



Governing Body

331st Session, Geneva, 26 October–9 November 2017

GB.331/INS/3

Institutional Section

INS

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THIRD ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Follow-up to the resolution on Advancing Social Justice through Decent Work: Framework for recurrent discussions

Purpose of the document

The Governing Body is invited to discuss and adopt the revised framework for recurrent discussions (see the draft decision in paragraph 4).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome/cross-cutting policy driver: All.

Policy implications: Implications for the functioning of future recurrent discussions.

Legal implications: None at this stage.

Financial implications: None at this stage.

Follow-up action required: Future recurrent discussions to be prepared and organized in accordance with the framework adopted.

Author unit: Management and Reform and Policy portfolios.

Related documents: GB.328/INS/5/2; GB.328/PV; GB.329/INS/3/1; GB.329/PV; GB.331/INS/5; GB.331/INS/8; GB.331/LILS/3; GB.331/PFA/4; ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008; resolution on Advancing Social Justice through Decent Work adopted by the Conference at its 105th Session (2016).

1. At its 328th Session (November 2016), the Governing Body provided guidance on a framework for recurrent discussions on the basis of an initial proposal prepared by the Office.¹ It requested the Office to prepare, in light of the discussion, a revised framework for deliberation and adoption at its 331st Session (November 2017) and to commence its preparation of the recurrent discussion on social dialogue and tripartism selected for the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference (2018) in the light of the framework.
2. During the 328th Session (November 2016) of the Governing Body, there was a broad consensus for a framework to enable recurrent discussions to better serve their intended purpose under the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (Social Justice Declaration) as both a knowledge and governance tool and to distinguish them from general discussions. Members have also expressed their support for the proposed four key elements of the framework covering: preparation of the report for recurrent discussions; organization of recurrent discussions; outcome of recurrent discussions and its follow-up; and linkages between General Surveys and recurrent discussions.
3. This document presents the revised framework in the light of the discussion and the guidance provided. Broad consultations have been conducted both within the Office and with constituents and the revised framework has also taken into account the experience under the recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work at the 106th Session of the Conference (2017). Enhancements are proposed in the section on linkages between General Surveys and recurrent discussions, drawing on and subject to the outcomes and progress under the Standards Initiative.² Flexibility has also been built into the revised framework. The framework is presented in the appendix as a stand-alone document for ease of reference and to ensure user-friendliness.

Draft decision

4. *The Governing Body:*

- (a) *adopts the framework for recurrent discussions presented in the appendix of document GB.331/INS/3; and*
- (b) *requests the Director-General to apply the framework for the preparation and organization of future recurrent discussions starting from 2018, taking into account the guidance provided by the Governing Body.*

¹ GB.328/INS/5/2, paras 21–31.

² GB.331/INS/5.

Appendix

Framework for recurrent discussions

Purpose and objectives of recurrent discussions

1. The introduction of a scheme of recurrent discussions by the International Labour Conference is a major innovation of the Social Justice Declaration. It is a key knowledge and governance tool, the intended purpose of which is to:
 - (a) understand better the diverse realities and needs of Members with respect to each of the strategic objectives;
 - (b) respond more effectively to them, using all the means of action at the disposal of the Organization;
 - (c) adjust the Organization's priorities and programmes of action accordingly; and
 - (d) assess the results of the ILO's activities with a view to informing programme, budget and other governance decisions.¹
2. A new five-year cycle and sequence for recurrent discussions for the period from 2018 to 2023 was decided by the Governing Body at its 328th Session (November 2016).²
3. The resolution on Advancing Social Justice through Decent Work adopted at the 105th Session (2016) of the International Labour Conference highlights that "recurrent discussions need to be improved to achieve a better understanding of the diverse realities and needs of Members and to realize their value as a tool for assessing implementation of the Social Justice Declaration and for informing future action."³ The resolution also calls for the adoption of appropriate modalities to better focus recurrent discussions and ensure that they are grounded in current realities and challenges so as to achieve fully their specific purpose under the Social Justice Declaration.
4. This framework is developed in response to these calls as well as on the basis of progress made in improving the functioning of the Conference and experience in the first cycle of recurrent discussions. It provides guidance to improve future recurrent discussions in four key areas: (i) preparation of the report for recurrent discussions; (ii) organization of recurrent discussions; (iii) outcome document and its follow-up; and (iv) linkages between General Surveys and recurrent discussions.

Preparation of the report for recurrent discussions

5. The preparation of the report to the Conference for the recurrent discussion is an important undertaking for the Office as a whole. It requires Office-wide collaboration between different portfolios and departments in Geneva and between headquarters and the field. For each recurrent discussion, a small working group consisting of staff from relevant portfolios, departments and offices should be established to draft the report to be submitted to the Conference. A task force headed by a Deputy Director-General and composed of

¹ [Social Justice Declaration](#), Annex, Part II(B).

² Social dialogue and tripartism in 2018; social protection (social security) in 2020; employment in 2021; social protection (labour protection) in 2022; and fundamental principles and rights at work in 2023.

³ See para. 8 of the [resolution](#).

representatives from both headquarters and the field should be formed to provide guidance and advice to the working group.

6. A common and yet flexible structure of the report should be developed to improve its quality and enhance coherence across all recurrent discussions. Despite the fact that each strategic objective has its own specificities that may lead to different ways of structuring or drafting the corresponding report,⁴ there should be certain similarities across all reports since they serve a common purpose. The structure of the report could comprise:
 - (a) a focused review and analysis of global trends and challenges and of the diversified needs of the constituents in relation to the strategic objective in question;
 - (b) an assessment of action taken by Members to date with a view to identifying good practices, gaps and needs, including efforts as regards the ratification and implementation of ILO standards;
 - (c) an assessment of action taken by the Organization in terms of governance, international labour standards, programming frameworks – including those relating to the Sustainable Development Goals and to Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), research and knowledge development, institutional capacity building, development cooperation, and policy coherence and partnerships. In this respect, the conclusions and action plans arising from the previous recurrent discussion should serve as the baseline;
 - (d) consideration of interrelations between the actions undertaken or promoted by the ILO, and those of other international and regional organizations, in order to assess synergies and minimize any contradiction or duplication;
 - (e) an evidence-based analysis of the integrated approach to decent work, focusing on synergies between the strategic objective being examined and the other three. Particular attention should be given to social dialogue, fundamental principles and rights at work and environmental sustainability, as well as to gender equality and non-discrimination also as cross-cutting issues; and
 - (f) proposals for future priorities and activities, including in standard-setting activities, capacity building, technical advisory services for constituents, research and development cooperation.
7. The report should be succinct and evidence-based, with an emphasis on updating existing knowledge and on action taken since the previous recurrent discussion on the same strategic objective. It should avoid repeating information in previous reports and instead highlight recent developments and identify topics of emerging importance, as well as innovative and replicable approaches based on a wide range of sources – the constituents, outcomes of sectoral meetings or other meetings of experts, research, development cooperation, standards-related action, publications of other multilateral organizations and information obtained through the corresponding General Survey. The synthesis report by the Evaluation Office to review and analyse lessons learned from the ILO interventions on the corresponding strategic objective should be made available in due time and should inform the preparation of the recurrent discussion report.
8. A broad and intensive process of consultations with constituents on the structure and topics of the Office report should start at an early stage to ensure that the report is relevant and reflects the views and expectations of the tripartite constituents. To facilitate such advance consultations, the Governing Body could decide to provide guidance as to the scope of the

⁴ In 2010, the Conference adopted a [resolution on the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#) which provides, in its Part III, details for the report to be submitted for a recurrent discussion on the strategic objective on fundamental principles and rights at work.

recurrent discussion and the proposed annotated outline of the Office report in the form of an exchange of views.

9. Moreover, experience has shown that informal consultations with the tripartite constituents after the report has been finalized (usually in January) and before the Conference begins are extremely productive. Continued informal consultations on concise and specific proposed points for discussion, working methods of the Committee (e.g. high-level exchanges and informal knowledge-sharing sessions) and key elements or building blocks for the outcome document (where appropriate and on a case-by-case basis) could enable more efficient and effective discussions by the Committee at the Conference.
10. The proposed points for discussion should be formulated to stimulate constructive debates and be policy and action oriented, with a focus on the way forward. Where necessary, a brief addendum report, to be made available to constituents no later than early May, could be prepared by the Office to summarize key issues and opportunities that may have emerged from the informal consultations. Such an addendum report would help delegates to the Conference to better prepare themselves for their participation in the Committee and help to focus the discussions on substantive issues. It should not in any way pre-empt the constituents' deliberations at the Conference.

Organization of recurrent discussions

11. There are no clear provisions in the Standing Orders of the Conference regulating working methods for non-standard-setting discussions. In practice, the proposed plan of work for recurrent discussion Committees is based on a format that comprises four parts: general discussion; drafting group; submission of amendments; and discussion of amendments. Members have expressed support for recurrent discussions to include interactive and dynamic discussions with the participation of key stakeholders in addition to the tripartite constituents.
12. In this regard, high-level exchanges with representatives from relevant regional and international organizations, as well as with representatives of the social partners and government entities, and other external experts could become regular practice in recurrent discussions. Furthermore, high-level tripartite exchanges on practices at the country level, based on in-depth country policy studies,⁵ where appropriate, could also be organized. These high-level exchanges would be organized on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the relevance of their inputs to the subject at hand. Their purpose would be to better equip delegates with further inputs and information and to help identify good practices and innovative approaches that work. In this respect, these high-level exchanges should be scheduled before relevant points for discussion are discussed by the Committee so as to inform the deliberations of the members of the Committee.
13. Where appropriate, information sessions to share national experiences and good practices could be organized for other members of the Committee while the drafting group is working on the draft outcome document.

Outcome document and its follow-up

14. The outcome document should be concise, focused, policy and action oriented, and based on the Committee's deliberations. After a brief section on trends and lessons learned with regard to the strategic objective under review, the outcome document should identify priority areas for action by the Organization, its Members (governments and workers' and employers' organizations) and the Office. It should cover all the means of action of the Organization, including standards-related action, institutional capacity development, development cooperation, technical and advisory services, and research capacity of the

⁵ GB.331/PFA/4.

Office, as well as partnerships and policy coherence. It should also provide specific guidance on priorities for follow-up action in terms of programming and resource allocation and mobilization. The outcome document should also contribute to proposals for the Conference agenda for the standard-setting and general discussion items.

15. Consideration should be given to the concrete implications for the programme and budget in the process of drafting the outcome document. The outcomes of the recurrent discussion should feed into the programme and budget cycle and inform priority setting and resource mobilization and allocation in the formulation and implementation of the biennial programme. This includes careful consideration of how the follow-up action could be incorporated into DWCPs.
16. The outcome document should also identify follow-up mechanisms for its implementation. The discussion at the November session of the Governing Body following the Conference session should identify how the priorities identified by the Conference will be systematically integrated into existing and future programmes and budgets and monitored through the integrated programme and budget policy outcome review/reporting within the framework of the four strategic objectives.⁶

Linkages between General Surveys and recurrent discussions

17. Under the resolution on Advancing Social Justice through Decent Work, the ILO should “Adopt modalities to ensure that general surveys and the related discussion by the Committee on the Application of Standards contribute to the recurrent discussions as appropriate”.⁷ These modalities will make the best use of the implementation of the Standards Initiative.
18. Drawing on, and subject to, outcomes and progress under the Standards Initiative and in order for General Surveys to better inform the recurrent discussions in line with Part I(A) of the Follow-up to the Social Justice Declaration, efforts should be made to:
 - (a) enhance alignment of the topics of General Surveys with those of recurrent discussions and maintain synchronization with the General Survey review in the Committee on the Application of Standards one year in advance of the corresponding recurrent discussion;
 - (b) coordinate the General Survey with the corresponding recurrent discussion at the earliest possible stage, particularly at the time of proposals to the Governing Body in relation to the subject matter of General Surveys, the corresponding instruments to be selected and the format of the questionnaire;
 - (c) develop the General Survey questionnaire following a targeted thematic approach based on the principles and provisions of the standards concerned and in light of the issues to be addressed by the corresponding recurrent discussion, while striving to ease the reporting obligations for member States. Where necessary, limited additional questions, including on broader policy matters and linked to the achievement of the broader strategic objective, could be added to the article 19 questionnaire to elicit information from Members which otherwise is not available to the Office but is important to inform the preparation of the recurrent discussion report;
 - (d) strengthen intra-Office collaboration in the development of General Survey questionnaires and the provision of support to Members, to facilitate the submission of

⁶ GB.331/INS/8.

⁷ See subparagraph 15.2(b) of the [resolution](#).

reports to be used in the preparation of General Surveys, through specific arrangements to be put in place by the Office; and

- (e) enhance formats to be used for the analysis and presentation of information in the General Survey report and the modalities of its discussions by the Committee on the Application of Standards so as to better understand the realities, needs and gaps of Members and thereby inform the corresponding recurrent discussion.