



Governing Body

326th Session, Geneva, 10–24 March 2016

GB.326/POL/5

Policy Development Section
Social Dialogue Segment

POL

Date: 22 February 2016

Original: English

FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Review and possible revision of formats and standing orders for meetings

Purpose of the document

The Governing Body is invited to determine a process for the review of standing orders and formats for ILO tripartite meetings and provide guidance on elements to be considered in that process (see draft decision in paragraph 14).

Relevant strategic objective: Social dialogue and tripartism.

Policy implications: None.

Legal implications: None at this point.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: The Office will set up the process in accordance with the Governing Body's decision.

Author unit: Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR).

Related documents: As indicated in the footnotes.

Introduction

1. This paper provides an overview of the different formats of ILO meetings (section I) and outlines a process through which a revision of the standing orders and related guidance for these meetings could be conducted (section II). It also considers the 1995 Standing Orders for Sectoral Meetings and corresponding practice in recent meetings, as well as issues that have been identified as requiring attention (section III).

I. Formats of ILO meetings

2. The ILO convenes a large number of global meetings every year. These include regular sessions of its constitutional organs, such as the International Labour Conference and the Governing Body; Regional Meetings; meetings related to a specific international labour standard, such as the second meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee established under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006), and the Ad Hoc Tripartite Maritime Committee for the amendment of the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185); sessions of such bodies as the International Conference of Labour Statisticians or the Joint Maritime Commission and its Subcommittee on Wages of Seafarers; as well as a large number of other meetings. These include meetings such as symposia, seminars and workshops (typically used for knowledge sharing or training) as well as other meetings aimed at policy-making or developing guidance for ILO constituents.
3. The tripartite ¹ meetings that fall under this last group typically take the format of sectoral meetings, meetings of experts or global dialogue forums. Most of these are organized by the Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR); meetings of experts have also been convened by other departments, albeit to a lesser extent. ²
4. While clear rules in the form of standing orders exist for sectoral meetings, ³ there are none for meetings of experts or global dialogue forums. The conduct of these two types of meetings has instead been established and has evolved in practice, on the basis of decisions and discussions in the Governing Body. ⁴

¹ Very few bipartite meetings aimed at policy-making or developing guidance have been convened in recent years. Sectoral meetings that used to be bipartite, such as those for education and public service, have in recent years been held as tripartite meetings, for example the Global Dialogue Forum on Challenges to Collective Bargaining in the Public Service (2–3 April 2014), the Meeting of Experts on Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel (12–15 November 2013) and the Global Dialogue Forum on Conditions of Personnel in Early Childhood Education (22–23 February 2012).

² Recent examples include the Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs (5–9 October 2015) and the Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Non-Standard Forms of Employment (16–19 February 2015).

³ ILO: *Sectoral meetings*, adopted by the Governing Body at its 264th Session (November 1995), SM/1996/SO. Part II of the document contains the “General characteristics of sectoral meetings”; Part III, the Standing Orders.

⁴ For sectoral meetings: GB.277/STM/1, GB.277/14, GB.283/STM/1, GB.283/13, GB.283/205, GB.286/STM/1, GB.286/16, GB.286/205; for meetings of experts: GB.289/STM/2, GB.289/14; for global dialogue forums: GB.312/POL/5, GB.312/PV, GB.313/POL/4/1(&Corr.), GB.313/PV.

5. The lack of clarity regarding the applicable rules of procedure has given rise to contention in some of these meetings of experts and global dialogue forums. For this reason, both at recent sessions of the Governing Body ⁵ and in the ongoing review of the Sectoral Policies Department, ⁶ constituents have requested an update of the Standing Orders and meeting formats.

II. Process

6. In line with the usual practice for revisions, it is proposed that, following an in-depth discussion of the issue in the Governing Body at the present session and further informal follow-up consultations, a proposal for revised Standing Orders should be presented to the Governing Body at an upcoming session for consideration in the Legal Issues Segment.

III. Substance

7. To facilitate further work by the Office, the Governing Body is invited to consider providing guidance on issues that should be taken into account in a revision.
8. Based on the recommendations made by a tripartite group of constituents in the informal consultations within the SECTOR review, it is proposed that the outputs of the revision should take the following form:
 - standing orders;
 - general characteristics of technical/sectoral meetings; and
 - general characteristics of meetings of experts.
9. As is the case for the existing guidance entitled “General characteristics of sectoral meetings”, the two proposed documents on general characteristics would comprise descriptions of the nature of the respective meetings and would include elements beyond rules and procedures to structure the work of a meeting, including guidance on their typical composition, duration and outcome.
10. Furthermore, based on the recommendations made in the informal consultations, it is proposed that the standing orders should be revised in a way that distinguishes between the two types of meetings, namely meetings of experts and technical meetings (which, if sector-specific, would be called “sectoral meetings”).
11. The reasons for distinguishing between these two types of meetings lies in their very different outputs and the fact that meetings of experts are consensus based. The composition of meetings of experts and the roles of individual experts have changed considerably over time: until the 1980s, meetings of experts were limited to the experts themselves. Experts were seated alphabetically by name to underline their independent status. Gradually the door was opened to accommodate technical advisers accompanying an expert (initially without

⁵ GB.320/PV, para. 444; GB.323/PV, para. 289.

⁶ As part of the review of SECTOR, an informal tripartite brainstorm among constituents was held on 21 July 2015. The meeting was chaired by a representative of the Chairperson of the Government group, Mr Ebenezer Appreku (Ghana). All governmental regional coordinators, Worker and Employer representatives, and the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organisation of Employers were represented.

the right to speak) and invitations to the United Nations, for example, were not limited to a specific observer. From the early 1990s onwards, experts sat in their groups, and Employer and Worker experts tended to speak through a spokesperson. Introductory group meetings on the first day soon gave way to daily group meetings; since the 2000s also for Government experts. What has not changed, however, is the consensus-based nature of meetings of experts.⁷

12. To this effect, the tripartite group of constituents recommended in the informal consultations that the standing orders should comprise a two-part section on technical meetings: one part based on the existing format of traditional sectoral meetings under the 1995 Standing Orders, which would be longer and would provide for a working party to discuss conclusions; and the other on a second format, which would have shorter meetings aimed more at fostering consensus, which would allow for more flexibility and would reflect the current practice established in global dialogue forums.
13. To assist the Governing Body in providing guidance on the desirability of codifying existing practice and to indicate where rules and practice might need to be simplified or harmonized, the table in the appendix below provides an overview of relevant issues. It outlines the provisions in the 1995 Standing Orders and the accompanying guidance (“General characteristics of sectoral meetings”), the existing practice, and issues requiring attention (as identified in the Governing Body or during past meetings)⁸ Where the informal consultations in the context of the review of SECTOR addressed the rules governing meetings, the recommendations made by the informal tripartite group of constituents have been included.⁹ The issues that might better be included in the two documents on general characteristics rather than in a revision of the Standing Orders are marked with an asterisk (*).

Draft decision

14. *The Governing Body approves the modalities in paragraph 6 and requests the Director-General to prepare – based on the guidance provided during the discussion – revised standing orders for meetings for its consideration at a future session.*

⁷ For more information, see GB.289/STM/2 and the related discussion in GB.298/12(Rev.), paras 19–27.

⁸ The table comprises only issues that are within the scope of standing orders and meeting formats. Therefore, the question of payment of daily subsistence allowance, for example, which is regulated in Annex IV to the Compendium of rules applicable to the Governing Body, and the question of the participation of non-governmental organizations, which is covered in Annex V to the Compendium, are not included.

⁹ The table does not address the SECTOR review as such and thus does not include recommendations that are related to sectoral work in general, such as recommendations regarding the modalities for holding sectoral advisory bodies, the number of sectoral meetings to be held in a biennium, or the definition of sectors covered by sectoral meetings. Issues that would not be featured in standing orders or accompanying guidance, such as the recommendation that the Office should aim to develop additional practical guidance for participants (including presentations and briefings) are also not included in the list, but will be followed up by the Office.

Appendix

Overview of issues

Issue	Provisions from the Standing Orders for sectoral meetings, 1995, or “General characteristics of sectoral meetings” (GC)	Rules and practice: Global Dialogue Forums (GDFs)	Rules and practice: Meetings of experts (MoEs)	Recommendations made in informal consultations
Scope	<p>Standing Orders apply to tripartite and joint sectoral meetings (art. 1). Excluded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ meetings of experts; ■ sectoral meetings in the form of seminars (para. 4 of GC) ■ symposia; ■ seminars; and ■ Joint Maritime Commission. 	Standing Orders are used as a general reference, but are not strictly applied.	Standing Orders are used as a general reference, but are not strictly applied.	<p>The tripartite group of constituents recommended during the informal consultations that not only SECTOR-held meetings would fall under the revised Standing Orders and that meetings currently held as GDFs and MoEs should also be covered by the Standing Orders.</p> <p>It was also recommended that informal meetings, such as consultations, should not fall under the Standing Orders.</p>
Governing Body decision on agenda and outputs	Governing Body establishes the agenda of the meeting and specifies which form(s) the output of its proceedings should take (art. 2).	Same practice.	Same practice.	None.
Possibility to simplify rules*	Para. 4 of the GC provides that the Governing Body may, when appropriate to the issue under consideration, determine that a seminar should be held instead of a sectoral meeting; the Standing Orders do not apply to seminars.	The GDFs were created in order to provide opportunities for interaction that would be shorter, would encourage discussion and would be less rule-driven than sectoral meetings under the Standing Orders.		It was recommended that revised Standing Orders should comprise a section on technical meetings that would comprise two parts (see para. 12 above).

Issue	Provisions from the Standing Orders for sectoral meetings, 1995, or “General characteristics of sectoral meetings” (GC)	Rules and practice: Global Dialogue Forums (GDFs)	Rules and practice: Meetings of experts (MoEs)	Recommendations made in informal consultations
Purpose*	Points 2 and 3 of the GC.		MoEs typically provide recommendations and general guidance for current and future ILO activities, or adopt a code of practice or similar text for subsequent publication. (For further information, see GB.289/STM/2, para. 2, and the table in GB.312/POL/5.)	For constituents to better understand how meetings could contribute to promoting decent work in the long term, it was recommended that suggestions for appropriate and realistic follow-up should be discussed at each meeting.
Outputs	May be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ record of proceedings; ■ conclusions; ■ resolutions (art. 2). 	May be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ record of proceedings; ■ points of consensus (including a section on recommendations for future action). (GB.313/POL/4/1(&Corr.), paras 10–12, as adopted.)	Have been: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ record of proceedings; ■ specific output (such as code of practice or guidelines); ■ recommendations for future action; ■ resolutions. 	Whereas some constituents considered that all ILO tripartite meetings should aim to produce specific outputs and results (such as concrete products, points of consensus or specific recommendations for future action), this view was not shared by all. It was pointed out that round tables and other types of meetings in the ILO, even in the absence of consensus or conclusions, still could have value, especially when difficult topics were discussed and there was an opportunity to share views, knowledge and lessons learned.
Types and length of documents prepared for meetings*	No written rules; practice has been an average of 75 pages for each report.	The Governing Body decided that each “issues paper” should be limited to 20 pages in English, French and Spanish. (GB.313/POL/4/1(&Corr.), para. 3, as adopted.)	The length of documents submitted to MoEs has varied considerably, also in view of the different types of products (such as guidelines or codes of practice).	The participants also considered whether it was advisable to reduce the length of background documents prepared by the Office to a few pages. Further reducing document lengths would cut preparation time, thus allowing decisions on meetings to be made on short notice through a designated consultative process to be agreed upon. It would also result in staff and other cost savings. However, this view was not shared by all constituents, as some considered that the reports prepared for sectoral meetings provided valuable background information that was helpful to constituents in deciding whom they should send to the meetings, as well as to participants and to the debate.

Issue	Provisions from the Standing Orders for sectoral meetings, 1995, or “General characteristics of sectoral meetings” (GC)	Rules and practice: Global Dialogue Forums (GDFs)	Rules and practice: Meetings of experts (MoEs)	Recommendations made in informal consultations
Types and length of documents prepared during meetings*				<p><i>Office commentary</i></p> <p><i>In the light of recently adopted paper-smart policies, it might also be important to reassess the practice of sending paper copies of preparatory documents to participants.</i></p>
Composition	<p>Governing Body determines size of delegations, member States to be invited, whether tripartite or joint (art. 3).</p> <p>The provisions of para. 6 GC providing that larger meetings would normally have national tripartite or bipartite delegations have not been used, at least since 2004.</p> <p>Since 2002, all interested governments have been invited to participate in sectoral meetings (GB.283/205, para. 51; GB.286/205, para. 63).</p>	<p>Same practice, with a composition following art. 3(3)(b) being the most usual choice.</p>	<p>Same practice, a composition following art. 3(3)(b).</p> <p>This practice is not fully in line with Annex VIII to the Compendium of rules applicable to the Governing Body, according to which the Director-General submits to the Governing Body for decision nominations of experts, who do not represent any government or group, after obtaining proposals from the three groups.</p>	<p>In relation to Office proposals for governments to be selected to nominate experts, Governing Body members have reiterated that the principles of regional balance and group autonomy should be observed (GB.323/PV, para. 289).</p>
Duration*	<p>Typical duration has been five days.</p>	<p>Two to three days. (GB.313/POL/4/1(&Corr.), para. 15, as adopted.)</p>	<p>Typical duration has been five to eight days.</p>	<p>No formal recommendation was made.</p> <p>Several constituents argued that the reality of two-day meetings did not match the original expectations and recommended that such short meetings should no longer be convened. While the practical considerations of the social partners were appreciated, it was also noted that long meetings (e.g. four- or five-day meetings) could be problematic, particularly for governments, since the higher costs and organizational problems could deter greater participation of Government experts based outside Geneva. It was emphasized that the duration of meetings needed to be determined on the basis of each meeting's mandate.</p>

Issue	Provisions from the Standing Orders for sectoral meetings, 1995, or “General characteristics of sectoral meetings” (GC)	Rules and practice: Global Dialogue Forums (GDFs)	Rules and practice: Meetings of experts (MoEs)	Recommendations made in informal consultations
Dates and location*	Not addressed in Standing Orders or GC. Sectoral meetings have all been held in Geneva.	All GDFs held since the creation of the format have been held in Geneva.	All MoEs have been held in Geneva for the last 15 years, with the exception of the Interregional Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Safety and Health in Shipbreaking for Selected Asian Countries and Turkey (7–14 October 2003 (Bangkok)).	Participants considered that work in specific sectors often had a strong regional relevance and wondered whether there were ways to ensure that those regions and countries most affected by certain issues would be represented at sectoral meetings where such issues were discussed. In order to reinforce the links between the global meetings and regional and country activities, they recommended that greater thought should be given to how sectoral meetings could be more closely linked with region-specific and country work, such as holding sectoral meetings or activities back-to-back with Regional Meetings.
Typical composition*	10–10 plus all interested governments.	6–6 plus all interested governments.	8–8–8.	None.
Advisers, substitute delegates	Art. 4.	Same practice.	Same practice.	None.
Observers	No observers other than from inter- and non-governmental organizations (IGOs and NGOs) (art. 9(2) and (3)) Rules have been followed, with the exception of a recent sectoral meeting in which “observers” were recognized for Worker and Employer groups.	Same practice as in Standing Orders: no observers other than from IGOs and NGOs.	In addition to IGO and NGO observers, a number of MoEs had allowed for the participation of additional Government experts as observers. Whereas in some meetings they were given the floor and the right to call for motions or advance amendments, the practice has differed between meetings, following consultations with the Officers.	<i>Office commentary</i> <i>It might be necessary to harmonize rules regarding Government observers’ rights.</i>

Issue	Provisions from the Standing Orders for sectoral meetings, 1995, or “General characteristics of sectoral meetings” (GC)	Rules and practice: Global Dialogue Forums (GDFs)	Rules and practice: Meetings of experts (MoEs)	Recommendations made in informal consultations
Chairperson	The Governing Body nominates a representative who acts as chairperson of the meeting (art. 5(1)).	Designation of chairperson from one of the three groups, typically the Government group. When designating a chairperson, preference is given to experienced participants, in particular Governing Body members. (GB.313/POL/4/1(&Corr.), para. 13, as adopted).	Designation of independent chairperson by the Office (as described in GB.289/STM/2, para. 19).	None.
Officers	Chairperson and three vice-chairpersons in tripartite meetings (art. 6(1)). Chairperson and two vice-chairpersons for joint meetings (art. 6(2)). In addition, Employer and Worker groups nominate group secretaries (art. 16). In practice, Employer and Worker groups often combine functions and ask the chairperson of their group to serve also as spokesperson.	Chairperson and three group coordinators for tripartite GDFs. To date, no bipartite GDFs have been held.	Chairperson and two or three vice-chairpersons (formerly often spokespersons). In a number of recent meetings, governments showed a preference for nominating a vice-chairperson rather than a spokesperson, based on the understanding that the Officer from the Government experts should not speak on their behalf on matters of substance, but only act as a focal point.	<i>Office commentary</i> <i>It might be necessary to find a way for the groups to prepare the election of their vice-chairpersons/ coordinators in advance of a meeting.</i>
Duties of officers	Chairing rotates between Officers (art. 7(1)). In practice, the Government Vice-Chairperson usually chairs the Working Party on Conclusions. The Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons chair plenary sittings in rotation with the chairperson.	Chairperson might ask for one of the group coordinators to replace him/her, if necessary. No automatic rotation.	Chairperson might ask for one of the vice-chairpersons to replace him/her, if necessary. No automatic rotation.	None.
Other duties (such as workplan)	Art. 7.	Same practice.	Same practice.	None.

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Admission to sittings	Sittings are public, unless meeting decides otherwise (art. 8). Working parties or other subsidiary bodies are usually closed to the public and observers.	Same practice.	Same practice, with the exception that working parties are sometimes open to observers.	None.
Conduct of meeting/rights of participants	Art. 9. In practice, group secretaries have also often been given the floor. However, as they are often not members of their respective groups (art. 16(2)), they do not have a right to speak under art. 9.	Same practice.	Same practice. The lack of written provisions governing the rights of representatives of IGOs has led to contention.	<i>Office commentary</i> <i>It might be important to clarify the rights of secretaries and rights of representatives of IGOs.</i>
Motions and amendments	Art. 10.	Same practice, but chairperson might discourage amendments to be submitted by a single participant. Since there is, however, no formal rule that would prohibit amendments and motions to be considered, if submitted by only one participant, forums have considered them.	Same practice, with the exception that there is no formal rule that would prohibit amendments and motions to be considered, if submitted by only one expert. Amendments and motions have also been submitted by Government observers.	<i>Office commentary</i> <i>The use of screens showing changes to a document under discussion has in some cases raised questions.</i>
Voting rights and procedures	Arts 11 and 12. In practice, as a consequence of the Governing Body's decision in 2002 to allow the participation of all interested governments, votes have to be weighted so as to ensure equal voting power for the three groups.	All decisions are taken by consensus. If no consensus can be found during the discussion of the draft set of points of consensus, the chairperson sometimes proposes to remove the part of the text to which an amendment was proposed.	All decisions are taken by consensus.	<i>Office commentary</i> <i>Given that the practice to allow all governments to take part in sectoral meetings has been consistently followed since 2002, weighted voting would need to be expressly provided for in the Standing Orders.</i>

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Setting up of a subsidiary body (working party on resolutions)	Art. 13(1). 5–5–5 has been preferred practice in order to improve geographical representation (although the Standing Orders provide for 4–4–4).	Not applicable. Resolutions were not foreseen at the time GDFs were created. Only records of proceedings and points of consensus were considered possible outputs of GDFs (GB.312/POL/5).	Resolutions are usually not adopted by MoEs, with the exception, in practice, of MoEs held in preparation for the International Conference of Labour Statisticians.	None.
Examination of resolutions	Art. 14.	Not applicable (see above).	In MoEs held in preparation for the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, all discussions are held in the plenary sittings.	None.
Subsidiary bodies (working party on conclusions)	Art. 13(2).	Not foreseen. Instead, points of consensus are discussed and adopted as follows: The Office prepares draft points of consensus, which are then discussed by the GDF plenary, often leading to very engaged debates, including on whether text under discussion should be deleted or further discussions should be held to amend it further, in order to meet all participants' concerns.	Not applicable.	<p><i>Office commentary</i></p> <p><i>In GDFs, the procedure to discuss and agree on points of consensus has been contentious in the past.</i></p> <p><i>Different modalities have been tried:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>deletion of text parts on which consensus could not be found in a timely manner;</i> ■ <i>the creation of a section in the document for text that is supported by the majority but opposed by some participants; and</i> ■ <i>the bracketing of text after a certain time set aside for discussion, so that the GDF can re-examine all bracketed text once the whole document has been reviewed.</i>
Subsidiary bodies (other)	Art. 13(3).	No instance known.	Same practice as for sectoral meetings (typically used for issues or larger parts of text that are interrelated).	None.
Subsidiary bodies (modalities for application of standing orders)	Art. 13(4).	No instance known (see above).	Same practice.	None.

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Languages	Governing Body determines working languages (art. 15). Interpretation and documents are usually provided in English, French and Spanish. Depending on participants, interpretation is often also provided for Arabic, Chinese, German and Russian.	Same practice.	Same practice.	<i>Office commentary</i> <i>Some participants in recent meetings have asked for documents to be available in languages in addition to English, French and Spanish.</i>