



Governing Body

349th Session, Geneva, 30 October–9 November 2023

Institutional Section

INS

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Third item on the agenda

Matters arising out of the work of the 111th Session (2023) of the International Labour Conference

Analysis of the measures taken to promote the effective functioning of the Conference

Purpose of the document

This document reviews the arrangements implemented at the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference (2023) and explores areas where improvements could be considered. The review of such arrangements will inform the proposals to be made in March 2024 with respect to the programme and working arrangements of the 112th Session of the Conference (June 2024) (see the draft decision in paragraph 39).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: Enabling outcome B: Improved leadership and governance.

Policy implications: Effective and efficient governance of the Organization.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None at this stage.

Follow-up action required: Preparation of proposals regarding the arrangements and programme of work for the 112th Session of the Conference (2024) to be considered and approved by the Governing Body at its 350th Session (March 2024).

Author unit: Official Meetings, Documents and Relations Department (RELMEETINGS).

Related documents: [GB.347/INS/2/2](#).

► Introduction

1. The 111th Session of the International Labour Conference, held from 5 to 16 June 2023, was the first session conducted fully in person since 2019. Meeting arrangements introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic that were deemed beneficial were retained, such as the possibility to submit pre-recorded video statements for the plenary and for participants to have passive remote access to committee sittings.
2. The 111th Session of the International Labour Conference achieved its objectives. Delegates' strong commitment to the ILO's mandate and their willingness to engage and find areas of convergence resulted in several significant outcomes, including the adoption of three new international labour standards and the programme and budget of the Organization.
3. This document analyses the effectiveness of the arrangements implemented at the 111th Session of the Conference and explores areas where further improvements could be made, building on the feedback received from constituents and the experience of members of the Secretariat.

► Participation

4. The lifting of travel restrictions and the return to a fully in-person meeting produced a significant increase in the number of accredited delegates, from 4,445 in 2022 to 6,095 in 2023. This was mainly due to the readmission of participants without active participation rights (officials accompanying ministers, persons appointed to replace advisers and other persons accompanying delegations). Of those 6,095 accredited delegates, 4,776 registered or attended in person. There was a slight decrease in the number of Member States participating.

► **Table 1. Number of accredited Member States and delegates (2018–23)**

	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
Member States	168	178	181	178	172
Accredited delegates	6 438	7 661	4 467	4 445	6 095

5. The overall proportion of women delegates and advisers remained low, at 36.5 per cent, despite repeated appeals by the Office to constituents to ensure greater gender balance in their delegations.

► Preparation and logistics

6. Unexpected delays in the renovation work at the Palais des Nations made it possible to hold the Conference at its traditional premises in 2023. The unavailability of the Assembly Hall, however, posed significant constraints. The plenary and the World of Work Summit were held in Room XX, which has significantly less capacity than the Assembly Hall. The special seating arrangements requiring special badges and restrictions on access to the conference room

caused difficulties for some delegations. This will not, however, be the case in 2024. The Office has received confirmation from the United Nations Office at Geneva that further delays in the renovation schedule will allow for the **2024 session of the Conference** to take place again at the **Palais des Nations** (from 3 to 14 June), with the same number of meeting rooms. The newly renovated Assembly Hall will be available and will accommodate the traditional eight seats per tripartite delegation.

7. Constituents recognized the Office's efforts to provide delegates with optimal conditions for their participation, notwithstanding the continuing constraints imposed by the renovation work at the Palais des Nations and at ILO headquarters. Improvements are needed, however, in certain aspects of the preparatory work, where new challenges were identified in addition to long-standing issues.
8. As in previous years, there was widespread recognition of the importance of securing **early nominations of the Officers of the Conference** and of the crucial role that committee chairpersons and spokespersons play in achieving consensus and in ensuring the smooth conduct of meetings. Some nominations, however, were only received shortly before the start of the session. Early identification of the Committee Officers is critical to the preparatory work, to ensure that they are provided with support in advance and briefed on ILO procedures and issues unique to the tripartite nature of the Organization. At the request of several constituents, and to assist groups in their nomination process, the Office will provide regional coordinators with a list of the duties of the chairpersons, a description of their tasks, and further relevant information that can help to identify potential chairpersons. Similar information will be provided to the secretariats of the Employers' and Workers' groups to facilitate the process of nominating their spokespersons.
9. In informal debriefings, national delegations called for the **early dissemination of key information** pertaining to the Conference. For future sessions of the Conference, the Office will ensure that an **advance information note** is published shortly after the Governing Body session in March 2024 when the proposed arrangements are approved, in advance of the Conference Guide that is normally published on the Conference website in May. Given that the numerous official communications containing detailed practical information (sent by note verbale or through the regional coordinators and group secretariats) were perhaps not effective enough in ensuring that participants were fully informed, the Office will explore alternative and more user-friendly forms of communicating information, through online tutorials, among others, in addition to the Conference Guide. It will also increase the number of briefings.
10. Participants requested further improvements in the **accreditation and registration procedures**, particularly in the issuance of badges. The Office will pursue possible solutions and find ways to mitigate the difficulties delegates faced, by making it possible for staff of Permanent Missions to collect badges for all Government delegates by proxy. A number of delegations also requested the Office to facilitate the process for introducing changes to the composition of their national delegations once the online platform has closed. The online accreditation platform depends on the Conference Management System (CMS), a database with associated applications that is at the centre of all the platforms and applications used by delegates and the Secretariat (online accreditation, registration and badges, processing of amendments and voting). This system, which has been in use for more than 20 years, generates a number of constraints, including for the transfer of data from the online accreditation platform to the CMS. The Office is currently exploring options to replace the ageing CMS, which could enable further improvements to the online accreditation process while ensuring the integrity of related processes, in particular electronic voting.

11. The old **electronic voting system**, which no longer met current cybersecurity standards, was replaced with a more secure and user-friendly system. The Office conducted several tests prior to the session of the Conference to ensure that the new system functioned successfully. Participation in voting was high, ranging from 78 to 82 per cent.
12. The Office provided several briefings on the new voting system to the regional Government groups and the Employers' and Workers' groups, included explanations of the rules of voting in *The International Labour Conference at a glance* guide and also published detailed instructions on how to use the new system. Nevertheless, some delegates encountered some of the same challenges faced in 2022, such as:
 - (a) a lack of familiarity with the rules on voting rights; some delegates were not aware of which members of a delegation had the right to vote;
 - (b) difficulty in receiving the necessary access codes by email due to firewall issues at the receiving end;
 - (c) a lack of clarity on whether votes were record votes, and not receiving confirmation from the system as to whether their vote had been registered.
13. In addition, some delegates were not aware that accreditation and registration are two separate processes, both of which are prerequisites to voting. In addition to being accredited, delegates have to register, and thus confirm their attendance at the Conference, to receive their access codes to vote. This step is often overlooked by Geneva-based delegates who already have an ILO or United Nations badge allowing them entry into premises, who may be unaware of the legal consequences of registering (and de-registering should they decide to leave before the end of the session). The Office can remedy similar information gaps in the future by producing user-friendly online tutorials and further increasing the number of information sessions for delegates on Conference procedures, particularly on voting, so that they are aware of what is required to be able to vote.
14. A number of participants experienced difficulties in logging into and using the **ILO Events app**, as a result of changes implemented by the service provider with no prior notice. Since June 2023, the Office has been exploring options with several providers to ensure that delegates do not experience the same problems at the next session of the Conference. It will also continue to explore ways to address the difficulties that some delegates had in accessing the app, to the extent possible.

► Conference plenary

15. The **World of Work Summit** on 14 and 15 June achieved a very high level of participation. Sixteen Heads of State or Government attended, in addition to representatives of employers' and workers' organizations, and discussed a range of issues centred on social justice, including the proposal to forge a Global Coalition for Social Justice.
16. Four high-level interactive panel discussions were held on the following themes: Addressing inequalities, informality and facilitating inclusion; Fostering equal opportunities and full, freely chosen and productive employment for all through education, lifelong learning and skills development; Jobs and social protection for just transitions; and Trade, employment and sustainable development: Advancing human and labour rights. The panels attracted a high level of interest and provided a unique space for heads of other United Nations entities and

multilateral bodies to share their perspectives on the action their respective organizations, and the multilateral system as a whole, needed to take to advance social justice further.

17. With the return to a fully in-person format, the number of statements made during the **plenary discussion of the Report of the Director-General and the Report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body** returned to pre-pandemic levels. In total, 104 ministers or their equivalent took the floor. Broken down by group, 43 per cent of statements were made by Government delegates, 27 per cent by Workers' delegates, 19 per cent by Employers' delegates, and 11 per cent by representatives of international organizations (table 2).

► **Table 2. Number of statements in the plenary, by group**

	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
Total number of statements	307	317	249	296	303
Ministers	95	104	95	90	104
Government delegates	43	32	29	44	26
Employers' delegates	55	56	44	51	56
Workers' delegates	75	81	66	77	80
Observers	39	44	36	34	37
No. of statements by women	79	66	66	84	87

18. The number of women who took the floor in the plenary (29 per cent of speakers compared to 71 per cent men) confirms that equal representation among speakers in the plenary remains a distant goal, as does gender balance in overall participation in the Conference.
19. With regard to the **format of participation**, almost all speeches were delivered in person. Only ten speakers (or 3 per cent of the total) opted to deliver their statements in a pre-recorded video.
20. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Conference, five minutes were assigned to statements on the Report of the Director-General and the Report of the Chairperson of the Governing Body. On the overall **time management**, all four presiding Officers ensured that sittings started punctually and that speakers adhered to the time limits. No extended sittings were necessary during the first week, with six out of eight sittings ending earlier than scheduled.
21. The compressed period for statements in plenary in the second week due to the two-day World of Work Summit and the high demand for speaking slots in that period inconvenienced many delegates and made it difficult for the Secretariat to accommodate requests to take the floor. Sittings had to be extended until as late as 8:45 p.m. to accommodate the 149 delegates who requested to speak in the second week. This figure represented 50 per cent of the total number of speakers in the plenary. The addition of one day in the first week by bringing forward the start of the plenary to Tuesday, 6 June did not help to distribute speaking slots more evenly, due to the very high number of ministers and delegates who attended only in the second week.
22. At the debriefings held in June, some groups therefore expressed a preference for a one-day World of Work Summit, on the Thursday of the second week, to avoid similar situations in the future and also to minimize the impact on the work of the committees. Constituents called for preparations for the Summit to begin earlier and for timely consultations on the selection of

the themes and formats of the panels, which will contribute to the timely identification of high-level participants.

23. While there is no established deadline for the publication of **Report of the Director-General**, constituents have requested that it be published three weeks before the opening of the session, to allow them sufficient time to analyse it and prepare their statements in plenary.
24. The introduction during the COVID-19 pandemic of 90-minute segments for the **adoption of committee reports** in plenary and of recommended speaking times for Committee Officers allowed for sound time management and should be retained.

► Conference committees

25. All committees successfully concluded their work. The technical committees produced the following outcomes:
 - (a) the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208);
 - (b) conclusions of the General Discussion Committee on a Just Transition;
 - (c) conclusions of the Recurrent Discussion Committee on Labour Protection.
26. As for the standing committees:
 - (a) the Finance Committee submitted its report to the Conference, including the recommendation to adopt a draft resolution concerning the adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2024–25 and the allocation of the budget income among Member States;
 - (b) the Committee on the Application of Standards presented its report to the Conference, including on the 24 individual country cases relating to the application of ratified Conventions by the Governments concerned;
 - (c) the Drafting Committee ensured the linguistic concordance of the draft Recommendation on quality apprenticeships in English, French and Spanish; the text of international labour standards adopted as of this session of the Conference is considered equally authentic in all three official languages;
 - (d) the General Affairs Committee submitted its recommendations to the Conference on all four matters referred to it: a draft resolution on the final provisions of international labour Conventions; proposals for the abrogation or withdrawal of 24 international labour standards; a draft Convention and a draft Recommendation concerning the partial revision of 15 international labour standards following the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO framework on fundamental principles and rights at work; and a draft resolution concerning the measures recommended by the Governing Body under article 33 of the Constitution on the subject of Belarus.
27. Feedback received by the Office identified key areas where improvements can be made. Recalling the protracted discussions in the Finance Committee, the social partners highlighted the need to learn lessons from the recent experience and explore ways to prevent similar situations from arising in the future. They called for greater inclusiveness within the Finance Committee, in line with the tripartite nature of the Organization, and for the Committee to remain within its remit and not venture into policy debates. Proposals in this regard could be explored for the Governing Body's consideration in due course.

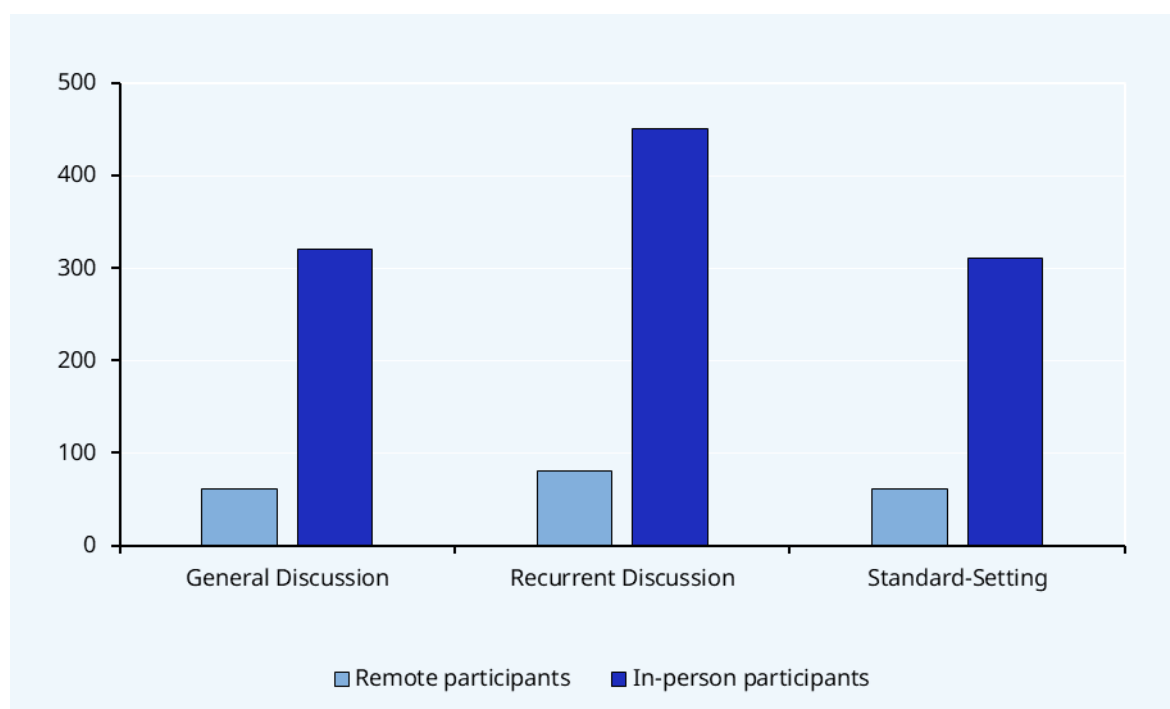
28. Governments reiterated the importance of conducting **tripartite consultations on the proposed points for discussion** for the **recurrent discussion committee and the general discussion committee** well in advance. The Office has committed to conducting such preparations for the 2024 session in good time. It will organize tripartite consultations in the first half of April on the proposed points for discussion, which will be shared simultaneously with all three constituent groups in advance, and on the tentative plan of work.
29. In addition, a preliminary exchange of views among the Committee Officers could be arranged remotely well in advance of the session, to pave the way for a smooth and effective discussion at the Conference. For this to happen, the Officers would have to be identified by mid-April. As mentioned above, the early nomination of the Officers would also allow for more in-depth briefings in a timely manner on key substantive and procedural matters.
30. As in previous years, and despite all of the efforts made to limit the number and duration of evening sittings, the recurrent and general discussion committees required several such sittings. The Governing Body may wish to consider further adjustments to the programme and methods of work of the committees to avoid sittings that go well beyond established working hours.
31. At the 2023 session, and in recent years, about 60 per cent of the text of the draft conclusions presented to the full committee was left in brackets, indicating a lack of agreement, despite extended sittings of the drafting group. To make the best use of the time available, the Office had proposed in 2022 to forgo the drafting group exercise and proceed directly to the submission of amendments to the tentative conclusions prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of the views expressed during the initial general discussion. This proposal received support from some groups, but not all.
32. The Governing Body may wish to consider an alternative proposal, under which the drafting group would produce the draft conclusions in one day, instead of two. The second day could instead be used as an additional day for the discussion of the amendments, which could contribute to avoiding evening sittings. This option would also be more inclusive, as it would allow all committee members to contribute more fully to the drafting of the outcome document. This option could be supplemented with other measures already mentioned, such as the early nomination of the Committee Officers and timely consultations ahead of the session of the Conference. The drafting group could be composed of a smaller number of members with particular knowledge of the topics concerned, to enhance the effectiveness of the preparation of the document for the Committee's examination.

► **Figure 1. Possible plan of work of the general discussion and recurrent discussion committees**

1/2 Mon (p.m.)	1 Tue	2 Wed	3 Thu	4 Fri	5 Sat	6 Mon	7 Tue	8 Wed	9 Thu (a.m.)
General discussion	Preparation of tentative conclusions by the Secretariat based on general discussion	Drafting group meets	Submission of amendments	Discussion of amendments					

33. The Governing Body may wish to consider this proposal at its 350th Session (March 2024), when it discusses the arrangements for the 2024 session of the Conference.
34. At the request of some groups, a remote connection was made available to allow participants to follow the committee proceedings online, albeit passively. As had been the case at the 2022 session of the Conference and at the last two sessions of the Governing Body, the majority of committee members participated in person (figure 2). This would indicate a recognition that attending in person allows committee members to work more effectively during negotiations and plays a critical role in facilitating consensus-based outcomes.

► **Figure 2. Remote and in-person participation in committees in 2023**



35. Providing a remote connection incurs additional costs. Figures provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva indicate a direct cost of US\$88,500. This does not include the indirect costs related to overtime compensation for technicians and operators, calculated at approximately US\$42,898.

► Communication

36. The communication strategy focused on engaging constituents and other priority audiences before, during and after the session. The majority of delegates interacted with the ILO communication stand, which provided the centrepiece for Conference-related communication at the Palais des Nations.
37. The live stream of the World of Work Summit saw a peak in page views on ILO Live, with more than double the number of page views of the 2022 session. It will be developed further to enhance the user experience and improve robustness, in the event of an external service failure during broadcast. The podcasts on how international labour standards are created and on a just transition generated over 8,000 page views during the two weeks, a 29 per cent increase from 2022. Engagement with the various social media platforms rose significantly

compared with 2022, to as high as 50 per cent on Twitter. The data derived from the 2023 session will be used to adapt the communication strategy for the 2024 session where needed, to ensure that the right channels and content are prioritized.

38. Five country communication officers were seconded to work with the Department of Communication and Public Information in an effort to raise the profile of the Conference at the country level. This successful experience will be repeated at future sessions.

► Draft decision

39. **The Governing Body requested the Office to prepare for its consideration at its 350th Session (March 2024) a detailed programme of work for the 112th Session (2024) of the International Labour Conference, taking into account the views expressed during the discussion of the measures implemented during the 111th Session (2023) of the Conference.**