



Governing Body

341st Session, Geneva, March 2021

Institutional Section

INS

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Third item on the agenda

Agenda of the International Labour Conference

Arrangements for the 109th Session of the Conference (2021)

1. Convening a session of the International Labour Conference “at least once in every year” is a constitutional obligation under article 3(1) of the Constitution. When the Governing Body decided in April 2020 to defer the 109th Session from 2020 to 2021 it was at the time materially impossible to hold the Conference, due to the closure of borders and the suspension of air travel, or to organize it on such short notice through alternative means. While the evolution of the pandemic remains highly unpredictable, in light of the experience of the first virtual Governing Body session in November 2020 and the generalized practice of constituents meeting remotely in a wide range of forums over the past 12 months, it appears feasible today to convene the Conference in 2021 although in a substantially different format.
2. It is against this background that extensive consideration has been given in three rounds of consultations with the tripartite Screening Group (on 21 January, 18 February and 26 February 2021) to the adjustments that would be required in the content, format, duration, dates, programme and working methods for the Conference to discharge its constitutional obligations in 2021.
3. In these consultations, tripartite consensus emerged on the need to convene the 109th Session of the Conference in 2021:
 - (a) in a fully virtual format, except for the possible physical presence on meeting premises of Conference and Committee officers and group secretariats if the travel and sanitary situation so permits;

- (b) over a period of two and a half consecutive weeks, from Thursday, 3 June to Saturday, 19 June 2021 for virtual sittings of the plenary and all technical committees, with a brief formal opening of the Conference during the week of 17–23 May in order to duly constitute the Conference, elect the Officers and appoint the committees, with the post Conference Governing Body session to be held a week after the Conference closure;
 - (c) in which all participants should have, to the extent possible, similar and decent participation conditions, taking into account different connectivity standards and time zones; and
 - (d) requiring adjustments to procedures and working methods, as well as flexibility from all interested parties, to ensure efficient and effective Conference proceedings within the time and interaction constraints of a virtual format.
4. Regarding the content of the work of the Conference, in addition to the election of the Governing Body for the 2021–24 terms of office and consideration of the proposed comprehensive review of the Standing Orders of the Conference,¹ there was also tripartite consensus on the need to retain on the Conference agenda the following time-critical items necessary to ensure the proper functioning of the Organization and those items deemed of high institutional importance:

Standing items

- I. Reports of the Chairperson of the Governing Body and of the Director-General): the Director-General's programme implementation report for 2018–19, the report of the Director-General (devoted to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis), the reports concerning the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories for 2019 and for 2020, and the reports of the Chairpersons of the Governing Body covering the 2019–20 and 2020–21 periods of office;
- II. Draft Programme and Budget for 2022–23 and other questions: adoption of a Programme and Budget for 2022–23 and the allocation of the budget of income among Member States; adoption of the scale of assessments of contributions to the budget for 2022; adoption of the financial reports and audited consolidated financial statements for 2019 and 2020; permission to vote to any Member State in arrears of its contributions that may so request; appointments to the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO and the ILO Staff Pension Committee and amendments to the Statute of the Tribunal recommended by the Governing Body;²
- III. Information and reports on the application of Conventions and Recommendations.

Items placed on the agenda by the Conference or the Governing Body

- VII. Abrogation of eight international labour Conventions and withdrawal of ten international labour Conventions and 11 Recommendations; and
 - VIII. Any additional item that the Governing Body may decide to place on the agenda of the Conference.
5. There remain, however, divergent views on whether and to what extent it would be feasible or reasonable for tripartite constituents gathered in a virtual Conference to also deal with all three technical items currently on the Conference agenda (namely

¹ GB.341/LILS/1.

² GB.341/PFA/14(Rev.1); GB.341/PFA/15/1 and GB.341/15/2.

inequalities, skills and a recurrent discussion on social protection), or for the Committee on the Application of Standards to be able to deal with the same workload as under normal circumstances.

6. Concerning the procedural and logistical adjustments required to ensure a proper functioning of the Conference within the time and interaction constraints of remote participation, it should be noted that the definition of such adjustments is to a large extent dependent on a final determination of the agenda of the Conference, and in particular on the number of committees and corresponding group meetings that would have to work concurrently during the Conference.
7. Pending such determination on the Conference agenda, the Office will continue exploring and developing solutions in close consultation with the tripartite constituents with the aim of finalizing the special procedures and arrangements applicable to the 109th Session as soon as possible after a decision is made on the Conference agenda by the Governing Body. Special procedures and arrangements should be formally endorsed by the Governing Body, possibly through a decision by correspondence, not later than end of April, especially in the event of an early constitution of the Conference and its committees at mid-May 2021. This tight calendar will require frequent and detailed tripartite consultations in the weeks following the present Governing Body session.
8. The aspects concerning the operation of a virtual Conference on which the Office has been asked to prepare more detailed proposals include:
 - (a) a plan to identify the tripartite constituents in need of assistance to ensure adequate levels of connectivity and the possible measures to be implemented to secure such connectivity;
 - (b) detailed proposals to frontload as far as possible the preparatory work of the Conference with a view to freeing time for in-session social dialogue and wide tripartite negotiations;
 - (c) introduction of new means for constituents to share their views on the items under consideration, tailored to the context and purpose of each discussion, such as written or pre-recorded statements for the discussion of the reports of the Director-General and the Chairperson of the Governing Body, or targeted questionnaires in the case of technical committees with a view to the elaboration of draft conclusions;
 - (d) procedures allowing delegates to exercise their right of reply, or the more general right to respond or comment on other groups' positions, to pre-recorded comments or comments submitted in writing;
 - (e) procedures for the facilitation of negotiation of conclusions in technical committees; and
 - (f) a customized programme of work to reduce the number of Conference activities running in parallel.
9. An important aspect of the 2021 Conference on which further work is also required refers to the manner in which the drafting of the COVID-19 response document will progress in the lead up to the Conference and the level of finalization of such a document prior to the start of the Conference. In this respect, while there is large support for the submission of a close-to-final consensus text to the Conference, some believe that the COVID-19 response document should reflect and include the outcome of the Conference discussions on the three technical items on the agenda. The manner in which the tripartite discussion of those three important items could feed into the COVID-19 response document is entirely dependent on whether, how and when those discussions

will take place. The Office will prepare more detailed proposals in this regard, together with procedures for discussion of the COVID-19 response document, as soon as there is a decision on the retention of the three technical items on the Conference agenda.

- 10.** To enable the Office and Member States to finalize in time preparations necessary for the organization of a virtual session of the Conference at the suggested dates, the Governing Body is called upon, as a matter of urgency:
- (a) to confirm the general framework for a virtual session of the Conference as described in paragraph 3 above;
 - (b) to confirm the list of items for consideration and decision at the 109th Session of the Conference in June 2021 enumerated in paragraph 4 above;
 - (c) to decide whether to retain all three technical items on the Conference agenda for a discussion in 2021, and in the event that any of them would not be retained, when and how they should be discussed;
 - (d) to invite the Committee on the Application of Standards to adjust, as necessary, the parameters of its work in light of the views expressed in the context of the informal tripartite consultations on its working methods; and
 - (e) to confirm that the finalization of the special arrangements for the 109th Session should be undertaken through intensive consultations with the tripartite Screening Group and approved by correspondence no later than end of April 2021.

▶ Draft decision

11. The Governing Body:

- (a) **endorsed the general framework for the 109th Session of the Conference as described in paragraph 3 of document GB.341/INS/3/2;**
- (b) **decided to [retain]/[not retain] the following items on the agenda of the 109th Session of the Conference in addition to those listed in paragraph 4 of document GB.341/INS/3/2:**
 - IV. Inequalities and the world of work (general discussion);**
 - V. Recurrent discussion on the strategic objective of social protection (social security);**
 - VI. Skills and lifelong learning (general discussion);**
- (c) **requested the Office to finalize as a matter of priority, through tripartite consultations, the special procedures and arrangements applicable to the 109th Session of the Conference, for adoption by correspondence no later than end of April 2021; and**
- (d) **requested the Office to elaborate as a matter of priority, through the informal tripartite consultations mechanism on the working methods of the Committee on the Application of Standards, proposals for adoption by the Committee regarding its work and working methods in June 2021.**