



Governing Body

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Institutional Section

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ILO regional meetings: Consideration of possibilities to maintain, discontinue or adapt future meetings

Purpose of the document

This document presents the evaluative assessment of the impact of regional meetings that was carried out as a follow-up to the decision taken by the Governing Body at its 346th Session (October–November 2022). The document outlines various options for the consideration of the Government Body (see the draft decision in paragraph 5).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

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

Policy implications: None.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: The Office to prepare a detailed proposal on one of the options for the 349th Session (October–November 2023) of the Governing Body.

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

Related documents: [GB.346/INS/PV](#); [GB.346/INS/17/7](#).

1. At the 346th Session (October–November 2022) of the ILO Governing Body, the Director-General proposed the discontinuation of regional meetings and the reallocation of the corresponding resources to strengthen the ILO’s field operations.¹ Governing Body members expressed divergent views and requested the Office to “undertake an evaluation, differentiated by region, including a cost–benefit analysis, of the impact of the regional meetings”, and to place an item on the agenda of its 347th Session (March 2023) concerning “the possibility to either maintain, discontinue or adapt regional meetings for its examination and decision”.²
2. The evaluative assessment was conducted from 5 December 2022 to 3 February 2023 by two external consultants, who applied a wide range of tools to measure the impact of regional meetings. It covers four regional meetings:³ (i) the 16th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (Bali, 2016); (ii) the 10th European Regional Meeting (Istanbul, 2017); (iii) the 19th American Regional Meeting (Panama, 2018); and (iv) the 14th African Regional Meeting (Abidjan, 2019). The analytical work also considered how ILO regional meetings have evolved since the current format was established in 1996.
3. The report submitted by the consultants is appended. It outlines the following options for the consideration of the Governing Body:
 - Option 1: Maintain the status quo.
 - Option 2: Discontinue ILO regional meetings.
 - Option 3.1: Attach ILO regional meetings to sessions of the International Labour Conference in Geneva.
 - Option 3.2: Attach ILO regional meetings to sessions of the International Labour Conference rotating among the regions.
 - Option 3.3: Attach ILO regional meetings to existing regional gatherings organized by other entities.
 - Option 3.4: Ad hoc approach by region.
 - Option 4: Move from ILO regional meetings to ILO regional forums.
4. If the Governing Body were to retain option 4 as set out in the consultants’ report, the Office could prepare for the consideration of the Governing Body at its next session a detailed report on the format and necessary amendments to the current framework regulating regional meetings, subject to the guidance received during the discussion.

▶ Draft decision

5. **The Governing Body requested the Office to prepare for its consideration at its 349th Session (October–November 2023) a proposal for the format of regional forums, taking into account the views expressed and the guidance provided during the discussion.**

¹ GB.346/INS/17/7.

² GB.346/INS/PV, para. 666.

³ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no regional meetings took place in 2020 and 2021. The cycle resumed in 2022 with the 17th Asia and Pacific Regional Meeting, held in Singapore in December 2022. Only some aspects of that regional meeting are included in the appended report, given how recently it took place.

▶ Appendix

Report of the evaluative assessment of the impact of ILO regional meetings

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1. Evolution of the format, rules and practices of ILO regional meetings

1. Regional conferences or meetings have been a long-standing feature of the International Labour Organization as a means of supporting its global governance.¹ The first ILO regional conference took place in 1936 in the Americas (Santiago), when travel was by sea and communications with headquarters were difficult and costly. This was followed by a second American regional conference three years later, in Havana, and a third seven years after that, in Mexico. After post-war decolonization and the increased number of ILO Member States, these conferences began taking place in other regions. Asia and the Pacific, which for the purposes of regional meetings also includes the countries covered by the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States, held its first regional conference in 1947 (in New Delhi). The first European Regional Meeting was held in 1955 (in Geneva) and the first African Regional Meeting in 1960 (in Lagos). However, it was only in 1973 that the Governing Body established the current practice of convening one ILO regional gathering every year, rotating among the four regions.
2. Regional meetings are not a decision-making body. Under article 38 of the ILO Constitution, adopted in 1946, the convening of such gatherings is optional and the functions and procedure should be governed by rules drawn up by the Governing Body and confirmed by the Conference.
3. ILO regional conferences operated without standing orders until 1948, when the International Labour Conference adopted formal rules governing them. Those rules were amended several times and remained in force until 1996, when the Governing Body decided, mainly for budgetary reasons, to replace the two-week regional conferences with shorter regional meetings² of one week. The first regional meeting was held in Bangkok in 1997.
4. The new format was applied on an experimental basis in the five regional meetings held between 1997 and 2001. Slight adaptations were made, and this established a standard pattern for all regional meetings held since then:
 - **Purpose:** Regional meetings support the global governance of the ILO and offer the opportunity for tripartite delegations to discuss the programming and implementation of the ILO's activities in the region.³
 - **Agenda:** The Report of the Director-General is the only item on the agenda.
 - **Duration:** Regional meetings are four days long, unless the Governing Body decides otherwise.
 - **Outcome:** Conclusions are produced to guide the future work of the ILO in the region, which are negotiated by a drafting group and adopted by the meeting plenary.
5. Minor modifications were made to the rules for regional meetings in 2002 and 2008. The Governing Body also agreed that the rules should be prefaced by a non-binding introductory note. Furthermore, at its 311th Session (June 2011), the Governing Body decided to review the functioning of regional meetings as part of the overall reform to achieve more effective governance of the Organization.⁴ After further discussions in 2016 and 2017, the Governing

¹ A total of 60 ILO regional conferences and meetings have been held: 19 in the Americas, 17 in Asia and the Pacific (including the Arab States), 14 in Africa and ten in Europe.

² For the purposes of article 38 of the Constitution, regional meetings should be considered to be regional conferences.

³ ILO, *Rules for regional meetings*, 2021, 5.

⁴ Within the Working Party on the Functioning of the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference. See also GB.328/WP/GBC/2 and GB.329/WP/GBC/4(Rev.).

Body adopted the rules that are currently in place at its 332nd Session (March 2018),⁵ which were subsequently endorsed by the International Labour Conference.

6. Over time, some improvements to the practical arrangements have been introduced, in particular with respect to the following:
- **Credentials:** A preliminary list of participants is published online one week before each regional meeting and two updated lists are published during the meeting.
 - **Location:** The introductory note to the rules states that regional meetings are held in the country where the relevant ILO regional office is located, unless the Governing Body decides otherwise. After the adoption of the new format in 1996, the seven subsequent regional meetings were held in the city of the respective regional offices. However, as from the 7th European Regional Meeting (Budapest, 2005), 12 out of the 16 regional meetings have been held elsewhere in the region.
 - **Agenda:**
 - (i) Thematic panels on key topics were introduced progressively from 2003.
 - (ii) Recent experience shows that regional meetings tend to receive additional mandates from the Governing Body or the International Labour Conference:
 - o In March 2014 the Governing Body requested the Office to include in the programme of regional meetings a special session on the promotion of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration), which is still organized at all regional meetings.
 - o Other similar decisions were discontinued (such as the ratification campaign for the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930⁶), or were never implemented (such as a discussion of the Conference resolution accompanying the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)).
 - **Outcome document:**
 - (i) Since the 9th European Regional Meeting (Oslo, 2013) the format of the outcome document has been reduced to a short declaration, statement or initiative, instead of lengthy conclusions.
 - (ii) The regional meetings still approve the outcome document, but no longer adopt the report of the meeting.⁷
 - **Possibility of remote participation:** The most recent regional meeting (the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting, Singapore, 2022) allowed invitees who were unable to participate in person to attend online, on an exceptional basis.

⁵ Including the principle that each Member State is a full member only in the meeting of the region where the country is located, with observer status being granted to Member States responsible for the external relations of territories in other regions.

⁶ This took place only once, at the 13th African Regional Meeting (Addis Ababa, 2015).

⁷ The draft report of the 16th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting was not submitted for adoption by the Meeting but was posted on the web. Participants had a deadline to submit amendments to their own statements. In addition, note-takers and translators are no longer physically present at the regional meeting but work from headquarters or from the respective regional office.

- **Information technology:**

- (i) Paper-smart approaches have been applied since the 9th European Regional Meeting (Oslo, 2013), with documentation provided to delegates on a pen drive, and since the 14th African Regional Meeting (Abidjan, 2019) through access to the ILO Events mobile app.
- (ii) Accreditation has been handled online since the 19th American Regional Meeting (Panama, 2018). Since the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (Singapore, 2022) badges have included a photograph (and, whenever possible, biometric passports are used for accreditation), thus improving security.

- **Communications:**

- (i) Since the 17th American Regional Meeting (Santiago, 2010), journalists have been brought in to cover the regional meetings.
- (ii) Since the 14th African Regional Meeting (Abidjan, 2019), the meeting has been broadcast publicly.

7. Despite these improvements, the overarching format of ILO regional meetings remains essentially the same as that adopted by the Governing Body in 1996.

2. Attendance at ILO regional meetings

8. An analysis of attendance at regional meetings by tripartite delegations and Heads of State and ministers shows no trend common to the four regions. At the four regional meetings under review, average attendance was 81 per cent of eligible Member States, representing a slight reduction compared with earlier regional meetings. In addition, several national delegations were reported to be not fully tripartite – a trend that, unfortunately, seems to be increasing in all regions.⁸ Considering all meetings since 2000 (figure 1⁹), participation decreased somewhat in Asia and the Pacific¹⁰ and Europe¹¹ over the last four regional meetings. In the Americas and Africa, participation increased, except for the most recent regional meeting.¹² Moreover, in the case of Africa, Europe and Asia and the Pacific, more Member States participate in the International Labour Conference than in the respective regional meeting, whereas in the Americas, more participate in the respective regional meeting.

⁸ For comprehensive up-to-date information on incomplete and non-accredited delegations at the four regional meetings, see [GB.347/LILS/2](#).

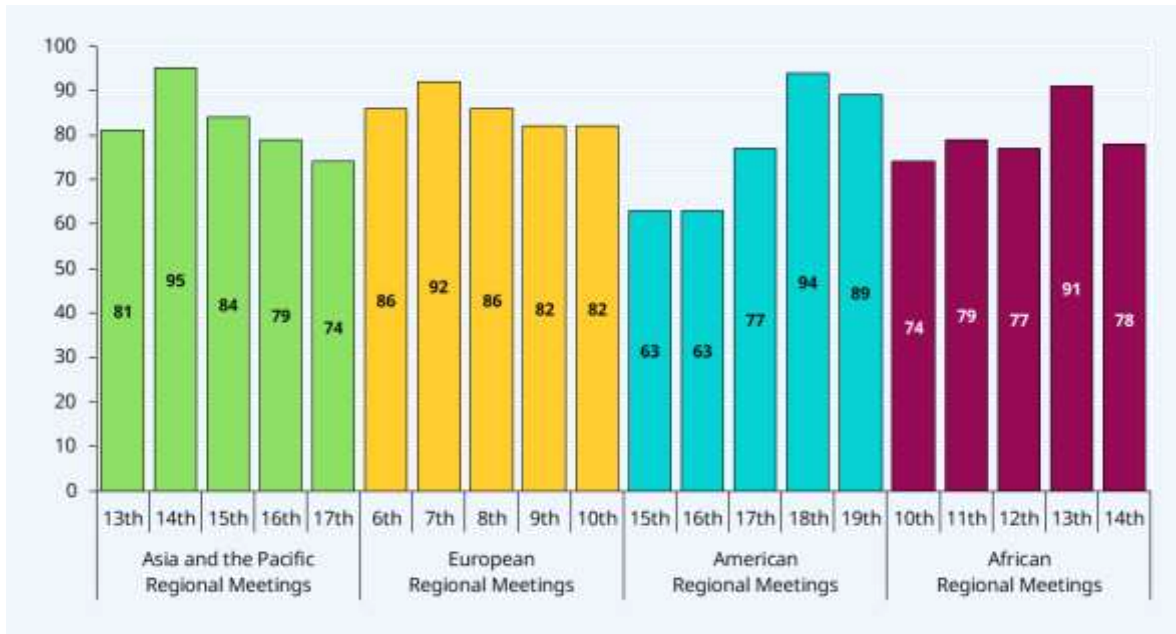
⁹ Due to differences in regional composition, figure 1 presents participation as a percentage of eligible Member States, not as absolute figures.

¹⁰ Since 2000, ten new Member States from Asia and the Pacific have joined the ILO.

¹¹ Participation in the 10th European Regional Meeting (Istanbul, 2017) was affected by the call of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to their affiliated organizations not to participate in the event.

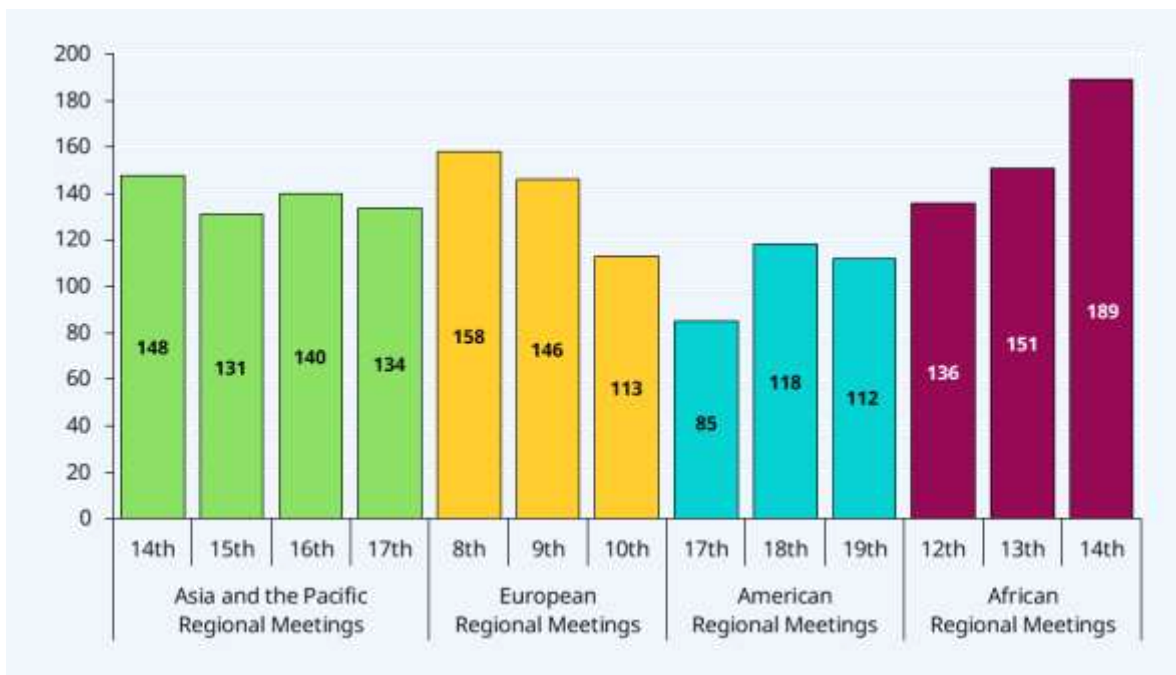
¹² Figures 1, 2 and 3 include the recent 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (Singapore, 2022).

► **Figure 1. Percentage of eligible Member States attending regional meetings since 2000**



9. The number of titular delegates attending regional meetings (figure 2) appears to be stable in Asia and the Pacific, decreasing in Europe, fluctuating in the Americas and increasing in Africa. The participation of women has been increasing continuously in all regions, to the current average of 31.8 per cent women in delegations.¹³

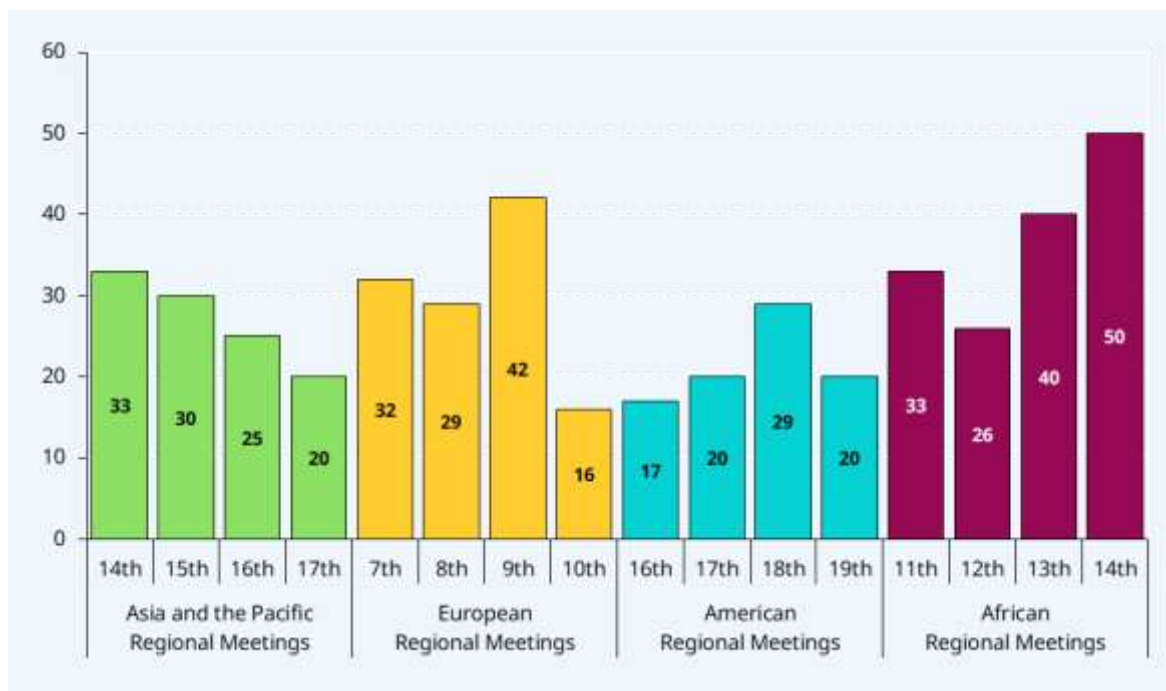
► **Figure 2. Number of registered titular delegates at regional meetings since 2006**



¹³ For comprehensive information on the participation of women in regional meetings, see GB.347/LILS/2.

10. The participation of Heads of State and ministers (figure 3) has varied significantly over time and from one regional meeting to another, possibly related to the attractiveness and accessibility of the host city or country. Overall, their attendance has decreased in Asia and the Pacific and Europe (except for the 9th European Regional Meeting (Oslo, 2013)) and increased generally in Africa and the Americas (except for the 19th American Regional Meeting (Panama, 2018)).

► **Figure 3. Heads of State and ministers attending regional meetings since 2005**



3. Cost-benefit analysis

3.1. Methodology

11. Data for the cost-benefit analysis was collected through: (i) consultations with government representatives from the various regions, with the workers' and employers' groups, and with a wide range of ILO staff members at headquarters and in the field; (ii) a desk review of relevant official documents and websites; (iii) an online survey of tripartite constituents from all ILO regions; and (iv) a questionnaire sent to the ILO regional offices.
12. Responses to the questionnaire were received from all ILO regional offices. The survey was issued to all tripartite constituents in the ILO's evaluation database, rather than a randomized sample. The sample, therefore, consisted of those who volunteered to respond.¹⁴ A total of

¹⁴ Because the sample was ultimately based on those who self-selected to participate rather than a probability sample, it was not possible to estimate margins of error. Furthermore, the data has not been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of each target population.

281 constituents (89 governments, 69 employers, 111 workers and 12 of unidentified affiliation) responded to the survey,¹⁵ as shown in table 1.¹⁶

► **Table 1. Number of respondents to the survey**

| | Africa | Americas | Asia and the Pacific | Europe |
|----------------------------|--------|----------|----------------------|--------|
| Completed surveys received | 75 | 43 | 52 | 94 |
| from (number of countries) | 36 | 23 | 28 | 42 |

13. In most instances, only one or two of the three groups of constituents in a country completed the questionnaire.¹⁷ Moreover, respondents often skipped one or several questions. Despite these shortcomings, the survey provides valuable insights into constituents' views on the usefulness and the shortcomings of ILO regional meetings in their current format. These findings were complemented by extensive consultations.

3.2. Follow-up to ILO regional meetings

14. A mid-term review was conducted for two of the four regional meetings under consideration. In the case of the Bali Declaration adopted at the 16th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting, the mid-term implementation report¹⁸ showed that the priorities of the Declaration had been mainstreamed into programming and resource mobilization exercises. The Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) established since the adoption of the Declaration referred to advancing its goals, and the new priorities influenced the work of some United Nations Country Teams. In addition, a set of 12 policy briefs on the Bali Declaration was published in October 2017 and updated in late 2018. According to the mid-term review, the Bali Declaration had had a positive impact. However, attributing such impact to the outcome document of the regional meeting is difficult, because the priorities identified in the document generally coincided with what the ILO was already doing.
15. The Abidjan Declaration adopted at the 14th African Regional Meeting was supplemented by an implementation plan, which was submitted to the 340th Session of the Governing Body (October–November 2020).¹⁹ In 2021, the implementation plan underwent a mid-term review covering December 2019 to September 2021. This was done through a survey of the ILO constituents in the region.²⁰ The survey found that activities related to the Abidjan Declaration had taken place in 58.5 per cent of all African Member States, and that the overall rate of achievement was deemed satisfactory. However, as in the case of the Bali Declaration, not all the activities reported by the constituents were initiated specifically because of the implementation plan, and many had already begun before its adoption. Hence, it would be

¹⁵ Equivalent to a response rate of about 12 per cent. Some 40 per cent of the respondents were members of the ILO Governing Body, and some 40 per cent of the respondents attended one of the four regional meetings under consideration.

¹⁶ In 17 questionnaires returned, the respondent's country of residence was not specified.

¹⁷ Out of the 129 countries that responded, 13 returned questionnaires from all three constituent groups, 50 from two, and 66 from just one.

¹⁸ [GB.337/INS/12/7](#) covering the period between January 2017 and December 2018. For a more detailed analysis, see [Bali Declaration Implementation Progress Report 2017–2018](#).

¹⁹ [GB.340/INS/8\(Rev.1\)](#), Appendix III.

²⁰ Responses were received from 49 of the 54 African nations, with a lower response rate by employers' organizations (37 out of 54) and workers' organizations (31 out of 54).

presumptuous to attribute the progress solely to the existence of the Declaration, even though there was a high degree of ownership by the constituents in the region.

16. All but one of the ILO regional offices that responded to the questionnaire were rather critical of the impact of and follow-up to regional meetings. They reported that conclusions are mostly a reaffirmation of existing thematic priorities for the region, and that the research, data collection and analysis needed for the Report of the Director-General increased their workload significantly. They remarked that it was difficult to argue that the regional meetings provided value for money.
17. The results of the survey of tripartite constituents indicate that some 31 per cent of the respondents were not familiar with the conclusions adopted by the respective regional meeting. Only 41 per cent of those who responded to the question (133 out of 281) stated that the conclusions of the regional meeting were reflected in national policy documents, chiefly the DWCPs or national employment and social protection policies (see table 2).

► **Table 2. Number of respondents who considered that conclusions of regional meetings were reflected in national policies**

| | Africa | Americas | Asia and the Pacific | Europe | Total |
|---|--------|----------|----------------------|--------|------------|
| Number of constituents who responded | 36 | 23 | 28 | 42 | 129 |
| from (number of countries) | 25 | 15 | 17 | 28 | 85 |
| Number of constituents who considered that conclusions are reflected in national strategies | 21 | 14 | 9 | 10 | 54 |
| from (number of countries) | 16 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 41 |

18. The survey asked constituents to rate the effectiveness, impact, follow-up and additional benefits of ILO regional meetings on a scale of 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest) (table 3).

► **Table 3. Effectiveness of ILO regional meetings (number of respondents, scale of 0 to 10)**

| | Africa | | Americas | | Asia and the Pacific | | Europe | | Total | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| | Low (0-5) | High (6-10) | Low (0-5) | High (6-10) | Low (0-5) | High (6-10) | Low (0-5) | High (6-10) | Low (0-5) | High (6-10) |
| Impact | 16 | 38 | 9 | 16 | 15 | 19 | 34 | 14 | 74 | 87 |
| Cost-effectiveness | 24 | 25 | 11 | 14 | 17 | 16 | 31 | 15 | 83 | 70 |
| Follow-up to regional meetings | 25 | 28 | 14 | 11 | 18 | 14 | 35 | 12 | 92 | 65 |
| Additional benefits | 16 | 36 | 5 | 21 | 9 | 24 | 23 | 23 | 53 | 104 |
| None of the above | | 8 | | 4 | | 6 | | 6 | | 24 |

19. While constituents from Africa and the Americas generally assessed the effectiveness of regional meetings positively, the views of constituents from Asia and the Pacific and Europe were far more critical. Overall, respondents representing employers' and workers'

organizations gave a slightly more positive rating than governments did. Constituents from all four regions were critical of a lack of follow-up to the regional meeting - an observation which was echoed by the ILO staff interviewed.

3.3. Benefits of ILO regional meetings

20. More than half of respondents across all four regions expressed satisfaction with the way in which the regional meetings were prepared and organized by the Office, as shown in table 4.

► **Table 4. Satisfaction with various aspects of regional meetings**

| | Africa | | Americas | | Asia and the Pacific | | Europe | | Total | |
|---|--------|----|----------|----|----------------------|----|--------|----|-------|-----|
| | Y | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | N |
| The ILO's overall support was good | 36 | 2 | 23 | 1 | 28 | 1 | 32 | 4 | 119 | 8 |
| ILO documents were of high quality | 36 | 2 | 23 | 0 | 27 | 1 | 33 | 4 | 119 | 7 |
| Meeting days were sufficient to achieve results | 27 | 29 | 21 | 18 | 26 | 24 | 28 | 33 | 102 | 104 |
| The regional meeting provided an effective platform for networking | 29 | 3 | 21 | 1 | 25 | 2 | 27 | 7 | 102 | 13 |
| There was effective tripartite participation | 29 | 5 | 19 | 3 | 22 | 5 | 14 | 21 | 84 | 34 |
| The regional meeting provided an effective platform for knowledge-sharing | 28 | 2 | 19 | 3 | 22 | 5 | 14 | 21 | 83 | 31 |

Note: Y = agree; N = disagree.

21. In their comments, many respondents expressed appreciation for the additional benefits that regional meetings offer - in particular, opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange. Some underlined the importance of the regional meetings in creating regional ownership of global ILO priorities and strategies, and of discussing ILO policies and results frameworks through the lens of the characteristics, needs and aspirations of the region. In some cases, constituents organized their own assemblies on the occasion of a regional meeting, thereby reducing travel costs and overheads. Constituents appreciated the opportunity to engage in social dialogue at the regional level. Many respondents, especially those from countries without an ILO office, asserted that regional meetings provided an excellent opportunity for constituents to meet the director of the responsible ILO country office and ILO technical specialists. Table 5 shows the number of respondents who agreed that regional meetings provided such opportunities. These intangible benefits cannot be quantified, but are highly valued by constituents in the regions. In addition, several respondents mentioned that regional meetings offer an opportunity to develop common regional strategies, positions, partnerships and projects, and to build regional ownership of the Decent Work Agenda.

► **Table 5. Number of respondents who agreed that regional meetings provide an opportunity to:**

| | Africa | Americas | Asia and the Pacific | Europe | Total |
|--|--------|----------|----------------------|--------|------------|
| meet colleagues and constituents | 46 | 22 | 34 | 41 | 143 |
| share knowledge | 49 | 19 | 31 | 37 | 136 |
| network in general | 35 | 14 | 23 | 38 | 110 |
| draft strategic conclusions | 41 | 15 | 20 | 25 | 101 |
| assess progress made since last regional meeting | 37 | 14 | 14 | 22 | 87 |
| meet ILO officials | 24 | 13 | 24 | 26 | 87 |
| meet development partners | 27 | 13 | 15 | 11 | 66 |
| participate in side events | 24 | 11 | 14 | 12 | 61 |
| meet senior officials from host country | 13 | 8 | 8 | 11 | 40 |

3.4. Shortcomings of ILO regional meetings

22. An assessment of the effectiveness of regional meetings points to the existence of some shortcomings. One aspect of significant discontent is the four-day format of the regional meeting, which many respondents considered too short to achieve concrete results. Respondents indicated that this is partly due to the time spent on general statements in the plenary, which were not considered to add great value. The majority of survey respondents questioned the cost-effectiveness of regional meetings. While the delegates’ travel costs and travel time were not considered a significant impediment, constituents from all regions criticized the lack of effective tripartite participation in some delegations, and, most importantly, the lack of follow-up on the conclusions of regional meetings.
23. From a programmatic viewpoint, the greatest deficiency of regional meetings seems to stem from the fact that their conclusions are not anchored in the ILO’s results-based framework. Hence, neither the constituents nor the Office are obliged to take the conclusions into account when drafting the programme and budget, the Strategic Plan or DWCPs, or when reporting results through the Office’s biennial implementation report. The 2019 Abidjan Declaration sought to address this shortcoming by requesting the Office to prepare an implementation plan, and to assess its progress through a mid-term review; yet the elements of the Declaration are not reflected in the Office-wide policy outcomes and outputs.
24. The Office staff interviewed for this report shared the constituents’ views on the impact and effectiveness of regional meetings, but expressed a greater level of concern about the cost-effectiveness and impact of the meetings.²¹

3.5. Cost of ILO regional meetings

25. Table 6 shows the estimated real cost of the last four regional meetings held during the period 2016–19. This includes the direct costs (such as travel, interpretation and hospitality) and

²¹ In addition, staff members observed that regional meetings cause a considerable carbon footprint, since each meeting requires around 400 round trips by air.

the indirect staff costs borne by the Office, an estimate of the host country's contribution, and an approximation of the travel costs of Member States.²² These estimates were based on the lists of participants and the secretariat lists of the four regional meetings, the financial records maintained by the Office, standard United Nations costs for staff and travel, interviews with Office staff at headquarters and in the field, and air ticket estimates obtained from online travel agencies.

► **Table 6. Cost of ILO regional meetings** (in thousands of US dollars)

| | Africa | Asia and the Pacific | Americas | Europe | Total | Average |
|------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Abidjan 2019 | Bali 2016 | Panama 2018 | Istanbul 2017 | | |
| ILO direct costs | 890 | 1 090 | 840 | 310 | 3 130 | 782.5 |
| ILO staff costs | 910 | 1 120 | 890 | 1 010 | 3 930 | 982.5 |
| Total ILO costs | 1 800 | 2 210 | 1 730 | 1 320 | 7 060 | 1 765 |
| Host country's direct costs | 560 | 50 * | 1 650 | 2 000 | 4 260 | 1 065 |
| Member States' direct costs | 1 580 | 800 | 570 | 590 | 3 540 | 885 |
| Total Member States' costs | 2 140 | 850 | 2 220 | 2 590 | 7 800 | 1 950 |
| Total costs of each meeting | 3 940 | 3 060 | 3 950 | 3 910 | 14 860 | 3 715 |

*The Bali meeting was largely financed by Office resources.

26. Depending on the regional meeting, the ILO staff costs represent between 45 and 50 work-months per year, meaning that the discontinuation of regional meetings would enable the Office to create up to four staff positions. However, these savings would only materialize over time because of the time it takes to redeploy staff. In contrast, the savings in direct costs would be available immediately and could be used, for example, to expand the ILO's presence in the field. In overall terms, the total cost of each regional meeting is equivalent to around US\$99,000 for each Member State, and around US\$13,000 per delegate participating in the meeting.
27. From an Office perspective, significant costs could be saved by:
 - (i) replacing the comprehensive Report of the Director-General with short thematic papers;
 - (ii) replacing the general statements made in the plenary with thematic round tables or working groups;
 - (iii) reducing the size of the secretariat by at least 30 per cent;
 - (iv) providing support from the Office remotely;
 - (v) reducing the duration of the meetings from four to three (or two) days.

²² The table does not include the staff costs incurred by Member States and by the host country, since these vary from country to country and would be very difficult to quantify.

28. These changes would reduce the costs of regional meetings by around US\$700,000 on average, of which US\$500,000 would be saved by the Office (including staff time) and US\$200,000 by the host country and Member States.
29. In conclusion, constituents attach significant importance to ILO regional meetings. The perceived benefits are not derived principally from the conclusions nor from the official statements in the plenary sittings, which are often poorly attended; rather, constituents value the regional meetings as an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience, to network and to establish and nurture partnerships. Regional ownership and regional identity are also important factors. Regional meetings offer the opportunity to harness regional knowledge and capability. These intangible benefits cannot be quantified in monetary terms, but the majority of the constituents consider that they justify the expenses incurred by the ILO and the Member States. Nevertheless, there is considerable room for improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of ILO regional gatherings, and for enhancing their impact on the ground.

4. Options for the future

30. The Governing Body will consider the possibility of either maintaining, discontinuing or adapting regional meetings. The advantages and disadvantages of the first two options, which are relatively straightforward, are summarized below.

Option 1. Maintain the status quo

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of the benefits of the present format, as identified above (“Why try to fix something that is not broken?”). • Some improvements could be adopted. • Member States’ costs could be reduced through the use of more hybrid options for tripartite participation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortcomings identified above would also persist. • High cost (estimated above). • Any improvements would be subject to the constraints of the current format. • Hybrid participation would impede networking opportunities. |

Option 2. Discontinue ILO regional meetings

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortcomings of regional meetings would no longer apply. • Savings could be reallocated. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The benefits of regional ownership and identity would be lost. • Some of the potential savings (staff costs) might be difficult to reinvest in the short term. |

31. A third option would be to retain the current format to the extent possible but to explore alternative scenarios to achieve comparable outcomes at a lower cost. The four scenarios outlined below were analysed but ultimately discarded, as various aspects were considered to be unfeasible for political, institutional, financial or logistical reasons.

Option 3.1. Attach ILO regional meetings to sessions of the International Labour Conference in Geneva

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the benefits of regional meetings would be retained. • Significant reduction in costs for Member States. • No need for a host country. • Improved efficiency and reduced costs of ILO support services. • Regional meeting could take place at ILO headquarters. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortcomings identified above would persist. • Very difficult (if not impossible) from a logistical point of view since the reform of the functioning of the International Labour Conference. • Regional meetings would have to be held before the start of the Conference, when ministers are not present. They could not be held after the Conference session because of the Governing Body session that takes place immediately afterwards. • Some of the benefits of regional meetings are linked to the fact that they are held in the respective regions, where they strengthen regional ownership and identity. • Geneva is an expensive city. Some Member States cannot afford to send tripartite delegations to regional meetings and the International Labour Conference. |

Option 3.2. Attach ILO regional meetings to sessions of the International Labour Conference rotating among the regions

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the benefits of regional gatherings would be retained. • The Conference would travel to constituents rather than constituents travelling to the Conference. • Reduction of costs for Member States (mainly in the region concerned). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortcomings identified above would persist. • Much higher costs (potential savings would be outweighed by the additional costs). • Possible from a legal point of view but overly complicated (if not impossible) in terms of logistics. • Regional meetings would have to be held before the start of the Conference, when ministers are not present. • Only very few countries have facilities large enough to host a session of the International Labour Conference. |

Option 3.3. Attach ILO regional meetings to existing regional gatherings organized by other entities²³

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the benefits of regional gatherings would be retained. • Significant reduction in costs for the ILO and Member States. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortcomings identified above would persist. • Tripartite nature of the ILO does not always fit these gatherings. • The ILO would lose control of the timetable of such events. • Little correspondence between ILO regions and the regional structures of other entities. |

Option 3.4. Ad hoc approach by region

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some regions could decide to maintain the status quo and others could decline to hold regional meetings. • Some of the benefits of regional gatherings would be retained in some regions. • More flexibility by region. • Potential savings if regions were to decline to hold regional meetings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortcomings identified above would persist in some regions. • Strong opposition from constituents who advocate a holistic approach (regional meetings either in every region or none). |

Option 4. Move from ILO regional meetings to ILO regional forums

32. A fourth option would entail a significant redesign of ILO regional gatherings. During consultations, all but one of the regional groups, as well as the social partners and the Office staff, were open to changing the format and design of regional meetings if doing so would enhance their efficiency and impact.
33. The ILO could retain the positive aspects of its regional meetings while transforming them into **regional forums**. Such regional forums would strike a better balance between constituents' expectations for regional ownership, networking and exchange, the need for regional platforms to discuss strategies for promoting decent work as part of the Global Coalition for Social Justice, and the call for conclusions of meetings to be better integrated within the ILO's results framework. Should the Governing Body agree to redesign the regional meetings, the new format could be tested over one four-year cycle.
34. The general format of regional forums could be as follows:
 - **Purpose:**
 - Promote the global social justice programme at the regional level, in the context of the Global Coalition for Social Justice.

²³ Such as the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour, the Meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers of the European Union, the Labour Ministers Meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Specialized Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment of the African Union.

- Provide a platform for networking, sharing knowledge and exchanging best practices across the region.
- Enhance partnerships and policy coherence at the regional level.
- Adapt ILO policy outcomes and outputs in line with regional realities.
- **Agenda:**
 - Thematic issues of key importance for the region²⁴ or global issues adapted to the circumstances of each region.²⁵
 - Flexibility for different themes to be discussed in different regions.
- **Inputs:**
 - Short thematic reports with points for discussion linked to the ILO results framework.²⁶
 - No general Report of the Director-General.²⁷
- **Frequency and duration:**
 - Current format of a four-year rotation maintained.
 - Held over two to three days.
- **Format:**
 - Debates organized around tripartite panel discussions and technical workshops.
 - Presentations from the workshops, followed by interactive debate in plenary.
 - No general statements in plenary.
 - Informal ministerial meeting to be maintained.
 - Whenever needed, time may be allocated to subregional events.²⁸
- **Outcome and follow-up:**
 - No drafting group.
 - No formal conclusions to be adopted, but a summary of key issues to be prepared by the Office for endorsement by the forum and for discussion by the Governing Body, which will determine the follow-up.
- **Participation and registration:**
 - Rules for tripartite participation would be maintained, with the necessary adjustments.

²⁴ Such as moving to a digital economy, transition from the informal to the formal economy or implementing social protection floors.

²⁵ Such as the Global Coalition for Social Justice or implementation of the United Nations reform.

²⁶ Following the format of the points for discussion for general discussions at the International Labour Conference.

²⁷ Biennial implementation reports include results achieved by region. These could easily be complemented with data and information compiled by regional offices.

²⁸ The ILO regional meetings cover very large and diverse regions; constituents may wish to assemble at the subregional level to discuss common topics pertaining to that subregion. The Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting, for example, could organize four subregional round tables (Arab States, South Asia, East Asia and Oceania).

- o Subject matter experts and representatives of other regional entities ²⁹ could be invited (list to be approved in advance by the Governing Body).
- o Host country agreement and systems for registration and issuance of badges would be maintained.
- o The rationale for having a Credentials Committee should be reviewed in view of the absence of decision-making at regional forums and the insufficient time to examine objections and complaints.

35. The advantages and disadvantages of moving from regional meetings to regional forums are summarized below.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact and effectiveness of meetings would be improved. • Regional forums less formal and more meaningful in view of the Global Coalition for Social Justice and ILO strategic plans. • Possibility of involving the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin in the preparation and organization of the regional forums. • Recommendations of existing ILO meetings covering the same thematic areas could be addressed in the respective regional forum. • Subregional aspects would receive greater attention. • Other entities could be mobilized to enhance their participation and perhaps to co-sponsor ILO regional forums. • Costs would be saved. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some choices might require amendments to the <i>Rules for regional meetings</i> (involving adoption by the Governing Body and confirmation by the Conference). • Cost savings would be lower compared with discontinuing regional meetings (option 2). |

²⁹ Such as United Nations agencies and development banks.