



**International Trade Union Confederation  
And trade union centres of ASEM partners**

**Terms of Reference for the Asia-Europe Labour Forum  
AELF**

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**Terms of Reference**

The 'Terms of Reference' provide information to support the case for the official recognition of the Asia-Europe Labour Forum.

**Further support**

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LABOUR FORUM**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Social dialogue is an indispensable element of good governance. Policies formulated and implemented in cooperation with the social partners promote good industrial relations and social stability and have the potential to boost economic and social progress.

Trade unions share the same goals as ASEM and they have been engaged unofficially in the process since its very beginning in 1996. To this end the ITUC established a series of meetings of trade union leaders from the ASEM countries of Asia and Europe. Those union leaders have been convening before every major ASEM meeting and have met with ASEM host Leaders and Ministers on many occasions to discuss workers' concerns and recommendations. Trade unions representing the workers of the Asia and Europe have proven their ability to bring a valuable perspective to the wide-ranging examination of the social and economic policies which make up the ASEM agenda.

## **2. PURPOSE**

Global governance has been under profound transformation in recent years. This transformation has accelerated the need of better global coordination and policy coherence in addressing the major crises and challenges that the world faces today. The new global governance adopted new structures that provide more flexibility and speed in taking decisions and recently has opened up to include non-state actors.

Participatory governance focuses on deepening democratic engagement through the participation of civil society groups in the processes of global governance. Among others, interest groups like business and trade unions have attained new channels of access to policy-makers at national and international level, intergovernmental organisations and international fora.

The international union movement endeavours to increase its participation in global governance in order to convey to international policy and decision makers the considerations of working people and provide them with intellectual input that would improve the quality of outcomes of the policies they decide.

The Asia-Europe Labour Forum (AELF) is the international union movement's representative body in the ASEM process.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

The ITUC, ITUC/Asia-Pacific, ETUC, their affiliated national trade union centres in Asia and Europe as well as the trade union centres of China, Laos and Vietnam aim at:

- making social development and social justice central on the ASEM dialogue agenda;
- getting ASEM decisions to reverse the current trend of increasing inequality with policies based on social justice, including the promotion of freedom of association, collective bargaining, establishment of minimum living wages, building social protection and the care economy;
- addressing the need for a just transition to a low carbon economy and the need for industrial transformation that would create decent green jobs.

#### **4. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES**

The AELF respects the ASEM principles of multi-dimensionality, equal partnership, informality and dual focus on high-level and people-to-people relations.

The AELF is the main instrument of interaction between unions on the one side and governments on the other, with business involved through the AEBF. The AELF is the official venue for the preparation of the trade unions' participation in the ASEM Social Partners' Forum which takes place before Labour and Employment Ministers' Conferences. The AELF and the Asia Europe Business Forum take necessary action to organise the Social Partners' Forum.

The exchange of views helps governments better understand workers' inputs regarding the social agenda of ASEM. The meeting delivers to governments new approaches to the agenda items and would also give an opportunity to labour representatives to propose new issues on the agenda for further consideration in the future.

As with any other ASEM structure, the Leaders are to request the AELF to provide its opinion on certain issues, conduct research, engage in dialogue with other bodies or actors and participate in conferences and other activities.

Other structures of ASEM, such as Ministerial Conferences and working groups, would also gain an official counterpart and dialogue partner on the social and economic agenda. These other structures are to address invitations to the Labour Forum to participate in events relevant to their work, as well as request opinions and other input that would assist in reaching their goals.

The activities organised by the Forum enhance dialogue on the political, economic and cultural, educational, and social pillars by promoting the exchange of views and the creation of better understanding between social partners, academia, civil society and peoples' organisations from Asia and Europe.

## 5. STRUCTURES AND ROLES

The AELF comprises senior union officials from all ASEM partners, the ITUC, the European Trade Union Confederation<sup>1</sup> (for EU), the ITUC Asia-Pacific and their associated organisations.

The annual meetings (plenary and ordinary) are chaired by the head of the host union centre or, in the event of there being more than one centre, the head of a host union centre. The decision on chairing is taken between the union centres and the option of co-chairing the plenary is also be possible.

The ITUC and regional trade union confederations and offices should provide technical assistance to the task forces and the Labour Forum plenary in order to assist them in meeting their goals.

### *Summits*

Adhering to the practice in ASEM, the AELF holds bi-annual summits alternately in Europe and in Asia in the country that hosts ASEM. The plenary meetings discusses and endorses the Forum's key messages to the Leaders and Social Partners' Forum, coordinates communications and media outreach, and ensures the continuation of work on different topics.

Each report should elaborate on political, economic and social developments around the topic in focus, identify major challenges ahead and explain the actions needed to be taken by Forum.

### *Extraordinary meetings*

Every year between ASEM Summits, the Forum convenes to follow-up action from the past year and prepares the participation in ASEM's Summits, Meetings and Conferences planned for the following year.

### *Consultations with Ministers and Leaders*

In most cases the Forum has been invited to meet the host Leader, and in occasions a delegation of AELF is invited to address ASEM Leaders in a session dedicated to outreach groups. Leaders and Forum representatives engage in a structured dialogue on pre-decided topics or address speeches. The key messages to be conveyed need to be approved by a plenary session.

The AELF summit selects its representatives to the Social Partners' Fora. The representatives take into account all input they receive from the plenary in order to make their intervention in the Social Partners' Forum. The Forum's representation must be balanced geographically and in terms of gender.

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<sup>1</sup> The ETUC should be working in conjunction with PERC as relevant.



## 6. DELIVERABLES

The reports and other documents of policy content would be one of the tangible deliverables of the AELF.

- The proposal of key messages to the Leaders is a document of political content that has to be debated and agreed upon by all members, after which it becomes the AELF Statement to an ASEM Summit.
- The proposal of key messages to the Social Partners' Forum is another document of political content which articulates messages directed to employers and governments. After agreement with members, it becomes the AELF Statement to an ASEM Summit
- The release on the outcomes of the meeting between Leaders and Forum members is a document that reflects the impressions created in the meeting with the Leaders. It does not contain quotes or sensitive information that might have been shared in the meeting. The document is prepared for media reasons as well as to provide an internal record. Alternatively, this document could be an analysis of the ASEM Summit's outcomes.
- Likewise, the release on the outcomes of the Social Partners' Forum is a media report that informs readers about the main views of business, unions and governments in the dialogue. Alternatively, this document could be an analysis of the ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting outcomes.