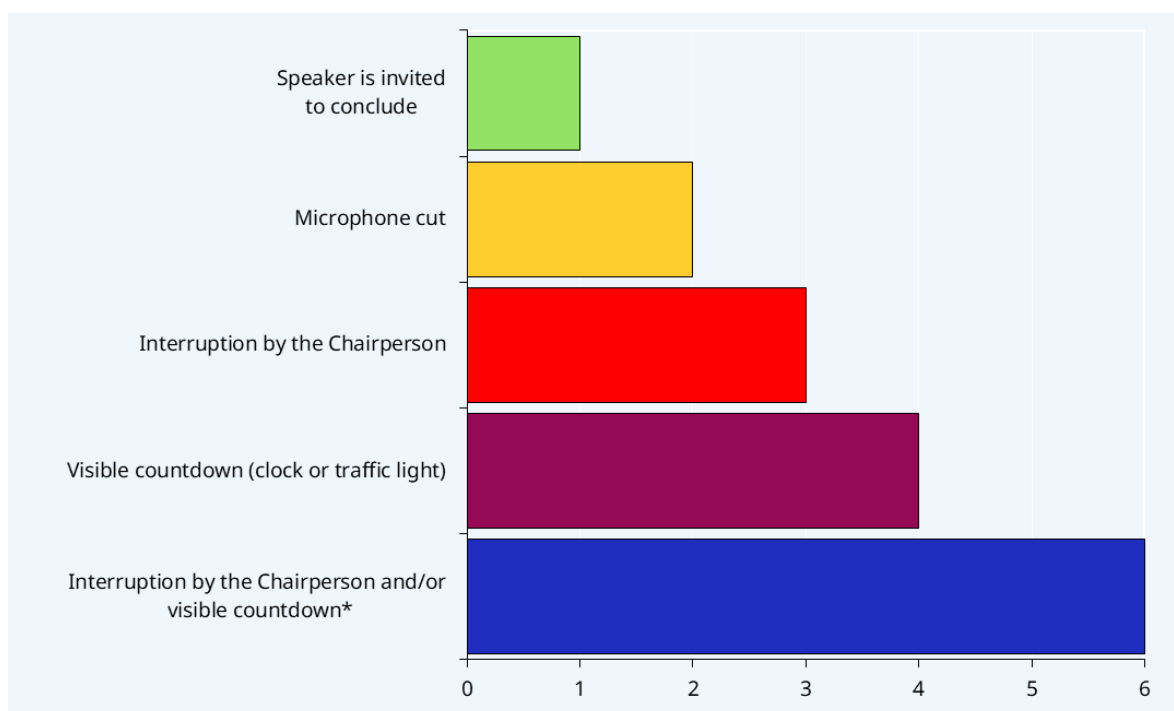
- advance registration in the list of speakers to facilitate the flow of discussions and to project the list of speakers onto the screen, including the time allocated to each speaker;
- clarity concerning on whose behalf statements are made, to avoid repetition or confusion. Only exceptions to the usual composition of a group need to be clarified. As only the positions of Governing Body members are taken into account for the purposes of assessing a consensus or a majority, clarifications regarding support from non-Governing Body members does not seem necessary;
- avoidance of frequent breaks and interruptions in sittings;
- greater adherence to indicative speaking time limits, including by ILO officials in response to questions and by speakers presenting reports of committees or other entities reporting to the Governing Body.

54. Despite a marked improvement in the length of statements, strict adherence to the agreed speaking time allocations remains the most significant challenge.

Time management measures applied by other organizations

55. The Office consulted 16 intergovernmental organizations on the time-management measures they apply in the meetings of their governance bodies concerning: (i) speaking time limits and ways to enforce them; and (ii) how to deal with items for which the time allotted in the programme was not sufficient to complete the relevant discussion.
56. In nine organizations, time limits are provided for in standing written rules, while in six of them there is an established practice to set recommended limits for each session, as is the case at the ILO. Only one organization does not set any limits at all. The measures in place to enforce the time limits are shown in figure 1.

► **Figure 1. Measures to enforce speaking time limits in other organizations**



* Six organizations consulted apply both the interruption by the Chairperson and a visible countdown system in the form of a clock or a traffic light, and one organization applies either one or the other depending on the governance organ.

57. Regarding the handling of items for which the discussion is not concluded within the scheduled time, most organizations resort to extended sittings, including in the evening, or resume the discussion at a subsequent sitting during the session.

B. Proposal for ensuring better time management

58. Building on the progress achieved, and in light of other organizations' practices, it is proposed to consider a more systematic and stringent application of time limits:
- by using a time monitoring application during the sittings that clearly and audibly signals the end of the time allocated or alternatively by enabling the chairing officer to interrupt the speaker when the allocated time is used up;
 - by allowing the chairing officer to strictly control the duration of breaks during the sittings.

III.3. Policy-related discussions and use of the High-Level Section

A. Description of the issues

59. When considering the policymaking role of the Governing Body in the context of previous reforms, it was agreed that policy discussions should clearly contribute to its governance and decision-making role. When determining the new structure of the Governing Body in 2011, the High-Level Section was retained as a forum for discussing global policy issues of high strategic importance to the ILO, not as a space for debates that it would be more appropriate to hold at the Conference or other meetings.
60. The High-Level Section comprises: (i) the Strategic Policy Segment, which functions in the same way as the other segments of the Governing Body, with participation limited to Governing Body members and the possibility of adopting decisions; and (ii) the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization that meets as a committee of the whole, which in accordance with paragraph 4.3.1 of the Standing Orders, has two particular features:
- it enables representatives of governments that are not represented in the Governing Body and other guests to participate in the debate with a more flexible approach towards conducting the discussion, thereby allowing broader participation and attracting high-level participation from constituents and invited organizations;
 - it does not have decision-making power and any recommendation or report has to be submitted to the Governing Body for decision.²³
61. Since 2012, the High-Level Section has been used on six occasions as shown in the following table.

► **Table 1. Topics considered in the High-Level Section between 2012 and 2024**

	Strategic Policy Segment	Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization
November 2012		• Global economic prospects and the Decent Work Agenda • Trade and employment
March 2015	Global employment and social challenges: Emerging trends and the role of the ILO	

²³ See paragraphs 37 and 41 of the Introductory note.

	Strategic Policy Segment	Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization
March 2016		Addressing the labour market impacts of refugees and other forcibly displaced people
March 2017		Decent Work for Sustainable Development
March 2018	Decent work for sustainable development	Reform of the United Nations: Implications for the ILO
March 2024		Challenges and opportunities of digitalization

62. It is worth noting that the Strategic Policy Segment has been used only twice in 12 years and policy discussions have been shifted to the INS Section and, to a lesser extent, to the POL Section. The fact that the Working Party has been convened more often indicates that the main interest in using this section lies in being able to apply the committee of the whole format which enables a broader participation and a more inclusive debate.

B. Proposals concerning the use of the High-Level Section

63. In view of the practice described above, it is proposed to eliminate the distinction between the Strategic Policy Segment and the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization and maintain a high-level section as a forum for discussing global issues of strategic importance for the world of work under the name "Strategic Dialogue Section". The section would apply the rules of procedure of the Committee of the Whole to allow non-members of the Governing Body (ILO Member States, as well as other guests) to participate in the debates.
64. As is the case for the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization (Committee of the Whole format), the Governing Body would not take decisions in the Strategic Dialogue Section. On occasions where the topic discussed would require a decision to ensure follow-up action by the Office, the draft decision would need to be submitted in a short report to be considered in a subsequent sitting of the same Governing Body session in the INS Section.
65. Policy-related topics would continue to be placed on the agenda of the POL Section. The decision to discuss such topics in the Strategic Dialogue Section instead, would depend on the intention to include non-members of the Governing Body – ILO Member States and high-level guests from other organizations – in the meeting as well as on the topic to be discussed and the expected outcome.

III.4. Committee of the Whole and inclusiveness of all interested constituents in policy-related discussions within the Governing Body

A. Description of the issues

66. As explained in paragraph 12 of the Introductory note, the provisions governing the situation of States that are not represented on the Governing Body are contained in articles 1.8 and 4.3 of the Standing Orders. The fact that both provisions limit the right to speak of non-members of the Governing Body to expressing views on the State's own situation and that their exercise thereof is subject to discretionary decisions by the Officers could suggest that they fulfil the same function and represent a duplication. However, this is not confirmed either by the history of those provisions or by practice and needs to be clarified.

67. Article 4.3, which regulates the Committee of the Whole format, was introduced in the Standing Orders in 1999 to provide an opportunity for governments that are not members of the Governing Body to take part in the discussions on the annual review provided for in the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration, to supplement the information contained in their reports. The article provides that representatives of such governments may “express their views with respect to matters concerning their own situation”. While the requirement to speak only on matters concerning governments’ own situation was perfectly adequate for the purpose of the discussions concerning annual reviews, it may be questioned whether it serves a purpose for other uses of the Committee of the Whole format. Indeed, the requirement has not been applied in recent years when the Committee of the Whole format has been used in debates on the implications of the United Nations reform for the ILO or on the question of whether to refer the dispute concerning the interpretation of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87).
68. Paragraph 1.8.3 was introduced as part of the 2011 reform to grant limited speaking rights to governments that are not members of the Governing Body on items not related to the implementation of supervisory procedures concerning that government (provided for in paragraphs 1.8.1 and 1.8.2) in cases where “a decision point may affect its interests, or if that State, or the situation of that State, has been specifically referred to in the discussion”. Except in some recent cases, this provision has always been applied narrowly, requiring that specific interests of the State were affected, beyond the mere significance of the question or the implications of a draft decision for the Member’s interests in general. This has been considered appropriate to maintain the distinctiveness of the Governing Body as an organ of limited composition compared to the Conference, and of the elected deputy members who have the right to speak but not to vote, and to ensure a balance among the tripartite groups.

B. Proposals concerning the use of the Committee of the Whole format and the right to speak of States that are not represented in the Governing Body

69. It is proposed to review the above-mentioned provisions as follows:
- (a) Adding in paragraph 1.8.3 the condition that the matter under discussion affects the interests of the State concerned “specifically and substantively”.
 - (b) Paragraph 4.3.1 could be modified to remove the restrictive condition that representatives of non-members of the Governing Body may express their views only “with respect to matters concerning their own situation” by deleting that phrase. Moreover, in view of the fact that all Governing Body members may participate in the sittings for which minutes are prepared and published, it could also be envisaged to remove the last sentence of the paragraph concerning the obligation to report to the Governing Body.

III.5. Office support to the Government group

A. Description of the issues

70. The creation of a dedicated senior professional position within the Official Relations, Meetings and Language Services Department to increase liaison with and support to the Government group, regional groups and individual governments was one of the main features of the 2011 reform package. Over time, the work of most of the department’s official relations team and of a substantial part of the department’s senior management has evolved mainly to providing support on ILO governance to the Chairpersons of the Governing Body and the Government group and to regional coordinators, through the organization of systematic or on-demand information

sessions and by liaising with technical departments and field offices for support concerning substantive matters.

71. The Office is ready to increase its activities in support of the Government group and regional groups in whatever manner they find appropriate, particularly to address the challenges of smaller representations with a view to enabling them to participate fully in Governing Body activities. Clearly, there are varying expectations of the nature and scope of the support to governments that the Office can provide. Some governments have suggested that structures within the Office similar to the Bureaux for Employers' and Workers' Activities (ACT/EMP and ACTRAV) could be considered to increase support to governments. This proposal was also discussed in depth during the 2011 reform but did not receive full support. Nonetheless, the perception that the support the Office provides to governments does not match the type of support the social partners receive persists and needs to be addressed.
72. The role of the Bureaux is to develop and manage a productive and constructive relationship between the ILO and employers' and workers' organizations by acting as the focal points for direct contact between the Office and employer and worker constituents, as well as to promote coherence between the policy priorities of the employers and workers and the overall work of the Office. To this end, the Bureaux fully deliver policy advocacy and capacity-building on organizational/institutional developments designed to lead to strong, independent and representative organizations of employers and workers. All technical departments and field offices are there to support governments in relation to ILO technical work. In relation to ILO governance, political and technical support to the social partners is provided by the secretariats of the groups, which are independent organizations located outside the Office and funded by the groups themselves.

B. Proposals for improving the support provided to the Government group

73. One key issue that has been raised on several occasions is the lack of institutional memory within the Government group, owing to the regular and frequent turnover of government representatives in Geneva. In addition, no record is kept of internal discussions and agreements reached within the group, in meetings in which the Office does not participate. To address this gap, the following three options could be considered.

(a) Knowledge sharing platform for the Government group supported by the Office

74. As suggested by one group, the Office could explore the creation of an online password-protected portal for Government members of the Governing Body to serve as a permanent repository for all matters relating to the Government group and allow for the transfer of information among government officials from one term in office to another. It would contain background documents provided by the Office on consultations and summaries of internal Government consultations provided by the country chairing the Government group, including on nominations for Governing Body organs and for chairing Conference committees; and official meetings. This could also include brief summaries of the outcomes of Screening Group discussions, which currently are only circulated to Screening Group members after each meeting for the benefit of other government representatives.

(b) ILO support unit for the Government group

75. The creation of a dedicated support unit would require additional human resources, including as a minimum, one professional and one general service support staff member. The total estimated cost for these positions would be US\$768,000 per biennium. The definition of duties and

responsibilities as well as organizational structure and reporting lines would have to be designed in such a manner as to avoid any possible conflict of interest between the Governments concerned and the Office in keeping with the principle of conduct governing the independence of the international civil service.

(c) Cost-shared position in a permanent mission to support the coordination of the Government group's activities

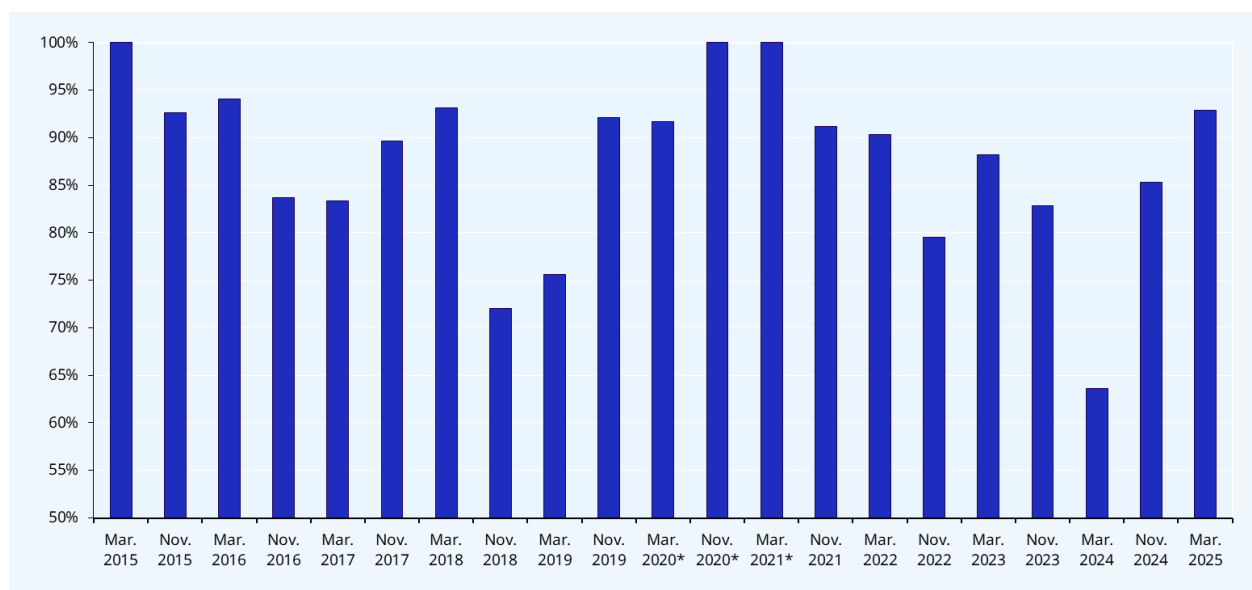
- 76.** Governments would share the costs of a specific position with administrative support in one of the permanent missions to coordinate the Government group's activities on a permanent basis in the same way as the secretariats of the Employers' and Workers' groups. This position's duties would include facilitating the onboarding and debriefing of each new chairperson of the group, ensuring that information is shared and recorded systematically to facilitate institutional knowledge transfer within the group and supporting regional coordinators in their functions by liaising with the Office as required. This position could be established under the employment conditions applicable to the Mission that would act as the employer and the cost implications would be determined accordingly.

III.6. Document production

A. Description of the issues

- 77.** Following the call by the Governing Body in the context of the 2011 reform for more concise, reader-friendly and decision-oriented documents, to be published simultaneously in the three official languages within a given timeline before the Governing Body session, the Office put in place the following measures to give effect to the provisions in paragraphs 5.6.5 and 5.6.7 of the Standing Orders:
- publication of a revised Office policy on the roles and responsibilities of all involved in document production, including target lengths by document type and production timelines to meet publication deadlines;
 - for each Governing Body session, preparation of detailed work plans in agreement with author units, including any departures from target lengths or established timelines in the document production chain;
 - introduction of electronic workflows to record all stages of document production (drafting, editing, approval, referencing, translation, formatting and publication);
 - regular monitoring of compliance with production deadlines and lengths, including early warning of problematic situations.
- 78.** Although these measures have helped streamline document preparation processes within the Office, the results in terms of timely publication are not consistent as shown in figure 2 and constituents continue to voice concerns in this regard. To some extent, this can be explained by the constraints faced in the preparation of certain documents which require inputs from constituents.

► **Figure 2. Percentage of documents published on time (March 2015–March 2025)**



* The March 2020 session was included in the analysis because its cancellation due to the pandemic occurred after the publication deadline. It should be noted that in the two subsequent sessions, November 2020 and March 2021, it was possible to publish all documents on time thanks to the fact that they were updated versions of the documents prepared for the March 2020 session.

79. Of the 21 sessions considered, only in 9 such sessions was the percentage of documents published on time lower than 90, the overall average being 88 per cent. It should be noted that most of the documents published after the required date are made available on the website between one and five days later. Therefore, all documents are published ten working days before the start of the session.
80. According to paragraph 5.6.7 of the Standing Orders, items on the agenda in respect of which the publication deadline of 15 working days (or 30 days in the case of the programme and budget proposals) is not respected will automatically be deferred to the following Governing Body session, except if late publication is authorized by the Officers in consultation with the three groups. In practice, the Office communicates to the Screening Group the list of documents that will be published late, together with the reason and the anticipated revised publication date and shares the information with the group secretariats and with governments during the information session that takes place two weeks before the Governing Body session. Since this rule was introduced, the Screening Group has decided to defer an item to the next session only once. To give constituents more time to consider such documents, they are scheduled for discussion during the second week of the session.
81. Regarding the length, as mentioned in paragraph 77 above, the Office policy governing official documents, provides for the maximum length per type of document, as shown in table 2.

► Table 2. Word and page limits by type of document versus typical length

Type of document	Maximum length		Typical length	
	in words	in pages	in words	in pages
Programme and budget proposals	36 000	72	58 000	85–120
Programme implementation report	36 000	72	44 000	88–90
Preview of Programme and budget proposals	25 000	50	30 000	60
Annual review as follow-up to the 1998 Declaration	12 000	24	17 000	34
Agenda of future sessions of the Conference	10 000	20	12 000	20–24
Evaluation reports	10 000	20	11 000	18–25
Follow-up to article 26 complaints and article 24 representations	8 000	16	4 000–8 000	8–16
ILO strategies and reports on their implementation	3 500–4 000	7–8	4 000–7 000	8–14
Plans of action as follow-up to Conference conclusions	3 500–4 000	7–8	4 000–8 000	8–16
Other technical matters	3 500–4 000	7–8	3 000–6 000	6–12
Standing items in the INS or PFA Sections (including reports of the Officers of the Governing Body)	1 900	4	500–2 000	1–4
For information *	1 500	3	800–1 500	1.5–3
* When an item for discussion is placed on the agenda for information only, the limit applied is the same as for documents concerning technical matters.				

82. It can be observed that in most cases the number of words is systematically higher than the prescribed limit, in particular for documents for which the limit is high, such as the programme and budget proposals, but also for strategies and plans of action. As Governing Body members have not expressed dissatisfaction with the length of such documents, consideration could be given to reviewing the word limit for certain types of documents to make sure that they contain the level of detail expected by constituents.

B. Proposals for improving document production

(a) Ensuring timely publication

83. In light of the fact that certain documents are frequently published during the week following the expected date, consideration could be given to establishing an alternative publication deadline of ten working days before the session, that would be applied mainly for documents concerning the follow-up to complaints submitted under article 26 of the ILO Constitution. This alternative publication deadline could also be granted by the Screening Group for a few other specific items per session, if the Office justifies the need for an extended deadline during the agenda-setting

process. This could be the case for the review of annual reports under the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration and the programme implementation report, for which the preparation time frame is too short as documents submitted to the March session must be published in mid-February and these documents need to include information that is only available at the beginning of February.

(b) Regulating the length of documents

- 84.** The length of documents has an impact on the time required by Governing Body members for the preparation of the discussion and has costs implications. Bearing in mind that the main purpose of documents submitted to the Governing Body is to inform the decision-making process, it is proposed to regulate the length limits by type based on the information provided in table 2 and taking into account constituents' expectations regarding their content. To ensure strict enforcement of the revised rules, they should be endorsed by the Governing Body.

III.7. Other procedural aspects

- 85.** Building on legal questions raised by constituents in the past, the Office identified other procedural aspects which would require an update of the Introductory note and the Standing Orders and, if addressed, would contribute to improving the functioning of the Governing Body. The proposals for clarifying the Standing Orders would in particular contribute to enhancing consistency with the Standing Orders of the Conference and the proposals for updating the Introductory note would improve clarity in the procedure of the Governing Body.

A. Proposals for clarifying certain provisions of the Standing Orders

(a) Delegation of authority to the Officers

- 86.** In the context of the 1990–93 reform, as a result of which the full session of the Governing Body in May was discontinued,²⁴ one of the measures adopted to reduce the size of the agenda was to delegate to the Officers certain routine matters, on the understanding that any matters in relation to which there was a difference of opinion would be referred to the Governing Body for decision.²⁵ The relevant provision of the Standing Orders is paragraph 2.3.1, which reads as follows:

The Governing Body may delegate to its Officers the authority:

- (a) to approve the programme of meetings and the dates of symposia, seminars and similar meetings;
- (b) to invite Member States or States which are not Members of the Organization;
- (c) to invite official international organizations;
- (d) to invite non-governmental international organizations;
- (e) to carry out the responsibilities of the Governing Body under article 17 of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference; any such delegation shall be made only for one specific session of the Conference, and relate only to proposals involving expenditure during a financial period for which a budget has already been adopted.

- 87.** This provision enables the Governing Body to delegate to its Officers authority on the matters enumerated therein. For the delegation to be effective, an explicit decision by the Governing Body is required. However, in practice, Governing Body decisions to delegate authority have been the exception rather than the rule. While with respect to subparagraph (e), a decision to delegate

²⁴ Up to the early 1990s, the Governing Body held three full sessions every year in March, May and November, in addition to its one-day session after the Conference.

²⁵ Article 2.3 of the Standing Orders and articles 18(5), 45(4) and 46(5) of the Standing Orders of the Conference.

authority is taken systematically every year at the March session,²⁶ with regard to subparagraphs (a) to (d), which were introduced in 2005, the Governing Body has never explicitly decided to delegate its authority on those matters to the Officers²⁷ and still “endorses” the proposals approved by its Officers in relation to the invitation of intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations to official meetings.²⁸

88. Furthermore, the list in paragraph 2.3.1 does not encompass all the responsibilities Officers have assumed in the past. For instance, for the purpose of convening the first meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, in April 2014, the Governing Body “delegated decisions relating to the appointment of the Chairperson of the Committee, and other matters that may arise related to the convening of the meeting ... to the Officers of the Governing Body”.²⁹ While no provision in the Constitution or the Standing Orders prevents the Governing Body from delegating authority to its Officers, it would be appropriate to add a clear reference to this effect in paragraph 2.3.1.
89. It is therefore proposed to amend paragraph 2.3.1 by inserting at the beginning an acknowledgement of the duties assigned to the Officers under various standing orders, rules and regulations,³⁰ stating that the duties currently listed in subparagraphs (a) to (e) are permanently delegated to them, and adding a new subparagraph to provide the possibility for the Governing Body to delegate any other matters to its Officers. Considering that the delegation of authority under subparagraph (e) has rarely been used in practice,³¹ the proposed amendment implies changing the requirement for an annual renewal to a permanent delegation.
90. The proposed changes to paragraph 2.3.1 would contribute to reducing the size of the agenda by removing the item concerning the authority to carry out the responsibilities under article 17 of the Standing Orders of the Conference; allowing for the list of intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations to be invited as observers to the Conference as approved by the Officers to be reported to the Governing Body for information only; and providing for the possibility to delegate other matters to the Officers.
91. In addition to the duties referred to in paragraph 2.3.1, the Officers assume responsibilities of a less formal, though highly important, institutional nature which consist in being consulted and providing timely advice to the Director-General on diverse, and often urgent, matters. The Director-General has in the past consulted the Officers on matters ranging from the acceptance of financial contributions from the private sector to the Director-General’s public statements relating to major political events. While it may be considered that such consultations are largely based on paragraph 2.2.8 of the Standing Orders, it would be useful to review that provision to align it with actual practice.

²⁶ See for example [GB.350/PFA/2](#) and [GB.353/PFA/2](#).

²⁷ See [GB.294/LILS/1](#), para. 2.3.1(b) and (c). An explicit delegation concerning the approval of invitations to meetings was given to the Officers only once as part of Governing Body reform in 1993. Although in the context of the 2011 reform, the Governing Body confirmed that an explicit delegation was required, this has not been applied in practice.

²⁸ See for example [GB.352/INS/22](#), para. 20(d).

²⁹ [GB.319/PV](#), para. 584(f).

³⁰ Such as articles 3(1), 18(5), 45(4), 46(5) of the Standing Orders of the Conference, article 2(3) of the Standing Orders concerning the procedure for the examination of representations under articles 24 and 25 of the Constitution of the ILO, article 4(2) of the [Rules for regional meetings](#), article 3(2) of the [Standing Orders of the Special Tripartite Committee established for the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#), and article 4.2(b) and (c) of the [ILO Staff Regulations](#).

³¹ As mentioned in [GB.198/SC/4/3](#), para. 8, until 1975 it had been used only once. During its 202nd Session (March 1977), before adopting the current provision, the Governing Body considered the possibility of setting a permanent delegation of authority ([GB.202/11/23](#), para. 13 and [GB.202/PV](#), p. III/2).

(b) Functions within the Government group exercised by non-members of the Governing Body (article 7.1)

92. On several occasions in recent years, the question has arisen as to whether the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Government group of the Governing Body and the regional coordinators must be representatives of governments that hold a regular or deputy seat in the Governing Body or could also be representatives of governments that are not members of the Governing Body.
93. While the Standing Orders and the Introductory note specify responsibilities attached to the diverse functions within the Government group, they do not govern the nomination process. Paragraph 7.1.2 of the Standing Orders simply provides that “[a]ny nominations to functions within the group shall be communicated in writing to the Chairperson”. There are three main roles in the Government group: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and regional coordinators. Regional coordinators present common positions and defend the interests of the regional group they represent, and also consult with the Chairperson of the Government group (paragraph 19 of the Introductory note). Both regional coordinators and the Chairperson of the Government group are members of the tripartite Screening Group that sets the agenda of Governing Body sessions (paragraph 3.1.1 of the Standing Orders). The Government group fulfils pivotal responsibilities concerning the functioning of the Governing Body, such as authorizing a Government deputy member to vote in the place of a regular member (paragraph 1.5.3(a)(ii)) and replacing a State that ceases to occupy a seat on the Governing Body between two sessions of the Conference (paragraph 1.7.2). The Chairperson of the Government group is also a key interlocutor in consultative processes, such as those initiated by the Chairperson of the Governing Body (paragraph 21 of the Introductory note).
94. Despite the absence of a specific provision in the Standing Orders governing the nominations within the Government group, in practice these responsibilities have consistently been conditional on membership of the Governing Body by reason of their direct and close bearing on the functioning of the Governing Body. Moreover, under the Standing Orders, governments that are not members of the Governing Body cannot fulfil those functions as, in principle, they do not have the right to speak and cannot move resolutions, amendments and motions on behalf of the group or region or attend private sittings of the Governing Body. Since the adoption of the 2011 reform package, functions within the Government group have generally been assigned to representatives of elected government members of the Governing Body, with a few exceptions.
95. Bearing in mind the need for procedural clarity and legal certainty, as well as the autonomy of the Government group, the Governing Body may wish to clarify the relevant provisions of the Introductory note to confirm the institutional logic and prevailing practice to limit the nominations for the three roles in the Government group to members of the Governing Body. Should the Governing Body consider that those nominations should be open to non-members, on the understanding that in practice the Government groups of the Governing Body and of the Conference are the same, and in the interest of enhancing the inclusivity of the Governing Body, the Standing Orders would need to be amended to clarify the speaking and other rights of those governments.

(c) Designation of a Government deputy member to vote when a regular member has lost the right to vote (paragraphs 1.5.3 and 6.1.4)

96. In a limited number of cases the question has arisen of whether a deputy Government member may vote in place of a regular member that has lost the right to vote due to arrears in the payment of the country's membership contributions. The relevant provision of the Standing Orders is paragraph 6.1.4, which reads:

If the Governing Body has been notified by the Director-General that the amount of the arrears due from a Member of the Organization represented on the Governing Body equals or exceeds the contribution due from that Member for the preceding two years, the representative of that Member and any deputy member of the Governing Body appointed by that Member shall, unless the Conference has decided to permit the Member to vote, in accordance with article 13, paragraph 4, of the Constitution, be disqualified from voting in the Governing Body and its committees until the Governing Body has been notified by the Director-General that the right to vote of the Member concerned is no longer suspended.

97. On the one hand, although deputy members are no longer appointed by regular members, this provision would seem to embody the principle, according to which a deputy member replacing a regular member at the latter's demand cannot be granted rights that the regular member does not or no longer possesses. On the other hand, paragraph 1.5.3(a)(ii) of the Standing Orders provides that "a Government deputy member may vote when authorized by the Government group of the Governing Body to vote in the place of a Government regular member who is not voting, who has not been replaced by a substitute and who has not appointed another deputy member to act ...".
98. In practice, deputy members have been allowed to participate in the elections of the Director-General at the 242nd and 271st Sessions (March 1989 and March 1998) of the Governing Body replacing members that had lost their right to vote in view of the need "to restore equality of voting strength between the Government group and the two non-governmental groups". More recently, at the 341st Session (March 2021), the Africa group appointed two deputy members to take part in a vote in lieu of two regular members that were in arrears, "in accordance with the procedure under paragraph 1.5.3 of the Standing Orders of the Governing Body".³² However, at the 351st and 352nd Sessions (June and November 2024), a regular member that was disqualified from voting was not replaced by any deputy member.
99. It would be appropriate to clarify this matter by amending the Standing Orders.

(d) Definition of consensus (article 6.1)

100. As set forth in paragraph 46 of the Introductory note, consensus is the main method for the adoption of decisions by the Governing Body:

46. The Governing Body, whether meeting in plenary or in committees, takes decisions usually by consensus. The term "consensus" refers to an established practice under which every effort is made to reach without vote an agreement that is generally accepted. Those dissenting from the general trend are prepared simply to make their position or reservations known and placed on the record.³³ Consensus is characterized by the absence of any objection presented by a Governing Body member as an impediment to the adoption of the decision in question. It is for the person chairing the sitting, in agreement with the spokespersons of the respective groups to note the existence of a consensus.

101. This principle has been repeatedly reaffirmed by Governing Body members, but the Standing Orders do not contain a binding definition of consensus, unlike the Standing Orders of the Conference (articles 21(1) and 42(1)) and the Standing Orders for Technical Meetings (article 12) and for Meetings of Experts (article 11). In order to harmonize the procedure concerning consensus in the Governing Body with those standing orders, consideration could be given to

³² GB.271/PV(Rev.), p.I/1; GB.242/PV(Priv.)(Rev.), p.I/2 and GB.341/PV, para. 373.

³³ *United Nations Juridical Yearbook*, 1987, 174–175.

codifying this principle in article 6.1 using the same wording as in articles 21 and 42 of the Standing Orders of the Conference.

(e) Duties of the Chairperson (paragraph 2.2.3)

- 102.** Paragraph 2.2.3 currently reads: “The Chairperson shall have the right to take part in the discussions and to vote, but shall not have a casting vote.”
- 103.** In practice, the Chairperson of the Governing Body or the chairing officer does not participate in the discussions beyond what is required for the efficient conduct of the debate and the search for consensus and, in particular, does not participate in votes.
- 104.** It is, therefore, proposed to amend paragraph 2.2.3 to align the rules with the practice observed by the chairpersons and all chairing officers of the Governing Body that reflects the fact that impartiality and objectivity are essential to their functions. The amended text would be aligned with article 13(3) of the Standing Orders of the Conference, which was amended to this effect in 2021 and provides that the President shall not take part in the debates and shall not vote.

(f) Suspension of a provision of the Standing Orders (article 7.2)

- 105.** Article 7.2 provides that the Governing Body may decide to suspend any provision of the Standing Orders only “exceptionally, in the interests of its own orderly and expeditious functioning” and “for the purpose of dealing with a specific non-controversial question before it”. This provision could be aligned with article 69(2) of the Standing Orders of the Conference, where similar restrictive conditions were abolished as part of its 2021 comprehensive review. It reads:

2. Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the Conference, on the recommendation of the Governing Body or the unanimous recommendation of the President and the three Vice-Presidents, may decide to suspend any provision of the Standing Orders with effect for its current session. Unless the proposal to suspend the Standing Orders has been published at least 24 hours before the sitting at which it is submitted to the Conference, a decision may not be taken until the following sitting.

B. Proposals for updating the Introductory note

(a) Decision-making process for the Officers

- 106.** Questions have occasionally been raised about how the Officers of the Governing Body take their decisions and, in particular, the legal implications of any failure to reach agreement.³⁴ It was clarified that no procedural rules governed Officers’ meetings and that the Officers operated on the basis of consensus rather than unanimity. In the absence of agreement among the Officers, the matter was to be referred to the Governing Body for decision. It is proposed to consider the possibility of restating key principles to address any difference of views that might arise among the Officers. A new paragraph could be inserted in the Introductory note to this end.

(b) Right to reply (article 5.8)

- 107.** The right to reply of Governing Body members and the groups is provided for in article 5.8, which reads as follows:

5.8.1. Any member or group which has been specifically referred to in the discussions may exercise the right to reply at the time decided by the person chairing the sitting.

³⁴ GB.349bis/INS/1/1, paras 6–12 and GB.337/INS/13/8.

- 108.** The right to reply is a well-established procedural rule of the Governing Body and of all ILO meetings. It was codified in the Standing Orders of the Governing Body in June 2011, following the adoption of the reform package in March 2011, which included the following proposed measure: “The right to reply of Government members of the Governing Body would be ensured upon their request and in the time to be decided by the Chairperson, provided they had been specifically referred to in the discussion (including in the concluding remarks by the Vice-Chairpersons or the group spokespersons).”³⁵
- 109.** Given its significance, it might be useful to provide in the Introductory note indications concerning the modalities of the exercise of the right to reply, which have been developed at the Conference and the Governing Body over the years through a consistent practice that can be summarized as follows:
- (a) In granting the right to reply, the Chairperson generally insists that the reply must be directed towards a reference made during the discussion to the member concerned; it should be brief; it should be delivered using parliamentary language; and there is no right to reply to a reply.
 - (b) The exercise of the right is generally granted at the end of the sitting during which the view serving as the basis of the request for a right to reply has been expressed. If this is not possible, the right to reply should be exercised preferably at the beginning of the following sitting.

(c) Status of substitutes nominated by the Employers’ and Workers’ groups (paragraph 11)

- 110.** The Office has been consulted on several occasions by the Employers’ and the Workers’ groups concerning the possibility for their groups to appoint substitutes as titular members to Governing Body committees, specifically the CFA. The relevant provisions of the Standing Orders read as follows:

1.5.4. Deputy members may be appointed by the Governing Body as titular members of committees and working parties of the Governing Body.

Article 1.6

Substitutes

1.6.1. Each government represented on the Governing Body may furthermore appoint for its regular delegate a substitute of the same nationality, who will replace the regular delegate should the latter be absent or unable to attend.

1.6.2. The substitute may accompany the regular delegate during the meetings of the Governing Body, but shall not have the right to speak.

1.6.3. In the absence of the regular delegate, the substitute shall enjoy all the rights of the regular delegate.

1.6.4. In the case of the Employers’ group and of the Workers’ group, full freedom is left to the groups as to the manner of appointing substitutes.

1.6.5. Any substitute is required to submit to the Chairperson credentials of appointment in writing.

- 111.** The Office has consistently advised against such a practice on the grounds that it contravenes these provisions of the Standing Orders. Accordingly, it is proposed to clarify in paragraph 11 of the Introductory note that substitutes can only replace regular members temporarily when they are absent or unable to attend and that they may not be appointed as titular members of

³⁵ GB.310/9/1, para. 25(1).

Governing Body committees. This clarification would ensure compliance with the Standing Orders and address the legality of appointing substitutes as titular members.

(d) Seat-sharing arrangements (paragraph 10)

- 112.** In recent years, the practice of “seat-sharing” among different governments of the same region or subregion has come under scrutiny. This practice involves unofficial and, in any event unpublished, arrangements by which one or more Government members elected to occupy a Governing Body seat would resign at a specific point during the three-year term to allow another government or governments to take over the vacancy or vacancies.
- 113.** While the Constitution refers to the possibility of a government seat becoming vacant, and the Standing Orders in article 1.7. and paragraph 1.7.2 set out the method for filling such vacancies, these provisions are not intended to permit or facilitate seat-sharing but only to ensure that vacancies are filled promptly and efficiently.
- 114.** In the absence of any explicit provision in the Standing Orders regarding rotation or seat-sharing arrangements, any such arrangement remains a private agreement between the governments concerned. This implies that there would be no legal obligation for a government occupying a seat to relinquish it or for the electoral college to fill the vacancy based on the agreement between those governments. The Office cannot be expected to take an active part in ensuring the successful implementation of such arrangements, which are incompatible with the principle of a three-year term for Governing Body members stipulated in article 7(5) of the ILO Constitution.
- 115.** It is therefore proposed to insert in paragraph 10 of the Introductory note a clarification to restate the applicable rules and indicate that seat-sharing arrangements may not be considered.

► Appendix

List of standing items included in the agenda of each Governing Body session

Institutional Section (INS)

Item	Mar.	June	Nov.
Election of the Officers of the Governing Body		▲	
Approval of the minutes of the previous Session of the Governing Body	▲	▲	▲
Agenda of future sessions of the Conference	▲		▲
Arrangements for the next session of the Conference	▲		
Questions arising out of the most recent session of the Conference requiring immediate attention		▲	
Follow-up to the resolutions adopted by the Conference at that year's session			▲
Analysis of the measures taken to promote the effective functioning of the Conference			▲
Review of annual reports under the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration	▲		
Outcome of the most recently held Regional Meeting (if any)	▲		
Reports of the Committee on Freedom of Association	▲	▲	▲
Report of the Board of the International Training Centre of the ILO			▲
Regular report of the Director-General	▲	▲	▲
Supplementary Report of the Director-General: Documents submitted for information	▲		▲
Supplementary Report of the Director-General: Follow-up to Governing Body decisions			▲
Reports of the Officers of the Governing Body	▲	▲	▲
Composition, agenda and programme of standing bodies and meetings	▲	▲	▲

Programme, Financial and Administrative Section (PFA)

Item	Mar.	May/ June*	Nov.
Programme, Financial and Administrative Segment			
ILO Strategic Plan (every four years)			▲
Preview of the programme and budget proposals for the next biennium (every two years in even-numbered years)			▲
The Director-General's programme and budget proposals for the next biennium (every two years in odd-numbered years)	▲		
ILO programme implementation (every two years in even-numbered years)	▲		
Delegation of authority under article 17 of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference			▲
Scale of assessments of contributions to the budget for the next financial period	▲		
Proposed biennial programme and budget for the Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (CINTERFOR) (every two years in odd-numbered years)			▲
Programme and budget for the previous biennium: Regular budget and Working Capital Fund (for decision in odd-numbered years and for information in even-numbered years)	▲		
Financial statements and report of the external auditor		▲	
Audit and Oversight Segment			
Report of the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee	▲		
Report of the Director of Internal Audit and Oversight for the previous year	▲		
Annual evaluation report			▲
High-level evaluations of strategies and Decent Work Country Programmes			▲
Matters relating to the Joint Inspection Unit			▲
Personnel Segment			
Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union	▲		▲
Amendments to the Staff Regulations (if any)	▲		▲
Matters relating to the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO (if any)	▲		▲
* PFA sitting held every year on the opening day of the Conference session.			

Policy Development Section (POL)

Item	Mar.	Nov.
Social Dialogue Segment		
Sectoral meetings held during the year and proposals for sectoral work for the following year	▲	▲
Development Cooperation Segment		
Enhanced programme of development cooperation for the occupied Arab territories		▲
Multinational Enterprises (MNE) Segment *		
Effect given to the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration)		
* Since November 2011, the Governing Body has held 13 discussions in the MNE Segment, 8 of which were held during the March session. With the exception of 2020 (COVID-19 pandemic) and 2023, discussions have been held annually.		

Legal Issues and International Labour Standards Section (LILS)

Item	Mar.	Nov.
International Labour Standards and Human Rights Segment		
Choice of Conventions and Recommendations on which reports should be requested under article 19, paragraphs 5(e) and 6(d), of the ILO Constitution		▲
Proposed form for reports requested under article 19, paragraphs (5)(e) and (6)(d) of the ILO Constitution	▲	
Report of the meeting of the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group held during the year		▲

Total number of standing items per section and session

Section	March	May/June	June	November
INS	10		7	11
PFA	9	1		10
POL	2			2
LILS	1			2
Total	22	1	7	25