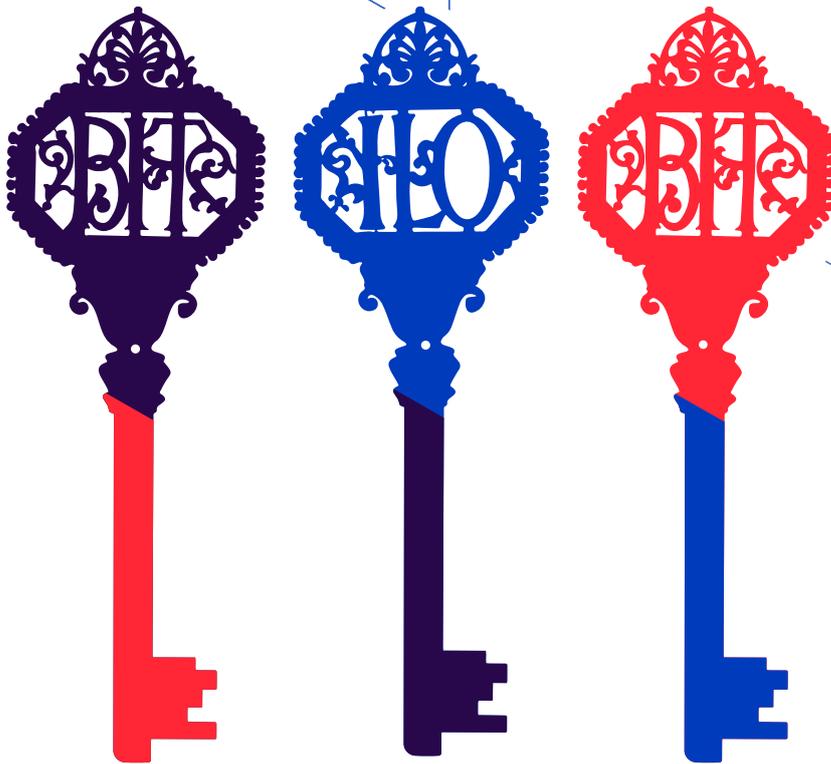




International
Labour
Organization

The ILO Governing Body at a glance





The ILO Governing Body at a glance

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► I. Introduction

The Governing Body of the International Labour Office is established by article 7 of the [Constitution of the International Labour Organization](#). The Governing Body's functioning is based on rules dispersed among different texts and established practices since 1919. These rules have been consolidated into a [Compendium of rules applicable to the Governing Body of the International Labour Office](#), revised in 2016.

The purpose of this publication is to provide a brief overview of the mandate and the functioning of the Governing Body.

► II. Role of the Governing Body

ILO governance organs

The three organs of the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) are:

- The International Labour Conference: the supreme body composed of the tripartite delegations of ILO Member States, which sets the strategic direction of the Organization;
- The [Governing Body](#): the executive body of the Organization. It makes operational decisions implementing decisions of the Conference, provides guidance and supervises the work of the Office between the sessions of the Conference;
- the [International Labour Office](#) (hereinafter "the Office"): the permanent Secretariat of the Organization tasked with the implementation of the policies and programmes adopted by the ILO governance organs.

► **Figure 1. ILO governance process**



Mandate

The Governing Body performs decision-making and oversight functions. Among others, it:

- elects the Director-General;
- decides on ILO policy implementing the strategic direction given by the International Labour Conference and guides the work of the Office and of the Director-General;
- determines the agenda of the International Labour Conference;
- approves the draft Programme and Budget of the Organization for adoption by the Conference;
- deals with constitutional procedures for the application of ratified Conventions (articles 24 and 26 of the Constitution); and
- approves the agenda and, where applicable, the composition of regional, sectoral and expert meetings.

Composition and membership

The Governing Body is composed of representatives of the three constituent groups, namely governments, employers and workers:

- **56 regular members** (28 government members +14 employer members +14 worker members); and
- **66 deputy members** (28 government members +19 employer members +19 worker members).

The regional distribution of Government seats is presented in Table 1.

► **Table 1. Regional distribution of Government seats in the Governing Body**

Regions	Regular members		Deputy members	Total elective seats	Total
	Non-elective**	Elective			
Africa*	0	6	8	14	14
Americas*	2	5	5	10	12
Asia and the Pacific	3	4	8	12	15
Europe	5	3	7	10	15
Total	10	18	28	46	56

* Africa and the Americas share a “floating” deputy member seat which alternates between the two groups for each Governing Body term of office. It is held by the Africa group for the June 2021–June 2024 term.

** Held by States of chief industrial importance: Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

The current composition can be found on the [Governing Body website](#).

Regular, deputy and substitute members

Deputy members enjoy the same rights as regular members, except for the right to vote and to present resolutions, amendments and motions.

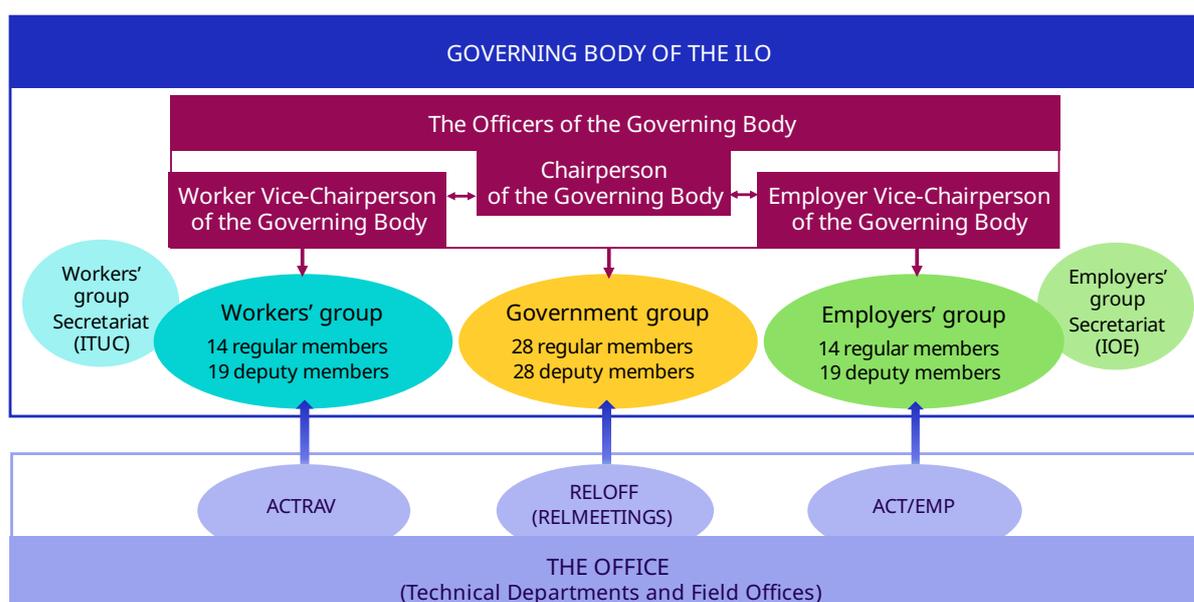
In the absence of a regular or deputy member, he or she may be replaced by a substitute, who enjoys all the rights of the regular member.

The number of persons accompanying regular or deputy Government members to a Governing Body session, whether as substitutes or advisers, should normally not exceed 15.

Election of the Governing Body members

The International Labour Conference elects the members of the Governing Body for a three-year term. Elections are carried out separately by the three constituent groups, by secret ballot. The Employers' and Workers' groups elect their respective members. Government members are elected by all Member States, except those which have lost the right to vote and the ten Government regular members representing States of chief industrial importance who hold non-elective seats.

► **Figure 2. Structure of the Governing Body**



► III. Officers of the Governing Body

The three Officers of the Governing Body (the Chairperson and two Vice-Chairpersons) are elected for a period of one year at a session of the Governing Body held at the end of the International Labour Conference. Only regular members may be elected Officers.

Chairperson of the Governing Body

The **Chairperson** is usually chosen among the Government members, following a four-year regional rotation cycle in the following order: Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Europe. However, there have been exceptions to this practice.¹ In case an Employer or Worker member is elected Chairperson, a Government Vice-Chairperson is appointed and the geographical rotation for governments for the post of Chairperson is suspended for the duration of that term of office.

The Chairperson of the Governing Body submits a report to the International Labour Conference on the work undertaken by the Governing Body during the year.

Vice-Chairpersons of the Governing Body

The **Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons** are chosen by their respective groups and can be re-elected for several terms of office.

Functions of the Officers of the Governing Body

The Officers are responsible for the proper conduct of work of the Governing Body. Between two sessions, they update the provisional agenda on arising urgent matters, in consultation with the members of the Screening Group (see section on the Screening Group).

They take decisions on certain matters by delegation of authority from the Governing Body. Among others, they approve the programme of ILO official meetings and the proposed symposia, seminars and similar meetings (decision on the latter has been further delegated to the secretariats of the Employers' and Workers' groups). The Officers also approve invitations to the Governing Body sessions of:

- Member States which are not represented in the Governing Body or are non-members of the ILO;
- official (intergovernmental) international organizations;
- international non-governmental organizations;

▶ IV. The groups of the tripartite constituency

The role and autonomy of the three groups

In line with the principle of autonomy of the groups, there are no provisions in the Standing Orders of the Governing Body concerning the way in which the three groups organize their work.

The Regional Coordinators of the Government group and the secretariats of the Employers' and Workers' groups play a key role in the work of the Governing Body.

¹ See the [list of Chairpersons of the Governing Body since 1919](#).

Government group

The Government group designates its own Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson from among the Governing Body members, elected each year, according to the following regional rotation cycle: Africa, Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe. In principle, and to ensure continuity, the Vice-Chairperson becomes Chairperson the following year.

The Government group is composed of the following regional groups:

- Africa group;
- Asia and the Pacific group (ASPAG);
- group of Latin American and the Caribbean countries (GRULAC);
- group of Industrialized Market Economy Countries (IMEC);
- Eastern European group (EEG); and
- Western European group (WEG).

Other subgroups may also play a role in the work of the Governing Body, such as the EU (European Union), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), or BRICS (Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa).

The Government group nominates the candidate for the position of Chairperson of the Governing Body, appoints the Government members of the committees and working parties established by the Governing Body, and the Governments invited to participate in official ILO meetings, such as technical meetings and meetings of experts. Furthermore, the group also serves as a forum for governments to seek convergence on certain issues.

Given the autonomy of the groups, how the regional groups of governments operate internally may vary from one group to another. Key tasks of the Regional Coordinators would nevertheless include:

- participating in the tripartite Screening Group which determines the agenda of the Governing Body sessions;
- relaying information from the Office to their respective groups in the context of the preparation for discussions and of the adoption of decisions of the Governing Body, coordinating the elaboration of group statements and acting as group spokespersons, as deemed necessary;
- acting as focal points for information sessions on procedural and substantive matters organized by the Office for the groups;
- coordinating the nominations of members of their respective groups in various committees and official meetings; and
- coordinating the regional slates for the election of Governing Body members.

Through their group meetings, the Regional Coordinators reach out to countries that are not members of the Governing Body and convey important information to all ILO Member States.

The Government group is supported by the Office. The Official Relations and Correspondence Unit (RELOFF) facilitates briefings and consultations of the Government regional groups, including with the Employers' and Workers' groups. RELOFF also serves as the liaison between the Governing Body members and the ILO departments at headquarters and in the field.

Employers' and Workers' groups

The Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons of the Governing Body chair their respective groups.

The Employers' and Workers' groups are supported by their own secretariats from the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), respectively. The secretariats support the groups before, during and after Governing Body sessions. They participate in the tripartite Screening Group which sets the Governing Body agenda, coordinate the work of the groups, assist their members, and conduct informal consultations with the other groups.

The Employers' and Workers' groups are also assisted by the Office, through the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), respectively.

► V. Sections and segments of the Governing Body

All sittings of the Governing Body are conducted in plenary and its work is structured in five sections, which are divided in segments.

Institutional Section (INS)

Matters related to the functioning of the Office and of the Organization, including constitutional obligations.

- Standing items, such as the selection of items to be placed on the agenda of the Conference, reports of the Committee on Freedom of Association, annual reports under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), as amended in 2022, representations under article 24 of the Constitution, and complaints under article 26 of the Constitution.
- Institutional issues relating to ILO official meetings.
- Urgent matters arising between or during Governing Body sessions.

Policy Development Section (POL)

- **Employment and Social Protection Segment:** ILO policies and activities in the fields of employment, training, enterprise development and cooperatives, working and employment conditions and environment, social security and promotion of equality between men and women in employment.
- **Social Dialogue Segment:** social dialogue and industrial relations, including matters concerning labour law, labour administration and labour inspection, as well as policy issues relating to ILO sectoral and technical meetings.
- **Development Cooperation Segment:** matters relating to ILO development cooperation programmes.
- **Multinational Enterprises Segment:** the effect given to the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

Legal Issues and International Labour Standards Section (LILS)

- **Legal Issues Segment:** matters relating to the ILO Constitution; the different Standing Orders; the status of the ILO in Member States; legal agreements concluded by the ILO with other international organizations; and any legal aspects of institutional issues.
- **International Labour Standards and Human Rights Segment:** matters relating to the ILO's standards-related activities, including the approval of report forms for ILO Conventions and Recommendations and the selection of instruments for article 19 reporting, and action relating to the protection of human rights.

Programme, Financial and Administrative Section (PFA)

- **Programme, Financial and Administrative Segment:** programme and budget proposals and programme implementation, other budgetary estimates and Office expenditure and reviews financial

and administrative matters, including matters concerning the ILO premises, matters relating to information and communication technology.

- **Audit and Oversight Segment:** audit, evaluation and oversight reports, including the report of the Governing Body's Independent Oversight Advisory Committee (IOAC).
- **Personnel Segment:** human resources matters and issues relating to the ILO Administrative Tribunal.

The High-level section (HL) meets on a need basis in one of the two modalities described below.

- **Strategic Policy Segment:** considers matters of strategic importance for the ILO. Its sittings are conducted as a normal segment of the Governing Body.
- The **Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization** meets as a Committee of the Whole. It enables the representatives of the governments that are not members of the Governing Body to participate in the debate. No decisions, recommendation or report emanate from the Working Party.

▶ VI. Proceedings

Sessions of the Governing Body

The Governing Body sessions are organized three times a year:

- Two-week sessions in March and October–November; and
- A one-day session in June (immediately after the International Labour Conference).

Setting the agenda of Governing Body sessions

The agenda of each session of the Governing Body is drawn up by a tripartite Screening Group composed of the Officers of the Governing Body, the Chairperson of the Government group, the Regional Coordinators representing the governments, and the Secretariats of the Employers' and the Workers' groups.

The decisions of the tripartite Screening Group are made, to the extent possible, by consensus. Issues on which consensus is not reached are referred to the Officers of the Governing Body. Between sessions and Screening Group meetings, urgent matters concerning the agenda of the Governing Body are dealt with by the Officers.

Agenda-setting timeline

1. **One week before the opening of each session:** a preliminary list of proposed agenda items for the next session is circulated to the Screening Group members.
2. **A few days after each session:** an updated version of the proposals including new items added by the Governing Body, any member of the Screening Group or the Office, is sent to Screening Group members.
3. **Around one week after each session:** the Screening Group meets to consider the proposals and set the agenda for the next session.

Chairing of the sittings

The sittings are presided by the Chairperson of the Governing Body. In the absence of the Chairperson, the two Vice-Chairpersons may preside the Governing Body sittings. The

Chairperson may also assign a regular or deputy Government member to chair a particular sitting.

This is normal practice for segments under the Legal Issues and International Labour Standards and Policy Development Sections.

Decision-making in the Governing Body

The Governing Body takes decisions usually by consensus. The term “consensus” refers to an established practice under which every effort is made to reach an agreement that is generally accepted, without resorting to a vote. Members dissenting from the general trend may make their position or reservations known and placed on the record.

Consensus is characterized by the absence of any objection presented by a Governing Body member as an impediment to the adoption of the decision in question. It is for the person chairing the sitting, in agreement with the spokespersons of the respective groups, to note the existence of consensus.

Apart from the election of the Director-General, which requires voting by secret ballot, decisions are rarely adopted by a vote. In such cases, only regular members of the Governing Body may vote or, where the regular member is absent or unable to attend, a designated substitute. Members who are in arrears for two consecutive years lose their right to vote.

Voting in the Governing Body is conducted by show of hands, except in cases where a ballot is required by the Standing Orders.

Right to speak, to propose amendments and to vote

Only regular and deputy members of the Governing Body may take the floor, with the Chairperson’s authorization. The right to vote and to submit amendments is reserved for regular members.

With the authorization of the Chairperson, representatives of official (intergovernmental) international organizations invited to attend the session may also speak, without the right to vote or to submit amendments.

In addition, with the authorization of the three Officers, the following may also speak, without the right to vote or to submit amendments:

- Member States who are not represented on the Governing Body, but whose situation has been specifically referred to in the discussion or whose national interests may be affected by the decision taken by the Governing Body;²
- representatives of international non-governmental organizations invited to attend the session.

² These include Member States concerned by representations under articles 24 and 25 of the Constitution, complaints under article 26 of the Constitution, cases under consideration by the Committee on Freedom of Association or a Fact-Finding and Conciliation Commission on Freedom of Association.

► **Table 2 – Rights to speak, propose amendments and vote**

	Right to speak	Right to move amendments	Right to vote
Regular members of the Governing Body	Yes	Yes	Yes
Deputy members of the Governing Body	Yes	No, except when replacing a regular member	No, except when replacing a regular member
Substitutes	Same rights as regular and deputy members when authorized to substitute for them		
Observers from ILO Member States, not members of the Governing Body	In cases under Article 1.8 of the Standing Orders of the Governing Body (with the authorization of the Officers in cases under para. 1.8.3).	No	No
Representatives of official (intergovernmental) organizations, invited by the Governing Body	Yes	No	No
Representatives of international non-governmental organizations, invited by the Governing Body	With the permission of the Chairperson, in agreement with the Vice-Chairpersons	No	No
Representatives of States not member of the Governing Body	With the permission of the Chairperson, in agreement with the Vice-Chairpersons and if specifically concerned by the discussion	No	No

Right to reply

Any member or group which has been specifically referred to in the discussions may exercise the right to reply at the time decided by the person chairing the sitting. This is usually granted within the respective sitting.

Time management and the list of speakers

In practice, the allocation of time for discussions of items on the agenda is determined before each session. The Office prepares the list of speakers for each sitting which is displayed in the room of the Governing Body. The person chairing the sitting is responsible for conducting the deliberations, giving and withdrawing the right to address the Governing Body.

Documents for Governing Body sessions

Documents prepared by the Office on the items on the agenda of the Governing Body are made available at least 15 working days prior to the opening of the session. For the discussion on the programme and budget proposals, the document is published 30

working days in advance.

Minutes of Governing Body sessions

The draft minutes of the Governing Body sessions are published on the Governing Body website as soon as possible, but at the latest within six weeks after the sessions end.

Governing Body members have the possibility of making corrections to the summary of their statements contained in the draft minutes, by presenting these directly to the secretariat, without the need to announce them in the Governing Body.

These minutes, once corrected, are adopted at the opening of the following session of the Governing Body.

Public and private sittings

While participation in the discussions of the Governing Body is restricted, its sittings are public, as a general rule, except when it sits in private to examine representations under articles 24 and 25 of the Constitution.

Side events

Meetings or initiatives proposed by either the Office or the groups, not intrinsic to the business of the session, but involving the participation of Governing Body members, should be an exception and kept to a minimum. Such side events should be approved by the tripartite Screening Group. They should not in any way coincide with Governing Body sittings.

► VII. Committees and working parties

The Governing Body may appoint a committee or working party to consider specific matters. The Governing Body determines the composition, mandate and duration of any such committee or working party.

When creating new committees or working parties the Governing Body establishes their composition in accordance with the rules of article 4.2 of the Standing Orders. Owing to the particular regional structure of the Government group, the number of its representatives in those bodies should be eight or any other multiple of four.

Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA)

The [Committee on Freedom of Association \(CFA\)](#) is a tripartite body set up in 1951 by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization to examine violations of workers' and employers' organizing rights.

The CFA is composed of nine regular members and nine deputies from the Government, Workers' and Employers' groups of the Governing Body, and has an independent Chairperson. The CFA meets three times a year just before the Governing Body sessions. The CFA carries out an examination of the complaints lodged against governments and recommends to the Governing Body, as appropriate, that a case requires no further examination (definitive report) or that it should draw the attention of the government concerned to the problems that have been found and invite it to take the appropriate measures to resolve them (interim or follow-up reports).

The Board of the International Training Centre of the ILO

The [Board of the International Training Centre of the ILO](#) in Turin, Italy, comprises 24 members appointed by the Governing Body of the ILO. 12 are from the government group, six from the employers' group and 6 from the workers' group. The Government of Italy, the region of Piedmont, the City of Turin, and the *Unione Industriale Torino* are also represented.

It meets once a year with a mandate to approve the general guidelines and budget of the Centre and submits the reports of its meetings to the Governing Body of the ILO. Its sessions usually take place before the November Governing Body sessions.

Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group (SRM TWG)

The [Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group \(SRM TWG\)](#) was established by the Governing Body in 2015 to review the international labour standards with the aim of ensuring that the body of standards is robust and responsive to the constantly changing patterns of the world of work, for the purpose of the protection of workers and taking into account the needs of sustainable enterprises. The composition of the SRM TWG as indicated in its terms of reference is that of 16 government members, eight employers and eight workers.

Tripartite Working Group on the Democratization of the ILO Governance (TWGD)

The [tripartite working group on the full, equal and democratic participation in the ILO's tripartite governance \(TWGD\)](#) was established by the Governing Body in 2019 and is expected to submit its final report to the Governing Body in March 2023. The TWGD mandate is to discuss, develop and present proposals to the Governing Body on the full, equal and democratic participation of the ILO's constituents in the Organization's tripartite governance by ensuring a fair representation of all regions and establishing the principle of equality among Member States, in the spirit of the [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#). The TWGD is composed of 14 Government members from each of the four regions and the Employers' and Workers' groups secretariats while all interested governments may attend and participate in the discussions.

Committee of the Whole

The Governing Body may also decide to meet as a **Committee of the Whole**, in accordance with article 4.3 of the Standing Orders of the Governing Body, including representatives of Governments that are not represented on the Governing Body to provide the latter with an opportunity to express their views on matters concerning the situation in their own countries.

► VIII. Special procedures of the Governing Body

The [Compendium](#) also contains texts governing some special procedures of the Governing Body, such as:

- Annex I "Standing Orders concerning the procedure for the examination of representations under articles 24 and 25 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organization";

- Annex II “Special procedures for the examination in the International Labour Organization of complaints alleging violations of freedom of association”; and
- Annex III “Rules governing the appointment of the Director-General”.

► Further reading

- Composition of the Governing Body
- Composition of committees and other bodies of the Governing Body
- Rules governing the appointment of the Director-General (Annex III of the Compendium)
- Rules for the payment of travel expenses (Annex IV of the Compendium)
- Historical List of Officers of the Governing Body