



Governing Body

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Institutional Section

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Report of the Director-General

Seventh Supplementary Report: Cancellation of preparations for the holding of a regional meeting in 2023 and possible discontinuation of regional meetings

▶ Introduction

1. In the Preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25 presented to the Governing Body at its current session, reference is made under Enabler B to the review of regional meetings.¹ During the Governing Body discussion on this item, the Director-General indicated his intention to propose the discontinuation of regional meetings and the allocation of the corresponding resources to increase the ILO's field operations, including the possible creation of new field offices to support ILO's action at the regional level.
2. The underlying rationale for the proposed discontinuation of regional meetings is that whereas those meetings had provided in the past a practical opportunity for tripartite constituents to meet and exchange views on ILO action from a regional perspective, they no longer represent a cost-efficient means to guide ILO policy-making at the regional level.

¹ GB.346/PFA/1, paras 19 and 181.

3. The Governing Body was expected to consider at its present session the proposed arrangements for the 11th European Regional Meeting to be held in 2023.² The Government of France had expressed interest in hosting the 11th European Regional Meeting in Paris and preliminary technical discussions with the Office were launched in April 2022 for the preparation for the meeting. The Government France has indicated that it would no longer pursue the hosting of the European Regional Meeting should the ILO wish to discontinue regional meetings.
4. As the purpose of the Governing Body's consideration of the preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25 at its current session is to provide guidance to the Office for the submission of proposals at its 347th Session (March 2023), the Director-General, after consulting the Officers of the Governing Body, proposes that, rather than examining the arrangements for the 11th European Regional Meeting, the Governing Body consider the possible discontinuation of regional meetings and the reallocation of the resources covering normally two regional meetings in a given biennium. A staged approach could be applied whereby at the current session the Governing Body could agree to cancel all preparations for the holding of a regional meeting in 2023 and have an initial exchange on the merits of discontinuing regional meetings without pre-empting the final decision on this matter which would be taken at the 347th Session (March 2023).
5. To facilitate the Governing Body's informed decision on the possible discontinuation of regional meetings, this paper addresses the institutional, legal and financial parameters of such a decision.

► Institutional framework of regional meetings

6. The institutional foundation of regional meetings is found in article 38 of the Constitution which provides as follows:
 1. The International Labour Organisation may convene such regional conferences and establish such regional agencies as may be desirable to promote the aims and purposes of the Organisation.
 2. The powers, functions and procedure of regional conferences shall be governed by rules drawn up by the Governing Body and submitted to the General Conference for confirmation.
7. This provision was introduced in 1946 to reinforce the visibility and impact of the activities of the ILO at the regional level. The aim was to enable Members of the same region "to work out, within the common framework of the world-wide activities of the Organisation, the regional arrangements best adapted to their own needs and requirements". Importantly, it was emphasized that "the regional activities of the ILO are designed as a contribution to a larger measure of world unity and must not be allowed to become a contributory factor in the perpetuation of disparities between different regions of the world".³
8. Thus, regional conferences were not intended to act as decision-making bodies but rather as forums for Members of the same region to share experiences, make known their needs and

² The matter was originally placed for discussion in the Institutional section under agenda item 18 as a report of the Officers of the Governing Body, with reference GB.346/INS/18/1.

³ ILO, *Reports of the Conference Delegation on Constitutional Questions*, ILC, 29th Session, 1946, paras 83 and 85.

inform the discussion globally at the level of the Conference and the Governing Body. Regional conferences were to be conducted in accordance with specific rules, which were adopted in 1948 and modelled after the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference.

9. At its 264th Session (November 1995), as part of the programme and budget adjustments for 1996–97, the Governing Body decided that the ILO would henceforth hold regional meetings instead of regional conferences.⁴ The aim was to have shorter meetings with a single agenda item. At its 83rd Session (1996), the Conference invited the Governing Body to adopt a new set of simplified rules and implement them on an experimental basis before submitting them to the Conference for confirmation. The new regional meetings were considered to equate with the regional conferences referred to in article 38 of the Constitution.⁵ The revised Rules for regional meetings were adopted by the Governing Body on an experimental basis at its 267th Session (November 1996).⁶ They were confirmed, with a few modifications in 2002⁷ and further revised in 2008.⁸
10. At its 328th Session (October–November 2016), the Governing Body initiated a review of the role and functioning of regional meetings as part of the overall actions taken for an effective governance of the ILO pursuant to the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008).⁹ It eventually adopted revised Rules at its 332nd Session (March 2018) that were confirmed by the Conference at its 107th Session (June 2018).¹⁰ The principal modification concerned the composition of regional meetings and established the principle that each Member should be invited as a full member to the regional meetings of only one region with the Governing Body having the discretion of inviting, as an observer, on a case-by-case basis, any Member State from another region. The revised Rules have been applied to the 19th American Regional Meeting (Panama) in 2018, the 14th African Regional Meeting (Abidjan) in 2019 and will also apply to the forthcoming 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (Singapore) in December 2022.

► Financial and policy implications of the discontinuation of regional meetings

11. The Office calculates and budgets for the costs of regional meetings, on the basis that a proportion will be covered by contributions in kind from host countries. Historically this has varied depending on the venue and country. In some cases, the contribution has included the costs of premises and in others, the costs for additional conference staff, accommodation and associated resources. In the 2020–21 and 2022–23 biennia the costs for regional meetings were estimated on this basis.

⁴ GB.264/8/3 and GB.264/PFA/9/3.

⁵ GB.265/8/1, paras 18–29 and GB.265/LILS/3. See also the [Resolution concerning rules governing regional meetings](#) adopted by the Conference at its 83rd Session (1996).

⁶ GB.267/9/1, paras 2–20 and GB.267/LILS/1.

⁷ GB.283/10/1, paras 2–19; GB. 283/LILS/1; [Provisional Record No. 2](#), ILC, 90th Session, 2022, paras 14–16 and appendix.

⁸ GB.301/11, paras 14–25; GB.301/LILS/2; [Provisional Record No. 2-1B](#), ILC, 97th Session, 2008.

⁹ GB.328/WP/GBC/2 and GB.328/INS/16.

¹⁰ GB.332/WP/GBC/4; GB.332/INS/12; and [Provisional Record No. 1B](#), ILC, 107th Session, 2018.

12. The average total cost per regional meeting/location was forecast at around US\$1.6 million. Of this amount, some US\$600,000 are attributed to the direct additional costs related to the meeting and associated functional support, with an additional US\$1 million related to staff time, travel costs and miscellaneous support costs allocated and associated with the meeting internally through the programme and budget process. Therefore, in this biennium a part of the resources currently allocated, some US\$3.2 million could be made available to significantly improve the support provided to tripartite constituents by reinforcing ILO country offices and equipping the five priority action programmes that the Office has decided to launch.
13. The ILO maintains around 40 field offices throughout the world, covering all 187 Member States. Some ILO country offices serve a large number of countries, which makes it very difficult for them to provide adequate support to the tripartite constituents in those countries, to participate in meetings of UN Country Teams to promote social justice and the decent work agenda, and to take part in the design and implementation of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks to reflect the priorities of the ILO tripartite constituents. At the country level, the ILO is currently less visible than other UN agencies, and therefore receives less funding from UN joint funds and other development partners. In addition, while more and more donors decentralize funding decisions to their local embassies and development cooperation agencies, the ILO, as a non-resident agency, cannot seize those opportunities because of the difficulty in establishing and maintaining regular contact with those local donors. In summary, there is a need for a critical mass of experts in country offices to respond effectively to the tripartite constituents' needs and to strengthen the ILO's presence in the field.
14. The Office-wide, cross-cutting action programmes are expected to realize the human-centred approach by addressing decent work deficits affecting specific population groups. They will foster an integrated way of working across the Office, bringing together the field and all relevant technical units at headquarters, as well as regular budget and development cooperation staff. They will consolidate and expand in-house expertise and knowledge on key policy areas for the world of work, which should translate into increased impact at the country level and a stronger positioning of the ILO globally. They are expected to build alliances with other relevant entities of the multilateral system, as well as the relevant social partners, development partners and members of civil society working with the respective population groups.

► Procedural aspects of the discontinuation of regional meetings

15. Under article 38 of the Constitution, the convening of regional meetings is optional. In line with constitutional practice and article 1 of the Rules for regional meetings, the power to convene regional meetings rests with the Governing Body. Even though article 1(1) of the Rules for regional meetings provides that "Regional meetings shall be convened from time to time", the constant practice has been for the Governing Body to convene regional meetings at regular intervals. As indicated in paragraph 2 of the introductory note to the Rules, "normally, a regional meeting is held each year in one of the four regions in the following order: Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, Africa and Europe". Under article 38(2) of the Constitution, the rules for regional meetings are drawn up by the Governing Body and submitted to the Conference for confirmation.
16. Given that the convening of regional meetings is provided in article 38 of the Constitution and that the Rules for regional meetings were last confirmed by the Conference in 2018, the

discontinuation of the regional meetings should be formally brought to the attention of the Conference. This process would take place in addition to the process carried out in the context of the programme and budget by the Governing Body and the Conference as regards the alternative use of the resources normally allocated to two regional meetings in a biennium. This would also be in line with the institutional importance and visibility that regional meetings have had in the past. Thus, it is proposed that the decision to discontinue the holding of regional meetings – as opposed to temporary suspension – should be submitted to the Conference for final adoption after the examination by the Governing Body. As per standard practice, the decision would take the form of a Conference resolution.

17. To avoid that the Rules for regional meetings, which would consequently lose their purpose, remain among the Organization's basic texts, it is proposed that the Governing Body recommends to the Conference to formally repeal them, for reasons of transparency and clarity.

► Draft decision

18. **Having regard to the Director-General's announcement in the context of the preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25 that he intends to propose the discontinuation of regional meetings, the Governing Body decided to:**
 - (a) **cancel all preparations for the holding of a regional meeting in 2023;**
 - (b) **place on the agenda of its 347th Session (March 2023) an item concerning the possible discontinuation of regional meetings for its examination and decision; and**
 - (c) **request the Director-General to prepare a detailed report on this matter taking into account the views expressed at its 346th Session.**