

Governing Body - 343rd Session, November 2021
Institutional Section

Workers' Group Comments

Document for Ballot by Correspondence

GB.343/INS/3/3(Rev.1)

Matters arising out of the work of the 109th session (2021) of the International Labour Conference

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

When the Workers' Group agreed that this paper be submitted for a ballot by correspondence, we did so on the understanding that the document would draw lessons on the first part of the Conference with a view to improve the second part to be held in November. We are concerned that the document is of a very nature than what was previously indicated in the Screening Group. It now suggests to digitalize many aspects of future in-person Conferences. In light of this, the Workers' Group would have preferred this document to be discussed during the forthcoming Governing Body session.

We therefore ask the Office to take account of our comments in preparing the programme of work for the 2022 International Labour Conference that we will discuss at the March 2022 session of the Governing Body.

The Workers' Group agrees with the document that the first part of the virtual International Labour Conference (ILC) was successful given the exceptional circumstances. However, we wish to reiterate that our Group agreed to a virtual format of the Conference in 2021 only due to the very exceptional context created by the pandemic. We strongly believe that once the health situation allows, we will need to go back to the essence of democratic negotiations with all delegates and technical advisers present in Geneva. We thus support a full in-person Conference for 2022 and beyond should the health situation allow.

In this regard, we wish to reiterate the commitment taken in the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the Covid-19, for urgent and coordinated action, including in the multilateral context, to ensure that people in all regions have timely, equitable, affordable and global access to quality, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, as this will certainly facilitate the holding of in-persons meetings in Geneva with proper representation from all continents.

We agree that no adjustments to the special arrangements and procedures is required for the resumed part of the Conference, besides technical improvements.

The document makes some suggestions for the next and future sessions of the Conference taking into account the experience of the virtual format of the 109th Session. The Workers' Group expresses great concerns at attempts to "digitalize/virtualize" future International Labour Conferences.

We are also concerned that the document is silent on the challenges that many constituents, and workers' organizations in particular, currently face in terms of access to the adequate technological infrastructure and equipment to fully participate in ILO digital events.

Paragraph 7 proposes to extend the practice of holding preparatory meetings well before the start of the Conference and its Committees to future in-person sessions of the Conference, thus allowing committees to start their substantive work as of the first day of the session. This proposal should be read in conjunction with the information provided on attendance. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the average number of delegates who attended the plenary and committee sittings was quite low: only 37% of accredited delegates were connected on average to the plenary or committee sittings, which certainly shows the challenges of ensuring an effective participation in a Conference with a virtual format. Moreover, holding preparatory meetings virtually favours those workers' colleagues with easy on-line connections and undermines a proper exchange amongst all workers' delegates on an equal footing. We are therefore not in favour of the proposal made in paragraph 7.

Paragraph 16 proposes to limit the accreditation to the physical sessions of the Conference to persons with an institutional role on a trial basis. Other persons from national or observer delegations could follow the proceedings remotely or be given access on request as visitors sponsored by national constituents. Before agreeing to this proposal, we would need to understand better its implications for the workers' delegation. Should its principle be accepted, we would support the option of providing access to people as visitors.

We do not support the combined approach suggested in paragraph 17 of physical presence and remote participation. One thing is a Minister who prefers to send a video message for the plenary. A complete different thing is the actual tripartite delegation discussing in the CAS or in a technical Committee. Moreover, tripartite constituents – with the facilitation of the ILO – may use the opportunity to be in Geneva to meet outside the official Conference meetings. This important opportunity would be totally lost if some people would not travel to Geneva anymore. As the document also rightly indicates, a hybrid format would entail a challenge for those following the proceedings remotely from other time zones and would create discrimination amongst participants.

While we know that the Palais is going to be under renovation, other arrangements can be found in Geneva in terms of venue rather than relying on a hybrid format of the Conference.

Paragraph 22 proposes to split the formal, procedural opening of the Conference from the more substantive and ceremonial opening of the Conference. If this means having this first meeting virtually, we do not support it, as it would imply to work under greater pressure to nominate the workers' officers of the Conference and rely, again, on virtual means for our workers' preparatory meetings with the related constraints to ensure open, democratic and representative discussions.

We support the Office initiative of finding another system for links to connect to Committees, Group meetings and plenary for the second part of the Conference as the system used during the first part of the Conference created a lot of confusion. We appreciate the willingness to clarify, ahead of the second part of the Conference, this and other aspects that were not easy to understand for delegates and which impacted greatly on ACTRAV's workload.

In respect of paragraph 36, we would need to get more details on the proposed adjustments in the amendments' validation process before agreeing to them.

We support the rationale for reducing the amount of paper printed during the Conference. However, we do not think the conditions are met for a full paperless Conference. A limited

number of documents (such as amendments for instance at least for the Officers and supporting teams of the Committees) still require printing.