



Governing Body

309th Session, Geneva, November 2010

GB.309/SG/DECL/1

Steering Group on the Follow-up to the Declaration (2008)

SG/DECL

FOR DEBATE AND GUIDANCE

FIRST ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Review of the process of the first recurrent discussion on employment

Overview

Issues covered

This paper aims to identify for the Steering Group lessons learned from the first recurrent discussion under the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

Policy implications

Preparation and discussion of future recurrent discussions at the International Labour Conference.

Financial implications

To be assessed.

Action required

The Steering Group is requested to provide guidance for future recurrent discussions on the basis of questions in paragraph 12.

References to other Governing Body documents and ILO instruments

GB.309/3/1, GB.309/WP/SDG/1.

Resolution concerning the recurrent discussion on employment, International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva 2010.

ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008.

1. When adopting the report of the first recurrent discussion on employment on 18 June 2010, the International Labour Conference (the Conference) also adopted a resolution which

... invites the Governing Body of the International Labour Office to: ... refer to the Steering Group on the Follow-up to the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (the Steering Group) the evaluation of the organization and impact of the first recurrent discussion, and report to the Governing Body in November 2010. This report should contain proposals for optimizing future recurrent discussions from the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference onwards.¹

This paper has been prepared with the aim of helping the Steering Group identify lessons learned from this first discussion under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (the Declaration) and to provide guidance for future Conference discussions.

2. The report prepared for the Committee for the Recurrent Discussion on Employment at the Conference in 2010 was based on extensive informal consultations and Governing Body discussions.² An annotated outline was discussed in late 2008 and in the early part of 2009, and agreement was reached on the outline for a thematic report and the main questions to be addressed. The preparation also included a paper submitted to the Committee on Employment and Social Policy (ESP Committee) of the Governing Body at its March 2009 session, which summarized and discussed the main strategic orientations of the Declaration for the work of the Office on the strategic objective of employment. Extensive informal consultations also took place around the draft report in the latter part of 2009 and in the first part of 2010.
3. The ESP Committee discussed the item in November 2009 and again in March 2010. Regional coordinators and the Employers' and Workers' groups' secretariats were consulted on the report and, once it had been finalized, on both the schedule of the committee and the questions for discussion. While the drafting was done under the responsibility of the Employment Sector, the preparations in the Office relied on interaction between all the technical sectors, departments and units as well as the regional offices. The Office-wide effort included a senior-level working party on the recurrent discussions which examined the concepts and the process of preparing the first, as well as subsequent, reports. Close cooperation also took place during the process of preparing the General Survey concerning employment instruments, adopted by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, with the team responsible for the report. The Office also undertook a thorough examination of a series of questions raised in the Annex of the Declaration which served as "knowledge-building blocks" and inputs for the report.
4. As a result of these consultations, the report aimed at broad coverage of the strategic objective of employment; it did not focus on one specific theme. The report had a strict thematic approach, with three chapters, one focused on employment policies, sustainable enterprises and skills (following the outcomes of the Strategic Policy Framework) and the other two chapters on the themes of the informal economy and trade and employment. The conclusions of the Committee for the Recurrent Discussion on Employment, adopted by the Conference, contain several detailed instructions on future activities, which will be

¹ ILO: Resolution concerning the recurrent discussion on employment, International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010, para. 2(c).

² ILO: Employment policies for social justice and a fair globalization, Report VI, International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010.

discussed separately by the Governing Body.³ The interaction between the General Survey and the recurrent discussion was assured by transmission, from the Chairperson of the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards to the Committee for the Recurrent Discussion on Employment, of a document it adopted containing a summary and the conclusions of its discussion on the General Survey concerning employment instruments. The Committee on the Application of Standards had advanced its discussion on the General Survey by one day to be able to reach this outcome and the Selection Committee had authorized the transmission in advance.

5. At the Committee for the Recurrent Discussion on Employment, there was also a presentation by the executive directors and the Director of the Gender Bureau about building coherence across the strategic objectives of the ILO. Indeed, the need to focus on coherence is one of the key messages both in the report of the Committee⁴ and in the discussion in the plenary of the Conference preceding the adoption of the report.⁵
6. Another issue in the preparation of the report and the discussions in the Committee for the Recurrent Discussion on Employment was the extent to which the current financial, economic and employment crisis would be covered. The initial concept was that the Committee would address the work done on the broad issue of employment while the focus on the crisis would be a natural part of the debate in the plenary of the Conference. However, the Committee did devote much of its time to the crisis and the response to it. One of the key points of the conclusions (point 50) in fact relates primarily to coherence and the macroeconomic response to the crisis.⁶
7. Another challenging issue in the consultations was the fact that there were different expectations on the extent to which the report and the discussion should be about governance issues related to the Office and/or about country employment policies and their impacts. The report attempted to balance these two aspects. However, the different expectations were also reflected in the varying appreciations of the report itself. It is also important to note that there was a considerable difference between the themes as agreed in the consultations and covered by the various chapters of the report and the agreed discussion points. The latter included issues that were not covered by the report. Conversely, certain chapters covered themes which were not systematically discussed by the Committee (such as sustainable enterprises).

³ GB.309/3/1.

⁴ ILO: Report of the Committee for the Recurrent Discussion on Employment, *Provisional Record* No. 18, International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010.

⁵ ILO: *Provisional Record* No. 22, International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010.

⁶ “50. Request the Director-General to rapidly initiate discussions with the main international financial and economic institutions and other relevant international bodies with the objective to achieve a better coherence between economic, financial, employment and social policies at the international level. Invite the Director-General to submit to the November 2010 session of the Governing Body a document outlining the elements and possible forms of a framework with the objective of promoting coherence between these policies. This document should provide a coherent framework to give governments and social partners the best possible advice to achieve full and productive employment and decent work at the centre of economic and social policies, while enhancing cooperation and exchange of experiences among them. In preparing the elements of such a framework, the Office should consult with the main economic and financial international institutions with a view to achieve a better coherence among economic, financial, employment and social policy at the international level, bearing in mind the contribution this can also make to facilitate coherence amongst government policies at the national level and their advocacy internationally.”

8. In the plenary debate at the Conference,⁷ the Employers called for future reviews to ensure a balance between explaining existing policies and looking at their impact. Future reports should explain what difference ILO policies and activities have made; they need to contain more impact information and focus more on cross-cutting issues where the focus on one strategic objective could be a significant factor in the ability to achieve another.
9. The Workers noted that the process had not been easy and could certainly be improved. Although, according to them, the report had not met their expectations, the process in the Committee had been successful. The ILO was a learning organization which would do better next year. The Workers recalled that the recurrent discussions were aimed at understanding the diverse realities of member States with respect to each strategic objective and responding to them using all the means of action at the disposal of the Organization, including standards-related action.
10. Some Government representatives stressed that in the future, reports for recurrent discussions should be shorter, more succinct, to the point, analytical and cross-cutting, to demonstrate the genuine interdependence of the four strategic objectives. Others called for the necessary coherence and coordination to be promoted at all levels, above all at the international level, between economic, financial, social and employment policies, as well as for setting a very specific calendar to build a framework for promoting coherence.
11. The Governing Body will be discussing the substantive questions relating to coherence between the main international financial and economic institutions, which is referred to in point 50 of the conclusions, separately under the relevant agenda items, i.e. in the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization and in the Governing Body itself.⁸ It should also be noted that the conclusions of the discussion are taken into account to guide future actions of the Office within the Strategic Policy Framework, including the preparations of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2012–13.
12. In light of the above, and to follow up on paragraph 2(c) of the resolution, the members of the Steering Group may wish to address, and provide further guidance on, the following issues:
 - (a) Does the Steering Group consider that the process of consultations for the recurrent discussion report and the Committee discussion was satisfactory? In particular, did the discussion on the preparations in the ESP Committee facilitate, and contribute to, the outcome of the Conference discussion? Should such preliminary discussions in a relevant Governing Body committee be a regular part of the process for preparing future recurrent discussions?
 - (b) What is an optimal balance between the recurrent reports and discussions focusing on policy challenges and lessons learned in different countries and regions or on the results of the Office's activities (referred to in the Annex to the Declaration)?⁹
 - (c) How should the interaction between the General Survey and the recurrent discussion report and the two relevant Conference committees be pursued? While for the next two years the General Surveys relate to the instruments that are directly relevant to the recurrent discussions, should the General Surveys eventually be prepared for the

⁷ See *Provisional Record*. No. 22, op. cit.

⁸ GB.309/WP/SDG/1 and GB.309/3/1.

⁹ ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, Annex, part II(B)(ii).

year preceding a recurrent discussion on the same theme in order to enable sufficient time for discussion in the Committee on the Application of Standards?

- (d) Should future recurrent discussion reports focus on a more specific theme or cover several themes under each of the strategic objectives? How can the desire for shorter and more focused reports be reconciled with an expectation that they give a comprehensive picture of each of the strategic objectives and their linkages with one another?¹⁰
- (e) What should be the recurrent discussions for 2013 and 2014? Should the 2013 topic be social dialogue, with a second employment report in the cycle in 2014, followed by social protection (occupational safety and health) in 2015?
- (f) Should there be a review by the Governing Body of the experiences with the recurrent discussions after the 2011 recurrent discussion on social security or after the 2012 recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work?

- 13.** The Steering Group is invited to express its views on the above questions, together with any other observation it might wish to make regarding lessons learned from the process of the first recurrent discussion and guidance for future recurrent discussions.

Geneva, 30 September 2010

Submitted for debate and guidance

¹⁰ At this session of the Governing Body, the ESP Committee will discuss an update on the recurrent item on social security for the 2011 Conference.