

**FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA****Other legal issues****Assessment of the use of information technologies at the International Labour Conference**

1. At its 282nd Session (November 2001), the Governing Body requested the Office, in the framework of the discussions on improvements in the functioning of the International Labour Conference, to provide it in March 2002, through the LILS Committee and the PFAC, with an estimate of the costs involved in updating the electronic voting system and making available various information technology facilities, as well as an assessment of the expenditure and savings made in this area during the last five sessions of the Conference.¹

I. Assessment of the introduction of the electronic voting system and other Conference applications

2. The electronic voting system was introduced in 1993 and was progressively integrated into the global Conference Management System (CMS). The CMS has allowed for the consistency of data as the names, titles and functions of all participants to the Conference are recorded only once in a single integrated database on the basis of credentials received from member States, observers, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. The system performs the following tasks:
 - (1) electronic voting;
 - (2) accreditation of delegates and production of the List of Delegations;
 - (3) registration of delegates;
 - (4) composition of committees;
 - (5) registration of speakers addressing the plenary;

¹ GB.282/8/1.

- (6) production of voting lists for use in committees; and
 - (7) production of various reports and statistics during and after the Conference.
3. The electronic voting system has been in operation for nine years and has been used in ten sessions of the Conference, including the 84th Maritime Session in 1996. As to the CMS, while it was developed in 1994, some of its functions ran in parallel mode in 1994 and 1995 during the transitional period necessary to test the programme. Therefore, the CMS has been in operation during eight sessions of the Conference, as well as in the past five Regional Meetings (the impact of the CMS in the functioning of Regional Meetings will however not be addressed in this paper).
 4. In order to carry out a useful cost-benefit analysis of the system, the Office considers it more appropriate to compare its overall cost against the savings achieved since its inception, rather than over the five past sessions of the Conference.

(a) Electronic voting

5. The electronic voting system was the first feature of the CMS to be introduced at the 80th Session of the Conference in 1993. Before its introduction, all the functions necessary for a record or secret vote in plenary, such as the preparation of the lists of delegates present entitled to vote, the elaboration of ballot papers for secret ballots, the call for delegations in the French alphabetical order of member States, the counting of the results, the production of the results of each vote, in particular in the event of a record vote (required for the adoption of Conventions and Recommendations, of the programme and budget or the authorization of a Member in arrears to take part in the vote), where the names of all voting delegates are to be appended to the verbatim of the sitting, were carried out manually. The only function computerized before 1993 was the calculation of the quorum and majority required. The hardware to perform this calculation was leased every year at a cost of US\$29,797. All the above functions were integrated into the CMS or became unnecessary (such as the vote call and the counting).
6. The advantages of the system are therefore threefold. First, the system has allowed for greater flexibility, efficiency and accuracy, as the quorum is now calculated on the basis of the voting list, and the availability in real time of up-to-date information on the number of delegates registered permits a vote to be scheduled at very short notice.
7. Secondly, savings in clerical support work time have been achieved: with the electronic voting system, no preparation other than the automatic printing of voting lists is required and the results of the votes, in particular record votes, are also generated automatically in a format ready for publication immediately after the vote. On the basis of an average of five record votes taken at each session of the Conference,² these improvements represent a reduction of three to four General Service workdays for each session (one workday for each vote), depending on the number of votes taken at the same sitting. Over the ten sessions where the system has been in operation, these savings add up to 30 General Service workdays, representing US\$9,000.

² Three votes at the 80th Session (1993), two at the 81st Session (1994), seven at the 82nd Session (1995), five at the 83rd Session (1996), seven at the 84th Maritime Session (1996), six at the 85th Session (1997), three at the 86th Session (1998), six at the 87th Session (1999), seven at the 88th Session (2000) and five at the 89th Session (2001).

8. Last, the use of the electronic voting system has contributed to a significant extent to the reduction of the duration of the Conference. Prior to the electronic voting, a record vote took approximately one-and-a-half hours (including the counting of votes), and secret ballots an additional hour. With the electronic voting, a record or secret vote takes an average of ten to 15 minutes. Considering the average of five record votes per session referred to above, the electronic voting system has contributed to a reduction of around six hours each session, i.e. two sittings of the plenary or one day of the Conference. In addition, the electronic voting has also been used on two occasions (in 1996 and in 1999) by the Government electoral college for the Governing Body elections. Prior to the system, a full day of the Conference, with no committees meeting, was set aside for the Governing Body elections. With the system being available for the Government electoral college, this time has been reduced to half a day. These results represent direct savings of approximately US\$10,000 in interpretation costs and US\$16,000 in premises rental costs for one day of plenary work, as well as indirect savings for the delegations and the secretariat. Over the ten sessions of the Conference concerned, such direct savings amount to US\$260,000.

(b) Accreditation of delegations and production of the List of Delegations

9. The accreditation of delegations is the source of all information registered in the CMS and the basis on which all the functions of the system operate.
10. Before the introduction of the CMS, all credentials and modifications of credentials received from member States, observers, international organizations and non-governmental organizations were first verified to ensure that the credentials were in order before the Lists of Delegations, which are appended to the *Provisional Records* of the Conference, were typed. These tasks commence 15 days before the opening of the Conference and extend until the last day of the Conference when the final List of Delegations is issued. The main advantage of the CMS has been the automatization of the production of the Lists of Delegations, which are generated on the basis of data recorded for each participant.
11. The accreditation of delegations and the production of the List of Delegations are the responsibility of the secretariat of the Credentials Committee. Although the Credentials Committee performs other functions, only its role regarding the accreditation of delegations, the production of the List of Delegations and the determination of voting lists and quorum have been affected by the CMS. The difference in the number of staff assigned to its secretariat is therefore to be attributed to the improvements achieved with the system. In this connection, while seven Professional work-months and seven General Service work-months were necessary to perform the work prior to the CMS, in recent years five Professional work-months and three General Service work-months have been required. A significant reduction in overtime was also made possible. Thus, for eight sessions of the Conference, the savings could be estimated at 16 Professional work-months and 32 General Service work-months, i.e. US\$178,544 and US\$194,560 respectively.
12. Among other information technology improvements, the Office has also developed a system of online presentation of credentials, which will be operational for the next session of the Conference on an experimental basis. At this stage, the system will be made available to Permanent Missions in Geneva, with extension to capital cities planned for future sessions of the Conference. This application should ensure greater accuracy of data and should also reduce the time devoted by member States and the secretariat to processing data.

(c) Registration of delegates

13. The registration of delegates, together with the provision of information and assistance, are the main responsibilities of the Information Desk. Before the introduction of the electronic voting system and progressive development of the CMS, the duties of the staff assigned to the Information Desk in connection with the registration of delegates consisted of receiving delegates, verifying that their credentials had been received on the basis of the lists established by the secretariat of the Credentials Committee, having them fill out a registration form and typing their names on an identification card allowing them access to the Conference and committees. The registration forms were carefully filed, as they were the basis for the calculation of the quorum by the secretariat of the Credentials Committee. With the CMS, all these functions have been computerized: upon arrival at the Conference, the Information Desk can quickly verify whether credentials have been received for each participant and a magnetic badge is produced by the system with the name, group and country of each participant. The issuing of a badge prompts the system to take the participant into account for the purpose of quorum calculation, registration in committees or in the list of speakers in plenary.
14. Since 1995, the 230 General Service workdays (excluding overtime) necessary to perform these functions prior to the CMS have been progressively reduced to an average of 165. This represents a difference of three General Service work-months, or US\$12,840, for each session of the Conference, i.e. a total staff time saving of 24 General Service work-months, representing US\$145,920 for eight sessions of the Conference.

(d) Composition of committees

15. Prior to the introduction of the CMS, the registration of members of delegations in the various committees appointed by the Conference was carried out manually, as was the production of the lists concerning the composition of the various committees and their subsequent modifications which were submitted to the Selection Committee for approval. With the CMS, registration in the different committees is made electronically and the lists are generated by the system in a format ready for publication. In addition, the updated information on the composition of committees has become available to the secretariats of all committees.
16. It has proven difficult to establish a detailed comparison, since only registration in the Government group of the committees is carried out by the Conference secretariat (this task is performed in respect of the Employers' and Workers' groups by their respective secretariats to whom the system is also made available). But the use of the CMS as regards the governmental composition of committees has resulted in savings in staff time estimated at four General Service workdays (or US\$1,050) for a session of the Conference. Over the eight sessions held since the operation of the system, this would represent one General Service work-month, amounting to US\$6,080.

(e) Registration of speakers addressing the plenary

17. As for the composition of committees, the registration of speakers in plenary and the production of the lists of speakers in a format ready for publication, either for the Conference daily bulletin or for use by the President and Clerk of the Conference, was prepared manually until the introduction of the CMS, by one official in the Professional category and one in the General Service category.

18. In addition to greater flexibility in reacting to the changing agendas of speakers and the reduction of mistakes, the use of the CMS in this connection has resulted in one Professional work-month saving, as this function is now performed by the remaining official from the General Service. Over the eight sessions held since the introduction of this feature of the system (the 84th Maritime Session has not been taken into account as there was no general discussion in plenary), this would represent eight Professional work-months, amounting to US\$89,272.

(f) Production of voting lists for use in committees

19. Before the establishment of the CMS, every committee secretariat had to establish, for each working day of the committee, the voting list, determine the quorum and calculate the voting coefficients. These tasks were performed manually. With the CMS, all the functions are performed automatically by the system.

20. The average time devoted to these functions can be estimated at half one General Service workday per working day of each committee. Taking four and a half as the average number of committees appointed at each session of the Conference (two standard-setting committees, the general discussion committee, the Applications Committee, the Resolutions Committee every second year, and the Finance Committee which though meeting every year holds significantly less sittings than other committees) and 11 days as the average length of each committee, the savings in General Service work time would add up to 49 workdays for each session of the Conference. This figure would represent, over the nine sessions of the Conference in which this application has been available, 490 workdays, or 22 General Service work-months, amounting to US\$133,760.

(g) Production of various reports and statistics during and after the Conference

21. A number of other functions have also been integrated into the CMS, such as the production of the telephone list for the Conference secretariat; badges for the secretariat; a wide range of lists intended for protocol, the organization of meetings or receptions (such as the lists of ministers attending the Conference, of heads of tripartite delegations, of ambassadors, including by region, etc.); statistics such as the number of women participating in the Conference, number of participants in each category, overall number of persons attending the Conference, reflected in the reports of the Credentials Committee; the index of speakers addressing the plenary, which is published after the Conference in the official record of the session, etc. The overall staff time savings in this respect can be estimated at least at one General Service work-month per session of the Conference, amounting to US\$48,640 over the eight sessions in which these facilities have been available.

22. The following table summarizes the savings referred to under the seven headings referred to above. It does not include indirect savings for delegations nor the impact of the CMS in the reduction of overtime, which the Office has not been in a position to accurately attribute to the introduction of the CMS.

	Average savings per session of the Conference (in US\$)	Average savings since introduction of CMS (in US\$)
Electronic voting	57 000	Since 1993 (ten sessions ILC) 570 000
Accreditation of delegates and production of the List of Delegations	47 000	Since 1995 (eight sessions ILC) 376 000
Registration of delegates	18 000	Since 1995 (eight sessions ILC) 144 000
Composition of committees	1 000	Since 1995 (eight sessions ILC) 8 000
Registration of speakers	11 000	Since 1995 (eight sessions ILC) 88 000
Voting lists for use in committees	15 000	Since 1994 (nine sessions ILC) 135 000
Miscellaneous	6 000	Since 1995 (eight sessions ILC) 48 000
Total	155 000	1 369 000

23. These savings (some of which have been reallocated to improve the services provided to delegations and the working methods and conditions of the secretariat), together with those achieved through the reforms introduced in the functioning of the Conference, have contributed towards the programme reductions of US\$5 million in the Conference budgets realized during the period 1994-2001. In comparison, the overall cost of the CMS is US\$773,500. The cost of the initial purchase of the hardware and creation of software tailored to the voting procedures of the Conference amounted to US\$590,500 and the remaining US\$183,000 were used for the progressive development of the additional functions of the system referred to above.

II. Replacement of the electronic voting system and introduction of further information technology facilities

24. As part of the global CMS, the electronic voting will soon need to be replaced, since while most of the applications surrounding the electronic system and those of the CMS can remain effective, its hardware components, namely the server and the voting stations, are based on obsolete technology and equipment no longer available.

25. Although, electronic voting equipment is now available on the market – unlike in 1993 – it is not adapted to the specificity of ILO voting procedures and it cannot be integrated into other applications in the CMS. Therefore, at the end of the last biennium, a prototyping exercise was undertaken to examine the possible use of new standard technology for ILO voting needs. The aim was to validate the combination of radio networking technology with pocket standard or Tablet PC, using a standard web browser interface connecting to a database for the software. The estimated cost of the replacement of the obsolete components of the electronic voting system would be of the order of US\$600,000.

26. In view of the discussions held last November, it appeared that the technology envisaged to replace the electronic voting could, with no additional cost, be extended to other areas.

Thus, the mobile hardware would not only allow computerized voting to remain for the plenary but also, if the need arises, in Conference committees, the Governing Body or even in all internal ILO elections (such as Staff Union, Pension Committee, Staff Health Insurance Fund (SHIF), Management Committee, etc.) or surveys, as the software technology used would allow also voting from standard office PCs. In addition these standard up-to-date software and hardware technologies would also allow the extension of the system to new services during the Conference, such as the possibility for committees to use the portable equipment in conjunction with a projection screen to work with amendments under discussion, submission of subamendments or motions.

- 27.** At its current session, the PFAC will consider a proposal from the Director-General to transfer part of the surplus from the 2000-01 biennium to the Information Technology Fund. Should this proposal be approved by the PFA Committee, the Governing Body and the Conference, subject to this Committee's recommendation on the principle of replacing the electronic voting system and the development of other applications, a detailed proposal could be presented to the Governing Body at its 285th Session (November 2002).
- 28.** *The Committee is therefore invited to express its views as to the appropriateness of recommending to the Governing Body the replacement of the electronic voting equipment and the introduction of the new information technologies, and a possible time frame for its introduction.*

Geneva, 18 February 2002.

Point for decision: Paragraph 28.